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Genesis and Developments of Scar Art

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前言

这项研究旨在分析伤痕艺术，一种自 20 世纪 70 年代后期在中国发展起来的现象。这是中国艺术界，特别是学术界对邓小平 (1904-1997) 在文化大革命结束后推行的开放和改革政策的最初反应之一。由于这些政策，从 1977 年开始，中国经历了一段新生期。经过十多年的政府压迫和征服，知识分子被赋予了更大的表达和创造自由。的确，许多在毛泽东和四人帮中被迫害的教授，艺术家和作家得到了恢复，艺术品和文学杂志开始重新出版，外国艺术品的展览越来越频繁。在随后的几十年中，所有这些都极大地影响了中国的艺术创作。许多受过教育的青年人 - 从一九六八年起被送往国家偏远地区并通过“上山下乡运动”接受了重新教育的年轻人-得以返回家园。一九七七年，当四川美术学院 (SFAI) 等第一批艺术学院重新开放招生考试的招生时，这些年轻人试图重建自己的生活并成为艺术家。20 世纪 70 年代末，新的中国政治和社会氛围使人们能够更深刻地思考和分析他们当时的生活。继邓小平在一九七九年提出的“实事求是”的口号，中国艺术院校的作家、艺术家和学生感到有必要对过去的事件创造一个新的版本，坚持客观现实，从而放弃前任领导模式所强加的所有艺术限制。因此，这些新作品的目标是描绘和揭露事实的真相，生活的经验，痛苦和民族的伤疤。这些作品主要创作于 1970 年代后期至 1980 年代上半期，后来被评论家定义为伤痕文学和伤痕艺术。

第一章介绍了“文化大革命”结束后发生的社会政治变化和事件对中国艺术和文学的影响。能够展现事件的真实性，甚至是过去的消极面的新可能性，导致了伤痕艺术的第一个见证的创造：这些艺术品描绘了一九七六年四五天安门事件以及纪念烈士张志新 (1930-1975)，张志新被政府指控为反革命并被残酷杀害。与这些创作的同时，值得注意的是一九七七年第一部伤痕文学作品的出现。这种类型创作最相关的例子有刘心武 (1942-) 的短篇小说《班主任》和卢新华 (1954-) 的中篇小说《伤痕》。这些文学作品的主题是“四人帮”对当时年轻人的影响、1966 年至 1968 年间震撼全国的红卫兵派系斗争的戏剧性事件以及“十年浩劫”中整个家庭所遭受的悲剧。这些文学杰作促成了伤痕艺术的体现。实际上，伤痕文学到伤痕艺术的转变，这要归功于连环画，是对已为公众所熟知的文学作品的改编，如著名的短篇小说《枫》，由郑毅 (1947-) 创作，由刘玉莲 (1948-1997)、李斌 (1949 -) 和陈一鸣 (1950-) 绘制。而且，由于《枫》连环画的插图，引出了一个问题：以现实主义风格刻画当时被谴责的政治人物是否正确和可以被接受，

在此之前，这些政治人物一直以贬损的方式描绘，例如林彪（1907 -1971）和江青（1914-1991）。本章最后简要分析了改革派漫画家廖炳雄（1915-2006）的《自嘲》。

第二章和第三章分析了所谓的四川画派的作品，即由一九七八年开始由重庆四川美术学院学生创作的作品，特别是被评论家称为「明星班」的七七级油画创作。这项研究以二十世纪七十年代末学术现实主义的发展为线索，按时间顺序，对这些后来闻名世界的大学生的艺术创作进行了划分。他们的作品所表达的趋势 - 后来被定义为伤痕艺术，乡土写实绘画（本土绘画），沉思绘画和生活流艺术 - 实际上都被认为是伤痕艺术的一部分。这些艺术家的传记对于了解历史事件如何改变了他们及其艺术也很重要。有趣的是，考察他们的作品在全国美术展览会上展出或在美术等官方美术杂志上发表后，对他们的创作、争议和批评所产生的影响。在分析了这些趋势在四川发展的原因之后，第二章更详细地讨论了所谓的伤痕艺术，乡土写实绘画及其产生的原因，特别是由于诸如高小华（1955-）的《为什么》，程丛林（1954-）的《1968年x月x日雪》，朱毅勇（1957-）的《父与子》和罗中立（1948-）的《父亲》。在其中一些作品中，可以看到从戏剧性的绘画创作到中国不同民族的农村男女的写实肖像画的突然转变，这些年轻艺术家中的许多人在农村接受再教育时与他们生活在一起。

第三章着重于一九七零年代末中国学术现实主义的最后阶段：沉思绘画。从一些学院学生在作品中表达的新主题开始，即幻灭和忧郁，然后对“忧郁青年”的作品进行分析。这些油画以受过教育的青年为题材，例如王亥（1956-）的《春》，王川（1953-）的《再见吧！小路》，何多苓（1948-）的《青春》。然后，这一章接着分析了艺术作品，它们表达了当时年轻人的新希望——也是受上述开放政策和重新开放的大学和学院的驱动 - 例如程丛林《1978年夏夜》，何多苓的《春风已经苏醒》。这些作品在七十年代末至八十年代初的全国美术展览中大获成功，同时也影响了四川画派以外的艺术家的创作，例如艾轩（1947-）。在本章的第二部分中，探讨了与本乡土写实绘画有关的第四个趋势的诞生：生活流艺术。与以前的艺术趋势不同，这种艺术趋势不是首先在四川美术学院的学生的油画中发现的，而是在北京中央美术学院的学生陈丹青（1953-）的作品中发现的。诸如他的《西藏组画》之类的艺术品表现出了对中国不同民族精神世界的关注，展示了艺术家对“下乡运动”期间所生活的种族的依恋和浓厚的兴趣。除了陈丹青，尚扬（1942-）和王沂东（1955-）之外，生活流艺术的最大代表还包括 SFAI 艺术家，例如周春芽（1955-），张晓刚（1958-），朱毅勇，程丛林。

第四章分析了 '85 新浪潮前卫艺术的兴起，新的政府政策以及许多艺术家向欧美的移民，对中国艺术这些相对短暂但基本的趋势产生了怎样的影响。本章还介绍了一些上世纪 80 年代至今讨论过的艺术家作品。这最后的分析有助于更好地理解为什么许多艺术家放弃了他们以往作品的主题和现实主义风格，以及伤痕艺术、本土绘画、沉思绘画和生命流艺术是否真的走到了尽头。

对待伤痕艺术这样一个话题的重要性是由这样一个事实决定的，即使第一个也是最大的创伤艺术作品是在不到 10 年的时间里创作出来的，它们无疑给中国艺术带来了前所未有的变化，这是后来艺术实验的基础。关于这项研究讨论的某些艺术家的生活和艺术品的信息很少。实际上，尽管伤痕艺术的画从未对当时的权威发表过直接批评，但它们证明了“文化大革命”期间发生的事情，多年来这一话题对中国政府来说是令人不愉快的。在 1990 年代，由于国际双年展，展览和艺术品拍卖，一些伤痕艺术家在国外变得非常有名。因此，本研究希望为中国艺术史上这种独特现象的研究做出贡献。

中外评论家和学者的作品，如吕鹏的《20 世纪中国艺术史》、高名潞的《完全现代性与 20 世纪的先锋》、朱莉娅·安德鲁斯的《现代中国艺术》和沈魁毅的《现代中国艺术》，都具有根本性和启发性。分析对当时中国艺术产生巨大影响的政策和改革，玛丽亚·加利科夫斯基的《1949-1984 年中国的艺术和政治》和朱莉娅·安德鲁斯的《1949-1979 年中华人民共和国的画家和政治》一直是有价值的教科书。吴洪的当代中国艺术：主要文件提供了大量的英文资料，没有这些资料，许多艺术作品的分析是不可能的。在最有用的资源中，Jiang Jiehong, Paul Gladston, Michael Sullivan, Jane Debevoise, Martina Köppel-Yang 的著作。特别值得一提的是栗宪庭和何溶，他们在后来被称为伤痕艺术现象的曙光中尽了最大的努力来支持年轻艺术家，并在《美术》杂志上发表了他们的作品，并附有大量重要的评论文章。佳士得和苏富比拍卖行的目录对绘画的分析也很有帮助。此外，为了尽可能公正地调查历史，政治和艺术事件，大量使用了中，英文文章，访谈和学术研究。

Table of contents

Introduction	10
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Chapter I

“Seek the truth from facts” - The genesis of Scar Literature and Scar Art.....	14
---	-----------

1. Artworks about the April Fifth Tian’anmen Incident	19
1.1 Ai Xuan – <i>Defending the Wreaths</i> , 1978.....	20
1.2 Cai Jingkai - <i>The Road of Truth</i> , 1978	21
1.3 Huang Rui - <i>April 5, 1976, 1978</i>	22
1.4 Shen Yaoyi - <i>Blood and Heart</i> , 1978-1979	23
1.5 Yin Guoliang, Zhang Tongyun - <i>Thousand Years’ Achievements and Crimes</i> , 1979.....	24
1.6 Bai Jingzhou - <i>Standing Firm in the Midst of Chaos</i> , 1979.....	25
2. Artworks about the martyr Zhang Zhixin.....	25
2.1 Li Shuang - <i>Red and Black</i> , 1979.....	26
2.2 Zhang Guilin - <i>Where Is the Party?</i> , 1979.....	28
2.3 Luo Zhongli - <i>The Song of the Loyal Ghost</i> , 1979.....	28
2.4 Wen Lipeng - <i>Daughter of the Earth. In Honour of the Martyr Zhang Zhixin</i> , 1979	28
3. The birth of Scar Literature	29
3.1 Liu Xinwu - <i>The Teacher</i> , 1977.....	31
3.2 Lu Xinhua – <i>Scar</i> , 1978.....	32
3.3 Yu Luojin - <i>A Chinese Winter’s Tale</i> , 1980	34
4. The rise of Scar Art – <i>Lianhuanhua</i> 连环画 or Picture-story books	34
4.1 Liu Yulian, Li Bin, Chen Yiming and Zheng Yi – <i>Maple</i> , 1979	35
4.1.1 The controversy over <i>Maple</i>	37
5. Liao Bingxiong - <i>Self-Mockery</i> , 1979.....	39

Chapter II

Sichuan School of Painting – Scar Art and Native Soil Painting.....	42
--	-----------

1. Sichuan Province – From centre of clashes to centre of artistic production.....	43
2. Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts.....	45
3. Scar Art	46
3.1 Gao Xiaohua - <i>Why?</i> , 1978.....	46
3.1.1 Artistic influences in <i>Why?</i> ’s creation.....	50
3.2 Cheng Conglin - <i>Snow on X Day X Month in 1968</i> , 1979	52
3.2.1 Artistic influences in <i>Snow on X Day X Month in 1968</i> ’s creation.....	55
3.3 Luo Zhongli - <i>Orphans</i> , 1979	60
3.4 Zhu Yiyong - <i>Father and Son</i> , 1980	61

4. Native Soil Painting	63
4.1 Luo Zhongli - <i>People of Daba Mountain</i> , 1979.....	63
4.2 Luo Zhongli - <i>Father</i> , 1980	65
4.2.1 The <i>Father</i> of the Nation	67
4.2.2 Influences in <i>Father's</i> creation	68
4.2.3 Controversies over <i>Father</i>	70
4.3 Luo Zhongli - <i>Spring Silkworms</i> , 1980.....	72

Chapter III

Melancholy Youth, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art76

1. Melancholy Youth.....	77
1.1 Gao Xiaohua - <i>I Love Oil Field</i> , 1978.....	77
1.2 Wang Hai - <i>Spring</i> , 1979.....	79
1.3 Wang Chuan - <i>Goodbye! Little Path</i> , 1980	82
1.4 He Duoling - <i>A Song We Used to Sing</i> , 1980.....	85
1.5 He Duoling - <i>Youth</i> , 1984.....	88
2. Contemplative Painting	89
2.1 Cheng Conglin – <i>A Summer Night in 1978, I Feel the Yearning of the People</i> , 1980	90
2.2 He Duoling - <i>Spring Breeze Has Returned</i> , 1982	93
2.2.1 Artistic influences in <i>Spring Breeze Has Returned's</i> creation	94
2.3 He Duoling - <i>Ancient Wall</i> , 1982.....	97
2.4 He Duoling - <i>Snow Goose</i> , 1984.....	97
2.5 He Duoling and Ai Xuan - <i>The Third Generation</i> , 1984.....	98
2.6 He Duoling - <i>Winter</i> , 1983	100
2.7 Ai Xuan - <i>High Aspirations</i> , 1981.....	101
2.8 Ai Xuan - <i>Stranger</i> , 1984	104
2.9 Ai Xuan - <i>Norgay</i> , 1985	104
2.10 Wang Chuan – <i>Old Man and Child</i> , 1984	105
3. Life-stream Art	106
3.1 Chen Danqing - <i>Tibetan Series</i> , 1980.....	107
3.2 Zhou Chunya - <i>A New Generation of Tibetans</i> , 1980	112
3.3 Zhou Chunya - <i>Shearing Sheep</i> , 1981	114
3.4 Zhou Chunya - <i>Radiance of the Sunset</i> , 1982.....	115
3.5 Zhang Xiaogang - <i>The Grassland Series</i> , 1981-1982	116
3.6 Zhu Yiyong – <i>Mountain Village Shop</i> , 1981 and 1984.....	120
3.7 Shang Yang - <i>Yellow River Boatmen</i> , 1981.....	121
3.8 Shang Yang - <i>Mother of the Loess Plateau</i> , 1983.....	123

3.9 Wang Yidong - <i>Ancient Mountain Village</i> , 1983.....	123
3.10 Cheng Conglin - <i>Woman of Yi Nationality Beside a Road</i> , 1983.....	124
3.11 Cheng Conglin – <i>A Girl and Her Younger Brother</i> , 1984.....	125
3.12 Gao Xiaohua – <i>Catch the Train</i> , 1982.....	126

Chapter IV

Scar Art after the 1980s.....	129
1. Gao Xiaohua.....	132
1.1 <i>Warm Winter</i> , 1998.....	133
1.2 <i>New Yorkers</i> series, 1990s.....	134
1.3 <i>Red Carpet</i> series, 2000s.....	135
1.4 <i>Back Street</i> series, 2000s.....	135
1.5 <i>Hongyan Village Apocalypse</i> , 2004.....	136
1.6 <i>Chongqing Bombing</i> , 2005.....	136
2. Cheng Conglin.....	138
2.1 <i>Chinese Workers' Boat and Stairs on the Wharf</i> , 1984.....	138
2.2 <i>Woman Dressing Up</i> , 1986.....	139
2.3 <i>People Attending a Funeral and People Escorting the Bride to the Wedding</i> , 1984-1990.....	140
3. Luo Zhongli.....	141
3.1 <i>Leopard and Luo Nu</i> , 1984.....	142
3.2 <i>Sunset</i> , 1990.....	143
3.3 <i>Taken Shelter from Rain #2</i> , 1995.....	143
3.4 <i>Crossing the River</i> , 2007.....	144
3.5 <i>Sculptures</i> , 2000s.....	145
4. Zhu Yiyong.....	146
4.1 <i>Mountain People</i> , 1988.....	146
4.2 <i>The Village Entrance</i> , 1990.....	147
4.3 <i>Memories of China</i> series, 2000s.....	147
4.4 <i>The Realm of the Heart</i> , 2010s.....	149
5. Wang Hai.....	149
6. Wang Chuan.....	151
7. He Duoling.....	152
7.1 <i>Little Zhai</i> , 1987.....	154
7.2 <i>Stolen Child</i> , 1988.....	154
7.3 <i>Life</i> , 1988.....	155
7.4 <i>A Horse in Red Weather</i> , 1991.....	156

7.5	<i>What Year Is This Night</i> , 1992.....	157
7.6	<i>Rear Window</i> series, 1990s-2000s.....	158
7.7	<i>Youth</i> , 2007.....	159
7.8	<i>The Russian Forest Series (Golden Age) - Chekhov Nightingale</i> , 2017.....	160
8.	Ai Xuan.....	161
8.1	<i>Waiting for the Sun in Winter</i> , 1994.....	163
8.2	<i>Tibetan Girl</i> , 1995.....	163
9.	Chen Danqing.....	165
9.1	<i>Two Young Shepherds</i> , 1986.....	166
9.2	<i>Wasteland Wind</i> , 1988.....	167
9.3	<i>Art Book as Still Life</i> , 1990s.....	168
10.	Zhou Chunya.....	171
10.1	<i>Heigen Playing on the Roof</i> , 1996.....	173
10.2	<i>Green Dog</i> series, 1997-.....	173
10.3	<i>Taihu Rocks</i> series, 2000s.....	175
10.4	<i>Peach Blossom</i> series, 2000s.....	176
11.	Zhang Xiaogang.....	178
11.1	<i>Forever Lasting Love</i> , 1988.....	180
11.2	<i>Three Black Songs – Terror, Contemplation, Melancholy</i> , 1989-1990.....	180
11.3	<i>Bloodline Series</i> , 1993 -.....	182
11.4	<i>Bloodline Series - The Big Family No. 2</i> , 1995.....	184
12.	Shang Yang.....	186
12.1	<i>Big Scenery</i> series, 1991-.....	187
12.2	<i>Dong Qichang Project – 2000s</i>	188
13.	Wang Yidong.....	189
13.1	<i>A Yimen Girl</i> , 1994.....	190
13.2	<i>A Married Woman in the Mountains</i> , 1995-1996.....	190
	Conclusions	193
	Bibliography	200
	Glossary of Chinese names and terms	218
	Figures	223

Introduction

This research aims to analyse Scar Art, a phenomenon that has developed in China since the late 1970s. It was one of the first responses of the Chinese art scene, especially the academic one, to the new policies of openness and reforms implemented by Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Thanks to these policies, from 1977 China went through a period of rebirth. After more than a decade of government impositions and submissions, intellectuals were granted greater freedom of expression and creativity. Indeed, many of the professors, artists and writers who had been persecuted during the supremacy of Mao and the Gang of Four were rehabilitated, art and literature magazines began to be published again, exhibitions of foreign art were organized more and more frequently. All this greatly influenced the Chinese artistic production during the subsequent decades. Many of the *educated youth* – young people who had been sent to remote areas of the nation from 1968 to be re-educated through the Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement - were able to return home. In 1977, when the first art academies such as the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts (SFAI) could reopen enrolment for the admission exams, some of these young people tried to reconstruct their own lives and become artists. In the late 1970s the new Chinese political and social climate allowed people to reflect and analyse more deeply what they had lived up to that moment. Following the motto enunciated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 "Seek the truth from facts", writers, artists and students of Chinese art academies felt the need to create a new version of past events, which would stick to objective reality, abandoning all the artistic restrictions imposed by the models of the previous leadership. The new works hence had the goal of depicting and exposing the truth of facts, life experiences, pains and scars of the nation. These works, created mainly from the late 1970s to the first half of the 1980s, would later be defined by the critics as Scar Literature and Scar Art.

Chapter I presents the effects that the socio-political changes and events occurred after the end of the Cultural Revolution generated on Chinese art and literature. The new possibility of being able to show the reality of events, even the negative side of the past, led to the creation of the very first testimonies of Scar Art: the artworks depicting what happened during the April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident of 1976 and those created in honour of the martyr Zhang Zhixin (1930-1975), who was accused of being anti-revolutionary by the government and brutally killed. Simultaneously with these creations, it is important to note the appearance of the first Scar Literature works in 1977. Among the most relevant examples of

this genre there are the short story *The Teacher* by Liu Xinwu (1942-) and the novella *Scar*, by Lu Xinhua (1954-). The topics of these literary works were the repercussions of the influences of the Gang of Four on the young people of the time, the drama of the clashes between Red Guards factions that had shaken the nation between 1966 and 1968 and the tragedies that entire families suffered during the "disastrous decade". These literary masterpieces contributed to the manifestation of Scar Art. Indeed, the transition from Scar Literature to Scar Art took place thanks to *lianhuanhua* (Picture-story Books), which were illustrated adaptations of literary works already known to the public, such as that of the famous short story *Maple*, written by Zheng Yi (1947-) and illustrated by Liu Yulian (1948-1997), Li Bin (1949-) and Chen Yiming (1950-). Moreover, thanks to the illustrations of *Maple's lianhuanhua*, a question arose: whether it was correct and acceptable or not to portray in a realist style political figures that were condemned at the time and that until then had always been portrayed in a derogatory way, such as Lin Biao (1907 -1971) and Jiang Qing (1914-1991). The chapter ends with a brief analysis of *Self-Mockery* by Liao Bingxiong (1915-2006), one of the reformed cartoonists.

Chapters II and III analyse the production of the so-called Sichuan School of Painting, the artworks created from 1978 onwards by the students of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in Chongqing, in particular by those of the '77 class of oil painting, now recognized by the critics as the "Class of Stars". This research divides the artistic production of these Academy students, who later became famous worldwide, in chronological order and follows the developments of academic realism at the end of the 1970s. The trends expressed in their artworks - later defined as Scar Art, Native Soil Painting, Melancholy Youth, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art - are in fact all recognized as being part of Scar Art. These artists' biographies are also important to understand how historical events changed them and their art. It is interesting to examine the influences in their creation, controversies and criticisms produced after their artworks were shown at national art exhibitions or published in official art magazines, such as *Meishu*. After an analysis of why these trends developed in Sichuan, Chapter II discusses in more detail the so-called Scar Art, Native Soil Painting and the reason for their genesis, especially thanks to oil paintings such as *Why?* by Gao Xiaohua (1955-), *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* by Cheng Conglin (1954-), *Father and Son* by Zhu Yiyong (1957-) and *Father* by Luo Zhongli (1948-). In some of these artworks is visible the sudden transition from the creation of dramatic paintings to realistic portraits

of rural men and women belonging to different Chinese ethnic groups, with whom many of these young artists lived during their re-education in the countryside.

Chapter III focuses on the last tendency of Chinese academic realism in the late 1970s: Contemplative Painting. Starting from a new theme expressed in the creations by some Academy students - namely that of disillusionment and melancholy - the artworks of Melancholy Youth are analysed. These oil paintings have the *educated youth* as subjects, such as Wang Hai's *Spring* (1956-), *Goodbye! Little Path* by Wang Chuan (1953-), *Youth* by He Duoling (1948-). The chapter then analyses artworks that express the new hope of young people of the time - also driven by the aforementioned openness policies and by the reopening of universities and academies - such as *A Summer Night in 1978, I Feel the Yearning of the People* by Cheng Conglin, *Spring Breeze Has Returned* by He Duoling. These paintings, which achieved enormous success due to their exposure at national art exhibitions of the late 1970s and early 1980s, also influenced the production of artists who were not part of the Sichuan School of Painting and SFAI, such as Ai Xuan (1947-). In the second part of the chapter, the birth of a fourth trend, linked to Chinese Rural Realism, is treated: Life-stream Art. Unlike the previous ones, this artistic trend was first identified not in the oil paintings by the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts students but in the creations by a student of the Beijing Central Academy of Fine Arts, Chen Danqing (1953-). Artworks such as his *Tibetan Series* demonstrate an even deeper attention to the spirituality of different Chinese ethnic groups, showing the artists' attachment and deep interest into the ethnic groups they had lived with during the Down to the Countryside Movement. In addition to Chen Danqing, Shang Yang (1942-) and Wang Yidong (1955-), among the greatest representatives of Life-stream Art there were also SFAI artists such as Zhou Chunya (1955-), Zhang Xiaogang (1958-), Zhu Yiyong, Cheng Conglin.

Chapter IV analyses how the rise of the '85 New Wave avant-garde art, the new government policies and the emigration of many artists to Europe and the United States influenced these relatively brief but fundamental trends in Chinese art. The chapter also presents some of the previously discussed artists' production from the 1980s until today. This final analysis is useful in order to better understand why many artists have abandoned the themes and the realist style that characterized their previous creations and whether Scar Art, Native Soil Painting, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art have really come to an end.

The importance of treating a topic such as Scar Art is dictated by the fact that even if the first and greatest Scar Art creations were produced in less than a decade, they undoubtedly caused an unprecedented change in Chinese art, fundamental for the subsequent artistic experimentation. Very little information is available about the life and the artworks of some of the artists discussed in this dissertation. In fact, although Scar Art paintings never directly criticized the authorities of the time, they are a testimony of what happened during the Cultural Revolution, a topic that over the years became unpleasant for the Chinese government. From the 1990s on, some of the Scar artists, however, became very famous abroad thanks to international biennials, exhibitions and art auctions. This research hence hopes to contribute to the study of such a unique phenomenon for the history of Chinese art.

Fundamental and inspiring were the works by Chinese and foreign critics and scholars such as *A History of Art in 20th-Century China* by Lü Peng, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century* by Gao Minglu, *The Art of Modern China* by Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi. For the analysis of the policies and reforms that have had enormous effects on Chinese art at the time, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984* by Maria Galikowsky and *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* by Julia Andrews have been valuable books. Wu Hung's *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* offered an enormous number of sources in English without which many of the artworks' analysis would not have been possible. Among the most useful resources there are also the books by Jiang Jiehong, Paul Gladston, Michael Sullivan, Jane Debevoise, Martina Köppel-Yang. A special mention goes to Li Xianting and He Rong who, at the dawn of the appearance of what was later called the phenomenon of Scar Art, did their utmost to support young artists, publishing their artworks in the magazine *Meishu* accompanied by numerous important commentary articles. The catalogues of auction houses such as Christie's and Sotheby's were of great help for the analysis of the paintings. In addition, for an investigation as impartial as possible of historical, political and artistic events, much use was made of a large number of articles, interviews, academic research in both English and Chinese language.

Chapter I

“Seek the truth from facts” - The genesis of Scar Literature and Scar Art

Without the Cultural Revolution, contemporary art would continue to exist in China, but very differently. The influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution is complex and exists at various levels. I argue that it is the foundation of the development of contemporary art in China and a crucial source of identity for Chinese art in the global art world today.¹

From 1966 to 1976, under the Zhongguo wuchan jieji wenhua dageming 中国无产阶级文化大革命 (Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, CR), not only Chinese economic, political, and social systems were modified according to the dictates of the Zhongguo gongchandang 中国共产党 (Chinese Communist Party, CCP) and the will of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976), but also the cultural and artistic system suffered enormous consequences. Never has Chinese society been so changed and scarred. Most of the intellectuals, writers and artists were purged or incarcerated. Schools and universities were closed. Mao's policies led hundreds of thousands of people to death and poverty. Every form of individual expression and critical thinking was pursued and punished. Religious freedom and worship were abolished, and every ethnic minority was subjugated. From 1968, young people who, after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, were the main supporters of Mao Zedong and members of the violent Hong weibing 红卫兵 (Red Guards), were sent to the most remote areas of China because of the Shangshan xiexiang yundong 上山下乡运动 (Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement)². They had to be re-educated by the farmers and the inhabitants through manual labour in the fields [fig.1].³ Many historians and art critics defined the more than 15 million young people who had to

¹ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, Hong Kong University Press, 2007, p. 2.

² More information can be found in WU Weiyi, HONG Fan, *The Identity of Zhiqing: The Lost Generation*, Routledge, 2016.

³ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 336.

abandon their families and their studies to go into exile as the "lost generation": this forced migration lasted for ten years, in some cases even after the end of the Cultural Revolution.⁴ Among those young people, then called *zhiqing* 知青 (*educated youth*), there were also the future leading artists of contemporary Chinese art.

1976 was a turning point for China: on January 8 the Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976) died, leading soon to the Siwu Tian'anmen shijian 四五天安门事件 (April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident), but above all on September 9 Mao Zedong's death - and the following arrest of the *Sirenbang* 四人帮 (Gang of Four)⁵ – put an end to what is still known as the *shinian haojie* 十年浩劫 (disastrous decade). Two years later, the government held a national congress to discuss about the possible mistakes made during the previous decade.⁶ Furthermore, the following year the Gang of Four was widely criticized and accused of being the only evil mind to have orchestrated the Cultural Revolution.

A fundamental historical step for the rebirth of China and its people took place at the Eleventh National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of 1977. Here, in addition to having decreed the end of the CR, it was sanctioned that the *Si da ziyou* 四大自由 (Four Freedoms) - freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of debate, freedom to put up posters of criticism - were to be included in an article of the 1978 constitution, becoming the fundamental rights of citizens.⁷ In 1978, a new era of openness and reform under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997) began. Thanks to the policy of the *Sige xiandaihua* 四个现代化 (Four Modernizations),⁸ his new program aimed to restore the Chinese economy and rehabilitate the reputation of the nation in the eyes of foreign countries.⁹ Thus, what was later recognized as the Beijing Spring started. The same year, various critical *dazibao* 大字报 (big-character posters) against the Gang of Four appeared

⁴ WU Weiyi, HONG Fan, *The Identity of Zhiqing: The Lost Generation*, op. cit., p. 1; YAN Jiaqi, GAO Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, translated and edited by KWOK Daniel W.Y., University of Hawaii Press, 1996, p. 279.

⁵ Composed by Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥 (1917-2005), Yao Wenyan 姚文元 (1931-2005), Wang Hongwen 王洪文 (1935-1992).

⁶ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, The MIT Press, 2011, p. 65.

⁷ HAGER Mark M., Law and the Political Economy of Repression in Deng's China, *American University International Law Review*, Volume 5, no. 3 (1990): 773-834, p. 817.

⁸ Deng's reforms aimed at an important improvement in science and technology, agriculture, industry and defence.

⁹ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1998, p. 175.

in Beijing. The new freedom of citizens soon led to the creation of the Zhongguo minzhu yundong 中国民主运动 (Chinese Democracy Movement) and the Minzhuqiang 民主墙 (Democracy Wall): three walls in Beijing's Xidan district, around 200 meters long altogether,¹⁰ that began to be the home for hundreds of petition posters, artworks, *dazibao* discussing about freedom, human rights or directly criticizing not only China's recent past events, but also Mao Zedong and the Gang of Four [fig.2].¹¹ On December 1978, the most famous Democracy Wall's *dazibao* appeared, written by Wei Jingsheng 魏京生 (1950-) to criticize Deng Xiaoping and to emphasise the need for a fifth modernization: political liberalization and therefore a true democracy. The most interesting *dazibaos* were not only affixed, but also published in the increasingly popular unofficial newspapers, sold near the Democracy Wall, which often also hosted their pages. The articles covered in these illegal journals also touched on hitherto taboo topics, such as the April 5 Movement or the details about the tragic story of Zhang Zhixin 张志新 (1930-1975).¹²

With regard to art, after the destruction of most of China's artistic and cultural heritage and the oppression of intellectuals, writers and artists in the years of the CR, the new policies of the CCP encouraged a new artistic development and freedom of expression, hoping to gain the support of artists who were still fearful after the terrible violence experienced with Mao.¹³ Soon, many of the artists who had been purged in the previous years were rehabilitated, hired as university professors, presidents of new arts organizations, or employed in government propaganda departments.¹⁴ Many of the artworks criticized during the Cultural Revolution were reprinted and published in the official art magazine *Meishu* 美术 (*Fine Arts*). Moreover, other art magazines resumed their sales and also began to publish contemporary Western and Japanese art, in addition to the traditional Chinese one.¹⁵ Foreign art exhibitions began to be organized such as the Faguo shiji nongcun fengjing hua zhanlan 法国十九世纪农村风景画展览 (Nineteenth-Century French Rural Landscape Paintings Exhibition) held in March 1978 at the National Art Gallery in Beijing. This was one of the exhibitions that most influenced the subsequent Chinese artistic academic

¹⁰ SHAO Jiang, *Minkan in China: 1949–89*, University of Westminster, 2011, p. 129.

¹¹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 83.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., pp. 189-191.

¹⁴ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p. 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 218.

production, showing for the first time in China artworks by the French Barbizon School artists: Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), Vincent Willem van Gogh (1853-1890).¹⁶ Free access to foreign styles and artworks thanks to their publications in art magazines and their exposure in exhibitions was fundamental for Chinese artists, who at the end of the 1970s found themselves surrounded by a multitude of styles and aesthetic concepts from abroad which, as will be analysed later, awakened their creativity.¹⁷

After ten years of closing, the reopening of art academies from 1977 was also a very important event for the subsequent artistic production: the first was the Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美术学院 (Central Academy of Fine Arts, CAFA) in Beijing which admitted fifty-five undergraduate students and received more than two thousand graduated students' applications for fifty-four places only.¹⁸ The basic requirements to participate to the admission exam were to be under the age of thirty-one and not to be on the government's blacklist. In the same year, the Sichuan meishu xueyuan 四川美术学院 (Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, now known as Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, SFAI) restored the admission exam system too. The new classes formed in these academies were composed by *educated youth* from across the nation, and they "comprised not only the elite of a single age group but of an entire ten-year generation".¹⁹

From 1979, in addition to the new policy of openness and reform implemented by Deng Xiaoping, the slogan "Shishi qishi 实事求是" (Seek the truth from facts) was also promoted.²⁰ This motto, which encouraged people to be practical and realistic, and therefore to analyse the facts in a scientific, rational and non-subjective way, aimed to re-educate society to avoid the fanaticism that was created in the 1960s and 1970s around the figure of Mao Zedong.²¹ Moreover, at the Zhongguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe disici daibiao dahui 中国文学艺术工作者第四次代表大会 (Fourth National Congress of Literature and Art

¹⁶ WU Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*, Thames & Hudson, 2014, p. 30.

¹⁷ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 184.

¹⁸ ANDREWS Julia F., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994, p. 387;

ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012, p. 203.

¹⁹ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 203.

²⁰ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 735.

²¹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 65.

Workers) held in Beijing between October and November 1979, it was affirmed that a new period of individual freedom and expression for artists was beginning.²²

As stated by the art critic Gao Minglu, “these circumstances encouraged people to express their long-suppressed desires to explore new art forms and to satisfy their demand for self-expression”.²³ With these precedents, intellectuals did not hesitate to show their dissatisfactions and demonstrate their personal aesthetics and thinking. In the late 1970s artists started to feel the need to create a new pictorial vision of past events, which would stick to reality. In this apparently relaxed atmosphere, writers, artists and art academies students looked for a reason for what they had experienced during the previous decade, upsetting with their creations the false optimism and the aura of well-being and wealth emanated by the CR propaganda artworks, in a journey of memory that would resurface their most painful and profound scars. These creations would later be defined as Shanghen wenzue 伤痕文学 (Scar Literature) and Shanghen yishu 伤痕艺术 (Scar Art).

Consequently, the iconography and the style of Chinese art completely changed, slowly abandoning the previous impositions. As will be analysed in the next chapter, this became more evident at the Qingzhu zhonghua renmin gongheguo chengli sanshi zhounian quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan 庆祝中华人民共和国成立三十周年全国美术作品展览 (National Exhibition to Celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China) – which corresponds to the Fifth National Art Exhibition - organized in Beijing in February 1980. Here, as well as exhibiting the sensational artworks of the art academies new students, an entire pavilion was dedicated to post-1976 hagiography, starting from the death of Zhou Enlai and the April Fifth Tian’anmen Incident.²⁴ From the end of 1970s on, the produced and published artworks still had to be carefully examined by the government thanks to the Ministry of the Culture and the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party, but these changes - together with the new policies mentioned above - decreed the birth of the Chinese modernist art²⁵ experimentation of the last twenty years of the twentieth century.

²² GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., pp. 176-180;

GLADSTON Paul, *Contemporary Chinese Art. A Critical History*, London, Reaktion Books, 2014, p. 88.

²³ GLADSTON Paul, *Contemporary Chinese Art. A Critical History*, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁴ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

²⁵ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture, Volume II, Brill Academic Pub., 2014, p. 15;

SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

1. Artworks about the April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident

According to the critic Lü Peng, it is possible to recognise an early nucleus of Scar Art even in the artworks by the artists who took part in the April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident, or those who subsequently depicted its tragic epilogue.²⁶ After years of illness, on January 8, 1976 the Premier Zhou Enlai died. A few months later, during the Qingming jie 清明节 (Qingming Festival) on April 4 and 5,²⁷ it is estimated that more than two million people gathered in Tian'anmen to honour his memory. The Monument to the People's Heroes in the centre of the square was filled not only with slogans, flowers wreaths and posters [figs.3-4], but also with expressions of criticism on the impositions of the Cultural Revolution - that would soon be over - and on the Gang of Four, who, in the previous months had tried to erase the memories and the deeds of Zhou in every way.²⁸ The real protest broke out on April 5, when people discovered that the government had ordered the clearing out of the square during the night and the destruction of all forms of memorial signs. A revolt began, brutally suppressed by force.²⁹ Many of the participants were arrested, hundreds of them were injured, and the government accused them to be part of a counter-revolutionary movement.

*Early April, a handful of class enemies, under the guise of commemorating the late Premier Zhou Enlai during the Qing Ming festival, engineered an organized, premeditated and planned counter-revolutionary political incident.*³⁰

This event upset the public opinion and had also effects on art. The first artworks depicting what occurred on April 5 were those by Zhao Wenliang 赵文量 (1937-2019) - one of the Wuming hua hui 无名画会 (No Name Group) founders - and those by two young artists, Zheng Ziyan 郑子燕 (1951-) and Zhang Wei 张伟 (1952-). The No Name Group, now considered one of the very first self-organized avant-garde group in China, was formed in 1959 (at the time called the Yuyuantan Lake School). It was largely influenced by the

²⁶ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 738.

²⁷ Chinese traditional festival to honour the memory of the ancestors and the deceased.

²⁸ TEIWES Frederick C., SUN Warren, The First Tiananmen Incident Revisited: Elite Politics and Crisis Management at the End of the Maoist Era, *Pacific Affairs*, Summer, 2004, Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 211-235, University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40022499>

²⁹ SULLIVAN Michael, A Fresh Look at Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, June 1985, Vol. 133, No. 5347, Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, p. 485. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41373985>

³⁰ Quotation of the April 8, 1976 issue of *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 (*People's Daily*) retrieved from BRODSGAARD Kjeld Erik, The Democracy Movement in China, 1978-1979: Opposition Movements, Wall Poster Campaigns, and Underground Journals, University of California Press, *Asian Survey*, Jul., 1981, Vol. 21, No. 7 (Jul., 1981), pp. 747-774, p. 757. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2643619>

Western art styles and remained active in secret also during the Cultural Revolution.³¹ In 1973, Zheng and Zhang had just come back from the Down to the Countryside Movement when they joined the group too. On April 5, 1976 they were in Tian'anmen Square, taking part to the commemoration of Zhou Enlai [fig.5].³² Soon after this shocking event, they created three oil paintings on paper - *In Memory* [fig.6], *April Fifth Incident* [fig.7] and *Tragedy of Chinese People* [fig.8] – all showing scenes of those two days both at night and in daytime. In these artworks, the Monument to the People's Heroes, symbol of the square, is packed with people and wreaths, and is depicted from a distant point of view, as if the three artworks were landscapes paintings.³³ This distance from the central point of the clashes and the poorly defined traits created by the artists, make these blurred scenes seem like artists' memories reproductions.

It was only after the end and the revision of the Cultural Revolution that more artists felt free to represent this dramatic event – and this historical wound for the Chinese society. On November 25, 1978 the Siwu Tian'anmen shijian 四五天安门事件 was redefined by the new government as a "revolutionary incident" - and thus a legitimate protest against the enemies of the Party, the Gang of Four.³⁴ In the same year, other artworks representing these clashes appeared, this time not showing blurred scenes: they were more realist than ever and they had no ambiguity.

1.1 Ai Xuan – *Defending the Wreaths*, 1978

Defending the Wreaths [fig.9] by Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), who will be later analysed as a Contemplative Painting artist, is a realist painting depicting a young woman protecting with her body a wreath of red and white flowers hanging from one of the decorated facades of the Monument to the People's Heroes. The woman is portrayed full-length, she is wearing a shirt with a black mourning armband on the left arm. Her face is turned towards her left side, towards a scene that the viewer cannot see but that can be guessed thanks to a shadow painted by Ai Xuan in the lower right corner of the artwork: a man armed with a truncheon is about to strike a blow at some demonstrators. On the left side of the scene, other people are protecting themselves with their arms from being hit. Instead, the woman is in a

³¹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

³² *Ibid.* p. 88.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 388.

completely different position, totally exposed as she is spreading her arms over the wreath. Her gaze is severe, full of dignity and courage: she looks like a heroine of the people. The colours chosen by the artist are intense and the brushstrokes are detailed. Here, the influences of the Cultural Revolution models' artworks are still evident, both for the way in which the woman is portrayed and for the lighting adopted. *Defending the Wreaths* was published in *Meishu* in February 1979.³⁵

1.2 Cai Jingkai - *The Road of Truth*, 1978

The Road of Truth [fig.10] by Cai Jingkai 蔡景楷 (1946-) is an artwork similar to Ai Xuan's creation in theme and style. A young woman is depicted on the ground, injured, as she is getting up from the steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes wet from the rain. Behind her there is a flowers wreath thrown to the ground. No other faces are visible: the left side of the painting shows the lower part of the army men's bodies, identifiable by the batons and handcuffs. Like Ai Xuan, Cai also portrays a heroine woman, fearless and careless of danger, with her determined gaze turned towards the monument and what remained of the other remembrances for Zhou Enlai. The close-up view chosen by Cai Jingkai makes the scene charged with tension and dynamism, also emphasised by the theatrical lighting, by the colours' cold tones and by the position of the advancing policemen and of the girl, with the wind moving her hair. Compared to previous paintings, Cai underlines the resilience of the Chinese people attending the commemorations by portraying this wounded woman surrounded by the police, but still wanting to get up without fear to protect freedom and truth. Portraying the scene from below, Cai transports the viewers into the clashes, as if they were protesters too. Cai Jingkai conceived this artwork as early as 1976 but following a serious illness - and the risks involved in producing such a painting of denouncement - it was only in 1978 that he created *The Road of Truth*.³⁶ The artwork was exhibited at the Fifth National Art Exhibition and published in *Meishu*.³⁷

³⁵ Meishu zuopin 美术作品 (Fine Arts Artworks), *Meishu* 美术 (*Fine Arts*), February 1979.

³⁶ Retrieved from Zhuoke yishu wang 卓克艺术网, <http://www.zhuokearts.com/artist/artistintro.aspx?id=753>

³⁷ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian gedi meizhan zuopin xuan 庆祝建国三十周年各地美展作品选 (Selected Artworks from National Exhibitions Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, November 1979.

1.3 Huang Rui - *April 5, 1976, 1978*

Huang Rui's 黃銳 (1952-) *April 5, 1976* [fig.11], is an oil painting created in 1978 on the theme of this tragic event by using a completely different style. This artwork depicts a naked female figure standing out and floating towards the sky in front of the Monument to the People's Heroes. The lower part of her body is covered by a white veil - the colour of purity but also of death in China. Below her, Huang depicted sad faces of people in the square and the pale stone of the monument using highly layered brushstrokes of light and neutral colours, while the female body has a more defined stroke. The view adopted by Huang is from the bottom up, to emphasise this naked figure. To depict her, in 1978 Huang invited a young woman - an acquaintance of him, daughter of doctors and well educated, who became a labourer after CR - to his bedroom as a model, seeing a naked woman for the first time in his life.³⁸ The pose the artist decided for her is reminiscent of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, which he saw that same year in a Western art artbook.³⁹ Therefore, Huang's painting is symbolist: the female figure is the incarnation of freedom and hope of the Chinese People who, even if they seemed to be defeated in 1976, they obtained justice with the end of the CR and the arrest of the Gang of Four. Huang Rui, a 24-year-old factory worker who came back from Inner Mongolia after the Down to the Countryside Movement, on April 4, 1976 went to Tian'anmen after his shift and read aloud a poem he composed titled *The People's Grief*. Before leaving the square, he hung his poem on the Monument to the People's Heroes.⁴⁰ The following day, there was no more trace of it. After two years from that tragic event, Huang depicted his memories of those days, also adding a nude figure, something unconceivable for the time. Regarding the style, before painting *April 5, 1976* he had recently attended the Beijing's Nineteenth-Century French Rural Landscape Painting Exhibition of March 1978. Here, he was fascinated by Cézanne's and Van Gogh's paintings, artists who influenced his production over the following 40 years.⁴¹ At the end of 1978, Huang Rui became one of the founders of the Xingxing 星星 (The Stars Group).

³⁸ O' DEA Madeleine, Huang Rui, the Artist Who Took on China and Mao, *The Australian Financial Review*, August 27, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/management/huang-rui-the-artist-who-took-on-china-and-mao-20160822-gqxx7o>

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ HUANG Rui, *Chinese Abstraction Series: Huang Rui – Ways of Abstraction*. Retrieved from <https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/huang-rui-ways-of-abstraction/>

1.4 Shen Yaoyi - *Blood and Heart*, 1978-1979

Shen Yaoyi's 沈尧伊 (1943-) *Blood and Heart* [fig. 12] shows the clashes of April 5, 1976 in realist style. Shen graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in the same year that the Cultural Revolution broke out. Soon after, he was drafted into the People's Liberation Army. During the CR he created propaganda artworks, mainly depicting Mao Zedong and his exploits. In late 1978, he started *Blood and Heart*. This oil painting, which resembles monumental paintings, with many characters and in a socialist realist style, depicts a very excited scene of the night of April 5, 1976. As for the above-mentioned paintings, the setting is the basis of the Monument to the People's Heroes, whose steps are packed with demonstrators, wreaths and banners. Unlike Huang's work, *Blood and Heart* clearly portrays the clashes between participants in the Zhou Enlai commemoration and the army. On the left side of the scene, the elderly men and women and the young people are trying to protect the flower wreaths and other commemorations for Zhou with their own bodies as a shield, while the men in uniform are making their way through the crowd with truncheons. On the right side, from a distance, the gateway of the Beijing's Imperial Palace shrouded in the darkness of the night is barely visible.

Shen Yaoyi leaves the central area of the painting almost empty: the focus of the scene falls on a girl who is hurrying to grab a bunch of white callas left on the bloody steps of the monument, but she is meeting the gaze of an armed man who is just in front of her. Shen's mastery lies in the use of theatrical lighting that makes the scene full of tension and graveness. The artist underlines the pain and the suffering of people using cold colours and shades of grey, blue and black. Moreover, the view adopted by Shen is from a higher point than the clashes, to allow the viewer to also see the swarming of people in the background. This artwork was exhibited at the Fifth National Art Exhibition and published in *Meishu* in 1979.⁴² In 2005, *Blood and Heart* was sold at auction for 6.27 million yuan (963,000 dollars), setting a record for a contemporary Chinese oil painting at the time.

⁴² Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian gedi meizhan zuopin xuan 庆祝建国三十周年各地美展作品选 (Selected Artworks from National Exhibitions Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, October 1979.

1.5 Yin Guoliang, Zhang Tongyun - *Thousand Years' Achievements and Crimes*, 1979

Yin Guoliang 尹国良 (1931-) and Zhang Tongyun 张彤云 (1928-), at the time already art professors and well-known painters, also chose the steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes as a background for their *Thousand Years' Achievements and Crimes* [fig.13]. The two decided to portray the body of a young woman, perhaps dead, lying on the ground over a wreath. White flowers surround the photo of Zhou Enlai, now stained with blood after the clashes. The rests of what remains from the protests surround the woman. Although she appears unconscious, she still has one arm stretched out to protect the flower wreath. Unlike the previously analysed creations, there is no other depicted figure here: the woman is left alone, the clashes seem to be over. The two artists illuminate her body in a dramatic way, also emphasised by the chromatic contrast between the white of the flowers and the black of her jacket. As Cai Jingkai's artwork, this is also a close-up scene from the tragic epilogue of April 5, 1976. To create it, in 1978 Zhang Tongyun went to Beijing to secretly collect material and testimonies, but it was not until the following year that the two artists - who had previously collaborated - created *Thousand Years' Achievements and Crimes*. The title of the painting (*Qianqiu gongzui* 千秋功罪) refers to a verse of a poem written by Mao Zedong in October 1935, at the end of the Long March (1934-1935), entitled *Nian nu jiao · Kunlun* 念奴娇·昆仑:

*Who has ever commented on the achievements and crimes of a thousand years?*⁴³

This painting was exhibited at the Fifth National Art Exhibition where it won third prize⁴⁴ and was published in the December 1979 issue of *Meishu*.⁴⁵

⁴³ 千秋功罪，谁人曾与评说？

The entire poem can be found in ZHU Xiangqian, *Shishi he yi —ling jie wenhua juren Mao Zedong* 诗史合——另解文化巨人毛泽东 (*Combination of Poetry and History - Another Explanation of Cultural Giant Mao Zedong*), Hunan Literature and Art Publishing House, 2016.

⁴⁴ JIN Kejun, Qingzhu zhonghua renmin gongheguo chengli sa [sic!] zhounian quanguo meizhan jinxing zuopin pingjiang 庆祝中华人民共和国成立卅 [sic!] 周年全国美展进行作品评奖 (Awarded Artworks of the National Art Exhibition to Celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, April 1980.

⁴⁵ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian gedi meizhan zuopin xuan 庆祝建国三十周年各地美展作品选 (Selected Artworks from National Exhibitions Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, December 1979.

1.6 Bai Jingzhou - *Standing Firm in the Midst of Chaos*, 1979

Bai Jingzhou 白敬周 (1946-2011), a 1966 graduate artist of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, created the lithograph *Standing Firm in the Midst of Chaos* [fig.14] in 1979. Bai portrayed men and women wearing black armbands during the Qingming Festival days of 1976. They are at the base of the Monument to the People's Heroes and it looks like they are waiting. Being a close-up scene, only a man and a woman are fully visible: they are looking with determination and pride towards the square, the man is crouched holding a wreath of flowers, while the woman is standing. Behind them, Bai depicts one wreath hanging on the facade of the monument: it has a hammer and a sickle in the centre – as the ones really present in the days of the April 5 Incident - as if the people were mourning for the death of the Chinese Communist Party's values. The expressions of the two "heroes" suggest that they are ready to defend the signs of commemoration for Zhou and criticism of the Gang of Four even risking their lives. Due to the style with which Bai Jingzhou portrayed these valiant figures - very muscular, with almost Western features and a steady gaze - the artwork is still influenced by previous Cultural Revolution's models. *Standing Firm in the Midst of Chaos* was published on the February 1979 issue of *Meishu*.⁴⁶

2. Artworks about the martyr Zhang Zhixin

After the openness policies, along with the events of the April 5 Tian'anmen Incident, another dramatic theme, the story of a heroic figure, began to appear in unofficial journals and so in the artworks by Chinese artists. Zhang Zhixin 张志新 (1930-1975) was an official in the Liaoning Party Propaganda Department who was accused of being a dissident in the 1960s for criticizing Mao Zedong's idolization and the Gang of Four's policies.⁴⁷ For this reason, she was jailed for more than five years, brainwashed, raped, tortured and finally, on April 4, 1975, executed.⁴⁸ This woman always refused to plead guilty, shouting her faith to the Communist Party till her last moment, but never to Mao or to Jiang Qing 江青⁴⁹ (1914-1991) and her comrades.

⁴⁶ Meishu zuopin 美术作品 (Fine Arts Artworks), *Meishu*, February 1979.

⁴⁷ ZHANG Wang, Yinglie hua kaihua yong zai – Yi Zhang Zhixin lieshi 英烈花开花永在 – 忆张志新烈士 (The Heroic Flower Blooms Forever – Recalling the Martyr Zhang Zhixin), *Meishu*, July 30, 1979, p. 5.

⁴⁸ SHEN Kuiyi, *Light Before Dawn – Unofficial Chinese Art, 1974–1985*, Asia Society Hong Kong Centre, 2013, p. 150.

⁴⁹ Pseudonym of Li Shumeng 李淑蒙.

When brought forth for public humiliation, she not only failed to confess her errors, but loudly declared her loyalty to the true Communist Party, and her belief that Mao had hijacked its principles.⁵⁰

Only after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the trial of the Gang of Four, Zhang Zhixin was rehabilitated, recognized as a revolutionary martyr and as a communist model who tried to oppose the dangerous ideas of the Gang of Four. Although her story was already known, in 1979 the then-kept hidden and bewildering details of her death were published by some unofficial journals such as *Zhixin* and *The April Fifth Tribune* and hung on the Democracy Wall. It was thus discovered that the woman who had dared to speak too much, after countless tortures, had her throat cut.⁵¹

More and more readers of the Democracy Wall became aware of the role of the official media and started to appreciate the alternative sources and critical comments offered by the Democracy Wall. They gradually got used to comparing different versions of the same story, judging for themselves what had been distorted and what had been left out and deducing the reasons behind such manipulations.⁵²

Unlike previous representations of national heroes, such as those depicted during the Cultural Revolution, the story of Zhang Zhixin was not mythologized by artists, but rather portrayed to convey a message of criticism towards a corrupt and totalitarian political system, which could only be fought through research and demonstration, in this case artistic, of historical truth.⁵³

That her motivation was patriotism and loyalty, and her heroic action was to criticize the failings of the Communist Party from a position within it has made her a symbol of free speech and principled dissent.⁵⁴

2.1 Li Shuang - *Red and Black*, 1979

One of the first artworks about Zhang Zhixin appeared in 1979, at the first Xingxing meizhang 星星美展 (Stars Art Exhibition). The Stars Group, created by Huang Rui and Ma Dasheng 马德升 (1952-) and soon followed by numerous other artists, became famous both

⁵⁰ SHEN Kuiyi, *Light Before Dawn – Unofficial Chinese Art, 1974–1985*, op. cit., p. 150.

⁵¹ SHAO Jiang, *Minkan in China: 1949–89*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., pp. 738.

⁵⁴ SHEN Kuiyi, *Light Before Dawn – Unofficial Chinese Art, 1974–1985*, op. cit., p. 150.

in China and abroad when, not having obtained an exhibition space from the official authorities, on September 27, 1979, Stars artists exhibited their creations on the railing of the China Art Gallery in Beijing.⁵⁵ The following day, the police dismantled the illegal exhibition and the Stars Group began a protest march. Among the displayed artworks, there was also *Red and Black* [fig.15] by the young Li Shuang 李爽 (1957-), one of the few women in the group.⁵⁶ This oil painting portrays two female figures: on the left the half-bust of Zhang Zhixin, with a partially visible blood-red face, her skin marked by torture, her arms tied, a cut on the throat, but with her eyes pointed towards the viewer and full of expressiveness. On the right side of the painting, instead, a red and bony figure seems to be begging or despairing, raising her chained arms towards the sky.⁵⁷ This artwork is then divided into two different scenes, counterposed also by the colours used by the artist: black, which recalls the hidden side of the Party, silence and torture; red, symbol of CCP and of the blood shed by the martyr; white, the colour of purity but also of death. The brushstrokes with which the artist creates these two figures are also different, marked and layered to portray Zhang Zhixin, more defined and smoother for the figure on the right. Furthermore, the style of *Black and Red* recalls Western expressionism.

Only a few months later, in December 1979, an exhibition in honour of the martyr Zhang Zhixin was held at the National Art Museum. What was produced and showed around this charismatic and heroic woman were sketches, woodcuts and sculptures centred on her struggle for truth, such as *Struggle for the Truth* [fig.16] and *Brave Warrior Defending the Truth* [fig.17], depicting her courage, the strength or her despair while she was jailed. One of the most famous sculpture portraying Zhang was *The Powerful One* [fig.18], made by Wang Keqing 王克庆 (1933-).⁵⁸ Moreover, her story became an inspiration for poems and essays.⁵⁹ In an article published in 1979 in *Meishu*, the author Zhang Wang 张望 explained how this woman and her past became a symbol for many young academic's artists too, who tried with all their efforts to pay homage to her organizing events, exhibitions and creating artworks: "Many comrades were very excited when they were making their creations, with tears in their eyes. They preferred to accomplish their task instead of eating".⁶⁰

⁵⁵ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 411.

⁵⁶ SHEN Kuiyi, *Light Before Dawn – Unofficial Chinese Art, 1974–1985*, op. cit., p. 150.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 389.

⁵⁹ Poems in honour of Zhang Zhixin can be found in Xian gei Zhang Zhixin lieshi 献给张志新烈士 (Dedicated to the Martyr Zhang Zhixin), Shikai 诗刊 (Poetry Periodical), July 1979, pp. 12-15.

⁶⁰ 许多同志在创作时, 热泪盈眶, 十分激动。宁可不吃饭, 也要完成任务。

2.2 Zhang Guilin - *Where Is the Party?*, 1979

Zhang Guilin 张桂林 (1951-) took part in the Exhibition to Commemorate the Martyr Zhang Zhixin with the woodcut *Where Is the Party?* [fig.19]. This creation shows the figure of Zhan Zhixin in the foreground, while she is sleeping. The woman is in prison, her hands are tied by an iron chain and she seems to be dreaming. In the background, Zhang Guilin gives shape to her thoughts, portraying her imploring with her hands, now with a broken chain, towards the hammer and sickle that shine in the sky among the black clouds like an almost divine light. This artwork seems to give life to the hopes of Zhan Zhixin - as expressed in the title - locked up and tortured by those who were at the head of the Party in which she believed until the last of her: a Party that was unable, however, to save her.

2.3 Luo Zhongli - *The Song of the Loyal Ghost*, 1979

One of the most important artists of what will be later recognized as Scar Art, Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), after being admitted to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, in 1979 felt the need to honour the memories of Zhang Zhixin by creating the oil painting *The Song of the Loyal Ghost* [fig.20]. This artwork was also displayed at the exhibition in honour of the martyr. In the full moonlight, the bleeding Zhang is being lifted by two white spirits - a man and a woman – who are carrying her to heaven. Behind them, the Monument of the People's Heroes rises above the clouds in all its majesty, as if it reveals the way to the sky. Luo adopts a bottom-up perspective to emphasise these three figures, the monument and the "sacredness" of the scene. This artwork plays on the cold tones of blue and white, interrupted only by the red of the blood on Zhang Zhixin's right arm.

2.4 Wen Lipeng - *Daughter of the Earth. In Honour of the Martyr Zhang Zhixin*, 1979

One of the most emblematic and appreciated masterpieces about Zhang Zhixin presented at her memorial exhibition was the oil painting by Wen Lipeng 闻立鹏 (1931-) *Daughter of the Earth. In honour of the martyr Zhang Zhixin* [fig.21]. Professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he graduated a few years before the Cultural Revolution, Wen returned to paint after the disastrous decade by creating this artwork.⁶¹ He

ZHANG Wang, Yinglie hua kaihua yong zai – Yi zhangzhixin lieshi 英烈花开花永在 – 忆张志新烈士 (The Heroic Flower Blooms Forever – Recalling the Martyr Zhang Zhixin), op. cit., p. 6.

⁶¹ Retrieved from *Marks in Mind-Wen Lipeng Oil Painting Art Exhibition unveiled in NAMOC*, May 30, 2016, http://www.namoc.org/en/news/news2016/201605/t20160527_298781.htm#.YFnPqa9KjIU

came to know the tragic epilogue of the martyr from a journal and having experienced on his own skin the arrest during the CR, he identified himself with this woman's story.⁶² Furthermore, the two had some other details of their life in common: they were more or less the same age, they were both supporters of the Party and Zhang had studied with Wen Lipeng's younger sister in the 1950s.⁶³ This story shocked him to the point that he decided to create a painting in her honour:

*But I did not want to delineate the scene as it was in a realistic approach – I couldn't do that. So I wanted to represent her beautiful nature with a symbolic approach, letting her lie on the earth with her blood flowing.*⁶⁴

In order to finish before the deadline of the 1979 exhibition to commemorate her, Wen completed the painting in just two weeks. Zhang Zhixin is depicted lying lifeless on the ground, on the top of a small hill. She is wearing a white robe - the colour of purity and death - her right hand resting on her chest while she is holding a red flower, the colour of truth.⁶⁵ Her body is surrounded by what looks like red flowers, but which are actually trails of blood. From afar, the mountains are barely visible, dominated by the grey and cloudy sky. *Daughter of the Earth. In honour of the martyr Zhang Zhixin* was put in the centre of the round hall at the National Art Gallery, receiving numerous compliments.⁶⁶

3. The birth of Scar Literature

As analysed, from 1977 onward a crucial period in Chinese art history began. Thanks to the new political and social climate, more and more artists modified their artistic and aesthetic approach gradually abandoning all the previous impositions: they started to depict episodes of China's recent past – even the painful ones - ceasing to only portray the leaders and glorify the Party.⁶⁷ At the same time, emotional and psychological individuality, but above all the theme of the senselessness and tragedy of the Cultural Revolution started to appear not only in art, but it arose in the literary field too. Thus, thanks to the policies of openness and reform, a new era began also for literature: magazines such as *Renmin wenxue*

⁶² REED Christopher A., From Text(s) to Image(s): Maoist-era Texts and Their Influences on Six Oil Paintings (1957– 79) in FARLEY James, JOHNSON Matthew D., *Redefining Propaganda in Modern China: The Mao Era and its Legacies*, Routledge, 2020, p. 212.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., pp. 738.

⁶⁶ REED Christopher A., From text(s) to image(s): Maoist-era Texts and Their Influences on Six Oil Paintings (1957– 79), op. cit., p. 213.

⁶⁷ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 193.

人民文学 (*People's Literature*) and *Shikan* 诗刊 (*Poetry Periodical*) returned to activity, many of the previously reformed or incarcerated writers returned free, publishing houses reopened. Moreover, the publications of magazines and translated foreign literary works became more and more frequent and new literary organizations were born.⁶⁸ Initially, the writers who had the courage to expose themselves with their works were mainly those who had supported and indulged the will of the CCP in the years of the Cultural Revolution, some of the re-educated artists who returned to activity and the young people who belonged to the *zhiqing* 知青 (*educated youth*), those who had been sent to the countryside from 1968.

The externalization of what people went through and felt during the CR resulted in the birth of a new literary genre: the later defined Shanghen wenxue 伤痕文学 (Scar Literature). The artworks belonging to Scar Literature dealt with two main themes: the physical and moral persecutions suffered by the people during the CR and the experiences and the fate of the so-called *zhiqing* 知青.⁶⁹ These themes were the background for the exposure of the numerous social problems of the time such as injustice, betrayal, juvenile delinquency, death, family tragedies, repentance, unjust accusations, disillusionment, late rehabilitation, love affairs.⁷⁰ As never before, the deep inner wounds of people who until then had never even had the right to externalize were exposed.

*Acknowledgement of the violence and suffering and lawlessness of the Cultural Revolution, previously taboo, (was) now permissible - providing that blame (was) pinned on Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.*⁷¹

For the first time from the 1950s, not only the bright and joyful side of reality stood out in Chinese literature: the principle established by Mao in Yan'an was thus overturned. Although the works of Scar Literature produced between 1978 and the early 1980s can be defined as a critique of what people had to bear during that disastrous decade, the only antagonists of the events described were the members of the Gang of Four. Furthermore, at the end of almost all the works there is praise or support for the new government born after 1978.⁷²

⁶⁸ OWEN Stephen, SUN Chang Kang-i, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 647.

⁶⁹ DUTRAIT Noël, *Leggere la Cina. Piccolo vademecum di letteratura cinese contemporanea (1976-2001)*, Pisani, 2005, p. 26.

⁷⁰ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 193.

⁷¹ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1986*, University of Leeds, 1990, p. 177.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 195;

3.1 Liu Xinwu - *The Teacher*, 1977

What critics and historians identify as the precursor of Scar Literature is the short story *Banzhuren* 班主任 (*The Teacher* or *The Class Counsellor*) by Liu Xinwu 刘心武 (1942-), published in *Renmin wenxue* 人民文学 (*People's Literature*) in November 1977. Although it is not autobiographical, the story is based on the experiences lived by the author himself: Liu Xinwu was a teacher in a Beijing middle school from 1961 to 1976.⁷³ The story is set just after the end of the Cultural Revolution. The protagonist is Teacher Zhang Junshi, who has a new student, the young reckless Song Baoqi. Zhang initially believes that the boy's inappropriate behaviour is due to family problems. He will later discover that he is rather "a victim of the corrupting political influences of the Gang of Four".⁷⁴ Zhang will also understand that the thinking of many of his other students - like the young Xie Huimin - is in line with that of the Gang of Four and this will make him question the magnitude of the psychological, spiritual, but above all cultural damage that politics and corruption of those years caused the younger and inexperienced Chinese generations.⁷⁵ This short story was totally different from the literary production created from the 1950s onwards.⁷⁶ It was one of the earliest examples of literature aimed at condemning and publicly exposing the excesses and psychological effects of the Cultural Revolution.

This work soon inspired other writers "to express their concerns over the violation of humanity and humanism",⁷⁷ triggering a series of debates centred around this theme that lasted throughout the 1980s. In *The Teacher*, scenes of violence typical of the CR are not described: the focus is placed on the psychological aftermath that this decade left in the population, especially in young people.⁷⁸ Liu Xinwu himself said that he was inspired by a

LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 736.

⁷³ LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, in GU Mingdong (Cur.), *Routledge Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature*, Routledge, 2019, p. 441.

⁷⁴ BARME Geremie, *Chaotou Wenxue - China's New Literature*, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, July 1979, No. 2, pp. 137-148, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University, pp. 137-138. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2158736>

⁷⁵ DUTRAIT Noël, *Leggere la Cina. Piccolo vademecum di letteratura cinese contemporanea (1976-2001)*, op. cit., p. 26;

MA Chunhua, *Shanghen wenxue de chuangshang jiyi yu xingbie zhengzhi* 伤痕文学的创伤记忆与性别政治 (The Traumatic Memories and Gender Politics in the Scar Literature), *Journal of School of Chinese Language and Culture Nanjing Normal University*, December 2019, p.77.

⁷⁶ KNIGHT Deirdre Sabina, *Scar Literature and the Memory of Trauma*, in MOSTOW Joshua S. (Cur.), *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 527.

⁷⁷ LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, op. cit., p. 440.

⁷⁸ CHEN Gongmin, "Shanghen" wenxue xiaoyi "伤痕" 文学小议 ("Scars" Literature Review), *Shanghai wenxue* 上海文学 (*Shanghai Literature*), December 27, 1978, p 94.

masterpiece of the Chinese literature, Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881-1936) *Kuangren riji* 狂人日记 (*Diary of a Madman*). Its influence is clearly visible in the final part of *Banzhuren* 班主任, where the professor's thoughts urge readers to save the younger generations from the indoctrination done by the Gang of Four:⁷⁹

*This call echoes the cry Lu Xun voiced 60 years earlier in [...] The Diary of a Madman to save the children from Confucian ethical codes. This connection lends “Banzhuren” an unmistakable sense of history and serves as a warning to the public that the old demons have come back in disguise to threaten the spiritual health of the children.*⁸⁰

The literary success that came after the publication of *The Teacher* was such that Liu Xinwu was encouraged to write more in the following months. People – who were used to works that for years had been limited by pre-established models - were eager to read new stories, explore new themes, get excited and identify with characters' lives and vicissitudes: experiences that most of them had lived on their own skin. What Liu created in 1978 was *Aiqing de weizhi* 爱情的位置 (*The Position of Love*), which reintroduced - for the first time in almost twenty years - the theme of love between a man and a woman, previously completely banned in the Cultural Revolution literature.⁸¹

3.2 Lu Xinhua – *Scar*, 1978

Although Liu Xinwu's short story *Banzhuren* 班主任 was published first, the literary work that according to critics inaugurated the new genre called Scar Literature was the novella *Shanghen* 伤痕 (*Scar* or *The Wounded*) by Lu Xinhua 卢新华 (1954-). Lu was a young student of Fudan University who had spent four years in a Shanxi village during the Down to the Countryside Movement.⁸² The story, which takes place in the ten years of the CR, is about a young woman - initially enrolled in the Red Guards - Wang Xiaohua. In 1969, her mother, a Party official, is accused of treason and Xiaohua, who is just 14, decides to abandon her family. After taking part to the Down to the Countryside Movement, she returns

⁷⁹ HUANG Zhigang, *Chinese Scar Literature on the Cultural Revolution as Testimony*, Carlton University, September 2001.

⁸⁰ YING Li-Hua, *Historical Dictionary of Modern Chinese Literature*, Scarecrow Press, 2009, p 117;

LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, op. cit., p. 441.

⁸¹ DUTRAIT Noël, *Leggere la Cina. Piccolo vademecum di letteratura cinese contemporanea (1976-2001)*, op. cit., p 26.

⁸² YING Li-Hua, *Historical Dictionary of Modern Chinese Literature*, op. cit., p 117.

home in 1978 when her mother is rehabilitated, nine years after her sentence. When Wang Xiaohua returns to her native village, she finds her mother dead.⁸³ This short story is focused on how, during the Cultural Revolution, personal relationships were outclassed by the values of the regime, even going so far as to disintegrate entire families.

In April 1977, the young Lu Xinhua attached his novella on the blackboard in his classroom of the Department of Chinese Literature at Fudan University.⁸⁴ Soon, his work was read by so many students that it caught the attention of local newspapers: *Scar* was officially published on August 11, 1978 in a special issue of the *Wenhuibao* 文汇报 (*Wenhui Daily*) of Shanghai [fig.22].⁸⁵ This short story aroused so much sensation and emotion that the magazine had to reprint other 1.5 million copies in the following months.⁸⁶ Lu and others *Scar* writers were even praised by senior party members, including Deng Xiaoping, as their stories discredited the Gang of Four's actions and were therefore in line with the politics of the time.⁸⁷ But what made *Scar* special is that, for the first time, the tragedies and emotions experienced by a generation of young people, the generation of Wang Xiaohua, were brought to light in a raw and realistic way. It was only after the publication of *Shanghen* 伤痕 that the term *Shanghen yishu* 伤痕艺术 was coined:

*Chen Gongmin coined the term in his article "On 'Scar' Literature" in the December 1978 issue of Shanghai Literature (Shanghai wenxue) to describe both a literary and social phenomenon.*⁸⁸

In the early 1980s, other novels, short stories, poems and plays that exposed the "dark side" of Chinese socialist society were published, all bringing to light the physical and psychological wounds of the radical politics of previous years. These first works of *Scar Literature* were not only important for the issues treated, but they also marked a starting

⁸³ XU Zao, *Wenyi fanying shidai benzhi wenti qianyi — cong xiaoshuo "Shanghen" tanqi* 文艺反映时代本质问题浅议 — 从小说《伤痕》谈起 (Discussion on Literature and Art Reflecting the Essence of the Times — From the novel "Scar"), *Jilin University Journal Social Sciences Edition*, January 31, 1979, p.56;

LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, op. cit., p. 441.

⁸⁴ LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, op. cit., p. 442.

⁸⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 736.

⁸⁶ HUANG Yiju, *Wounds in Time: The Aesthetic Afterlives of The Cultural Revolution*, University of Illinois, 2011, p. 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁸⁸ LI Meng, TAM King-fai, *Literature of Trauma and Reflection*, op. cit., pp. 440-441.

point for what is called Xin shiqi wenxue 新时期文学 (Literature of the New Period), which is, literature from 1978 onwards.⁸⁹

3.3 Yu Luojin - *A Chinese Winter's Tale*, 1980

A novel that can be part of the sentimentalist genre and at the same time of Scar Literature is *Yige dongtian de tonghua* 一个冬天的童话 (*A Chinese Winter's Tale*) by Yu Luojin 遇罗锦 (1946-).⁹⁰ Begun in 1974 but published only in 1980, this work mainly narrates the events experienced by Yu Luoke, the writer's brother, the ostracism, persecution and ferocious violence suffered by their family during the *shinian haojie* 十年浩劫. Yu Luoke was executed by government forces after being convicted as a political dissident,⁹¹ while his sister, the author, had to spend three years in a labour camp for some political statements written in her personal diary found by the Red Guards. Of this novel, however, what shocked the literary critics and readers of the time was not the brutality implemented by the Party - to which people had been accustomed for years - but the exposition, in no uncertain terms, of the most intimate insecurities and the scarce sex education that the young people of the time had, especially those who had taken part in the Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement.⁹² Furthermore, Yu Luojin also wrote about the custom of marrying for mere convenience and how, after getting married out of sheer necessity, she found herself disoriented and helpless on her wedding night, comparing her knowledge in the sexual field to that of children.⁹³ Indeed, this work is considered an autobiographical novel.

4. The rise of Scar Art – *Lianhuanhua* 连环画 or Picture-story books

The transition from Scar Literature to Scar Art was short and took place thanks to the novella *Scar*. After the enormous success obtained with its publication, in March 1979 a

⁸⁹ DUTRAIT Noël, *Leggere la Cina. Piccolo vademecum di letteratura cinese contemporanea (1976-2001)*, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁹¹ MILLER Jane Eldridge, *Who's Who in Contemporary Women's Writing*, Routledge, 2001, p. 355.

⁹² DUTRAIT Noël, *Leggere la Cina. Piccolo vademecum di letteratura cinese contemporanea (1976-2001)*, op. cit., p. 28.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 28;

MILLER Jane Eldridge, *Who's Who in Contemporary Women's Writing*, op. cit., p. 355.

picture-story book (*lianhuanhua* 连环画)⁹⁴ adaptation of *Scar*'s story was created [fig.23]. The illustrations were created by Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), three young people from Shanghai who had returned from almost ten years spent in northern Manchuria. With this artwork, the three artists won the first prize at Quanguo di er jie lianhuanhua pingjiang zuopin zhan 全国第二届连环画评奖作品展 (The Second National Picture-story Book Critics Exhibition) [figs.24-28]. Unlike the *manhua* 漫画 (cartoon) and the *lianhuan manhua* 连环漫画 (serial cartoon or comic books), the *lianhuanhua* 连环画 were adaptations of stories already published or known to the public. Some historians believe they have ancient origins, but they began to appear more frequently towards the end of the 19th century when "they were used to support social and political movements and to educate and mobilize readers. And, as such, they were under stricter control than Western comics."⁹⁵ In the early years of the People's Republic of China they were initially used as a vehicle for mass propaganda but were completely banned after the anti-right campaigns promoted by Mao in 1957 and throughout the Cultural Revolution because more and more artists used them as a means of expression to criticise the government. The peculiarity of the *lianhuanhua* is that they are mainly "palm size, five inches long, three and a half inches wide, and one-fourth of an inch thick" and so they are pocket-sized and practical.⁹⁶ Each page contains an illustration combined with a description on the bottom or the side.

4.1 Liu Yulian, Li Bin, Chen Yiming and Zheng Yi – *Maple*, 1979

The first *lianhuanhua* of a work of Scar Literature to become famous and controversial nationwide is that of *Feng* 枫 (*Maple* or *The Maple Tree*). The short story *Maple* was published on February 11, 1979 in the Shanghai's *Wenhuibao* 文汇报 (*Wenhui Daily*) and it was the first work written to bring to light the violent clashes between Red Guard factions that occurred between 1966 and 1968 and about how unhealthy the indoctrination caused by the idolatry of the figure of Mao was. The author himself, Zheng Yi 郑义 (1947-), was the leader of a faction of the Red Guards rebels in the 1960s.⁹⁷ The *lianhuanhua* version of

⁹⁴ More information about *Lianhuanhua* can be found in LENT, A. John, *Asian Comics*, University Press of Mississippi, 2015, pp. 31-36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ LENT, A. John, *Asian Comics*, op. cit., p 31.

⁹⁷ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 196.

Maple was published starting from August 3, 1979 in the *Lianhuanhua bao* 连环画报 (*Journal of Illustration, or Serial Pictures Gazette*).⁹⁸ It was composed by thirty-two illustrations created by Chen Yiming, Liu Yulian and Li Bin, all former Red Guards⁹⁹ and the same artists who had previously illustrated the short story *Scar*. It can therefore be said that the illustrations by these three artists were the fundamental link between *Scar* Literature and *Scar* Art.¹⁰⁰

Maple's story is set in October 1967 and is about Li Honggang and Lu Danfeng, young lovers enrolled in two opposing factions of the Red Guards and their tragic and impossible love during the very first years of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰¹ One of the characters, as well as the narrator of the events, is the high school art teacher of the two young people who describes the tragic epilogue of their love when they found themselves facing each other in two opposing Red Guards groups.¹⁰² The narration begins with the teacher, that with the excuse of painting maple trees in the school garden is sent by his own faction to draw the military set-up of the opposing faction that had besieged the building.

*The maple leaves are growing red after the first frost, an image of the revolutionary fervor surrounding the educational world at the time.*¹⁰³

He is soon discovered by a group from the enemy faction [fig.29] led by a former student of his, Lu Danfeng. Because of her love for art and the beautiful memories of her teacher's lessons, she decides to let him escape and gives him a letter for her boyfriend Li Honggang, belonging to the teacher's same faction. The teacher escapes to the school basement but in the meantime a bloody clash breaks out. The climax of the narrative is reached when the two lovers, Danfeng and Honggang, meet on the roof of the building, one against the other [fig.30].¹⁰⁴ Lu Danfeng decides to commit suicide by throwing herself

⁹⁸ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 72.

GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 196.

⁹⁹ CHENG Yiming, LIU Yulian, LI Bin, Guanyu chuanguo lianhuanhua "Feng" de yixie xiangfa 关于创作连环画“枫”的一些想法 (Some Thoughts on Creating the Comic Book "Maple"), *Meishu*, January 31, 1980, p. 34.

The translation of the entire article can be found in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2010, pp. 19-21.

¹⁰⁰ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁰¹ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 739.

¹⁰² ANDREWS Julia F., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., p. 396.

¹⁰³ CHEEK Timothy (Cur.), GOLDMAN Merle (Cur.), HAMRIN Carol Lee (Cur.), *China's Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship, Harvard Contemporary China Series: 3*, Harvard University Council on East Asian, 1987, p. 217.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 217-218.

below rather than ending up in the hands of the enemy, her beloved Honggang [fig.31]. After the victory of the Danfeng faction, Li Honggang is charged with murder and publicly executed. The narration ends with the teacher walking among the red maples, while the young Honggang is killed [fig.32]:¹⁰⁵

[...] *On both sides of the road, the maple leaves were red again, like fire. The fiery red tree crowns were almost like blood poured from a wound.*¹⁰⁶

The tragedy of this work lies in the senselessness of the conflicts between the factions, as each defended what they considered truth and fought in the name of the Great Helmsman. Noteworthy is the omnipresent detail during the story - the red maple leaves - which recall the girl's name and her tragic fate: Danfeng in fact means Crimson Maple.¹⁰⁷

4.1.1 The controversy over *Maple*

Maple caused a strong reaction among readers. As in Liu Xinwu's *The Position of Love*, this short story also presents the theme of love, previously considered immoral. The only love that was allowed to be expressed in art and literature during the Cultural Revolution was that of class struggle and the revolutionary cause.¹⁰⁸ However, it was not this that provoked a stir and aroused much criticism from readers: at the centre of the debates was the way in which Lin Biao 林彪 (1906-1971), Mao's right-hand men, and Jiang Qing were portrayed.¹⁰⁹ Targets of criticism and hatred by the whole nation for the crimes committed in the previous decade, Lin and Jiang were often represented in cartoons or illustrations, but always in a satirical or derogatory way [fig.33]. On the other hand, in *Maple* the two lovers were portrayed in a realistic style and depicted simply for what they were: human beings. According to public and critics, in the *lianhuanhua* they resulted as "positive" characters instead of being condemned.¹¹⁰ To understand the true motivations of this criticism, it is

¹⁰⁵ ANDREWS Julia F., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., p. 396.

¹⁰⁶ 那天，刑车从人群中驶过。我没有去看，我只是在一条静僻的路上漫步沉思。路的两边，枫叶又红了，像一丛丛烧得旺旺的火。那火红的树冠，简直像刚从伤口喷射出来的血，浓艳欲滴……

Text of the *Maple*'s illustration #32, 1979.

¹⁰⁷ ANDREWS Julia F., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., p. 394.

¹⁰⁸ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 741.

¹⁰⁹ More information about the letters of criticism arrived at the editorial office of *Lianhuanhua bao* can be found in GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., pp. 196-199;

CHENG Yiming, LIU Yulian, LI Bin, Guanyu chuanguo lianhuanhua "Feng" de yixie xiangfa 关于创作连环画“枫”的一些想法 (Some Thoughts on Creating the Comic Book "Maple"), op. cit., p. 35.

¹¹⁰ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 72;

GUO Bao, ZHENG Li, Women dui lianhuanhua "Feng" de yijian 我们对连环画《枫》的意见 (Our opinion on the comic book "Maple"), *Meishu*, August 29, 1979, p. 33.

necessary to remember how, in previous decades, artists and writers were often forced to distort the historical reality in their works to conform to political-government situations. The two most striking cases are *Birth of a Nation* by Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914-1973) [fig.34] - an artwork that was redone four times, eliminating and adding again the political figures as they were discredited or rehabilitated by the Party - and *Charmain Mao Goes to Anyuan* [fig.35] by Liu Chunhua 刘春华 (b. 1944). Furthermore, the figures discredited by the Party could be removed from the artworks or portrayed in a caricatured way, emphasising their negative aspects. The same was true - in a positive way - for the great pro-Communist figures promoted in the works of the CR. The image of Lin and Jiang the people were used to see in artworks which appeared in 1979 was that of two enemies of the people, mean and inhuman [fig.36].¹¹¹ It is peculiar, however, how, in the specific case of *Maple's* illustrations, even the two young Honggang and Danfeng were never portrayed as revolutionary heroes or martyrs: the three artists simply wanted to represent them as young students, indoctrinated from Mao's cult and destined to a tragic end [figs.37-39].¹¹²

The criticised images were essentially two: in the very first illustration Jiang Qing is portrayed as a joyful woman, among the young revolutionaries of the Red Guards [fig.40], while in the fourteenth illustration the image of Lin Biao, smiling and proud while wielding Mao's *Red Book*, appears on a gigantic poster [fig.41]. The goal of the three artists was therefore to portray the historical characters and the protagonists of the story as had been suggested in Deng Xiaoping's speeches in those years: without artifice. This desire to move away from the Maoist socialist realism representations was very important for the subsequent rebirth of social realism, which, as it will be analysed, became the fulcrum of the paintings of Scar Art.¹¹³ Maybe for the first time:

*The public was offered the chance to make its own judgements, instead of accepting official versions of events. [...] By dropping the formulaic symbols and not "telling" the reader whether the figures depicted were "positive" or "negative", the pictures for the story left people to draw their own conclusions.*¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 72.

¹¹² GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., pp. 197-198;
CHENG Yiming, LIU Yulian, LI Bin, Guanyu chuanguo lianhuanhua "Feng" de yixie xiangfa 关于创作连环画“枫”的一些想法 (Some Thoughts on Creating the Comic Book "Maple"), op. cit., p. 34.

¹¹³ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 72.

¹¹⁴ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1986*, University of Leeds, 1990, p. 182.

Following these images' criticism, a few weeks after the publication of this *lianhuanhua*, the Chuban guanliju 出版管理局 (Bureau of Publications) ordered to block its sales.¹¹⁵ The ban did not last long: thanks to the support of numerous readers and artists - including He Rong 何溶 (1921-1989)¹¹⁶ and Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1907-1995) - who clamoured to resume publications, the Chuban guanliju 出版管理局 withdrew the order. By that time, *Maple* became a literary sensation and sales skyrocketed, making these illustrations among the best-known images of the post-Cultural Revolution period.¹¹⁷ *Maple's* official crowning achievement came in 1979 with the first prize at the National Exhibition to Celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China [fig.42].¹¹⁸

5. Liao Bingxiong - *Self-Mockery*, 1979

After the reforms to ease government control over artistic production, in 1979 a great cartoonist also felt free to return to activity after more than twenty years: Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915-2006). Liao began drawing cartoons when he was only 19 years old. His production can be divided into four phases: the first cartoons created for the anti-Japanese propaganda of the 1930s, the artworks against the Nationalist regime of the 1940s, the cartoons created in the three years in which he emigrated to Hong Kong and finally the artworks from 1979 onwards.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 741;

HE Rong, Jiang rensheng you jiazhi de dongxi huimie ji ren kan - Du lianhuanhua "Feng" he xiangdao de yixie wenti 将人生有价值的东西毁灭给人看 - 读连环画《枫》和想到的一些问题 (Let People See the Destruction of Life's Valuable Things - Reading the Lianhuanhua "Maple" and Some Other Questions), *Meishu*, August 29, 1979, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ The eulogy article written by He Rong can be found in HE Rong, Jiang rensheng you jiazhi de dongxi huimie ji ren kan - Du lianhuanhua "Feng" he xiangdao de yixie wenti 将人生有价值的东西毁灭给人看 - 读连环画《枫》和想到的一些问题 (Let People See the Destruction of Life's Valuable Things - Reading the Lianhuanhua "Maple" and Some Other Questions), *Meishu*, August 29, 1979, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ ANDREWS Julia F., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., p. 396; CHENG Yiming, LIU Yulian, LI Bin, Guanyu chuanguo lianhuanhua "Feng" de yixie xiangfa 关于创作连环画“枫”的一些想法 (Some Thoughts on Creating the Comic Book "Maple"), op. cit., p. 35.

¹¹⁸ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojiang zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of Award-Winning Works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, March 1980.

¹¹⁹ CHEN Jing, Cartoonist Liao Bingxiong: Traditional Chinese Cartoons Are Dead, *Southern People Weekly*, July 19, 2006.

*Four persons made my life. The first is the Japanese Emperor, because my cartoons were created for the sake of national salvation. One is Chiang Kai-shek. One is Mao Zedong. One is Deng Xiaoping.*¹²⁰

Liao has always demonstrated a predilection for creating satirical, comic and derogatory cartoons that took inspiration from the events close to the nation's politics. It was precisely for some of his artworks which were unpleasant to the government [fig.43] that in 1957 he was condemned as a right-wing artist, re-educated in labour camps and then jailed for four years.¹²¹ From 1957 to 1978 he could not produce any artwork. It was only with the end of the Cultural Revolution and the gradual political and artistic reopening that Liao made what became his most controversial and famous cartoon: *Self-Mockery* [fig.44].¹²² The artist portrayed himself as an elderly man sitting and hesitating to move between two pieces of a vase: the same vase that shaped, forced and blocked him for years. Liao launched therefore a provocation to all the people who during the reign of Mao Zedong let themselves be influenced and indoctrinated, without questioning but just undergoing:

*After the destruction of the Terrible Four I composed this piece mocking myself and others of my kind. The year 1979, Bingxiong.*¹²³

Although the artworks created by Liao Bingxiong and other cartoonists are not recognized as Scar Art, *Self-Mockery* subtly recalls and manifests the psychological suffering that many artists had to face during the hegemony of Mao Zedong when bumped into a crossroads: to live up to their principles and risking their lives or adapting to the will of the government to survive.

Thanks to all the works here analysed, in the late 1970s for the first time “to discuss literary and artistic issues meant to discuss social issues, and it was a truly mass discussion”.¹²⁴ Artists and authors started to convey what they had seen, experienced, felt, without pre-established formulas. Their works were the mirror of reality, honest and truthful

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ CHRISTIANSEN Linn A., Corruption Among the Cats: Hypocrisy Exposed by Liao Bingxiong, *International Journal of Comic Art* 18(1): 138-156, 2016, p. 138.

¹²² LENT, A. John, YING Xu, *Comics art in China*, op. cit., p. 107.

¹²³ Text of the cartoon of *Self-Mockery*.

CHRISTIANSEN Linn A., Corruption Among the Cats: Hypocrisy Exposed by Liao Bingxiong, op. cit., p. 139.

¹²⁴ 讨论文艺问题就是讨论社会问题,而且是真正群众性的讨论.

CHEN Gongmin, “Shanghen” wenzue xiaoyi “伤痕”文学小议 (“Scars” Literature Review), op. cit., p 95.

reflections on life. Together with many other ones composed or created between 1977 and the early 1980s, they became real testimonies of the suffering, violent and unjust past that the people had lived. They were created to exorcise that horrible past and remained in the history of Chinese art and literature like the scar of a deep wound that will never heal.

Chapter II

Sichuan School of Painting – Scar Art and Native Soil Painting

*I am also the witness, the participant and a victim of this tragedy; every "scar" that remains in our body and soul is a testimony of history. Our generation has the right and the responsibility to tell and to record this historical fact.*¹²⁵

The transition from the realistic depiction characterising the *lianhuanhua* version of *Maple* to the representation of historical authenticity and the scars of the nation on large oil paintings was rapid. As already discussed, thanks to the new atmosphere of the late 1970s opening and the rise of Scar Literature, artists felt freer - but above all they felt the urge - to expose the reality of what had happened in the previous fifteen years - not only truthfully, but also critically. For this introspective re-analysis, most artists tried to use new forms of realism, without the rigidity of revolutionary models, but still influenced by the strong features of Soviet socialist realism. Furthermore, thanks to the publication of foreign artworks in official art magazines, artists started to use the imported techniques and styles of Western art, such as photorealism.

From 1977 onwards, with the reopening of art academies, official academic art followed three main developments: Scar Art, then Native Soil Painting (or Chinese Rural Realism) and finally Contemplative Painting (which also includes Melancholy Youth). A fourth trend that will be analysed in the next chapter is Life-Stream Art, which can be linked to Chinese Rural Realism and, in some cases, also to Contemplative Painting. The main feature of these currents is that they were all created thanks to the artworks by the young students of art academies, especially those of the 1977 class of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in Chongqing, Sichuan.

¹²⁵ 我也是这场悲剧的目睹者, 参与者和受害者; 那深留在我们身上、心灵上的每一条“伤痕”都是历史的见证。我们这一代人有权和义务来发言, 来记载这一历史事实。
GAO Xiaohua, Weishenme hua “Weishenme” 为什么画“为什么” (Why I painted “Why?”), *Meishu*, July 1979, p. 7.

1. Sichuan Province – From centre of clashes to centre of artistic production

It is no coincidence that these currents, now recognised as belonging to Scar Art, were born in this area of China. Sichuan was the scene of the bloodiest Red Guards clashes between 1966 and 1968, especially in the city of Chongqing.¹²⁶ Here, the fights among the RG factions began in early 1967, when the main organization, the 8.15,¹²⁷ split into two groups - 8.15 and "Rebel to the End" (*fandaodi* 反到底) - who began to face each other armed.¹²⁸

*The conflict escalated. Fights with wooden bars and iron spears in early April became fights with small-caliber [sic!] guns by July. Entering August, semi-automatic rifles, automatic machine guns, four-barrel anti-aircraft guns, cannons and even tanks were used.*¹²⁹

The reasons why these clashes were mainly concentrated in this city and in the surrounding areas were many. First, Chongqing was one of the largest arms manufacturers of the nation - shortly after the fighting began, eight of the biggest arms factories were requisitioned by two different Red Guards groups. Second, the warring factions always remained balanced, making the fights prolonged and exhausting, and while in other areas of China the groups split into smaller and smaller factions, the Chongqing ones only dealt with two major internal divisions.¹³⁰ Even today it is not possible to have official data on the number of deaths caused by these battles, but the last remaining Red Guard cemetery in the whole nation, right in Chongqing, is home to more than 450 bodies: some of them have never been identified and have been buried in mass graves. Emblematic is the age of the deceased who died as Red Guards martyrs or were killed by them: the youngest victim was only 6 years old, the oldest was 60, the youngest Red Guard was 14 years old. According to some historians, in 1968 in Chongqing there were about 20 cemeteries like this one, which were

¹²⁶ Chongqing, now one of the four autonomous municipalities of China, was part of Sichuan until 1997.

¹²⁷ Group created on August 15, 1966 and made up of students from Chongqing University.

¹²⁸ ZHANG Everett Y., Grieving at Chongqing's Red Guard Graveyard: In the Name of Life Itself, *The China Journal*, No. 70, July 2013, pp. 24-47, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University, p. 28. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/671331>

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 29.

then dismantled by the government during the years of "reinterpreting" those historical events.¹³¹

Some of the artists who will be discussed here were born in Sichuan, took part in these clashes or witnessed them. They created artworks that emphasised the human cost of the early years of the Cultural Revolution. Other artists did not depict the physical violence of that period: they described what they had seen during the Down to the Countryside Movement. Thanks to their experience in the most remote areas, the focus of their artworks shifted from the memory's anger and pain to the depiction of rural reality and ethnic minorities, thus giving way to Native Soil Painting. With no hints to politics, artists started to put all their attention on the characterization of the figures, portrayed as rural ordinary people, no longer as stereotyped models, and on their humanity.¹³² Many academic artists thus changed their iconography and style again: the new paintings showed the abandonment of the Soviet socialist realism rigidity, which made Chinese social realism flourish again.¹³³ A third phase - but not less important - of the emotional and psychological journey that the artists faced between the 1960s and the early 1980s, was reflected in the artworks that expressed the mental suffering of the *educated youth*, their disillusionment and the melancholy of their lost youth during the years of the Down to the Countryside Movement. The later called Scar Art creations initially served as a means for a spontaneous introspective analysis of the artists' traumas, but in a very short time they turned into an artistic weapon of social and political criticism of the past.¹³⁴ In any case, unlike the artworks focusing on the previously seen April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident, on the martyr Zhang Zhixin and on the criticism of the Gang of Four, Scar Art lacked direct and explicit criticism on high political officials. Furthermore, it was not considered subversive by the government because it was created in a phase of political openness that condemned the excesses of the past, being exactly in line with the policies of the time.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p. 28.

¹³² GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 66.

¹³³ *Ibid.* pp. 66-67.

¹³⁴ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 28.

2. Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts

Most of the artworks belonging to the current of Scar Art were created by artists from the Sichuan meishu xueyuan 四川美术学院 (Sichuan Academy of Fine Art, now Sichuan Fine Art Institute or SFAI) in Chongqing. This Academy was founded in October 1940. After the forced closure during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, it reopened the registration for the entrance exam in 1977. As soon as the admission notice was published, about 30,000 applications arrived, but only 6,000 aspiring students could take the exam. After being admitted to the school in 1977, students only started attending classes from March 1978.¹³⁵ Just like for the first class formed after the reopening of the CAFA in Beijing, the selected students were the flagship of the youth art scene of all the previous ten years. The 1977 oil painting class of the SFAI, which had in total 20 students - 16 men and 4 women between the ages of 17 and 30¹³⁶ – included, for example, Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-), Zhu Yidong 朱毅勇 (1957-) and Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-), destined to become leading artists in the subsequent Chinese Art scene. In fact, this class would be later called by critics the Mingxing ban 明星班 (the Class of Stars) [fig.45].¹³⁷ Gao Xiaohua himself defined the environment that was created at the SFAI in those years as "the concentration of the whole history of contemporary Chinese art".¹³⁸ The oil paintings created by these students and their style were so innovative and representative that the art circles and

¹³⁵ Ji Rongfei, Duihua "Shanghen meishu" daibiao ren Gao Xiaohua - zhuisu dangdai yishu yuanquan 对话“伤痕美术”代表人高小华 - 追溯当代艺术源泉 (Dialogue with Gao Xiaohua, the Representative of "Scar Art" - Tracing the Source of Contemporary Art), *Chongqing ribao* 重庆日报 (*Chongqing Daily*), March 29, 2012.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*;

LIU Jia, *Mingxing banzhang Gao Xiaohua "Wo xiang shi yige luxing zhe"* 明星班长高小华“我像是一个旅行者” (*The Stars Class Leader Gao Xiaohua "I Am Like a Traveller"*), January 2, 2014. Retrieved from <http://news.swun.edu.cn/info/1006/3651.htm>

¹³⁷ Ji Rongfei, Duihua "shanghen meishu" daibiao ren Gao Xiaohua - zhuisu dangdai yishu yuanquan 对话“伤痕美术”代表人高小华 - 追溯当代艺术源泉 (Dialogue with Gao Xiaohua, the Representative of "Scar Art" - Tracing the Source of Contemporary Art), op. cit.

¹³⁸ “川美浓缩了一部完整的中国当代艺术史”.

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in LIU Jia, *Mingxing banzhang Gao Xiaohua "Wo xiang shi yige luxing zhe"* 明星班长高小华“我像是一个旅行者” (*The Stars class leader Gao Xiaohua "I am like a traveller"*), op. cit.

critics of the time began to identify these young artists as Sichuan hua pai 四川画派 (Sichuan School of Painting).¹³⁹

It is essential to underline how these artworks and related artists have been consecrated and praised throughout the nation after their participation in government-sponsored exhibitions, most of them organized by the Ministry of Culture and the China Artists Association (CAA). In fact, in 1980, among other exhibitions, two fundamental ones took place: the Fifth National Art Exhibition called the Qingzhu guoqing sanshi zhounian zhanlan 庆祝国庆三十周年展览 (National Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic of China), from February 10 to March 10, and the Di er jie quanguo qingnian meishu zuopin zhanlan 第二届全国青年美术作品展览 (Second National Youth Art Exhibition), from December 21, 1980 to January 20, 1981. Both were hosted by the China Art Gallery¹⁴⁰ in Beijing. Moreover, many young artists, after winning major prizes at these exhibitions, had the honour of seeing their paintings published in official art magazines such as *Meishu*, becoming famous throughout the country.¹⁴¹

3. Scar Art

3.1 Gao Xiaohua - *Why?*, 1978

The first artist who started to show a new and more critical type of realism in his paintings was Gao Xiaohua 高小华 [fig.46]. Born in Nanjing in 1955, he was the son of a military officer, Gao Pingjie, and a military doctor, Fan Jun. Due to his parents' job, at the age of 5 he moved with his family to Chongqing [fig.47].¹⁴² As a boy, during his visits to his mother in the military hospital, he saw the victims and injuries caused by the clashes among Red Guards - of which he was part for a short time - and this deeply disturbed him.¹⁴³ His memory of those years in Chongqing is "gunpowder smoke and blood, brutal poverty".¹⁴⁴ In

¹³⁹ Zhenshi jiedu "Sichuan hua pai" teshu shidai de teshu chanwu 真实解读“四川画派”特殊时代的特殊产物 (A True Interpretation of the Special Result of the "Sichuan School Of Painting" in a Special Era), *Chongqing chenbao* 重庆晨报 (*Chongqing Morning Post*), July 24, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ Now known as National Art Museum of China (NAMOC).

¹⁴¹ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., pp. 25-29.

¹⁴² LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 742.

¹⁴³ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁴⁴ “硝烟血迹、野蛮贫穷”.

1969, his father was labelled "capitalist sympathizer" and placed in solitary confinement for further investigation while the family was exiled to the rural zone of Hubei province.¹⁴⁵ Because of this accusation, the entire family was stigmatized, Gao was expelled from the Red Guards and forced to work.¹⁴⁶

At the age of 15, Gao was enlisted into the Luoyang military camp, after having obtained the recognition of "Model of *educated youth*" for his correct behaviour and his hard work in the countryside.¹⁴⁷ At 17, he started working as an official military photographer and art editor on the Wuhan Military Area newspaper *Zhanxi Daily* [figs.48-49].¹⁴⁸ Since he was a child, he has been passionate about art and painting but he trained as a self-taught boy. In the years in which he was part of the army he created numerous paintings, prints and illustrations such as the colour woodcut *The Camping Road* of 1972 and the gouache painting *Thousand Shots on the Coldest Days of the Year* of 1975, created with Liu Borong 刘伯荣 (1952-), which were selected for some national military art exhibitions.¹⁴⁹ After returning to Chongqing in 1976, one year later he was admitted to the first class formed after the reopening of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts.¹⁵⁰

*I was the 'wildest' person in the class, the only one from other provinces, the only one who had ever been a soldier and went north and south of the country.*¹⁵¹

Gao Xiaohua was appointed class leader, and he and his classmates were assigned a decrepit and dangerous three-storey house as a dormitory that was soon to be demolished. In an interview, he himself recalls how there were only old wooden beds with straw

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in LIANG Kui, WANG Daiming, Gao Xiaohua yu "Shanghen meishu" ji "Sichuan huapai" 高小华与“伤痕美术”及“四川画派” (Gao Xiaohua, "Scar Art" and "Sichuan School of Painting"), *Wenyi zhengming 文艺争鸣 (Literary Controversy)*, March 15, 2008, p. 175.

¹⁴⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 742; *Portrait of an Artist*, August 26, 2004, China Daily website. Retrieved from https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-08/26/content_369030.htm

¹⁴⁶ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 742.

¹⁴⁷ LIANG Kui, WANG Daiming, Gao Xiaohua yu "Shanghen meishu" ji "Sichuan huapai" 高小华与“伤痕美术”及“四川画派” (Gao Xiaohua, "Scar Art" and "Sichuan School of Painting"), op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁴⁸ *Portrait of an Artist*, August 26, 2004, China Daily website. Retrieved from https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-08/26/content_369030.htm

¹⁴⁹ LIANG Kui, WANG Daiming, Gao Xiaohua yu "Shanghen meishu" ji "Sichuan huapai" 高小华与“伤痕美术”及“四川画派” (Gao Xiaohua, "Scar Art" and "Sichuan School of Painting"), op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁵⁰ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁵¹ “我是班里最‘野’的人——唯一当过兵走南闯北的外省人”。

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in LIU Jia, *Mingxing banzhang Gao Xiaohua "Wo xiang shi yige luxing zhe"* 明星班长高小华“我像是一个旅行者” (*The Stars Class Leader Gao Xiaohua "I Am Like a Traveller"*), op. cit.

mattresses.¹⁵² Some of his classmates were already known locally, such as He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-) and Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), who were among the eldest in the class. Others, on the other hand, were not even in their twenties, like Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 (1957-), Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-) and Yang Qian 杨千 (1959-), and at night they tried to “steal” any advice and teaching from the eldest classmates, who sometimes organized lessons for roommates.¹⁵³ There are numerous interviews in which the artists remember with great nostalgia the years at the Academy, where life was hard - the electricity was disconnected as soon as it got dark so the students had to create new artworks and sketches by candlelight; they could eat meat only once a week, showing a special ticket in the canteen, which soon they began to falsify thanks to their artistic skills¹⁵⁴ - but they sacrificed themselves to do what they loved. At that time, the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts was not among the most famous academies in the country, and young artists still had no idea that their artworks would forever change their life, their career but above all the history of Chinese art, starting from a painting by Gao Xiaohua.

Gao's most important artwork, which made him known throughout the country, was *Why?* [fig.50]. Begun in the summer of 1978, in his second year at the Academy, it was later considered the first Scar Art painting. *Why?* is a realist-style oil painting depicting a scene of four exhausted young Red Guards after one of the fights that set China on fire between late 1966 and 1968. Three young men are slumped on a sidewalk, not far from the sewers. Each of them is intent on doing different things or simply absorbed in their own thoughts.¹⁵⁵ On the far left of the painting, a girl is lying on the ground, she has a bandaged arm, her eyes are suffering and she is covered by a red cloth - which resembles a flag - with a part of the slogan written on it: “Attack with words but defend with weapons”, promoted by Jiang Qing in 1967 to mobilize the Red Guards.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ SHI Yan, WAN Jing, 30 nian qian de daxue yu qingchun 30 年前的大学与青春 (University and Youth 30 Years ago), *Beifang ren* 北方人 (*Northerner*), June 2007.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

*I relied on my sense of responsibility and conscience to describe this real incident, to accuse, expose and criticize Lin Biao's "Gang of Four", advocating the crime of "Attack with words but defend with weapons".*¹⁵⁷

In the upper right corner, a comrade has his head down and his back leaning against a pole, one hand on the playing cards and a cigarette in his mouth. The scene, however, is catalysed by the other two young men, both seated on newspaper sheets, wearing armbands that identify them as members of the Rebel Faction. The one on the right has his machine gun ready, staring to nothing, perhaps thinking about the next fight. The absolute focus of the painting is the young man in the centre: his gaze fixed on the painting's viewer, the expression of extreme bewilderment, loneliness and emptiness, with bandaged head and finger, he is crouched with the rifle on his chest.¹⁵⁸ The sense of dismay that these figures instil is emphasised by their gaze: looking at different directions, lost in their own doubts and uncertainties. Also noteworthy is the great accuracy with which Gao Xiaohua portrayed the objects and especially the weapons, thanks to his personal experience in the army.¹⁵⁹

The particularity of this artwork lies - in addition to the theme - in the composition, completely different from previous paintings: Gao adopted a view from above, which gives a sense of oppression and emphasises the senselessness of the scene. The use of grey and dark tones - enlivened only by the red of the drape and armbands - and the thick paint underline its tragic nature.¹⁶⁰ Whoever observes the painting cannot help but wonder what the purpose of these disastrous clashes was and the price people had to pay. The title itself is the emblem of the absurdity and chaos of that historical period and political situation, and, in pushing the public to find a reason for what happened, it instils further doubts and questions.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ 我就是凭着自己的这种责任感和良心, 去描写这一真实事件, 控诉、揭露、批判林彪“四人帮”鼓吹“文攻武卫”的罪行。

GAO Xiaohua, Weishenme hua “Weishenme” 为什么画“为什么” (Why I painted “Why?”), op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁵⁸ ANDREWS Julia, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., p. 394;

ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁵⁹ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 205.

LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op.cit., p. 392.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

3.1.1 Artistic influences in *Why?*'s creation

Although *Why?* was an absolute innovation in the Chinese art scene of the time, its manner, the lead grey tones and the thick and vigorous brushstrokes recall the paintings by the Russian artist Gelij Michajlovič Koržev-Čuvelëv Гелий Михайлович Коржев-Чувелёв (1925-2012), known for his harsh brushstrokes and dramatic lighting.¹⁶² *Why?* clearly recalls Koržev's *Picking up the Banner* [fig.51], an oil painting that is part of the *Communists Triptych*, where a man is depicted picking up a red flag fallen from the hands of one of his comrades who was mortally wounded during the clashes of the Russian Revolution.¹⁶³ The point of view adopted by Koržev is from above to depict a close-up scene, as in Gao's artwork. Just like in *Why?*, the tones are grey and dark, broken by the red of the flag; the brushstrokes are imprecise and the lighting is dramatic; there is a road in the background with a clearly visible manhole and the two secondary figures are partially visible. The most obvious analogy, however, is that the central figure - the man who is holding the flag - is looking straight at the viewer, exactly like *Why?*'s young wounded Red Guard. In addition, the clothing of the two protagonists also looks identical - a dirty and worn white shirt, dark trousers and light-coloured shoes. The main difference in the two artworks is the emotion conveyed by the gaze and expression of the two protagonists: senselessness and sadness in Gao's painting, blind fury and desire for revenge in Koržev's one. Furthermore, while in Koržev's artwork the man with the flag is portrayed as a folk hero, the young Red Guards of Gao Xiaohua are not heroes: they are victims. Gao went totally against the principles of revolutionary model artworks.¹⁶⁴

In his essay *Huiyi, zixing yu pipan* 回忆, 自省与批判 (*Reminiscence, Self-examination and Critique*), Gao Xiaohua recalls the genesis of this painting: six months after entering the

¹⁶² LIANG Kui, WANG Daiming, Gao Xiaohua yu “Shanghen meishu” ji “Sichuan huapai” 高小华与“伤痕美术”及“四川画派” (Gao Xiaohua, “Scar Art” and “Sichuan School of Painting”), op. cit., p. 176.

¹⁶³ Korzhev H., *Picking up the Banner*, The Virtual Russian Museum website. Retrieved from https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting/19_20/korzhev_gm_podnimayuschiy_znamya_1960_zh_8_120/index.php?lang=en

¹⁶⁴ QUAN Ke, Gao Xiaohua youhua zuopin “Weisheme” jiedu 高小华油画作品《为什么》解读 (Interpretation of Gao Xiaohua's Oil Painting “Why”), *Yishu ping jian* 艺术评鉴 (*Art Evaluation*), June 2019, p. 38.

Academy, he heard of the Fifth National Art Exhibition planned for 1980, and so he began to draft two artworks, *Why?* and *I Love Oil Field* [figs.52-53].¹⁶⁵

[...] *At that time my mind was still filled with all that had happened in the Cultural Revolution and so when I decided to take up my brush I wanted to paint some explanation of “why” and to express my own cruel experiences of the Cultural Revolution in that work, which was my long-standing wish. I needed to break into the forbidden area of taboos, in order to show the avant-garde spirit of rebellious youth in that new time of change. [...]*¹⁶⁶

By deciding to create these paintings, he contravened the Academy’s regulations, even risking to be expelled. After completing a drawing of *Why?* [fig.54], Gao Xiaohua sent a photo of it to *Meishu*.¹⁶⁷ *Why?* was first exhibited at the Sichuansheng qingzhu guoqing sanshi zhounian zhanlan 四川省庆祝国庆三十周年展览 (Sichuan Province National Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic of China), organized at the Sichuan Provincial Museum in October 1979.¹⁶⁸ In the same year, Gao also proposed his painting for the selections of the Fifth National Art Exhibition, held in Beijing's China Art Gallery.¹⁶⁹ *Why?* was not only selected and exhibited, but it won second prize together with Gao's other artwork, *I Love Oil Field* [fig.55]. Both paintings became part of the permanent collection at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. *Meishu*, which in July 1979 had published the picture of *Why?* sent by Gao together with a letter explaining his creation,¹⁷⁰ published both the winning paintings in the special issue of May 1980, dedicated to the artworks awarded at the Fifth National Art Exhibition.¹⁷¹

*Let the next generation remember this bloody lesson - historical tragedy can't be repeated!
At the same time, we should also think about it, [...]*¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 741.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 741-742.

¹⁶⁷ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 206;

LIU Jia, *Mingxing banzhang Gao Xiaohua “Wo xiang shi yige luxing zhe” 明星班长高小华 “我像是一个旅行者” (The Stars Class Leader Gao Xiaohua “I Am Like a Traveller”)*, op. cit.

¹⁶⁸ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 68.

¹⁶⁹ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 391.

¹⁷⁰ GAO Xiaohua, *Weishenme hua “Weishenme” 为什么画 “为什么”, (Why I painted “Why?”)*, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁷¹ *Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojiang zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of Award-winning Works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China)*, *Meishu*, May 1980.

¹⁷² 让后一代人记住这个血的教训—历史悲剧不能再重演了! 同时也应该想一想, [...].

GAO Xiaohua, *Weishenme hua “Weishenme” 为什么画 “为什么”, (Why I painted “Why?”)*, op. cit., p. 7.

How it will be analysed later, after *Why?* Gao Xiaohua followed the footsteps of some of his other classmates and created paintings of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art, showing the reality of peasants' life and various ethnic groups in the most remote areas of the country in a completely new way: truthfully.

3.2 Cheng Conglin - *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968, 1979*

Another great artist who produced masterpieces later recognized as Scar Art was Cheng Conglin 程丛林 [fig.56], born in Chengdu, Sichuan, in 1954. During the Cultural Revolution, Cheng created numerous propaganda artworks, such as *Struggle for Spread the Dazhai County Model* [fig.57]: this poster depicts a vigorous worker moving heavy blocks of pale stone to create a huge building, partially visible to his left. As written in the red slogan at the bottom, this poster refers to the Nongye xue Dazhai 农业学大寨 (In Agriculture, Learn from Dazhai Movement), launched by Mao in the 1960s and implemented during the Cultural Revolution, to push the peasants to work more and more actively by sacrificing and supporting the government, just like the inhabitants of Dazhai County.¹⁷³ Cheng's perspective is bottom-up, emphasising the impressiveness of the stone blocks and the might of the man - healthy, tanned and plump, smiling and happy with the effort he is making to help the nation. Two workmates are laughing behind him, they seem to joke between each other as they are carrying weights on their shoulders. The figures, the composition, the colour and the lighting are typical of the CR's model artworks: bright tones, red details and chiaroscuro emphasised thanks to the intense light. This poster is in complete antithesis with the artworks Cheng had created from the late 1970s onwards. In 1977, he was admitted to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in the oil painting program along with Gao Xiaohua. At the Academy, there were also other young artists with whom he had previously collaborated, such as Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-) and Hua Ti 华提 [fig.58]. In 1980, his most famous painting *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* won second prize at the Fifth National Art Exhibition and was then published in *Meishu*.

Created in 1979, in his second year of Academy, the oil painting *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* [fig.59] is the visual narration of the absurdity of the battles among the Red Guards factions that took place between 1966 and 1968, especially in Sichuan, where is

¹⁷³ ZHAO Shukai, "Nongye xue Dazhai" de yiduan lishi "农业学大寨" 的一段历史 (A History of "In Agriculture, Learn from Dazhai"), *Guowuyuan fazhan yanjiu zhongxin xinxi zhongxin* 国务院发展研究中心信息中心 (*China Development Observation*), pp. 89-93, August 2015, pp. 90-91.

Cheng from. The title itself is the emblem of how the scene shows the nonsense of life at that time: days were all the same, marked by the inhuman violence of the clashes. The artwork is therefore an autobiographical memory of the artist, or of an entire generation. This oil painting strongly recalls French academicism and at the same time it takes up the perspective of socialist realism and the composition of historical monumental paintings.¹⁷⁴ The scene depicted is the end of a clash between Red Guards rival factions, and is set in what looks like the courtyard or the entrance to a school, which has now become a battlefield.¹⁷⁵ The lighting and poses of the figures are very theatrical. A group of defeated young people is being escorted by the winners out of the building where the battle took place. Most of the space is dedicated to the figures who are walking on the building staircase, in what looks like a "parade of shame". In the upper left corner, in a raised terrace, some of the winners are rejoicing and enjoying the scene. Just below them, a line of boys from the same group are carrying out the crates of weapons and ammunitions.¹⁷⁶ The central front part of the painting is occupied by the defeated people. A young man is about to be beaten by an enemy with the butt of a rifle, while a little ahead there are two other seriously injured boys: one is carried on the left side of the staircase, the other is helped by a comrade on the right, dragging his feet, his hand leaving a trail of blood on the ground. Not far, at the foot of the staircase, there is a young man holding a machine gun, his clothes are not dirty or torn, so he does not seem to have participated in the battle. Around his neck he has a pouch with the character zhong 忠 (loyal) written on it in red paint.¹⁷⁷

*The bag formerly contained the words of the Great Helmsman [Mao's Red Book] [...], to which one had to be loyal. Now, in accordance with Jiang Qing motto "Attack with words, but defend with arms", the bag is filled instead with munitions.*¹⁷⁸

To his right, a young man is preparing his camera to capture the scene. Behind them, many citizens are curious and frightened while witnessing the scene. In the crowd, all blurred and painted in dark shades of blue and grey, three main figures stand out. The group is led by a middle-aged woman, holding a broom in her hands as if it were a handhold, she is wearing glasses - the symbol of intellectuals. She has been identified by the critics as a teacher who, after being pointed out as a counter-revolutionary, is forced to sweep the streets,

¹⁷⁴ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 205.

¹⁷⁵KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, Timezone 8 Limited, 2003, p. 78.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 79.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

a typical punishment of reformed intellectuals.¹⁷⁹ At her side there is a child wearing a blue uniform: he looks fascinated at the machine gun in front of him, to which he is dangerously close. But there is also a second boy wearing glasses and a jacket with a badge - perhaps a Mao Zedong pin: it is Cheng Conglin. In the years of the Red Guard clashes, Cheng was about 13 years old. When he created *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*, he was 25 - but the memories of the violence he experienced first-hand were still alive. In fact, he portrayed himself as a helpless little boy, close to the teacher as his shelter, his protection. Between 1966 and 1968, these crude scenes of urban warfare were commonplace, and middle school kids often took part in them too.

The absolute protagonist of this complex scene is a young girl who is leading the group of the defeated: she has her right hand on her chest while trying to hold together the shreds of the white shirt she is wearing, all ripped after the battle. She is barefoot, even though the road is covered with snow. Her right shoulder shows signs of fighting and injuries. She has short hair and uneven tufts, which suggests that her hair has been cut as a sign of humiliation.¹⁸⁰ With her left hand, she is touching the arm of her badly injured comrade. She is the leader of the group. The girl is staring at two young women to her right with a contemptuous look, in a mix of shame and defiance at the same time. They are wearing winter coats, in complete antithesis to her clothing. In the foreground, in the lower left corner, in front of the two girls there is a young man portrayed from behind: he is the leader of the winning faction who is smugly watching the defeators' parade. His coat is hanging from his left shoulder, he is holding a rifle in his hand. His right arm is medicated and bandaged. Looking carefully at the singlet worn by the young man, it seems the left strap of it looks white: it is not clear whether the garment is soaked in blood or is originally dyed red.¹⁸¹

Cheng Conglin had an almost obsessive attention to detail: above the snow-covered road, possibly stained with blood and mud, there is a metal helmet, a red cloth and what looks like a torch. The bullets are still on the ground. Just in front of the staircase, on the right, there is a wooden cross that was used for defence, perhaps to create a barrier with barbed wire. The small glimpses of the school wall that are visible are riddled with bullet holes or covered with slogans written in red. These iconographic details, together with the

¹⁷⁹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 68; KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁸⁰ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

characterization of the figures, allow the viewer to immediately recognize the historical moment narrated, imprinted in the collective memory of the Chinese people.¹⁸² The soft light on the faces of the characters accentuates facial expressions and focuses the viewer's attention on them. The brightest area is the snow-covered road: the snow creates an almost surreal atmosphere and setting, like a distant memory or a nightmare.¹⁸³ Given the autobiographical detail in the painting, it can be assumed that the school depicted was in Chengdu. The fact that it snows in Sichuan, in Southwest China, is a unique phenomenon:

The abnormality of the natural phenomenon, which according to popular belief connotes the end of an illegitimate rulership, introduces a fateful aspect into the representation. It is the lost innocence of sincere enthusiasm that has been betrayed and turned in fanaticism through political agitation, to which Cheng here alludes.¹⁸⁴

The snow thus becomes the very symbol of lost innocence, of abused purity, as well as a reference to the colour of death for the Chinese:¹⁸⁵ white is in contrast with red, which recalls the communist faith but also the blood of wounds. Like in *Why?* by Gao Xiaohua, the brushstrokes are thick and vigorous, underlining the tragic nature of the moment. The senselessness of the scene is emphasised by the expressions of each figure: the fatigue and humiliation of the losers, the smug laughter and pride of the winners who believe they have honoured the thought of Mao Zedong, the dismay and pain of some citizens and the teacher, helpless facing the violence of her students – which will be later defined as the “lost generation”. Furthermore, Cheng portrays winners and losers as heroes and victims at the same time.

3.2.1 Artistic influences in *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*'s creation

This Scar Art milestone can be linked to artworks by other great artists also created in different styles. Cheng took inspiration mainly from paintings depicting scenes of protest or conflict, characterized by dramatic and strong narrative components. Firstly, *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* recalls the Soviet socialist realism typical of Peredvizhniki, and in particular *Morning of Streltzi's Execution* [fig.60] and *Boyaryna Morozova* [fig.61] by Vasily Ivanovich Surikov Василий Иванович Суриков (1848-1916).¹⁸⁶ The Soviet

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p. 86.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 85.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 86.

¹⁸⁵ TANG Xiaobing, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 96.

¹⁸⁶ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 744.

socialist realism that largely influenced Chinese art from 1949 onwards derives from the social realism of the late nineteenth century produced specifically by a group of artists from Moscow and Saint Petersburg. This union, active from 1870 to 1923 and known as Peredvizhniki Передвижники (The Wanderers)¹⁸⁷ was born to protest against the artistic restrictions imposed by the Russian Academy of Fine Arts in Saint Petersburg. In their artworks, Peredvizhniki synthesized the formal realism of European academism with the themes of poverty and human degradation, creating a style "which reflected their own sense of social responsibility"¹⁸⁸ - thus becoming the first independent art group of the late imperial Russia.¹⁸⁹ The social realism expressed in the art of this group greatly influenced the Chinese socialist art produced in the 1950s, especially thanks to the creations by Ilya Yefimovich Repin Илья Ефимович Репин (1844-1930) and Surikov. The socialist realism that developed in China combined the more human aspects of The Wanderers' artworks with the typical themes of Communism.¹⁹⁰ Vasily Ivanovich Surikov was an artist particularly appreciated in the USSR and China for his dramatic battle scenes filled with figures and details. According to Martina Köppel-Yang, Cheng Conglin set the scene on a snowy day by taking inspiration from Surikov's paintings, which Cheng had been able to see thanks to the numerous publications and illustrations of foreign artworks in art magazines and periodicals in the pre-Cultural Revolution period and after 1977.¹⁹¹ Another characteristic that unites Cheng's painting with some of Surikov's ones is the use of some brushstrokes less defined than others, very thick and of dense and opaque colours.

The most evident influence in *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* recognized by critics is that of *The Bloodstained Shirt* [fig.62] by Wang Shikuo 王式廓 (1911-1973). This is the most emblematic artwork about the tragic situation of the Chinese rural population in the 1950s. This 1959 pencil and charcoal¹⁹² artwork depicts the drama of popular uprisings during the 1950 agrarian reform using the Soviet socialist realist style. This artwork:

¹⁸⁷ "This neologism was derived from *peredvizhnaia vystavka* (touring exhibition), and referred to the artists' practice of mounting touring exhibitions in the Russian provinces."

SHABANOV Andrey, *Art and Commerce in Late Imperial Russia, The Peredvizhniki, a Partnership of Artists*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁸⁹ SHABANOV Andrey, *Art and Commerce in Late Imperial Russia, The Peredvizhniki, a Partnership of Artists*, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁹¹ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁹² It remains an unfinished artwork, Wang Shikuo died before making an oil painting of it.

TANG Xiaobing, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts*, op. cit., p. 64.

*Is an epic depiction of the historic land reform that forever transformed the tradition-bound Chinese countryside and society in the mid-twentieth Century. It remains the most comprehensive, therefore the most paradigmatic, visual representation of the sweeping and unprecedented land redistribution program undertaken by the Communist Party.*¹⁹³

The Bloodstained Shirt was censored during the Cultural Revolution and was only rehabilitated in 1977. In the same year, it was published in *Meishu*. The resemblance to Cheng Conglin's creation is immediate, especially in the choice of the setting. Both scenes take place in front of a building: in *The Bloodstained Shirt*, it becomes a sort of courthouse; in *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* the courtyard and the interior of a school become a battlefield.¹⁹⁴ The composition is also very similar: in both artworks there are various groups of figures well characterized by a strong dynamism of poses. Furthermore, the focus is always on a white shirt: in Wang's artwork it is that of a mortally wounded farmer; in Cheng's painting the shirt belongs to a girl at the centre of the scene. Again, to accentuate the drama of their works, both artists rely on contrasts of light and shadow and on various levels of dynamism. As Martina Köppel-Yang points out, the tension of both scenes is emphasised by the sometimes-exaggerated expressions and gestures of some figures. This can be linked to the Russian critical realism present in the paintings by Surikov and other artists of the Peredvizhniki group: their artworks were not used as a model only by Wang Shikuo and his contemporaries in the 1950s, but they were also studied in academies by post-Cultural Revolution artists like Cheng.¹⁹⁵ However, there are substantial differences between these two masterpieces. First, in Wang Shikuo's artwork the characters are fewer in number and seem to have a more precise order, all concentrated in the central section.¹⁹⁶ The antagonist, the culprit of so much despair, is also represented: in the foreground in front of the table is a landowner with his head down, waiting to know his destiny. In Cheng's painting there is no culprit, there is no visible cause or explanation, the event cannot be rationalized. In Wang's scene, it seems that the female figure brandishing the bloody shirt - like *Liberty Leading the People* by Delacroix - is doing justice to one of her comrades, while in Cheng's painting no one has done justice to young people, not even history. The biggest difference - besides the use of colours for Cheng and pencil and charcoal for Wang - is that in *The Bloodstained Shirt* the scene is like paused, photographed, the climax of the action has yet

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ TANG Xiaobing, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China: Paradigms and Shifts*, op. cit., p. 96.

to happen and that is what loads the artwork of theatrical power and creates suspense.¹⁹⁷ In *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* instead the violent battle has already happened.

For the dramatic rendering of the figures, Cheng Conglin was also inspired by the realism of other paintings such as *Home* [fig.63] by Qin Zheng 秦征 (1924-2020), *Redeployment* [fig.64] by Wang Liuqiu 王流秋 (1919-2011) and *Liu Hulan* [fig.65] by Feng Fasi 冯法祀 (1914-2009), all created in 1957. Cheng was also inspired by *Liu Shaoqi* and the *Anyuan Miners* [fig.66] by Hou Yimin 侯一民 (1930-) for the complexity of the composition and the tension of the characters.¹⁹⁸

The last work with which *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* can be compared, and the most contemporary to Cheng, is *Maple*, both for its plot and for its *lianhuanhua* illustrations [figs.29-32]. In addition to taking up its content - the senselessness of the tragic clashes between opposing factions of the Red Guards - other details of the short story written by Zheng Yi are also present in Cheng's painting, like a soldier who is about to hit a boy with the butt of a rifle and the narrator of the story, the teacher - who just like the female teacher and the thirteen-year-old Cheng Conglin in the painting – is watching helplessly the clashes. Furthermore, some details of the young woman in the centre of Cheng's painting match Lu Danfeng's description.¹⁹⁹ Martina Köppel-Yang supposes that the indecipherable gaze - perhaps regretful, perhaps melancholy - of one of the young men carrying the crates facing the young leader of the losing faction may recall an impossible love story like *Maple's*.²⁰⁰ As for the illustrations of *Maple*, the analogy lies in the use of colours: grey, blue and green for the defeated; olive green and some shades of red, orange and brown for the winners [fig.37].²⁰¹ Finally, like Chen Yiming, Liu Yulian and Li Bin, Cheng Conglin also aspired to represent individuals - not stereotyped models - thus focusing on the characterization and representation of the characters' reactions in his paintings. This will be even more evident in his subsequent painting *A Summer Night in 1978* [fig.67].²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 204.

KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 83-84.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 79.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.83.

²⁰² *Ibid.* p. 89.

It can therefore be said that *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* has “pedagogical aims” as it conveys a message that, in 1979, can be understood by everyone in China.²⁰³ This was precisely Cheng's intent, who left the large white space of the snow-covered street to welcome those who are looking at the painting, as a free zone from which to analyse and understand the feelings caused by the artwork. Cheng's original plan was to compose a triptych. Each oil painting had to depict a phase of the psychological process faced by young people like him between the 1960s and the 1980s. The first artwork, *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*, expresses the fanaticism (狂热 kuangre) and the alienation of the Red Guards. The second one, never created, was supposed to depict one of the sent-down young people visiting home and its title had to be *Deep Autumn in 1977*: the artist wanted to express the sense of hesitation (徘徊 paihuai) that the *educated youth* went through after the years spent in the countryside and in the most remote areas of China. Finally, *A Summer Night in 1978*, created in 1982, expresses the desire of Cheng's generation to find hope (希望 xiwang) again, to look forward.²⁰⁴ The creation of *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* can be considered as a watershed in Cheng Conglin's artistic production. This painting was in fact the first step on this path towards hope, like a cathartic journey to heal the wounds of the soul.²⁰⁵

Like *Why?* by Gao Xiaohua, *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* was also exhibited at the Sichuan Province National Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic of China in the fall of 1979. In addition, in 1980 it won second prize at the Fifth National Art Exhibition of Beijing. Thanks to this achievement, it was published in *Meishu* in the May 1980 issue.²⁰⁶ Its critique of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution early years shocked the public, who was not yet used to seeing public exhibitions of themes and subjects that were so familiar but at the same time so painful for many. This painting was appreciated above all for the drama and the verisimilitude of the depiction. As for *Maple*, some critics – still strongly anchored to creations limited by revolutionary models - raised criticisms on the too neutral representation of the figures: no character was idealized or portrayed as heroic.²⁰⁷ As it will be analysed in the next chapters, after *Snow on X Day X*

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 84.

²⁰⁴ XIA Hang, Sichuan qingnian huajia tan chuanguo 四川青年画家谈创作 (Sichuan Young Painters Talk About Creation), *Meishu*, January 31, 1981, p. 44.

²⁰⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 744.

²⁰⁶ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojian zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of Award-winning Works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, May 1980.

²⁰⁷ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 88.

Month in 1968 also Cheng's artistic production turned for many years towards a more contemplative style, creating artworks which could be defined as belonging to Life-stream Art and Chinese Rural Realism.

3.3 Luo Zhongli - *Orphans*, 1979

The third major artist of Scar Art, Luo Zhongli 罗中立 [fig.68], was born in Chongqing in 1948. He inherited the passion for art from his father, a designer in a factory who in his spare time taught Luo and his brothers to draw and paint. As a boy, Luo immediately showed great artistic skills: in his second year of middle school, one of his paintings was exhibited in an international exhibition of children's paintings in Hong Kong.²⁰⁸ After graduating from the High School of Sichuan Fine Art Institute, in 1970 Luo was sent to a small village in the mountains of Daba, Sichuan, where he worked as an art teacher and as a worker in a boiler shop.²⁰⁹ Upon his return to Chongqing, also like Gao Xiaohua and Cheng Conglin, he was admitted to the 1977 oil painting class at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. As already discussed in the previous chapter, in 1979 Luo took part to the Exhibition to Commemorate the Martyr Zhang Zhixin with his oil painting *The Song of the Loyal Ghost* [fig.20]. He became famous in China and overseas for his painting *Father*, created in 1980, whose success spread a new trend that was beginning to characterize the artworks of SFAI students, the abovementioned Native Soil Painting or Chinese Rural Realism. This style characterized the artistic production of Luo and of some of his Academy mates for many years.

Although Luo Zhongli is famous for his masterpieces in Chinese Rural Realism, during his first years at the Academy he created - together with some classmates - *Orphans* [fig.69], which is recognised as belonging to Scar Art. This oil painting created in 1979 depicts the drama that many children had to go through during the Cultural Revolution: the loss of their parents. The scene is set at night, in a bare bedroom with walls smeared with dark paint. In the upper right corner, an open window is barely visible, barred by two wooden boards, which, however, allow a glimpse of the full moon high in the sky. The curtain is moved by the wind, it feels like it is a freezing night. The centre of the scene is occupied by

²⁰⁸ Luo Zhongli, *Take Shelter from Rain – 2*, Ravenel International Art Group website. Retrieved from <https://www.ravenelart.com/en/auCal/lotsIn/c04b7bb9-5aff-4f01-a031-d8781aad4055/e0a2fbd4-d808-4378-bc09-8e408cfcfbe9>

²⁰⁹ Luo Zhongli, *End of the Year*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/contemporary-chinese-art-i-hk0266/lot.813.html>

the figures of two children, the young boy is sleeping on a bed. The older girl, the centrepiece of the scene, is kneeling beside him, wearing underpants and a vest, holding a violin in her hands and looking intently at a photo hanging on the wall. The photo she observes shows her father, a violinist, playing. It is precisely the drama in the girl's gaze that suggests that the two children are now orphans, perhaps because their father was a victim of the Red Guards.²¹⁰ And here, too, the detail of the red writing on the wall - accusing slogans against the father - and the bars on the windows acquire meaning. Although the girl's face is portrayed laterally, her expression shows the suffering and pain experienced, but above all the fear of the future. In fact, she seems to be wondering who will raise her and her little brother. At the same time, she seems to realize her prematurely finished childhood and the responsibilities she will have to take on her. The only light source of the scene is a candle lit above the bedside table, in the lower left corner. This candle, however, is too small for the lighting adopted by Luo and the other painters. Furthermore, it is impossible not to notice that the two children do not appear to have Chinese features: on the contrary, they appear to be of Caucasian origin, with light brown hair. *Orphans* was exhibited at the National Art Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of People's Republic of China and was published in *Meishu*, in the February 1980 issue.²¹¹

3.4 Zhu Yiyong - *Father and Son*, 1980

Born in Chongqing in 1957, Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 [fig.70] has been passionate about drawing since he was a child: his dream has always been to become an artist and he himself recalled how, even in the terribly sultry summer days, in his childhood he preferred staying at home to paint rather than going out to play with his friends.²¹² This passion of him was also encouraged by his parents, who allowed him to attend drawing and painting lessons. When Zhu was only nine years old, the Cultural Revolution broke out: schools closed and so did the art classes, but he never abandoned his love for art.

We were very poor and art supplies were almost unaffordable. Luckily my father was working in a hospital and they had these sculptures made from plaster. I borrowed them

²¹⁰ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., p. 220.

²¹¹ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian gedi meizhan zuopin xuan 庆祝建国三十周年各地美展作品选 (Selected Artworks of the Exhibition Celebrating the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, February 1980.

²¹² GILES Oliver, *Zhu Yiyong on the State of China*, December 12, 2016, Prestige Online. Retrieved from <https://www.prestigeonline.com/hk/pursuits/zhu-yiyong-on-the-state-of-china/>

*and used mud to make a copy of that sculpture. Based on that I made drawings and practiced my drawing skills.*²¹³

In 1975, Zhu, who was just 18, was sent to the countryside around Chongqing to be re-educated through the Down to the Countryside Movement. Although he was not far from home, he could only return to see his family once a month and only after his written request was accepted.²¹⁴ Zhu had to live in a small and anonymous peasant village: when he did not work in the fields, the only thing he could do was paint. He then began to portray Mao Zedong in propaganda mural paintings on the walls of the village buildings. Later he also decided to send small reproductions of them to the county authorities, so that if they ever needed a painter, they could remember him.²¹⁵ Fortunately, Zhu only had to stay in the countryside for two years. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, he tried the entrance test for the 1977 class of oil painting at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, taking with him the voluminous portfolio of propaganda artworks that he had managed to create in the previous years. Zhu Yiyong entered the Academy as one of the youngest in his class along with Zhang Xiaogang, one year younger than him, who remembers him as a very calm and hardworking student.²¹⁶

The artwork that introduced the young Zhu to the national Chinese art scene was *Father and Son* [fig.71]. Given the theme of this large oil painting (270 x 210 cm) created in 1980, it is considered by critics as Scar Art. During the Cultural Revolution, in front of the entrance to a building, presumably a school, a crowd of young people are witnessing the heart-breaking scene of the repentance of a son who denounced his father, a teacher.²¹⁷ The middle-aged man is standing, his figure is emphasised thanks to the light-coloured jacket and he has a resigned expression while looking towards the crowd. The son is kneeling at his feet, his head hidden in shame, asking for forgiveness while embracing his father. Not far from them, the police are loading another arrested man into the van and waiting for the scene to end to take away the father as well. The artist portrays this dramatic moment from a point of view higher than the street, picking up some details from Cheng Conglin's *Snow*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ ZHANG Xiaogang, *Zhang Xiaogang: Chuanmei 77, 78 ji wangshi, cong ji zhang lao zhaopian tan qi* 张晓刚：川美 77、78 级往事，从几张老照片谈起 (*Zhang Xiaogang: The Past of Chuanmei Class of '77 and '78, Starting From a Few Old Photos*), October 27, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/427557608_278692.

²¹⁷ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., p. 235.

on *X Day X Month in 1968* such as the building with the staircase, the large masses of young people flocked to witness the scene, the motorbike in the foreground and a brighter zone - the road - which corresponds to the only free space in the artwork. Moreover, both still demonstrate Soviet socialist realism influences, especially in the composition. Although the two paintings portray different scenes - the armed clashes between factions of the Red Guards for Cheng and the indoctrination of young people that even led to the denunciation of their families for Zhu – they both show in a direct and truthful way what commonly happened during the CR. With *Father and Son* Zhu Yiyong won third prize at the Second National Youth Art Exhibition in 1980 and in 1982 it was also exhibited at the Sichuan Fine Arts Academy's Artworks Exhibition held in the National Art Museum of China, in Beijing.²¹⁸ In 1982, Zhu graduated and earned a professorship at the Academy. In the same year, some of his artworks were exhibited at the French Spring Salon at the Louvre Museum, where his classmate He Duoling also participated. As it will be discussed later, Zhu Yiyong soon abandoned the dramatic themes of Scar Art, to create artworks of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art.

4. Native Soil Painting

4.1 Luo Zhongli - *People of Daba Mountain*, 1979

One of the first paintings made by Luo Zhongli later recognized by critics as a Chinese Rural Realism artwork was *People of Daba Mountain* [fig.72]. This oil painting, created in the same year as *Orphans*, does not portray the pain and traumas of the Cultural Revolution, but a glimpse of the daily reality of rural populations. As already mentioned, Luo Zhongli lived for nearly ten years in the areas surrounding Mount Daba, on the northern border of Chongqing, his hometown. With this artwork, Luo began to reproduce what he had experienced and seen during the years of the Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement, starting a new style of the late 1970s later known as Native Soil Painting.

Compared to the previously analysed paintings, the scene of *People of Daba Mountain* is very simple and it is set along the shore of a small mountain stream. At the top left, a crevasse makes the source of the stream visible in the foreground, which continues to flow to the lower part of the painting. The waterway is crossed by a narrow bridge created with

²¹⁸ Zhu Yiyong's profile, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute website. Retrieved from <https://www.scfai.edu.cn/bhx/info/1013/1066.htm>

three planks of dark and worn wood and ropes. The detail that is immediately noticeable in this painting is the whiteness of the rocks, which emphasises the depicted figures: the pale rocks of the riverbed also stand out, making the water almost crystal clear. On the only visible bank of the stream, on the right, there are two men with very tanned complexions and damaged skin. The first is standing: looking at his face, he seems to be over 60 years old, but he has a muscular body. The clothing is very simple: he is wearing a white turban, an open grey vest fluttering with the wind and revealing his naked torso, he has a long-sleeved garment tightened around the waist. He is wearing dark trousers, rolled up to above the knee and he looks barefoot, as if he has just wet his feet. With his right hand he is leaning on a wooden stick, a typical aid for those who walk in the mountains, a long tobacco pipe in his left hand.²¹⁹ He is bearing two wheels of a vehicle, perhaps a tractor, on his back and some metal water bottles. Everything is tied in a kind of backpack created with ropes, fabric stripes and wooden poles. He looks bald, tired but happy with the pause he is taking, his gaze straight at the viewer. A totally different look from that of the exhausted young Red Guard in Gao Xiaohua's *Why?*.

The second man is portrayed at the foot of the first, crouched by the stream and wringing a freshly washed white cloth, probably his turban. This figure is much younger and less tanned than the first one, but equally muscular and shaved. He is wearing a red singlet, long forest green trousers and beige shoes. Between his left thigh and his chest, he is holding a garment, perhaps a shirt. The man is not looking towards the viewer, his gaze is a little absorbed. At his right, at the feet of the older man, there is a black and brown dog: it has got a high and fluffy tail, it is wearing a collar and looking towards the other side of the stream with curiosity. Behind the young man's back, on the right of the painting, there is a group of objects tied with ropes to wooden planks, maybe a cart or another backpack. The largest object is a grey plastic tank, filled three quarters with a darker liquid.

The brushstroke used by Luo is completely different from that in the paintings by his abovementioned classmates: more defined and linear, the colours are opaque and neutral - except for the red details - in contrast with the white which emphasises the background. Luo Zhongli's intent was not to convey a message of criticism of the Cultural Revolution or of some political figure of the time, but only the desire to portray the authentic reality of the rural world and the most remote areas of the nation. The rendering of the details - the veins

²¹⁹ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 48.

and tendons in the arms of the two men, the face's wrinkles and the chest's muscles of the elder, the folds in the clothes, the tread of the tires, the dark patina on the white rocks soiled by time and weather conditions - and the use of a more precise and subtle brushstroke, suggest that Luo Zhongli's influences came no longer from Soviet socialist realism, but that he was beginning to approach hyper-realism imported from the United States. This will be particularly evident in his following painting, *Father*.

4.2 Luo Zhongli - *Father*, 1980

The artwork that consecrated Luo Zhongli for many years as one of the most famous Chinese realist painters was *Father* [fig.73]. Shortly after *People of Daba Mountain*, Luo created this large oil painting (217 x 152 cm), completed in 1980 and presented to the commission of the Second National Youth Art Exhibition in the same year. This half-length portrait of an old Chinese peasant shows a man of about 70. His skin is very dark, hollowed out by deep wrinkles after years of hard work in the fields. His forehead is creased, marked by central veins and drops of sweat that run towards his eyebrows, cheeks and nose. His eyes are dark and deep, in dim light and half closed because he is dazzled by the scorching sun while he is looking straight at the viewer with an empty gaze. His nose and mouth are slightly disproportionate, to emphasise his expression. His lips are dry, half open and show only one tooth. On his dark chin there are tufts of bristly white unshaved beard. Just below the chin, his right hand in the foreground is bony and very large compared to the face, the nails dirty, the index finger is partially bandaged. The man is holding a ceramic bowl - originally white - with blue decorations. It is worn, chipped, cracked and containing a hot liquid and leaves. His left hand is not visible, only his thumb protrudes in support of the bowl. A ballpoint pen is visible just above the left ear, stuck in the white turban. The background is an intense and bright yellow, between ochre and gold. It is created from various regular streaks that resemble a freshly sown soil or crop drying under the sun. In the central part of the painting there is the handle of a wooden tool, a rake lying on the field.²²⁰ The main colours are those of the soil, which are highlighted by the bright yellow in the background. The contrast between the old man's tan skin and the white of the fabrics and the bowl is almost taken to exasperation.

²²⁰ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 93.

As with *People from Daba Mountain*, this oil painting also depicts a pause, during which the old farmer has something to drink after the exhausting work. But all he seems to be able to have is plain tea, perhaps a watery soup. All the details therefore identify the farmer as a man with a poor and difficult life. The pinpoint accuracy with which Luo portrays him is astonishing for a viewer of Luo's times. From the ripples of the turban to the wrinkles made by the merciless climate, from the pores and the hair to the sweat drops, everything is extremely realistic, as if it were a close-up photograph. Every imperfection is visible, but at a first glance the meaning of this artwork is not clear.²²¹ The composition is particular: the head, the turban, the hand and the bowl take up almost the entire space of the painting, but it is the old man's face that dominates the scene. Compared to other peasant portraits created earlier, it looks like the figure wants to get out of the painting. The man seems to be leaning forward and some critics believe - also by analysing the description of the genesis of the artwork made by Luo - it may have been thought of as in the squat position typical of Chinese people in moments of rest. This gives a sense of instability to the figure.²²²

What the Scar Art artists repurposed in their paintings was also the use of details and syntactic elements emphasised just like in propaganda art: according to Martina Köppel-Yang, this aimed to influence the viewer's feelings and their perception of reality.²²³ In *Father*, the man's skin is therefore lined and exposed to the weather just like the soil that he works: the merciless sunlight burns his skin but at the same time makes the crop grow, sweat becomes a metaphor for the water that nourishes the plants, the unkempt and bristly beard represents vegetation that grows with difficulty on an arid and poor soil.²²⁴

*The peasants - I feel a closeness to them. They reserve countless drops of sweat for the soil, and repeat the same work for thousands of years.*²²⁵

Lighting plays a fundamental role in the painting: the light reflects directly and violently on the man's forehead and nose emphasising every detail of the face and it makes the white of the turban shine. It is a totally different light from that of *Orphans* but above all from the one used to praise the figure of Mao Zedong in the Cultural Revolution artworks: it shows the reality of the situation of the peasants, still malnourished and exploited after

²²¹ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 48.

²²² KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 94.

²²³ *Ibid.* p. 95.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 93-97.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 95.

years of political campaigns, no longer the highly idealized positive models of Maoist revolutionary realism.

4.2.1 The *Father of the Nation*

The depicted man was considered by the public and by some critics as the emblem of the 800,000 peasants of the nation.²²⁶ In reality, Luo reproduced a familiar face, that of a farmer he really saw during his years in the Daba mountains. In a letter written on December 14, 1980 during his participation in the Second National Youth Art Exhibition, Luo explained the genesis of the painting and the impetus he had for its creation:

*Essentially, this painting resulted from my strong, enduring feelings toward peasants, and I wanted to say something honest on their behalf. [...] I used my greatest efforts to portray everything I was familiar with — all of the unique characteristics and details of the farmers. This was the only thought I had during the entire process of painting this piece.*²²⁷

In the same letter, Luo explained how the idea of this artwork came to him as soon as he saw a farmer guarding the manure in a public toilet of the village where he lived during the years of the CR. It was the night of the 1975 Chinese New Year. Luo walked into the toilet and saw him there, with his cigarette hanging from his lips, crouched on the ground, his hands tucked up in his sleeves, warming himself in the freezing night. Luo then wondered how a person could stay in the cold and in such a dirty place as a public toilet even on New Year's Eve, while outside there were shouts of joy and the roar of fireworks. He wondered if his family were not waiting for him at home, what he might have eaten that day, or much sadder, if he even had a home and if he had eaten anything.²²⁸ In the letter, Luo also explained the reason for the choice to compose such a large portrait, which did not go unnoticed in the public eye:

Everyone standing in front of Father's enormous portrait would be able to feel its strong visual impact. This is why I increased the size of the painting. If this painting were half its current size, its effect would be completely different. Therefore, scale is also one of my languages. Only as such, in front of this enormous head, can I feel the pressure from his kind, ox- or sheep-like eyes, hear his heavy breathing, see his pulsing veins and his racing

²²⁶ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 56.

²²⁷ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 24.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

*bloodstream, smell the odor of tobacco and sweat, and feel his skin trembling with sweat beads oozing from his pores. His dried lips, with only one tooth in his mouth, leaves viewers asking what he could have eaten — how many bitter herbs and how much white rice. . . Father — this is indeed the father who birthed and nurtured me.*²²⁹

The original title of the painting was *Hardship with Each Grain*. While Luo was creating it, one of his professors suggested him to name it *Father*: this is how this anonymous farmer acquired the symbolic meaning of father of the Nation.²³⁰ Luo's intent was to praise and honour the role of the poorest, most exploited and forgotten, but at the same time the most important, part of society: "Yet this farmer, who had left his home to stand guard, seemed like a forgotten man".²³¹

4.2.2 Influences in *Father's* creation

To portray *Father's* farmer's face, Luo used his previous painting *People of Daba Mountain* as a model. In the 1979 artwork, the man has a face marked by wrinkles and fatigue, he is wearing a white turban and looking towards the viewer. However, he is a healthy farmer, with a vigorous physique and an almost relaxed look while enjoying a break. In *Father* the turban, wrinkles and leathery skin return, but the man's expression is totally different: he is exhausted, blinded by the dazzling light of the sun, he is older than the peasant depicted in the previous painting and in precarious hygienic and health conditions. Furthermore, the use of colours - neutral and cold tones for *People of Daba Mountain*, warm and reminiscent of the soil and the sun in *Father* - emphasise the feeling of relaxation in the first painting and drama and fatigue in the second one. The rendering of the two figures is therefore in complete antithesis: in the first painting it is understood that the peasant lives in a condition of prosperity, in the second one in a condition of misery.

To create the background of *Father*, Luo Zhongli used loose brushstrokes, typical of the artists of the French Barbizon School²³² and of the painter Jean-François Millet (1814-1875) [fig.74], exhibited at the 1978 Nineteenth-Century French Rural Landscape Paintings

²²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 25.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.* p. 24.

²³² The Barbizon School or Barbisonniers is a term that identifies a group of painters active in the 1800s including Jean-François Millet, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875), Pierre Étienne Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867) and Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878). The term is also used to identify the artistic current created by these artists, a romantic realism that depicted the landscapes of their hometowns and authentic scenes of peasant life.

MOLLETT John William, *The Painters of Barbizon I. Memoirs of Jean Francois Millet, Theodore Rousseau and Narcisse Diaz*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890, pp. v-vi.

Exhibition. In later artworks, what Luo shared with Millet was a fondness for rural subjects - which, as Martina Köppel-Yang points out, are portrayed by both in a romantic atmosphere - and the treatment of light. Furthermore, in the creation of this painting (but above all for his later artworks), Luo Zhongli also took inspiration from the lighting techniques used by the Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) [fig.75].²³³

The artist to whom Luo Zhongli's *Father* owes the most is undoubtedly the American photorealist painter Chuck Close (1940-). Close's artworks are hyper-realistic large-scale portraits that reproduce reality mechanically in a way which is completely detached from the feelings of the depicted faces [fig.76]. Initially, Close's paintings were huge black and white acrylic portraits created from photographs taken by himself. From the 1970s on, he began to produce them also in colour [fig.77]. The technique is that of reproducing a photograph on canvas using a grid to get the right proportions [fig.78] – the same that Luo Zhongli used for *Father*, not starting from a photo but from a sketch [fig.79]. The peculiarity of Close's artworks is the inexpressiveness of the subjects and the representation of every little physical detail of their face: the pores of the skin, the broken capillaries, the hairs. Close thus created imperfect and human depictions of the portrayed figures. It was Luo Zhongli himself who confirmed the influence of the American painter, whose paintings had been published in *Meishu* in August 1980.²³⁴

*Previously I had seen some American photorealist portraits and the impression they gave me definitely influenced me in painting this work, because I felt that this form was the most powerful for conveying my feelings and ideas in their entirety.*²³⁵

As pointed out by Lü Peng, most of the Chinese people at the time had never heard of, or had the opportunity to see, Close's hyper-realism, and therefore Luo's painting - where the artist portrays personal but expressionless memories on a huge canvas - shocked public opinion and created vast debates.²³⁶

²³³ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 94.

²³⁴ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 50.

²³⁵ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 24.

²³⁶ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 747.

4.2.3 Controversies over *Father*

One of the first problems that Luo Zhongli faced during the creation of *Father* was a small critique made by Li Shaoyan 李少言 (1918-2002), at the time vice president of the Chinese Artists Association, deputy minister of the Propaganda Committee of the Sichuan Province, as well as printmaker.²³⁷ The painting of the elderly peasant created by Luo did not show any semblance of improvement in the condition of the peasants after the advent of the new socialist regime: on the contrary, their situation seemed to be even worse than the one of the previous decades. Upon Li's advice, before proposing *Father* to the selections of the national exhibitions, Luo added a ballpoint pen over the farmer's left ear, tucked into the white turban. According to his professor, by doing so, the viewer could have immediately guessed that man lived in a modern and economically advanced country like post Cultural Revolution China.²³⁸ Luo Zhongli said: "I agreed because I thought it would not impact in a big way the overall presentation, and I was afraid my work would not meet the exhibition requirements!"²³⁹ The artistic institutions of the time still exerted a strong pressure and influence on the art produced: the new directives were mainly those of favouring intelligibility to ambiguity - this is one of the reasons why realism was preferred - and to create artworks that expressed the social responsibility of artists rather than individual expression.²⁴⁰

With *Father*, Luo Zhongli won first prize at the Second National Youth Art Exhibition in 1980. The oil painting was first published on the cover of *Meishu* in January 1981 [fig. 80], and in March of the same year in the issue announcing the winners of the exhibition. Soon, the critics became more and more active. First, the most disconcerting detail was the size of the painting.²⁴¹ The Chinese public was already accustomed to monumental artworks but the only portraits of this size that had ever been admitted were those of the emperors or of Mao Zedong. As soon as Chinese people of the time saw the gigantic face of the poor, old and dirty farmer, they could not refrain from associating *Father* with the artworks portraying the

²³⁷ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 98.

²³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 93;

LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 750.

²³⁹ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 59-60.

²⁴¹ Di er jie quanguo qingnian meishu zuopin zhanlan huojiang zuopin mingdan 第二届全国青年美术作品展览获奖作品名单 (List of Winning Works in the Second National Youth Art Exhibition), *Meishu*, March 1981.

Great Helmsman: for some of them, Luo had created an outrageous heresy. The size of the painting was therefore considered absolutely inappropriate to portray an anonymous peasant. Furthermore, precisely because of this truthful and authentic representation of the farmer's condition, Luo totally deviated from the Cultural Revolution model artworks, and also from the principles enunciated by Mao in Yan'an. *Father's* manner exacerbates the defects of the man's face, thus creating a complete antithesis with the ethereal, composed, perfect and austere representation of Mao [fig.81].²⁴²

Another debate raised by some critics was the lack of a clear message in Luo's painting. Compared to *People of Daba Mountain*, which depicts two healthy, sturdy farmers from post-CR China enjoying a break before returning home, *Father* depicts an old peasant who looks like a beggar, poor and malnourished, exhausted and scarred by the sun. As analysed by Jane Debevoise, the portraits of old farmers [fig.82], or the photos of them thanks to photojournalism [fig.83], were not new in the Chinese art scene of the time. The earlier artworks, however, were all romanticized depictions of the rural condition.²⁴³ He Rong 何溶 (1921-1989), a member of *Meishu* editorial board, exposed himself in numerous articles in favour of Luo's painting and those by other young artists of the SFAI, calling them "a necessary antidote to the excesses of the past, which was characterized by 'the worthless praising of the bright side of life with false, boastful, and empty talk'".²⁴⁴ Zeng Jingchu 曾景初 (1918-2001) instead, in the March 1981 issue of *Meishu*, defined the farmer as "the father of our 800-million-strong rural population".²⁴⁵

The greatest critiques to Luo Zhongli's painting came from Shao Yangde 邵养德 (1934-). Still strongly rooted in the conservative and revolutionary mentality, in a series of articles also published in *Meishu* Shao defined *Father* as a dark portrait of an old farmer from the pre-liberation period. Furthermore, he accused Luo of having completely misunderstood the real situation of the peasants of the time and of having even despised them with the excessive depiction of the physical characteristics of *Father*, depriving them

²⁴² DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 48.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 54.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 56.

of their dignity.²⁴⁶ He also defined Luo's obsession with ugliness as "perverted and unhealthy", only to exhibit his technical skills in hyper-realistic painting.²⁴⁷

After Shao Yangde's accusations, another great figure in the Chinese art scene, Shao Dazhen 邵大箴 (1934-), also took up the defence of Luo's creation, blaming Shao Yangde of not seeing the beauty in the suffering expressed by *Father* and affirming that the monumentality of the painting ennobled the inner beauty of the peasant and did not show only his pain and affliction. In addition, Shao Dazhen praised the courage of Luo in presenting to the public and critics an artwork so realistic and without ideological contaminations.²⁴⁸ In the early months of 1981, the publications of periodicals and art magazines were full of opinions, criticisms or praise by critics and the public on this painting, and the debate continued in the following years. This did not stop even after the publication of a letter with the title *We Will Not Be Ashamed of "Father"*, written by Guo Zuxiang, a 39-year-old farmer who argued that even after years of land reforms, 60% of Chinese farmers still lived in a situation of extreme poverty, and that therefore *Father* represented exactly the real Chinese farmer.²⁴⁹ In any case, *Father* was included in the permanent collection of the China Art Gallery in Beijing and Luo continued, for some years, to create hyper-realistic portraits that reflected the rural reality and that exposed the forgotten side of society.

4.3 Luo Zhongli - *Spring Silkworms*, 1980

Spring Silkworms [fig.84] is an example of the symbolic use of lighting that characterizes Luo's paintings of the early 1980s. This oil painting, created in 1980, shows an elderly country lady, with her head bent over a wide and flat basket, intent on feeding silkworms with a leaf. The bowed head hides the face of the skeletal woman. She is wearing a long shirt or perhaps a dark blue dress, with the sleeves rolled up and has an embroidered red camellia on her chest, perhaps a pin. Her arms are tanned and scarred by time and hard work in the fields, her hands are bony, wrinkled, with a bandaged finger and dirty nails. The

²⁴⁶ SHAO Yangde, Chuangzuo·xinshang·pinglun——du “Fuqin” bing yu youguan pinglun zhe shangque 创作·欣赏·评论——读《父亲》并与有关评论者商榷 (Creation, Appreciation and Criticism—— Examine "Father" and Discuss with Relevant Critics), *Meishu*, September 1981.

²⁴⁷ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

²⁴⁸ SHAO Dazhen, Ye tan “Fuqin” zhe fu hua de pingjia 也谈《父亲》这幅画的评价 (Also Talk About the Evaluation of the Painting "Father"), *Meishu*, November 1981.

²⁴⁹ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., pp. 59.

background is a deep and dark forest green, with lighter horizontal streaks, as if to create a wall pattern. The only lightning in the painting is given by the glare of the lady's hair, gathered in a bun, looking like silk threads ruffled like in a cocoon. The suspended hair makes the scene perceive as eternal, as if it were a photograph.

The title and theme of the painting refer to a verse by the poet Li Shangyin 李商隐 (813-858), often quoted in the communist propaganda: "As soon as the silk is finished, the worm dies like tears [wax drops] that start to dry when the candle is melted".²⁵⁰ Just like the silkworm, a symbol of short and mediocre life, the elderly peasant woman also had to work hard for the construction of socialist China, silently dying after exhausting the last remaining energy.²⁵¹ The theme of death is also symbolised by the colour of the peasant's hair and the silkworms, pure white. Just like *Father*, the obsessive attention to details, the authentic realism and the close-up of this scene give the viewer a sense of intimacy and familiarity with the figure. The view is from top to bottom, emphasised by the posture of the woman, bending towards the basket or perhaps hunched. *Spring Silkworms* is also called "Mother", as if to create a pair with the previous painting *Father*. Once again Luo publicly exposes the real conditions of the peasants, their exploitation, their old age and fatigue, in complete antithesis with the pre-revolutionary socialist realist style paintings of the 1960s [fig.85], with the CR artworks [fig.86] and also with some paintings by Luo's contemporary artists who, despite taking considerable inspiration from the artworks of the Sichuan School of Painting, continued to create following the revolutionary canons [fig.87].

During the 1980s, Luo's artistic style changed considerably. Initially, he continued to focus more on the portraits of peasants he had seen in the areas of Mount Daba or during his journeys in the remote villages of China, but in a more expressionistic style, such as in *Old Woman of Yi Nationality* [fig.88] and in *Portrait of Old Man* [fig.89]. Later he began to approach to Contemplative Painting, portraying the inhabitants of rural areas in a less dramatic way than in *Father* and *Spring Silkworms*, such as in *Years* [fig.90], painted in 1984, or in a melancholy way as in *Silent Snowfield* [fig.91], *Kids in The Village* [fig.92]

²⁵⁰ 春蚕到死丝方尽, 蜡炬成灰泪始干.

REN Yong, Cong "Fuqin" dao "Chuncan" —— Yidian zhiyi he kanfa 从《父亲》到《春蚕》——一点质疑和看法 (From "Father" to "Spring Silkworm" —— Some Doubts and Opinions), *Dangdai wentan* 当代文坛 (*Contemporary Literary Criticism*), August 1982, p. 24.

²⁵¹ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, op. cit., p. 96;

REN Yong, Cong "Fuqin" dao "Chuncan" —— Yidian zhiyi he kanfa 从《父亲》到《春蚕》——一点质疑和看法 (From "Father" to "Spring Silkworm" —— Some Doubts and Opinions), op. cit., p. 24.

and *Autumn* [fig.93], created in the late 1980s. As it will be discussed in chapter four, Luo Zhongli went more and more from the hyper-realism of the early 1980s to an expressionist stroke, an almost primitive style characterized by thick brushstrokes and the use of brighter colours in the 1990s [fig.94]. The distinctive feature of his paintings, however, always remained the representation of rural environments and peasants but above all their humanity and spirituality. Luo Zhongli was certainly the first artist to represent rural populations in such an authentic way, but he was not the only one: his classmate Gao Xiaohua also created paintings of Rural Realism, such as *Herdsmen* [fig.95], *Portrait of Yi Girl* [fig.96] and the portraits of the *Butuo Yi People* series [fig.97], all made in 1983. To find inspiration for these artworks, he went to the autonomous prefecture of Liangshan, in Sichuan, to portray the faces of the Yi ethnic group.²⁵² These portraits are very different from his following creations and from other Life-stream Art paintings. Like in *Father* by Luo Zhongli, Gao's artworks show ugly, old, toothless and dirty subjects, far from the young and beautiful Yi girls that he portrayed in the 1990s. This was the aim of Chinese Rural Realism: to show the truthful reality of people.

*At the beginning, what I wanted to express was the unique 'five flavours' of the Butuo Yi people. That is the odour of sweat, smoke, alcohol, oil, and soil. This was my pursuit at the time.*²⁵³

As these paintings and what stated by Gao Xiaohua demonstrate, this new style went against all the principles previously enunciated by Jiang Qing for the revolutionary model artworks: figures were no longer gao 高, da 大, quan 全 (sublime, outstanding, perfect) and hong 红, guang 光, liang 亮 (red, bright, and shining).²⁵⁴ In a short time, also other young artists of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts – among them Cheng Conglin and Zhu Yiyong too - shifted their attention to the populations of the most remote areas and to the various ethnic groups of China. This new theme is also present in another trend, linked to Native

²⁵² WAQI Bi-huo, Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), *Xinchang xueyuan xuebao* 西昌学院学报 (*Journal of Xichang University*), September 2015, p.81.

²⁵³ “当初，我所要表现的是布拖彝人身上特有的那种‘五味’。即‘汗味’、‘烟味’、‘酒味’、‘油味’、‘土味’，这就是我当时的追求。”

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in WAQI Bi-huo, Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), op. cit., p.81.

²⁵⁴ LI Xianting, Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art in DORAN Valerie C. (Editor), *China's New Art, Post-1989*, 后八九中国新艺术, Hong Kong, Hanart T Z Gallery, 1993, pp. XII, LXXIV.

Soil Painting but more soulful: Life-stream Art, formally started by Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1953-), one of the CAFA's class of 1977 students.

It is ironic that when the whole nation of China was asked to look forward, the rustic realist painters insisted on looking backward, downward, and inward through their images of rural misery, stark poverty, and the rudimentary world of backbreaking peasant toil so characteristic of rural China's "primitive," or at the very least marginal, regions.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 75.

Chapter III

Melancholy Youth, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art

Although life was very difficult, we [young people sent to the countryside] were very young at that time, we didn't care about anything, and we had a special feeling for the surrounding environment and people. [...] It was very hard. Our workload was huge. We had to get up and go to the fields before dawn and we could go home only after dark. A workpoint corresponded only to one mao 毛 [10 cents], the workpoints earned in a year could only be used for food, and they were just enough to eat, and then there was nothing. [...] At that time, the shock to me was too big, and it left such a deep impression that it cannot be erased. If I close my eyes, everything is still vividly visible, like an image that has been frozen forever.²⁵⁶

Scar Art and Native Soil Painting had a huge impact on the Chinese art scene of the time. Within a few years, the innovative and disruptive themes of the oil paintings of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts students won the major prizes at the national art exhibitions and gained approval throughout the country. The analysed trends, however, were not the only ones produced by the academies young artists to show their inner and psychological scars: some of their artworks did not portray explicit dramatic scenes from the past, but rather young people of the *educated youth*, with a veil of melancholy in their eyes, in desolate and

²⁵⁶ “生活上虽然非常艰苦，但那时我们都很年轻，什么都不在乎，对周围的环境和人有一种特别喜欢的感觉。[...] 特别艰苦，我们的劳动量非常大，天不亮就得起床下地，天黑透了才能回家。一个工分只有一毛钱，一年下来所挣的工分只能吃饭，或者说刚刚够吃饭，然后什么都没有了。[...] 那个年代那里给我的震撼实在是太大了，至今留下无法抹去的深刻印象。我只要一闭上眼睛，那里的一切历历在目，是一种永远凝固了的画面。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Chiluluo de zhiqing shenghuo dai gei wo dute de shenmei quwei* 何多苓：赤裸裸的知青生活带给我独特的审美趣味 (*He Duoling: The unadorned life of educated youth brought me a unique aesthetic taste*), August 8, 2013. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20130820/n493330.html>

gloomy settings. The anger and tragic nature of the clashes depicted in the early artworks of Scar Art were soon abandoned to focus on the deeper and psychological aspect of the artists' past. The experience of the Down to the Countryside Movement touched almost 17 million young people of different social backgrounds, who dealt with a common destiny: that of losing the "best" years of their lives. Moreover, as Lü Peng states, until 1976 these young people had always had to live according to Mao Zedong's strict precepts.²⁵⁷ From the death of the Great Helmsman, they had not only lost everything they had believed - or were forced to believe in - but they had felt even more destabilized after Deng Xiaoping's open policies.²⁵⁸ This process of disillusionment provoked a strong internal debate, which led them to a necessary psychological and emotional reanalysis of what they had lived. Artistically speaking, this resulted in the birth of the latest realist trend recognized as being part of the Sichuan School of Painting: Contemplative Painting.²⁵⁹ This trend is sometimes called Melancholy Youth, because some of the artworks depict young people from the *educated youth*, often a girl, portrayed in a melancholy way.²⁶⁰ Contemplative Painting's artworks aimed to expose the psychological state of the "lost generation" or faces and landscapes that the artists had seen during the Down to the Countryside Movement. These paintings show a new pictorial language that mixes realism, sentimentality and an almost poetic expressionism.²⁶¹

1. Melancholy Youth

1.1 Gao Xiaohua - *I Love Oil Field*, 1978

The first artist belonging to the Scar Art current, Gao Xiaohua, in the same year he created *Why?* he also completed a second oil painting, *I Love Oil Field* [fig.55]. This artwork exposes the inner conflict of some young people of Gao's age, who at the end of the 1970s faced difficult life choices.²⁶² Unlike the scene portrayed in *Why?* - very realistic but invented by the artist - Gao Xiaohua admitted that for the creation of *I Love Oil Field* he was

²⁵⁷ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 746.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ WU Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 44.

²⁶² PENG Rong, ZHI Yu, "Zhiyou buduan guan Zhu, caineng xingcheng ziji de xiangfa yu zuofa" —— Gao Xiaohua jiaoshou fangtan lu "只有持续关注, 才能形成自己的想法与做法" —— 高小华教授访谈录 (Only by constantly paying attention one can form his own ideas and method" —— Interview with Professor Gao Xiaohua), *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studies*), June 10, 2012, p. 96.

inspired by a true story, which he heard during an educational trip organized by the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts:

*I remember that in the winter of 1978, our painting class of '77 was appointed to experience life in the oil and gas well team in the Zigong mountain area of Sichuan. There were quite a few veterans there, and when they saw female college students from the city coming to the well team, they were all "stunned" and agitated. I have been a soldier so I can understand that mentality. [...]*²⁶³

During this experience, Gao had the opportunity to speak with some oil and gas well workers, especially about their sentimental life and asked them why no one was married. With a sad smile, they said that no girl would have ever wanted to get married and live in such a place. They also added that their boss's wife had run away a short time before, but that he had not even tried to follow her because he did not want to leave his "real family": his workmates, with whom he had lived for more than ten years, since he was in the army.²⁶⁴

*[...], facing such simple and honest people, I could hardly remain indifferent. It came from instinctive sympathy and a sense of humanity, coupled with the inescapable classwork, I began to conceive and create this painting seriously.*²⁶⁵

What Gao decided to express in *I Love Oil Field* is the inner pain, but above all the sadness of those who try to accept things, making compromises. As in the case of the young and beautiful girl sitting on a suitcase in this oil painting: she is looking towards the horizon, as if searching for a handhold outside the scene, with the worried and melancholy expression of knowing that she will never be able to enjoy life in the oil field, not even for the sake of her boyfriend. He, a worker, is behind her, leaning against the gold-coloured handrail of a wooden staircase, turning resigned and aware of the girl's disquiet. This scene is not properly Scar Art, because it does not directly narrate the events that took place during the Down to Countryside Movement. The girl's sense of constraint, her bewilderment and homesickness implicitly recall what many young *educated youths* felt after being sent to the countryside, to the nation's most remote and harsh places. Moreover, the sad situation in which the

²⁶³ “记得 1978 年的冬天，我们“七七级”油画班被指定去四川自贡山区的油气井队体验生活。在那里有不少的退伍老兵，当见到城里女大学生来井队时都“色迷迷”坐立不安。我当过兵能理解那种心态。[...]”

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ “面对这样愚朴老实的人，我是难以无动于衷的，出自本能的同情与一种人道意识的感怀，再加上不可推卸的课堂作业，我开始认真地构思创作这幅画。”

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in *Ibid.*

workers known by Gao lived is also reproduced in the painting: just like the portrayed boy, they too seem to have resigned to not being able to have a wife as long as they work in the oil and gas well.²⁶⁶

Gao used vigorous and hefty brushstrokes, typical of Soviet realism, to underline the texture of the different materials present in the scene such as the fabrics, the soil, the wall, and the wood of the staircase. To emphasise the girl's expression, Gao framed her face in a blue scarf, which captures the viewer's attention and is in contrast with the greyness of the scene. Furthermore, great care was put in the composition: the girl - sitting with her knees together and her hands overlapping them - is shown from above, creating a sense of further oppression and insecurity. The boy is seen from behind, wearing a very voluminous open jacket, which enlarges the real proportions of his bust. Only a part of his face is visible, but his expression full of sadness and resignation can be perceived as he is observing the girl. The staircase acts as a vanishing point for the viewer, giving dynamism to the scene. This artwork, like *Why?*, won second prize at the Fifth National Art Exhibition in 1980 and was published in *Meishu* in May of the same year.²⁶⁷

1.2 Wang Hai - *Spring*, 1979

One of the first artists who created artworks depicting melancholy youth was Wang Hai 王亥 [fig.98], born in 1956 in Chengdu, Sichuan. Although his father was one of the best instructors at the Military Academy of the city and his mother was a graduate, in the 1960s they lost their jobs, they were extremely poor and began working as rickshaw pullers.²⁶⁸ Wang grew up on the streets but was immediately recognized as a child prodigy: at just ten years old, he was able to reproduce huge portraits of Mao with the utmost accuracy.²⁶⁹ The desire to change his social condition and his own destiny made Wang Hai a rebellious boy, both towards society, but above all towards his father. His dream was to become a philosopher, but his financial situation led him to work as a stevedore at the

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojiang zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of award-winning works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, May 30, 1980.

²⁶⁸ ZHANG Yuanling, Wang Hai: Chengshi meiyou jiyi, jiu hui buliao jiale 王亥: 城市没有记忆, 就回不了家了 (Wang Hai: If the City Has No Memory, You Cannot Come Back Home), *Fengmian xinwen* 封面新闻 (Cover News), December 19, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.thecover.cn/news/183978>

²⁶⁹ KONG Lingqiang, Wang Hai: Cong shanghen meishu dao sifang cai taidou 王亥: 从伤痕美术到私房菜 泰斗 (Wang Hai: From Scar Art to Private Kitchen Master), *Chongqing Chenbao* 重庆晨报 (*Chongqing Morning Post*), August 27, 2014.

Chengdu railway station.²⁷⁰ The turning point of his life came in 1977, when he was admitted to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. In an interview, he talks about his deep friendship with He Duoling 何多苓, his fellow student, with whom he shared a passion for painting female figures:²⁷¹

At that time, my classmates liked to paint works about big themes. Only He Duoling and I liked to paint 'fanzi' (a beautiful woman in Chengdu dialect) most. We often looked for a lot of beautiful models. At that time, the classmates were very envious of us, seeing that we could often bring different beauties back to school. In fact, they were our models.

It was during a train trip from Chongqing to Chengdu with He that Wang Hai got the inspiration for *Spring*, after seeing a beautiful young student standing by the window of the carriage, with the wind ruffling her hair:

The image at that moment made me think she was very beautiful. I wanted to paint her at that time. This is the prototype of my "Spring" work.²⁷²

Although *I Love Oil Field* by Gao was created a few months earlier, it was *Spring* [fig.99] to be later defined by critics as one of the very first Melancholy Youth paintings. This 1979 oil painting was exhibited first at the National Art Exhibition in the Sichuan Museum in Chengdu, and the following year at the Fifth National Art Exhibition in Beijing, where it won second prize along with *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*, *Why?* and *I Love Oil Field*, created by Wang's mates. *Spring* is very simple in its composition. A young girl is standing under a canopy, leaning with her back against a white wall next to the door of a country house. Rainwater is dripping from the roof, forming puddles on the ground. The scene is characterized by a cold and intense lighting which lays emphasis on the wall, some objects and part of the young woman's body and face. In the upper left corner, a straw hat hanging on the wall emerges from the wooden beams and just below there are two flying swallows. On the ground, to the left of the young girl, there is an enamelled metal cup that

²⁷⁰ ZHANG Yuanling, Wang Hai: Chengshi meiyou jiyi, jiu hui buliao jiale 王亥: 城市没有记忆, 就回不了家了 (Wang Hai: If the City Has No Memory, You Cannot Come Back Home), op. cit.

²⁷¹ “那时候, 同学们都喜欢画一些大题材的作品, 只有我和何多苓最喜欢画‘粉子’(成都话美女的意思), 我们经常找很多漂亮的模特画。[...] 那个时候同学们都很羡慕我们, 看我们经常能带着不同的美女回学校, 其实她们也就是当我们的模特。”

Quotation of Wang Hai in KONG Lingqiang, Wang Hai: Cong shanghen meishu dao sifang cai taidou 王亥: 从伤痕美术到私房菜泰斗 (Wang Hai: From Scar Art to Private Kitchen Master), op. cit.

²⁷² “那一刹那的形象让我觉得非常的美, 当时我就想要把她画出来, 这也就是我《春》那件作品中的原型。”

Quotation of Wang Hai in *Ibid.*

contains a dark green cactus, enlivened by an orange-red flower on the tip, the only warm colour in the work. The girl is looking straight at the viewer with a serene gaze and a feeble smile, as if she is pondering on the “spring” of her life. She has got long black hair - a symbol of freedom - that falls on her left shoulder.²⁷³ Her left hand is behind her back; in her right hand she is holding a comb. Not far from her, along the concrete that borders the porch, there are tufts of wildflowers. This is all that Wang Hai represented in his painting: a few details that may seem ordinary to most, but not to the eyes of those who have been part of the *educated youth*. In fact, the red writing on the straw hat - *guangkuo tiandi* 广阔天地 (broad world) - and the red and green of the cactus that recall the colours of the military uniform of sent down people, are details that inevitably refer to the years of the Down to the Countryside Movement.²⁷⁴ *Spring's* theme is not immediately understandable because it does not respect the canons of the previous revolutionary models: there is no artificiality in this artwork, and it conveys a feeling of sincerity. What makes the painting noteworthy is the atmosphere created by Wang's brushstrokes, like those of the socialist realism artworks, and the use of grey and blue tones enlivened by cold lighting.

The title of the painting recalls the detail of the swallows and the red flower, a metaphor for the desire for rebirth of young people, but forever marked by their experience in the countryside, a painful memory present in the painting as a weight expressed by some darker areas in the scene. Some critics, such as Lü Peng, judge this painting as full of the sadness and the melancholy of the Wang's generation young people.²⁷⁵ On the other hand, giving the presence of some elements that can be considered positive and hopeful – the spring, the blossomed flower, the swallows, the girl's expression – other critics and scholars interpreted this artwork as desire for "the return of spring after the winter of political turmoil",²⁷⁶ and therefore fully showing all the young woman's hope. The cold tones and the play of light and shadow seem to suggest that things did not go exactly as the young people expected in the future. After winning second prize at the Fifth National Art Exhibition,

²⁷³ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., p. 220.

²⁷⁴ ZENG Xisheng, Qingchun xushi san bu qu — Zhongguo zhiqing youhua de lishi liu bian (xia) 青春叙事三部曲—中国知青油画的历史流变（下）(Youth Narrative Trilogy—The Historical Evolution of Chinese Educated Youth Oil Painting - Part 2), *Nanjing yishu xueyuan xuebao - Meishu yu sheji* 南京艺术学院学报 - 美术与设计 (*Journal of Nanjing University of Arts - Fine Arts and Design*), December 15, 2012.

²⁷⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 746.

²⁷⁶ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 27.

Spring was published in the May issue of *Meishu*, dedicated to the awarded artworks.²⁷⁷ The public was truly touched by the first paintings of Melancholy Youth, so introspective, emotional and moving. As reported by Wu Hung, more than 4000 letters of praise for *Spring* were sent in a single month to an art magazine.²⁷⁸ The enormous and unexpected success obtained by Wang made him reflect for a long time on what his goal in his life was: while he was still at the Academy, he understood that he could not repeat such a success as with *Spring*.²⁷⁹ As will be analysed in the following chapter, his rebellious character soon led him to argue with the superiors of the Academy and to abandon art and painting, to follow his aspirations as a man of letters and scholar and engage in writing novels.²⁸⁰

1.3 Wang Chuan - *Goodbye! Little Path*, 1980

Another young Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts student shocked the Fifth National Art Exhibition audience with his oil painting *Goodbye! Little Path*.²⁸¹ Wang Chuan 王川 [fig.152], born in Chengdu, Sichuan, in 1953, had a very troubled childhood. In 1966 his father was declared an anti-revolutionary criminal and for this reason the whole family was criticized and marginalized. Wang was only in middle school when he was labelled "heibang zidi 黑帮子弟" (criminal child).²⁸² After the accusation against his father, his family broke up and as soon as he finished middle school, Wang abandoned his studies. In the following years, he dedicated himself to the study of drawing and painting as a self-taught boy, being able to draw only from Soviet art books of the 1950s, even though his aspiration was the creation of still life. Although he was never a rusticated youth, his life experiences came very close to the vicissitudes of his sent down peers. In fact, in 1970 he began working as a labourer for a railway infrastructure company operating in Guizhou, Guangxi and Hunan.²⁸³ During the years of gruelling physical work in those remote mountainous areas, he nevertheless found time to create small drawings for his colleagues, hoping to become a

²⁷⁷ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojiang zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of award-winning works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, May 30, 1980.

²⁷⁸ WU Hung, WU Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁷⁹ ZHANG Yuanling, Wang Hai: Chengshi meiyou jiyi, jiu hui buliao jiale 王亥: 城市没有记忆, 就回不了家了 (Wang Hai: If the City Has No Memory, You Cannot Come Back Home), op. cit.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 394.

²⁸² Yilang yishujia | Wang Chuan 艺琅艺术家 | 王川 (Yilang Artist | Wang Chuan), April 15, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/228333759_100144056

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

great artist one day. After his father's rehabilitation in 1974, Wang was transferred to a Chengdu railway engines factory, where he often had the opportunity to portray the company's best workers in some *lianhuanhua*.²⁸⁴

The turning point came when, in 1977, he was admitted to the Chinese painting course of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, along with eleven other students. A few months after the beginning of the courses at the Academy, Wang Chuan had already begun to prepare some preliminary drawings [fig.101] for his first painting later defined as *Melancholy Youth: Goodbye! Little Path* [fig.102]. This oil painting completed in 1980 shows a young girl from the *educated youth* who is about to leave the countryside where she had lived for years. Just like in other artworks of *Melancholy Youth*, the girl is looking towards the viewer, with an uncertain gaze. She has got dark hair pulled back in two ponytails, her mouth tightened in a kind of grimace, her hands and neck show she is thin. The surrounding landscape is a dark wasteland, it seems inhospitable and it is cut in two by a narrow clear path, to which the young woman is turning her back. At the top left, in the distance, light poles can be seen, perhaps lining a road. In the central area of the painting a man is holding a large load on his back - a basket for the harvest - and supporting himself with a stick. The focus of the lighting lies in the upper part of the painting, thanks to the sun that is about to set on the horizon, which warms the tones of the scene.²⁸⁵ The title of the artwork suggests that this girl has come to the end of her experience in the countryside. However, what should be a day of great joy for the imminent change in her situation, is experienced with sadness and melancholy for having to leave what had now become her home and the path she had walked countless times.²⁸⁶

In an article entitled *Qiwangzhe ta zou zai da lushang* 期望着她走在大路上 (*Expect Her to Walk on the Road*), published in the January 1981 issue of *Meishu*, Wang Chuan described the genesis of this artwork, saying he was pushed precisely from the need - shared with many other academics - to analyse the situation in which young people found themselves at the end of the 1970s and their feelings:

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 394.

²⁸⁶ WU Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

*Our generation is a generation that works hard and passionately pursues a better tomorrow. I, along with my peers, continue to fervently explore the question of how we should live our lives. Ultimately, what are we after? What will we lose during the process? When I follow this meandering trail of thoughts looking for my future, I am confused, distraught, and hesitant...*²⁸⁷

In the article, Wang recognizes how his personal reinterpretation and the memory of what he had suffered during the years of the Cultural Revolution led him to broaden his creative horizons, but inevitably also led him to portray the feeling of still being anchored to the past. A past to which he could not say goodbye, just like the young girl in his painting:

*It [this process of introspective analysis] made me realize that thousands of young men had valiantly bidden farewell to the past and got on with their new lives. But I still feel the lonely soul that wanders and grieves. She [the girl depicted in *Goodbye! Little Path*] lacks the courage to utter the word goodbye to her past, [...].*²⁸⁸

Wang portrayed this young woman as tormented by the past, but at the same time also by the present, while “she waits and expects the future to call on her”.²⁸⁹ In any case, creating this painting, Wang Chuan had a very specific purpose and theme:

I experience a wave of profound internal agitation, feeling a deep sense of responsibility to take social morality and artistic conscience as my priority and serve as an ardent advocate for those unfortunate youth who so earnestly chased a better tomorrow. [...] I

²⁸⁷ 我置身于这一代为争取美好命运而顽强生活的热血青年们中间, 不断希望和热情地探求我们该如何生活?我们在追求着什么? 我们又失去了什么? 当我站在这样一条弯弯曲曲小路上思索未来的时候, 我就惆怅, 苦闷, 徘徊。

WANG Chuan, *Qiwangzhe ta zou zai da lushang* 期望着她走在大路上 (Expect Her to Walk on the Road), *Meishu*, 31 January 1981, p.46.

Translated by Shang Kela in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁸⁸ 使我看见了千百万青年勇敢地告别了过去的的生活往前走。但我仍感到了—个孤独的心灵在彷徨、悔悟。她没有勇气去向她过去的的生活告别, [...]

WANG Chuan, *Qiwangzhe ta zou zai da lushang* 期望着她走在大路上 (Expect Her to Walk on the Road), *Meishu*, 31 January 1981, p.46.

Translated by Shang Kela in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁸⁹ 她期待着未来去呼唤她。

WANG Chuan, *Qiwangzhe ta zou zai da lushang* 期望着她走在大路上 (Expect Her to Walk on the Road), *Meishu*, 31 January 1981, p.46.

Translated by Shang Kela in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 29.

take as my theme the kind of mental anguish one experiences when pursuing the light at the end of the tunnel while immersed in utterly dark uneasiness, [...].²⁹⁰

Although this painting has many things in common with Wang Hai's *Spring* - a young girl from the *educated youth* with her gaze fixed on the viewer, the rural setting, the sense of melancholy and emptiness - *Goodbye! Little Path* does not express a feeling of hope for the future. On the contrary, it reveals all the girl's anguish, who does not have the courage to start a new life.²⁹¹ If in *Spring* the cold tones and the precise brushstroke induce a sense of sadness or melancholy, in Wang Chuan's painting the warm tones of the sunset accentuate even more the darkness that is about to envelop the girl, her doubts and insecurities. Wang Chuan showed for the first time the sense of "bucolic nostalgia for the rustic experience"²⁹² that many young people felt after returning home in the late 1970s.

After submitting the painting to the critical gaze of his professors, Wang was denied permission to participate in the selections for national art exhibitions: it was too sad and dramatic. Wang Chuan, however, did not give up and when he saw the truck with the artworks by his academic fellows ready to leave for the selections, he secretly loaded his painting too.²⁹³ So, in 1980 *Goodbye! Little Path* was exhibited at the Second National Youth Art Exhibition, where it won third prize, and was published in the May 1981 issue of *Meishu*.²⁹⁴

1.4 He Duoling - *A Song We Used to Sing*, 1980

One of SFAI's most acclaimed young students was He Duoling 何多苓 [fig.103], born in Chengdu in May 1948. He is the son of an Economics professor at Southwestern University of Finance and Economics and a clerk in the administrative office of Sichuan

²⁹⁰ 我体验着一种深刻的内心激动, 深感自己有责任, 把社会的道义感的艺术良心放在首位, 来为那些追求美好命运而又如此不幸的青年作一种热情的辩护。我面对命运和现实的冲突, 我选择了在迷茫的不安中追求光明的精神挣扎这一主题, [...].

WANG Chuan, *Qiwangzhe ta zou zai da lushang* 期望着她走在大路上 (Expect Her to Walk on the Road), *Meishu*, January 31, 1981, p.46.

Translated by Shang Kela in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁹¹ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 747.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Yilang yishujia - Wang Chuan* 艺琅艺术家 - 王川 (*Yilang Artist - Wang Chuan*), April 15, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/228333759_100144056

²⁹⁴ Qingzhu jianguo sanshi zhounian meizhan huojian zuopin tu lu 庆祝建国三十周年美展获奖作品图录 (Catalogue of award-winning works in the Art Exhibition Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China), *Meishu*, May 30, 1980.

University. Although no one in the family was part of the artistic milieu, he immediately showed great artistic skills: at the age of seven, one of his drawings was published in a national children's magazine and shortly after he was awarded an international painting competition for children.²⁹⁵

*I remember that when I was young, the pictures I drew were different from those of ordinary children. At that time, I painted things with perspective, light and shade, not the kind of scrawls of ordinary children. It can be said that my drawings were not childish at all, they were basically already inclined to realism.*²⁹⁶

Over the years, he had to put aside his passion for art to pursue his studies, but while he was in high school the Cultural Revolution broke out. Schools were closed and he was able to devote himself more to drawing, producing artworks in a revolutionary style, and beginning to approach Soviet oil painting, thus creating large drawings with many characters. In 1969 he was sent to live in a rural community in the Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Liangshan, Sichuan, which he himself called the most influential event in his life.²⁹⁷ Unlike many other *educated youths* who "hoped to get rid of that life as soon as possible",²⁹⁸ He Duoling defined himself in the four years spent in remote areas of Sichuan as "always in a state of aesthetic pleasure and of extreme excitement".²⁹⁹ What surprised him most was the uncontaminated and raw nature of that plateau:

As soon as I went there, I was shocked by the environment. The sky was high and the clouds were pale, completely different from the Sichuan Basin. It belongs to the plateau area, and the climate is like that of the north. It feels like a completely different world, [...]. [...] I really liked it very much, and I was moved by the desolation and the vegetation there. [...], the natural environment was very harsh, but from an aesthetic point of view it was shocking. [...] There was no "beauty" at all, but it was very stimulating to me, and I was excited when

²⁹⁵ He Duoling: *Chiluoluo de zhiqing shenghuo dai gei wo dute de shenmei quwei* 何多苓：赤裸裸的知青生活带给我独特的审美趣味 (*He Duoling: The Unadorned Life of Educated Youth Brought Me a Unique Aesthetic Taste*), op. cit.

²⁹⁶ “我记得小的时候我画的画就跟一般孩子不一样，那时我画的东西就有透视、有明暗，不是一般孩子的那种涂鸦，可以说一点都不幼稚，基本上是一种写实主义的趋向。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Baoli Xianggang, Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), Hong Kong, December 8, 2020, p. 46.

²⁹⁸ “[...]，他们希望的是尽快能够摆脱这种生活，[...]。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Chiluoluo de zhiqing shenghuo dai gei wo dute de shenmei quwei* 何多苓：赤裸裸的知青生活带给我独特的审美趣味 (*He Duoling: The Unadorned Life of Educated Youth Brought Me a Unique Aesthetic Taste*), op. cit.

²⁹⁹ “始终处在一种审美的乐趣和状态之中，那是一种非常激动和特别兴奋的状态。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *Ibid.*

*I looked at all this. So, I did not worry about going back to the city at all. I felt very comfortable in such a place.*³⁰⁰

In those four years, many county labour units went to recruit young boys and girls and offer them a job, but he turned down all proposals, remaining the last rusticated youth to leave the village.³⁰¹ During the years of the Cultural Revolution he created revolutionary artworks, such as *Chasing after the Enemies*, where, however, the influence of Russian socialist realism he had been able to copy from at an early age was still evident.³⁰² After the end of the CR, his style still strongly recalled the paintings by the Peredvizhniki but later some friends gave him some catalogues miraculously saved from the destruction of the CR, which allowed him to see and analyse European artworks.³⁰³

In 1977 he was admitted to the oil painting class of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, where he immediately found himself in tune with his classmate Wang Hai. The two shared a passion for drawing female figures, an element present in the most famous artworks of Contemplative Painting, and which characterized almost all of He's creations. Another feature of his artistic production of the 1980s and 1990s is the use of soft, opaque colours, especially grey and "to avoid bright red or green or excessive strong colours so as not to affect people's overall and emotional perceptions of the composition".³⁰⁴ He Duoling entered the Academy at the age of thirty and along with Luo Zhongli was one of the oldest and most experienced students in his class. The two had already had the opportunity to exhibit their works locally, and He had already organized private painting courses. For this reason, the other very young classmates had great esteem of the two and followed their creations with enormous attention.

³⁰⁰ “刚一去我就被那里的环境所震撼，真可谓是天高云淡，跟四川的盆地完全不一样，属于高原地区，气候又与北方类似，感觉完全到了另外一个世界，[...]。[...] 我真的是非常喜欢那里，被那里的苍凉感动，被那里的一草一木所感动。[...] 其实那里的自然环境非常恶劣，但从审美的角度又非常震撼人心的。[...] 其实并没有什么“美”可言的地方，但对我的刺激就非常大，看着这一切心里就激动。所以根本就不着急回城什么的，觉得在这样的地方待着心里特别的舒服。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History in ZHANG Jian, ROBERTSON Bruce, *Complementary Modernisms in China and the United States, Art as Life/Art as Idea*, Punctum Books, 2020, p. 659. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16zk03m.52>

³⁰³ *Ibid.* pp. 659-660.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 667.

In 1980 He Duoling painted with three of his friends - Tang Wen 唐雯, Li Xiaoming 李小明 and Pan Lingyu 潘令宇 - *A Song We Used to Sing* [fig.104].³⁰⁵ In this oil painting in warm red tones, four rusticated young people are sitting, perhaps in front of a bonfire, and singing at the end of a gruelling workday in the fields and farms.³⁰⁶ Their depiction does not have the drama or pain of Scar Art's works. Instead, it is loaded with an almost poetic meaning, which expresses the sense of optimism that was born in the souls of young people knowing that they would finally be back in the city soon.³⁰⁷ The setting is indefinite, the scene, although characterized by this deep and dark red tone, is enlivened by soft and cold lighting, as if it were a nostalgic memory of the artists. The brushstrokes are still charged with the vigour of Soviet socialist realism. *A Song We Used to Sing* was exhibited at the 1980 Sichuan qingnian meishu zhanlan hui 四川青年美术展览会 (Sichuan Youth Art Exhibition) and the deputy director of *Meishu*, He Rong 何溶, commented by writing:

*Regardless of the so-called "great accomplishment" of the 'Educated Youth's Life' in their thoughts [the four boys and girls in the painting], how much pain [this experience] left in their feelings, they cherish the life they have lived and the land they have worked on. There is bitterness in the joy of memories, and bitterness when they bid farewell to their educated youth's life.*³⁰⁸

Although in the 1980s He Duoling created purely Contemplative Painting artworks, after his debut in the Chinese national art scene with *The Spring Breeze Has Returned* in 1982 - which will be analysed later - He created *Youth*, one of the most famous painting depicting the Melancholy Youth.

1.5 He Duoling - *Youth*, 1984

Youth [fig.105] is the artwork that encompasses all the characteristics of Melancholy Youth's previous paintings, and at the same time can symbolise the end of this trend.³⁰⁹ This oil painting, which for its large proportions (150 x 187.5 cm) is reminiscent of monumental

³⁰⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 750.

³⁰⁶ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 7.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ 不管所谓‘大有作为’的‘知青生活’在他们思想、感情上留下多少痛苦，他们对自己所走过的生活、对于他们劳动过的土地都是珍惜的。在回忆的欢乐中有苦味，要告别知青生活时又有辛酸。

HE Rong, Du Sichuan qingnian meizhan ji qita ——zai lun meishu chuanguo de weida zhuanzhe 读四川青年美展及其他 —— 再论美术创作的伟大转折 (Reading Sichuan Youth Art Exhibition and Others—— Rediscuss the Great Turning Point of Art), *Meishu*, December 26, 1980.

³⁰⁹ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 751.

artworks, features a young girl on a rocky promontory, sitting on a boulder, an eagle flying behind her. The landscape is very particular and is the background to almost the whole scene: a very light rocky ground, sloping, inhospitable, with a piece of metal plough stuck into it. The scene is cut off by the horizon, which however is crooked, and this gives a sense of chaos and disorientation. The sky is created by a cold blue mixed with shades of grey. The view is from the bottom up, which mainly emphasises the figure of the girl. She has got short hair, a faded military uniform with rolled up sleeves, trousers and sandals. She is sitting in the sun, with her hands lying down and half open as if in a sign of helplessness, looking straight at the viewer - an empty, sorrowful look [fig.106]. The artwork is a portrait of the loneliness, misery and surrender of a girl who is aware of having lost - or by then abandoned - her youth.³¹⁰

*The eagle in my paintings symbolizes the ideal of our generation, while the pale sunshine attempts to lacerate and destroy the beautiful youth. However, the strength of life still enables the youth to envisage all the tribulation taking place.*³¹¹

As in all the other artworks created by He Duoling in the first half of the 1980s, *Youth* also owes a lot to the American realist painter Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009), who greatly influenced He's compositions, lighting and use of colour. *Youth* was initially commissioned by the Chengdu Art Academy.³¹² In the same year of its creation, it was exhibited at the Sixth National Art Exhibition where it won the third prize. In February 1985, the painting was published on the cover of *Meishu*, in the issue dedicated to the awarded artworks. *Youth* encompasses themes and emotions of both Scar Art and works depicting the *educated youth*. This painting thus marked the break point with the past: “there was no more that artists could say about that period which was so painful to recall”.³¹³

2. Contemplative Painting

In the same years when the artworks depicting Melancholy Youth appeared, some of the artists of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts focused their attention on the following phase of the psychological and emotional process experienced by young people of the *educated youth*, that is, on the new hope born after their return to urban centres and after the

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 659.

³¹³ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 751.

reopening of universities from 1977 onwards.³¹⁴ In the early 1980s, however, the influence of Rural Realism began to grow stronger and in a short time these artists - following the footsteps of Luo Zhongli - focused on depicting the various ethnic groups present in China and rural populations, not necessarily in a hyper-realistic key like Luo, but in a more contemplative way. This change is also due to the strong influence of a fourth trend, Life-stream Art, a term that subsequently identified many paintings of the early 1980s created by young students from the academies of the other provinces, among them Chen Danqing 陈丹青.³¹⁵ For some of these artists, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art came to a melting point, allowing them to create artworks that are so deep and expressive to unsettle the viewers.

2.1 Cheng Conglin – *A Summer Night in 1978, I Feel the Yearning of the People*, 1980

One of the earliest paintings that expressed the change in the mood of post-Cultural Revolution youth was Cheng Conglin's *A Summer Night in 1978, I Feel the Yearning of the People* [fig.67]. As discussed in the previous chapter, with *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* [fig.59], Cheng embarked on a sort of artistic journey to expose, analyse and metabolize what he and his generation had experienced between 1966 and 1978: from the fanaticism of the Red Guards, to the desire to start living a normal life again.³¹⁶ The artwork *A Summer Night in 1978* expresses all the hope for a better future felt by the boys and girls returned from the Down to the Countryside Movement, also fuelled by the reopening of universities since 1977 - hope and anxious expectation that Cheng himself felt when he was admitted to SFAI.

The composition of the painting is complex: more than one hundred figures of young men and women are gathered in an anonymous place, a huge and bare room. There are very few details that characterize the setting. In the only entrance, on the far left of the painting, young people are crowding, some curious, others annoyed. In the central window, wide open and with broken glass, some young people are climbing and trying to take part in the meeting,

³¹⁴ LI Shufang, *Sanshi nian jiaoyu gaibian Zhongguo* —— Cong “1978 nian xia ye” tan jiaoyu gaige sanshi nian 三十年教育改变中国 ——从《1978 年夏夜》谈教育改革三十年 (Thirty Years of Education Changed China ——Thirty Years of Educational Reform from "Summer Night in 1978"), *Meili Zhongguo* 魅力中国 (*Charming China*), November 5, 2009.

³¹⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 757.

³¹⁶ XIA Hang, *Sichuan qingnian huajia tan chuanguo* 四川青年画家谈创作 (Sichuan Young Painters Talk About Creation), op. cit., p. 44.

someone is taking notes on a notebook. On the far right, a second window can be glimpsed, with other students who have climbed up to assist. Outside the room the darkness of a hot summer night is visible, also underlined in the title of the painting and by the light clothing of the characters.

The large building in the picture is fictitious, and I used this rundown environment to accommodate those unhealthy lives. [...] I was yearning to go somewhere but could not go forward. I believed that these people are the backbone of the nation – people wanting to move forward but unable to and waiting to retreat but finding that intolerable. This is the emotional state that inevitably accompanies human advance; it is these ordinary but unhealthy people who share in the yearning of the nation, who find inspiration and who struggle even when they are filled with a sense of loss.³¹⁷

The sense of loss that Cheng is talking about is that of his own youth, but unlike the artworks about melancholy youth, the term he uses to describe the mood of the young people of the time is "yearning". This desire to turn the page and abandon the past is the last step of his introspective journey to metabolize the events of the fifteen years preceding the creation of *A Summer Night in 1978*.³¹⁸ The young people in the room are almost all seated and form neat lines, arranged by Cheng obliquely, to emphasise the sense of disorder and overcrowding in the eyes of those who observe the painting. All the figures - seated, standing, outside the window or huddled at the entrance - are facing the same direction, to the right, and this gives an optical sensation of a continuous flow, as if it were a river of people. Each of the figures has been captured in different actions: some of them are sleeping, others are listening or smoking, some of them are absorbed in their own thoughts or chatting, others are smiling or seem suspicious. According to Martina Köppel-Yang, the depicted group is one of the first classes of students admitted to the university after 1977: "Out of the night of ignorance and blind fanaticism they push into the bright room of knowledge and hope".³¹⁹ Actually, given the number of young people in the room, what Cheng depicts is more probably a scene from the entrance exam to one of the country's universities. The restoration of entrance exams to universities and academies was an important event not only for education, but above all for the enormous impact it generated on the social development of

³¹⁷ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 745.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 744.

³¹⁹ KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989*, op. cit., p. 87.

the nation.³²⁰ This significantly changed the sad state of mind of the younger generations of the time and inspired the psychological and cultural rebirth of hundreds of millions of young people.³²¹ In the faces of the boys and girls portrayed by Cheng, however, there is a sense of tiredness - emphasised by the use of opaque and cold colours - of emptiness and bewilderment, of a desire for redemption and helplessness at the same time.

Although each figure is extremely characterized and emphasised by the dynamism and contrast between light and shadow, compared to *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*, the faces of the characters are softer and more relaxed. This makes the scene much less dramatic than that of the previous painting, but above all it makes it less incisive and impactful. Cheng's abandonment of the models and canons imposed during the Cultural Revolution is even more evident in this second creation: in this flow of figures there is no main protagonist, no hero or antagonist, the tones are neutral and cold, the arrangement of the figures does not follow an order.³²² Another important difference from *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* is the less expressive and dramatic rendering resulting from the use of lighter and more defined brushstrokes. This technique was interpreted by some critics of the time as a lack of professionalism on the part of Cheng.³²³ In addition, other criticisms were made against this artwork, such as the lack of a defined theme, the use of opaque and too neutral colours, the lack of accuracy in depicting the characters.³²⁴ Some critics went so far as to define *A Summer Night in 1978* as "unrealistic, inflexible and nondescript".³²⁵ Cheng responded to the criticism in the short article *You 'Xia ye' sua xiangdao de* 由'夏夜'所想到的 (*Thoughts about 'Summer Night'*) published in the February 1981 issue of *Meishu*.³²⁶ It was Li Xianting himself, at the time editor of *Meishu*, who defined Cheng's painting as "China's earliest contemporary artwork".³²⁷ *A Summer Night in 1978* was exhibited at the Second National Youth Art Exhibition in 1980, where, however, did not get any awards.

³²⁰ LI Shufang, *Sanshi nian jiaoyu gaibian Zhongguo* —— Cong “1978 nian xia ye” tan jiaoyu gaige sanshi nian 三十年教育改变中国 ——从《1978 年夏夜》谈教育改革三十年 (Thirty Years of Education Changed China ——Thirty Years of Educational Reform from "Summer Night in 1978"), op. cit.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989*, op. cit., p. 90.

³²³ XIA Hang, *Sichuan qingnian huajia tan chuanguo* 四川青年画家谈创作 (Sichuan young painters talk about creations), op. cit.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 744.

³²⁶ CHENG Conglin, *You “Xia ye” suo xiangdao de* 由《夏夜》所想到的 (*Thoughts about 'Summer Night'*), *Meishu*, February 1981.

³²⁷ “中国最早表现当下的作品。”

2.2 He Duoling - *Spring Breeze Has Returned*, 1982

He Duoling's national fame began with *Spring Breeze Has Returned* [fig.107]. This oil painting was his graduation project in 1982, on which he worked for a full year. This artwork was subsequently recognized by critics as the emblem of the Contemplative Painting of those years. Also, after being published in *Meishu* in December 1982, it became one of He's most debated artworks. The scene features a young country girl, sitting on a dry grass lawn that is the background to the whole painting.³²⁸ Behind her there is a resting ox and not far from her a black and white dog staring at the sky. The girl is wearing country clothes: a heavy, worn shirt, a work apron tied at the waist, faded trousers and worn shoes. She is thoughtful, looking far away, the wind blowing her dark hair coming out of her braids. She is bringing a hand - skinned and dirty from manual labour - to her mouth as if to nibble her nails. Her expression is a mixture of tiredness, perhaps sadness or expectation [fig.160].³²⁹ This painting is enigmatic, characteristic of many of He Duoling's artworks. Even though space and time are explicit (a rural area and early spring), it does not have a plot or narration, exactly like *Youth*. However, unlike *Youth* - a painting that would have been created two years later - *Spring Breeze Has Returned* does not convey a sense of disappointment or resignation: the young girl is in a bucolic landscape, in a scene that is both romantic and poetic, the ox protecting her, the dog waiting impatiently. Thanks to the breeze, the young woman knows that spring is back and that the lawn will return to be a lush green, just like her life. Another interpretation, made by Gao Minglu, is that “the ‘spring’ is a suggestion of the future, but the girl is representative of the passive, wounded Chinese people who need the revitalizing spring to rescue them from the dormant past (and the current status quo).”³³⁰

One of the most important elements of the painting is the grass: dry, yellowish, and whipped by the wind, just like the one typical of the arid areas where He lived during the Cultural Revolution:

In the winter of 1969, among Sichuan's Daliang Mountains' connecting peaks I lay on a patch of tawny grass and looked up to the sky. The grass grew despite the harsh winter and seemed to suspend in the borderless and limitless sky. It wasn't until ten years after when

Quotation of Li Xianting in LI Shufang, *Sanshi nian jiaoyu gaibian Zhongguo* —— Cong “1978 nian xia ye” tan jiaoyu gaige sanshi nian 三十年教育改变中国 ——从《1978年夏夜》谈教育改革三十年, op. cit.

³²⁸ WU Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*, op. cit., p. 43.

³²⁹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 176.

³³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 176.

*I realized that it was in those years of loitering about and doing nothing that my life has been unconsciously woven into that piece of grass.*³³¹

He later defined the element of grass as evocative of the memories of the years spent in Liangshan, memories that allowed him to find himself in his creations, exactly what many young people of the time aspired to do.³³² To recreate the dense and dry grass pattern that evoked melancholy memories so much, He used very fine calligraphy brushes, which allowed him to meticulously paint every thread.³³³

2.2.1 Artistic influences in *Spring Breeze Has Returned*'s creation

The original composition that He Duoling wanted to paint in *Spring Breeze Has Returned* did not involve the portrayal of a country girl, but of an intellectual one.³³⁴ Shortly after starting the draft of the artwork, in January 1981, He saw some prints of the paintings of the American artist Andrew Wyeth [fig.109] published in the magazine *Shijie meishu* 世界美术 (*World Art*), which accompanied an article about Wyeth's creations.³³⁵ It was the painting *Christina's World* [fig.110] that changed He Duoling's artistic vision forever, as if it had sparked an illumination in him:

*'Spring Breeze Has Returned' is my graduation work. At first, I intended to paint it differently. The grass was there from the beginning. But the main character was meant to be a public intellectual but then was changed to be a civilian. What decided how I eventually painted it was my sense of affinity with Andrew Wyeth's 'Christina's World', which I first saw on the back cover of an issue of 'World Art'. I then felt that that's how I should paint my painting. Of course, no one paints oil paintings that way, but I simply went my own way. Not only did I paint the way Wyeth paints but changed the details of the village farmer girl's clothes. That was pretty subversive then. It set the tone of my early painting style, which further influenced greatly the development of Chinese new art.*³³⁶

Andrew Wyeth was an American realist painter among the most famous in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. His artworks were often influenced by autobiographical events and depict people close to him. His masterpiece is *Christina's World*, painted when

³³¹ LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 661.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 658.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

he was only 31 years old. Created in 1948, it depicts a young woman lying on a large sloping grassy field, turned to her back and looking towards a house on the hill.³³⁷ Her body is very thin, her arms skeletal, her skin looks like porcelain. Her torso is taut, supported by bony arms.³³⁸ The point of view used by Wyeth is from above, as if he or the viewer were watching the scene standing. The use of neutral and opaque colours characterizes all the elements of the landscape, from the grey buildings to the gloomy sky and dry grass. The only colour that stands out is the pink of the woman's dress, which however is of a soft shade. Everything is illuminated by a very cold light, which loads the scene with anxiety.

For the female figure, Wyeth took inspiration from her neighbour, Anna Christina Olson, who was suffering from polio.³³⁹ From 1940s to 1970s Wyeth often portrayed Anna and her brother as subjects for his works, and it was after seeing her crawl - the woman refused to use a wheelchair - on a field near her home that Wyeth had the intuition for this painting: "The challenge to me was to do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless".³⁴⁰ Although he was inspired by Anna Christina, the portrayed woman is Wyeth's wife, Betsy. In Wyeth's painting, what destabilizes the viewer is that the accuracy in the rendering of details - every blade of grass, the woman's hair, the nuances - focuses attention on the landscape and on the tension emanating from the woman's position. On the contrary, however, the title reveals a much deeper, inner meaning, as if that place were a "psychological landscape [...], a portrayal of a state of mind [...]".³⁴¹ After its creation, the painting caused little resonance and critics interpreted this artwork as a representation of the loneliness and misery of the human condition of "Christina". It was only after the purchase by MOMA of New York to include it in the museum's permanent collection that *Christina's World* became a symbol for modern American art, so much so that the building depicted in the work - Olson House, in Cushing, Maine, where Wyeth spent his summer vacation - became a national historical monument.³⁴²

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, New York's Museum of Modern Art website, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>.

³³⁹ LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 658.

³⁴⁰ Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, New York's Museum of Modern Art website, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² Andrew Wyeth, New York's Museum of Modern Art website, <https://www.moma.org/artists/6464>.

For the Chinese art scene of the early 1980s, Wyeth's painting was undoubtedly innovative and at times destabilizing. It is therefore not surprising that He Duoling took it as a model for *Spring Breeze Has Returned* and for his subsequent artworks, including *Youth*.³⁴³ Although in the following years critics called him an imitator of Wyeth, he never denied his admiration for the American artist and the profound influence of him:

[...]for some reason some have said that I am an imitator of Andrew Wyeth. This is correct, because I am really very fond of this 'melancholy realist' and I do try to copy him. I love the seriousness of his thinking and his lonely horizons appeal to me. In addition, although critics comment on his romantic ambience, he is more rational and philosophical, and his approach is more objective and accurate.³⁴⁴

Three months after discovering Wyeth, He Duoling chose to title the work *Spring Breeze Has Returned*, quoting a verse from a poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).³⁴⁵ When He finished his graduation project, he showed it to his professor who, however, did not appreciate the composition and technique used at all. The painting was rejected, and He was unable to graduate with his classmates.³⁴⁶ If for the professor of the Academy *Spring Breeze Has Returned* was an artwork to be discarded, it was not the same for Li Xianting and He Rong, at that time editor and deputy director of *Meishu*: after seeing a photo of the painting, they decided to publish it on the cover of the December 1981 issue. It was only after his artwork reached the whole nation thanks to *Meishu* that the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts decided to award the bachelor's degree to He Duoling anyway.³⁴⁷ After having seen *Spring Breeze Has Returned*, some critics and part of the public contested the lack of a theme and called the painting too sentimental, not analysing the feeling of loneliness that He wanted to convey.³⁴⁸ Furthermore, hardly anyone seemed to grasp the metaphor of the new spring breeze as the awakening of the girl thanks to a new national policy. Critics and art scholars had not noticed the painting only in China: *Spring Breeze*

³⁴³ LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 659.

³⁴⁴ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 750.

³⁴⁵ Dongzhou she: rang ren zhaomo de meili huajia —— He Duoling 东周社: 让人着迷的魅力画家 —— 何多苓 (Dongzhou she: An Enchanting and Charming Painter —— He Duoling), February 20, 2017, [Video]. Retrieved from https://www.iqiyi.com/v_19rraoyhq8.html

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁷ The Poet-painter, *Global Times*, May 13, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/654807.shtml>;

Dongzhou she: Rang ren zhaomo de meili huajia —— He Duoling 东周社: 让人着迷的魅力画家 —— 何多苓 (Dongzhou she: An Enchanting and Charming Painter —— He Duoling), [Video], op. cit.

³⁴⁸ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 750.

Has Returned was also exhibited at the 1982 French Spring Salon at the Louvre Museum, allowing the art of He Duoling to be known even overseas.

2.3 He Duoling - *Ancient Wall*, 1982

Ancient Wall [fig.111] represents the beginning of a process of change in the figures and scenes depicted by He Duoling. All that makes up the painting is the close-up image of a child peeking out from behind a clay wall holding a small cat in his hand. No lawn, no spring breeze, no *educated youth*. Only the child's look of distrust, melancholy and sadness. The tones are those of the soil, the lighting is uniform. According to critic Ruan Xudong, the child is trying to look beyond an obstacle that he would like to destroy, as if this old wall symbolised the remnants of feudal society:

Perhaps this ancient wall blocked his vision, separated him from the outside world, and restricted his naiveté as a child. Perhaps, he will respond to the call of the spring breeze, muster the courage and strength of seven- or eight-year-old, leap over this ancient wall that has confined him for far too long, and walk toward the new world waiting outside of the wall.³⁴⁹

This particularly expressive portrait strongly recalls other oil portraits created in the same years, composed of a single figure, often children or teenagers, depicted in rural, desolate, and bare environments, which critics later identified as Contemplative Painting.

2.4 He Duoling - *Snow Goose*, 1984

In 1984 He Duoling finished another very important project, *Snow Goose* [figs.112-121]. It takes its title from the short novel written in 1940 by Paul Gallico (1897-1976), an American writer. The novel is set in England in the 1930s and 1940s and is about Philip, a young artist who is improving his art in painting nature and birds but, marginalized by society because he is disabled, finds refuge in a lighthouse. After three years, one day a young girl, Fritha, finds an injured snow goose and asks the man for help to save it. Over the years, between the two - who managed to save the goose - a deep friendship is born, but Philip soon takes part in the Second World War, trying to save wounded soldiers with his sailing boat during the German bombing in Dunkirk. The tragic ending sees Philip lost in

³⁴⁹ Translated by Shang Kela in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 31.

the sea - after days of relentless help, while the snow goose always flies over his boat - the destruction of the lighthouse during the bombing and Fritha, who discovers she loves Philip, who manages to save only one of his paintings: the depiction of the first time Philip saw her, with the wounded snow goose in her hands.³⁵⁰

He Duoling's goal was to reconcile literature and painting and what he created was a series of accompanying paintings to the story by Gallico which, however, did not necessarily have to stick to the plot, but which could have a meaning on their own.³⁵¹ In this *lianhuanhua* therefore, He overshadowed the narrative elements of the novel, but amplified the emotions and sensations that the paintings could arouse. He used a "background and horizon" scheme in many illustrations, with a single painted figure, which also characterized many of his later creations and influenced other Contemplative Painting artists.³⁵² These illustrations won second prize at the Di san jie quanguo lianhuanhua pingjiang 第三届全国连环画评奖 (The Third National Picture-story Books Awards), shocking audiences with their drama and expressive force.

2.5 He Duoling and Ai Xuan - *The Third Generation*, 1984

What He Duoling and another great Contemplative Painting artist, Ai Xuan 艾軒, painted in 1984 was the portrait of the young men and women of the so-called "third generation". In the early 1980s, art critics began to distinguish three groups of intellectuals and artists based on their generation. The first to make this subdivision public was Deng Pingxiang 邓平祥 (1947-) in an article entitled *Lun disandai huajia* 论第三代画家 (*Discussing the Third-generation Artists*).³⁵³ The subdivision he proposed was as follows: the first generation was of those who managed to finish university studies in the 1950s and early 1960s, the second generation was made up of university students who had to abandon their studies during the Cultural Revolution, the third generation was that of those who emerged on the art scene after 1976.³⁵⁴ Subsequently, Gao Minglu revisited the subdivision

³⁵⁰ ALLARDICE Lisa, *Winter reads: The Snow Goose by Paul Gallico*, December 19, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/19/winter-reads-snow-goose-paul-gallico>

³⁵¹ LI Pu, *Chong wen jingdian: Zou jin He Duoling lianhuanhua zuopin "Xue yan"* 重温经典：走进何多苓连环画作品《雪雁》 (*Revisiting the Classics: Entering He Duoling's Picture-story Book "Snow Goose"*), March 23, 2016. Retrieved from https://heduoling.artron.net/news_detail_824483

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ DENG Pingxiang, *Lun disandai huajia* 论第三代画家 (*Discussing the Third-generation Artists*), *Meishu sichao* 美术思潮 (*Fine Arts Trends*), April 5, 1985.

³⁵⁴ ANDREWS Julia, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, op. cit., pp. 472-473.

by Deng and defined the third generation as that of the *educated youth*, that is, that of He and the other young students enrolled in universities and academies after 1977.³⁵⁵

*With us the third generation began, and I have always thought that we were lucky ones. The general experience of the first generation (my parents for example) could be summed up as chaos caused by war and political movements; that of the second generation were endless political movements. Born in our time, we witnessed changes and yet could refuse to be drawn into the matter, we became survivors and spectators, and were able to enjoy the results of the changes. Starting with us everyone was able to go their own way and our voices were made heard.*³⁵⁶

He Duoling and Ai Xuan then created *The Third Generation* [fig.122]. This large oil painting (180 x 190 cm) features a group of Chinese young people standing, all facing the viewer, without showing any expression on their faces. But what is immediately perceived is their need to communicate something. The main figures are three, two men and a woman in the foreground. He and Ai all portrayed faces familiar to them, using friends and classmates as models. The best known are the poetess Zhai Yongming 翟永明 (1955-), the architect Liu Jiakun 刘家琨 (1956-) (both painted by He Duoling), but also the painter Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (painted by Ai Xuan) and just behind Zhou Chunyu 周春芽.³⁵⁷ The focus of the scene is the young and beautiful Zhai Yongming - He Duoling's future wife and her muse in many later artworks. Zhai has got long black hair pulled up in two tails, a tired but healthy face, her mouth is half open. She is holding a brown bag tightly over her shoulder while she is wrapped in a red coat that is contrasted with Liu's black jacket, thus catching the viewer's attention. Behind her is a group of young adults, led by Liu Jiakun (on the right) and Zhang Xiaogang (on the left). He Duoling later explained the genesis of the artwork, inspired by the young students of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts who every morning poured into the streets of the campus to go to class:

At the beginning of the 1980's, I was still living on the campus of Sichuan University. Early in the morning when I went to work, I always saw the stream of students going to class. In front of the main school building stood the towering statue of Chairman Mao, his fingers pointing towards the East. At his feet however the masses, moving as waves, were

³⁵⁵ HE Duoling, *The Origin of The Third Generation (I)*, Poly Auction website, November 8, 2011. Retrieved from http://en.polypm.artron.net/english/news_detail.php?nid=256

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ AI Xuan, *The Origin of The Third Generation (II)*, Poly Auction website, November 8, 2011. Retrieved from <http://en.polypm.com.cn/news/detail/257/24>

*spreading in all directions. Every day I could see a scene like this, and I felt that it resembled very much to a painting.*³⁵⁸

Initially the title of the painting should have been “Our Generation”,³⁵⁹ but in order not to be too explicit, the two artists decided to change it, still portraying the young people of their generation, their anxieties and expectations for the future:

*At that time, it happened to be the beginning of the reform and opening policy in China, the old and the new were mixed; the situation felt just like a fallow garden which suddenly meets the spring season; western philosophy and influences were also about to set something off; nobody knew what the future would look like.*³⁶⁰

The Third Generation has a feeling of something unresolved, unspoken, which induces the viewer to look more carefully at the details. Whoever observes the painting cannot help but contemplate these faces, and uselessly search for a message, a meaning.

*This generation went through a lot of sufferings, it bears very deep marks of an era in which China underwent big changes. The figures in the painting are facing directly towards the audience as if they were about to walk out of the painting. [...] Each figure has a powerful charisma which holds the viewer spellbound, it shows a generation that constantly reflects upon themselves during a time of social transformation, a generation which bears the future of their nation.*³⁶¹

The artwork was exhibited at the Sixth National Art Exhibition in 1984, where it won the “Artwork of Excellence” award.

2.6 He Duoling - *Winter*, 1983

Parallel to the dramatic or contemplative artworks depicting Melancholy Youth, or portraying young adults or children, after graduating in 1982 He Duoling also concentrated his artistic production on portraits of people of the Yi ethnic group, with whom he had lived in Liangshan during the Down to the Countryside Movement. Oil paintings such as *Winter* [fig.123], *Land with Brambles* and *Child Under the Sky* did not propose a dramatic nor innovative vision of rural life: with the techniques of Rural Realism that other classmates and friends such as Luo Zhongli, Ai Xuan, Chen Danqing, Gao Xiaohua, Cheng Conglin

³⁵⁸ HE Duoling, *The Origin of The Third Generation (I)*, op. cit.

³⁵⁹ AI Xuan, *The Origin of The Third Generation (II)*, op. cit.

³⁶⁰ HE Duoling, *The Origin of The Third Generation (I)*, op. cit.

³⁶¹ AI Xuan, *The Origin of The Third Generation (II)*, op. cit.

were using at the time, He Duoling began to depict Yi men and women in all their simplicity, honesty and dignity, arriving at a meeting point between Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art.

What almost became a symbol of the rural and contemplative oil paintings of the 1980s is contained in *Winter*. The side portrait of a young Yi woman, her black hair covered with a veil that also protects her ears and neck from the cold, with a heavy cloak barely visible on her shoulders. She is expressionless but at the same time she has a deep look, underlined by the dark eyebrows and dark shadows under the eyes. She is looking straight ahead. This gaze turned elsewhere, which does not reveal emotions, almost detached from reality, often became the main feature of the creations by some Contemplative Painting artists, such as Ai Xuan. The tones of the painting are soft, opaque and recall those of the soil. The lighting is characteristic of this kind of artworks: no longer dazzling as in the first paintings by Luo Zhongli, but soft, grey, and almost suffused, in this case reproducing the light of a pale winter sun. The theme of the harsh winter in the most remote areas of the country have also been used by many other artists, one among them was Ai Xuan, one of He's friends.

According to Lü Peng, "painting Yi people was a natural 'homecoming' for He Duoling".³⁶² As will be analysed in the next chapter, the depiction of rural landscapes and desolate areas remained in almost all of He's artistic production of the 1980s.

Later, I painted a lot of Yi people's style oil paintings, which are the deep imprints of that period. I drew a lot of sketches of Yi people when I jumped into the queue and worked in peacetime. Their way of life and attitude towards nature and life are completely different from ours. In addition, the natural environment there is very special, with strong sunlight and strong wind, giving people a feeling of desolation...³⁶³

2.7 Ai Xuan - *High Aspirations*, 1981

As already mentioned, a great friend of He Duoling and his colleague in the creation of some artworks was Ai Xuan 艾軒 [fig.124], later defined as one of the greatest Chinese

³⁶² LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 751.

³⁶³ “后来我画了很多彝族风情的油画，就是那个时期留下的深刻烙印。插队那会平时劳动我就画了很多彝族人的速写，他们的生活方式以及对自然和人生的态度跟我们完全不一样，再加上那里的自然环境非常特殊，阳光特别强烈，风也很大，给人一种苍凉的感觉，...”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Chiluluo de zhiqing shenghuo dai gei wo dute de shenmei quwei* 何多苓：赤裸裸的知青生活带给我独特的审美趣味 (*He Duoling: The Unadorned Life of Educated Youth Brought Me a Unique Aesthetic Taste*), op. cit.

artists of Contemplative Painting. Born on November 11, 1947 in Jinhua, Zhejiang, Ai was the son of one of the best-known figures in the Chinese literary scene of the twentieth century, the poet Ai Qing 艾青 (1910-1996). It is worth noting that Ai Xuan is the older brother of another great Chinese artist, much discussed and famous abroad for his political ideas, Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (1957-). Always a great lover of drawing, Ai Xuan graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts High School in 1967.³⁶⁴ Although he is not considered as one of the Sichuan School of Painting's artists like the previously analysed painters, Ai Xuan also experienced the drama of the Down to the Countryside Movement: from 1969 to 1973 he was sent to work in a military farm in Yu County, in Hebei. In the following years Ai enlisted in the People's Liberation Army: in 1973 he was assigned to the Creative Group of the Ministry of Culture of the Chengdu Military Region as an art creator [fig.125].³⁶⁵ During those years in the army, Ai began to create sketches and portraits, especially those of the Tibetan people, in a highly realistic style [fig.126]. A clear example of this is *A Girl* [fig.127], an oil painting from 1975 depicting a girl from the Qiang ethnic group from Wenchuan (a city in Sichuan province) whom Ai saw during his years in the army.³⁶⁶ What struck Ai Xuan was the way she was dressed, her traditional clothes so whimsical - a black turban wrapped around her hair and embellished by a coloured bow, a deep red shirt and a brown suede waistcoat lined with a fur - her features so different from those of the Han people.³⁶⁷ The use of contrasting colours and vigorous brushstrokes are softened by the lighting that brings out the young woman's rosy cheeks. Although the theme of ethnic minorities always remained the emblem of Ai Xuan's artistic production, the technique he used went from still having strong influences of Soviet realism to getting closer and closer to hyperrealism. This allowed him not only to continue developing his artistic skills, but also to move to the Aba area of Sichuan and come into contact with people of the Tibetan plateau, which soon became the main theme of his paintings. This experience influenced almost all his artistic production, leading him to reproduce faces and scenes of rural life in artworks that would have become icons of Contemplative Painting.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁴ Ai Xuan's Artron profile, retrieved from <https://aixuan.artron.net/about>

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Ai Xuan, *A Girl*, Robert and Mei Li Hafner Collection website. Retrieved from <http://www.hefnercollection.com/hefnercollection/portfolio.cfm?aid=1>

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ai Xuan: Ren zai tiandi jian ruci miaoxiao ren ziran roulin yu cuihui* 艾轩：人在天地间如此渺小小任自然蹂躏与摧毁 (*Ai Xuan: People are so small in the world, and they are naturally ravaged and destroyed*), March 31, 2018. Retrieved from <https://m-news.artron.net/news/20200710/n1130017.html>;

In 1981 Ai Xuan won second prize at the Second National Youth Art Exhibition with *High Aspirations* [fig.128]: this oil painting portrays a young invalid girl in a library, reading a book while standing with the help of a crutch. This figure is a clear reference to young people returning from the Down to the Countryside Movement and who survived the Cultural Revolution, not portrayed in a melancholy or dramatic way, but expressing a sense of hope and rebirth.³⁶⁹ The girl is in fact one of the thousands of young people who in those years, despite the physical and psychological scars, tried to enter universities and take back their lives. This artwork marked a stylistic change in Ai's creations: a single figure portrayed in shades of grey and blue, the increasingly defined brushstroke, the cold and soft lighting became the hallmark of his later paintings. After *High Aspirations*, Ai Xuan began to become popular nationwide and attempted to enrol in the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts without success.³⁷⁰ He then decided to live for a period of time at the home of his friend He Duoling, who not only introduced him to other artists then defined by critics as belonging to the Sichuan School of Painting, but also brought him closer to the melancholy realism of Andrew Wyeth. Ai Xuan was certainly not indifferent to the expressiveness of the American artist's works. His painting *Grass* [fig.129], created in 1987, recalls *Youth* by He Duoling and *Christina's World* by Wyeth for the composition, the crooked horizon, the lighting and the technique. The months spent with He inevitably influenced his artistic production and it is also for this reason that it is appropriate to discuss Ai Xuan in this chapter. Moreover, in the early 1980s Ai Xuan collaborated with He Duoling several times, such as in *The Third Generation*. In those years Ai Xuan began a series of oil paintings focused exclusively on the Tibetan populations with whom he had lived in the previous ten years, portrayed in a totally new way for the artistic panorama of the time. These faces told of the fatigue, sadness, and courage of those who live in extreme conditions, in remote areas of China with extremely cold winters and very hot summers, in an arid, almost inhospitable territory. His most famous and noteworthy artworks of this period are *Cold Rain* [fig.130] and *Someone Sings Behind the Mountain* [fig.131] - in which Wyeth's influence is evident - and *Perhaps Sky is Still Blue* [fig.132].

Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), Hong Kong, December 8, 2020, p. 32.

³⁶⁹ *Jiade chun pai Ai Xuan "Youzhi zhe" 2438 wan chengjiao shuaxin qi paimai jilu* 嘉德春拍艾轩《有志者》2438万成交 刷新其拍卖纪录 (*Guardian's Spring Auction of Ai Xuan's "High Aspirations" Sold for 24.38 Million*), June 19, 2018. Retrieved from <https://m-news.arttron.net/news/20180619/n1151751.html>

³⁷⁰ *Ai Xuan: Ren zai tiandi jian ruci miaoxiao ren ziran roulin yu cuihui* 艾轩：人在天地间如此渺小任自然蹂躏与摧毁 (*Ai Xuan: People are so small in the world, and they are naturally ravaged and destroyed*), op. cit.

2.8 Ai Xuan - *Stranger*, 1984

One of Ai Xuan's most famous Contemplative Painting artworks is *Stranger* [fig.133]. This oil painting, completed in 1984 and which is recognized by critics as Ai's most enigmatic work, depicts a Tibetan girl - identifiable by her orange beaded necklace and a reddish complexion - standing in the middle of a dirt road, among the deserted tundra of the Tibetan plateau. Although the theme is totally different, this scene recalls the composition of another painting created a few years earlier, *Goodbye! Little Path* [fig.102] by Wang Chuan. Ai's Tibetan girl has shaggy, unkempt hair, uncared just like the ground behind her. Her face is dirty and marked by the harsh climate of that area, she is wearing a worn sheepskin jacket and a red shoulder bag. The expression on the girl's face reproduces the exact surprise mixed with mistrust of when in the 1970s she found herself in front of the young soldier Ai Xuan, who for her was nothing more than a stranger, just as expressed in the title of the painting.³⁷¹ The emotions aroused by her gaze were so intense that Ai could no longer forget it, so much so that years later he reproduced it in *Stranger*.

2.9 Ai Xuan - *Norgay*, 1985

In the oil painting *Norgay* [fig.134] Ai Xuan began to express the influence of Wyeth and sentimental realism.³⁷² Unlike *Stranger*, the figure depicted is an adult man, a shepherd from the Tibetan plateau, portrayed in profile. This man has got thick hair, bristly like the fur of the animals he raises and pitch black. His face is ruined by the cold and it is very dark, like the one of people who spend whole days working outdoors. He is wearing a padded sheepskin jacket. He is looking straight ahead, where the viewer cannot see, with a focused and stern gaze. The peculiarity of this painting lies in the composition and in the use of colour and lighting: the figure of the man is positioned at the bottom right, it is dark and purple, as if frozen, highlighted by the clear sky that predominates and acts as a background. In the lower area of the painting there is a barely visible strip of a snow-covered and hilly land. The horizon is highlighted by a shade of purple that harmonizes the sky and the cold tones of grey and blue used for the figure - the typical colour of the pale sun reflecting on the snow at sunset or dawn. In the ivory sky there is a white cloud with an unusual shape,

³⁷¹ Ai Xuan, *Stranger*, Robert and Mei Li Hafner Collection website. Retrieved from <http://www.hefnercollection.com/hefnercollection/portfolio.cfm?aid=1>

³⁷² Ai Xuan, *Norgay*, National Art Museum of China website. Retrieved from http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/t20130619_253551.htm

almost round.³⁷³ As in Wyeth's paintings, the theme of isolation is also present in *Norgay*, but Ai Xuan's artworks lack the psychological depth present in the American artist's works. On the contrary, his paintings are more sentimental and emotional depictions of the artist's vision.³⁷⁴ In this artwork there is no time, there is no place, there is no meaning. What is expressed is all the temperament and dignity of this man, an anonymous Tibetan shepherd, whom the viewer cannot help but contemplate. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Ai Xuan never abandoned the production of Contemplative Painting artworks centred on the Tibetan people, always portrayed in the harsh winter and in desolate settings. Young girls and shepherds from Tibet then became his main subjects. These oil paintings will make him one of the most famous and appreciated Chinese realist artists abroad.

2.10 Wang Chuan – *Old Man and Child*, 1984

The expressive power of Rural Realism and Contemplative Painting artworks like the ones by Luo Zhongli and Ai Xuan also influenced Wang Chuan in the early 1980s. *Old Man and Child* [fig. 135] is a clear fusion of the two aforementioned styles: an elderly man and a boy - both seem to be of Tibetan ethnicity – are walking along an icy road, on a cold winter day, surrounded by a mountainous and desolate landscape. The man is wearing a black turban and cloak, his face is reminiscent of the *Father's* old farmer, with very dark skin marked by time and bad weather. He is looking straight at the viewer; his mouth is half open and shows only one tooth - again recalling the painting by Luo Zhongli. The old man is contrasted with the boy next to him, very thin and gaunt, wearing a white cloak, the colour of purity and innocence. He is turned towards the old man but seems to be absorbed in his own thoughts. The style with which Wang creates the face of the old man is close to hyperrealism, while the brushstroke is lightened and becomes softer in the reproduction of the clothes, the snowy road surface, and the little surrounding vegetation. As with the already analysed works of Contemplative Painting, also in this painting there is no theme or narration. The two seem to have been taken by surprise, the boy seems impatient to get back on the road. The viewer cannot understand where that road may lead the two, how far they may have walked and how far they will still have to walk. All these questions lead the audience to pause further, to analyse the details of the scene, but they cannot help but contemplate the gaze of this anonymous man and the veiled sadness of the boy.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 206.

3. Life-stream Art

In the early 1980s, the Rural Realism adopted by Scar Art artists influenced other artists who produced paintings very similar to the previous ones in terms of contents, but with slightly different connotations. These new creations were later defined as Life-stream Art.³⁷⁵ Just like Native Soil Painting, this particular pictorial genre which became very popular from about 1980 to 1985, portrays the rural populations and ethnic minorities of China, not to show the critical conditions in which they lived (as in *Father*), but to exalt their humanity and spirituality.³⁷⁶ It is no coincidence that these two trends were born in the early 1980s and precisely amidst the Academy students. As for the young artists of Contemplative Painting - many of whom also approached Life-stream Art - it is essential to take into consideration the psychological situation in which they lived at the end of the 1970s: some of them recently returned from almost ten years spent in the most remote areas of the nation, in urbanized cities which were completely different from those they had left, without a job and some of them without ever having started or finished their studies. They tried to find their own self, inevitably reconstructing and analysing what they had lived. The young people who managed to enter art academies and universities were able to take back the reins of their lives, albeit with difficulty, but the memory of what they had experienced remained indelible. What characterizes the Life-stream Art works is therefore a sense of nostalgia of rural life, as if the artists felt the need to recall faces, landscapes, actions and sensations seen and experienced during the years of Down to the Countryside Movement,³⁷⁷ certainly a traumatizing experience, but - as expressed in the artworks of *Melancholy Youth* - which was now part of them and had changed them forever.

Life-stream Art was based on the total rejection of revolutionary models: there is no hero depicted, no figure is more important than the others, there are only reproductions of everyday moments of ordinary people, who first of all were human beings, without stereotypes and falsifications.³⁷⁸ The focus was more on the humanity of the people and their feelings than on the settings and the landscape. In addition, Life-stream Art aimed to point out the connection between man and nature that characterised those rural populations and which artists, now in chaotic and modern cities, missed so much.³⁷⁹ As Gao Minglu affirms,

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 199.

³⁷⁶ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 752.

³⁷⁷ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 202.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 201.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Life-stream artists revealed "a pure and clean humanity which has received no interference from class struggle".³⁸⁰ Although it can be said that Life-stream Art is a natural development of Native Soil Painting, it is different from the latter for the use of a more expressionist realism, largely influenced by European artistic currents. Furthermore, the greatest exponent of Life-stream Art was not a student of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, but of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, Chen Danqing.

3.1 Chen Danqing - *Tibetan Series*, 1980

Born on 11 August 1953 in Shanghai, Chen Danqing 陈丹青 [fig.135] has been passionate about drawing since he was a child. His father, Chen Zhaochi, was his first supporter and introduced him to art and literature. It is remarkable how his future was already written in destiny: the characters that make up his name mean respectively red (dan 丹) and green-blue (qing 青), two fundamental colours in Chinese traditional painting, which together compose the literary term for "painting". In 1969, aged just sixteen, Chen was sent to a village in Southern Jiangxi Province as part of the Down to the Countryside Movement, where he remained for 5 years.³⁸¹ Here, in addition to working in the fields, he was employed in the creation of propaganda artworks but in his spare time he was also able to create works in the European academic style. This is due to his friendship with another artist, Chen Yifei 陈逸飞 (1946-2005), who taught him the basics of academic painting.³⁸² When he was moved to northern Jiangsu in 1975, Chen's artistic skills were already well developed, and he had also taken part in the creation of various revolutionary cartoons. Towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chen Danqing went to live in Tibet, where he was impressed by the local population, who became the predominant subject in his creations of the 1980s. One of the most important artworks of this period is *Tears Fill the Bumper Harvest Fields* [fig.137], created in 1976. This two-meters long oil painting depicts the despair of a rural community after hearing of Mao Zedong's death. The Tibetan elderly, adults and children are in a field of golden wheat, gathered around a radio: some of them are crying, others are bewildered or looking towards the viewer. Still connected with Cultural Revolution artworks for the theme and with Soviet realism for the style, this painting however presents a dramatic scene,

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 202.

³⁸¹ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁸² HAN Yuting, Chen Danqing: Gudu de jue doushi 陈丹青: 孤独的角斗士 (Chen Danqing: The Lonely Gladiator), *Shenzhou*, December 15, 2004, p. 49.

previously unthinkable given the revolutionary models, as well as demonstrating Chen Danqing's already keen interest in rural and ethnic populations.³⁸³

His artistic talent was such that in 1978 he was admitted to the oil painting program for graduate students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, despite not having a high school diploma.³⁸⁴ As mentioned in Chapter I, in March of the same year, the China Art Gallery in Beijing hosted an exhibition of nineteenth century French paintings that had rural landscapes as their theme.³⁸⁵ The public and the young students of the academies were able - many for the first time like Chen - to see new techniques and new landscapes (for the Chinese art scene), with bucolic and poetic atmospheres like the artworks by Millet and the Barbizon School. The painting that surprised the public the most was *Haystack* (or *Hay Making*) [fig.138] by Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884):

*'Haystack' elicited a strong response from audience, who had never seen such meticulous technique. Prior to the exhibition of French 19th-century rural landscape paintings, there had been no large-scale exhibitions of western paintings in China. Very few moreover had been abroad. Seeing original works was so different in its impact from seeing reproductions and audiences were quite startled by the works.*³⁸⁶

Lepage's painting depicts a couple of peasants resting on the cut hay of their fields. The man is asleep lying on the ground with a straw hat over his face; the woman is seated, staring, her arms dead weights along her legs. This simple and peaceful scene of rural life is almost overturned by this enigmatic and disturbing gaze. Furthermore, the reproduction of the bucolic landscape, so simple but at the same time so authentic - of this artwork but also of the ones by Millet, Rembrandt, and Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875) - greatly influenced the production of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art paintings.

I'm not a romanticist. My feelings and impressions are all completely natural, resulting directly from contact with various concrete things. [...] Impressions from everyday life flood my senses and I myself have no imaginative input. I love Rembrandt, Millet and Corot ... and I have been tremendously influenced by French painting, especially after attending the "19th Century French Painting Exhibition" held in Beijing in 1978, which was the first time I saw French painting in the original. [...] Faced with the natural

³⁸³ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 757.

³⁸⁴ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁸⁵ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 759.

³⁸⁶ Quotation of Li Xiangting in *Ibid.*

*surroundings [of Tibet] and the customs of the Tibetans, I quite naturally chose to portray them in an almost classical style, using oils. Classical beauty lies in its naturalness.*³⁸⁷

In those years, Chen Danqing developed a painting style that came close to European academicism also thanks to the teachings of one of his professors, Wu Zuoren 吴作人 (1908-1997), who in the 1920s and 1930s had the opportunity to study in Belgium.³⁸⁸ The dynamic and strong brushstrokes, the use of bright colours, the outdoor settings are the main features of Chen's most famous paintings, the *Tibetan Series*. Artworks focusing on ethnic minorities had already been created in China, such as *First Steps on the Golden Road* [fig. 139] by Sichuan artist Li Huanmin 李焕民 (1930-2016).³⁸⁹ This 1963 block print presents the progress, well-being and wealth of national minorities thanks to Communism through the representation of two young and beautiful girls leading two oxen loaded with hay on their backs, surrounded by fields of golden hay that seem to overflow. However, Chen's creations are totally different: the figures are not embellished, the faces are not softened, the settings are often poor, sparse but completely authentic. Other examples similar to Chen Danqing's ones are the paintings depicting Tibetan people created by Dong Xiwen 董希文 in the 1960s, such as *Labuleng Temple* [fig.140], *Spring comes to Tibet* [fig.141], from which Chen took inspiration.

Tibetan Series, proposed by Chen as his graduation work at CAFA, consists of seven oil paintings depicting scenes from the Tibetan people's daily life. At the age of twenty-five, to conceive and create this series, Chen went to live in Tibet for six months, letting himself be inspired by Tibetan genuineness and spirituality.³⁹⁰ Unlike the artworks of Contemplative Painting, the paintings created by Chen are not purely sentimental: the artist aspired to express the dignity and pride of individuals, even if portrayed in usual actions or in private life, such as breastfeeding or praying.³⁹¹ Also, to differentiate his production from the great revolutionary artworks of the 1960s and 1970s and the huge Scar Art paintings, he voluntarily decided to create about one-meter large paintings.³⁹² The artworks realized for this series are *Mother and Son* [fig.142], *Going to town #1 - #2* [figs.143-144], *Khampa Men*

³⁸⁷ Quotation of Chen Danqing in GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 206-207.

³⁸⁹ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁹⁰ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions)*, Hong Kong, December 8, 2020, p. 70.

³⁹¹ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁹² Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions)*, Hong Kong, December 8, 2020, p. 70.

[fig.145], *Pilgrimage* [fig.146], *Shepherd* [fig.147] and *Girls Washing Their Hair* [fig.148]. As can be seen from the titles, the scenes reproduce - absolutely not in a dramatic way - usual or typical actions of Tibetans to which the artists of the time had never given importance, and that the public was not used to seeing, such as nude scenes like in *Girls Washing Their Hair*.

*I wanted to let people see that on the remote plateaus people lead valiant and rough lives. If you have seen the herdsmen of the Khampa areas, you realize that there are such real men. [...] Their eyes have a piercing gleam, their brows are strong and, with their hair wound up into a plait at the top of their heads they saunter along with a swagger, pendants swinging from their waist. They stride with a heroic gait and they look fearsome. People admire them. From head to toe they look like the ideal capture for the portrait artist, and I wanted to capture them just as they are. When they simply stand, they are a painting.*³⁹³

This was the genesis of *Khampa Men* [fig.145], which depicts five Tibetan men with dark and damaged skin, curly hair covered by turbans, dressed in heavy suits and coats embellished with necklaces, jewellery, holding hunting knives. The tones are those of the soil, warm and dark, accompanied by soft and cold lighting. What troubled the critics was that these characters are doing nothing but getting together in a group. Due to its simplicity, some of the critics defined this artwork – like all the other paintings of this series - as an initial project, a simple study of these figures, not a real painting.³⁹⁴ As already mentioned, the peculiarity of Chen Danqing's production of these years was the use of bright colours to highlight details such as the pearls of the necklaces, the bands in the hair or the ones around the waist, the decorations of the heavy winter boots. In this painting, as in *Mother and Son* and *Going to Town #1*, the central figure is looking straight at the viewer: his expression cannot be understood, but it is not suffering or tragic.

Pilgrimage [fig.146] is another painting that attracted the attention of critics for the unedited scene it portrays. It shows a group of people intent on praying: some kneeling, others prostrating on rugs, a young man standing with his hands joined. Behind him there is a child sleeping on the ground. The background consists of a bright brick wall. At the base of the wall, in front of the most worn and dark bricks, there is a resting goat. The four people are not visible in the face and are portrayed in different moments of prayer. Some of them are wearing traditional winter clothes, others have simple black trousers and jackets, as if

³⁹³ Quotation of Chen Danqing in LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 759.

³⁹⁴ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 27.

they were foreigners who are taking part to the rite. The act of praying is not glorified, but simply shown in all its authenticity and spirituality.³⁹⁵ Chen created this painting after seeing tens of thousands of pilgrims in Lhasa.³⁹⁶

The most famous artwork of this series is *Shepherd* [fig. 147], which features a couple of elderly Tibetan shepherds. The woman is leaning on a stone wall, her eyes half closed, while the man, with his back to the viewer, is about to kiss her. What shocked the public of the time was the almost blatant presentation of the theme of love between man and woman, previously prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, and not yet fully accepted in the early 1980s. The two are dressed in traditional clothes: she is wearing a brick red shirt with coloured pearl necklaces and a grey skirt; he has a naked shoulder visible from the voluminous sheepskin coat, in which he seems to disappear. Behind them a flock of sheep are grazing in the fields nearby. In addition to the grassy lawn, the sky is composed of a very bright area, of an ivory white - as in *Going to Town #2*. This white background detail is also created in *Pilgrimage, Khampa Men, Going to Town #1* and *Mother and Son* with the use of building bricks. In the following years many people, unable to make sense of these simple but expressive paintings, asked Chen Danqing to explain his creations.³⁹⁷ But he always refused, arguing that his goal was to let the sense of humanity that permeated his figures provoke emotions and arouse internal debates in the audience:

*People wanted me to discuss how I felt towards the people and their lives depicted in this picture, and my concern for social phenomena and ethnic destiny. [...] I am unwilling to be more explicit... If audiences can be moved by the true description in this work and its sense of humanity without bringing their own expectations to the work, and simply feel that this is life and these are people, then this fulfils my greatest hopes. [...]*³⁹⁸

Chen Danqing's artworks showed for the first time - not critically but naturalistically - the "stream of life" that animated Tibetan people, praising their human and spiritual aspect, their deep connection with nature and their resilience. Chen graduated from CAFA in 1980, where he worked as a professor for the following year.³⁹⁹ In 1982 he decided to emigrate to the United States. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Chen continued to produce Life-

³⁹⁵ SOLIMINE Kaitlin, Tibet in the Artistic Imagination: An Interview with Chen Danqing, *The World of Chinese*, December 15, 2012, p. 33.

³⁹⁶ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 28.

³⁹⁷ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 760.

³⁹⁸ Quotation of Chen Danqing in *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ SONG Min, Chen Danqing, I Have Escaped and Now I Am Free, *Yishu jie* 艺术界 (*Art Life*), April 15, 2011.

stream Art oil paintings throughout the 1980s, however getting closer and closer to new artistic influences.

3.2 Zhou Chunya - *A New Generation of Tibetans*, 1980

Zhou Chunya 周春芽 [fig.149] was born in 1955 in Chongqing, Sichuan. In the early 1960s, his parents moved to Chengdu but in 1969 his father, a literary critic, died. In 1971 Zhou entered the May Seventh Art School, an institution created after the proclamation of the Cultural Revolution to train new propaganda artists.⁴⁰⁰ Here he received a rigorous education and studied the Soviet and socialist art of Surikov, Repin, Valentin Aleksandrovič Serov (1865-1911). From 1974 to 1977 he worked in Chengdu as a propaganda artist, specializing in the portraits of Mao Zedong.⁴⁰¹ In 1977 he was admitted to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in Chongqing, in the painting and printmaking course [fig.150]. At first, he created numerous portraits and landscapes using techniques and styles typical of European art - such as watercolour and impressionism [figs.151-152]. In the early 1980s, many of his fellow students had achieved national fame with the artworks of Scar Art, but Zhou decided not to follow this critical and dramatic trend.

*At the time I'd also experimented regularly with plot-driven paintings, with Scar Art-type subjects, but ultimately, I couldn't do it. Perhaps it's that I can't immerse myself in thinking that is too complicated. I wanted simply to sketch from life, because in sketching from life, I am facing nature in a very direct, flesh-and-blood way. This allows me to keep the expression of art within my personal emotional impulses.*⁴⁰²

During his studies Zhou had already tried his hand at portraits of people of the Yi ethnic group [fig.153] and in 1980 he left for the Hongyuan County, in the Qing and Aba Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan, where he lived a few weeks with the Tibetan people. Zhou was fascinated by the intense colours of the sky and the mountains, but above all by

⁴⁰⁰ LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 663.

⁴⁰¹ ZHAO Ziqin, Zhou Chunya_Ba muguang touxiang ziran 周春芽_把目光投向自然 (Zhou Chunya: Turn Your Eyes to Nature), *Sichuan tongyi zhanxian* 四川统一战线 (*Sichuan United Front*), December 15, 2004, p. 25;

Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), *Yishu jie* 艺术界 (*Art Life*), February 28, 2011, p. 17.

⁴⁰² Zhou Chunya, *Radiance of the Sunset*, Sotheby's website, retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/modern-contemporary-asian-art-evening-sale-hk0581/lot.1078.html>

the so different customs and habits of the Tibetans.⁴⁰³ This trip was of fundamental importance both for his artistic production and for his career: in fact, he managed to take inspiration for his most famous artwork of Life-stream Art, *A New Generation of Tibetans*. With this painting, Zhou inaugurated the first macro-period of his artistic production: the Tibetan series. With *A New Generation of Tibetans*, he participated in the Second National Youth Art Exhibition in 1980, where he won second prize. In the same year, Zhou began to create his graduation project, a series of more than thirty woodcuts entitled *Half of the Life* [fig.154]. This series proposes "a narrative illustration about the story of this generation [Zhou Chunya's one]. The artist claims it to be an artistic statement of the ideal of his youth".⁴⁰⁴ For the creation of these woodcuts, Zhou took inspiration from the artworks of the Belgian painter and woodblock artist Frans Masereel (1889-1972) [fig.155]. *Half of the Life* was published in the February 1981 issue of *Meishu* magazine.⁴⁰⁵

A New Generation of Tibetans [fig.156] was the oil painting that brought Zhou Chunya to national fame. Created after returning from a summer trip to Hongyuan, it depicts five Tibetan students aged around ten. In the weeks he spent there, Zhou used an empty classroom in a school as a workshop for his creations. Here, many curious kids went to visit him to see his sketches and he took inspiration from these children to paint the students in *A New Generation of Tibetans*. The composition is very simple: there is no narration, only the depiction of these kids, portrayed frontally and dressed in traditional clothes, who are going to school. They have dark complexion and red cheeks; they are wearing heavy clothes despite the sunny day. Their happy smiles emphasise their innocence and demonstrate their optimism. The style is naturalistic and sentimental, and Zhou recreates an atmosphere reminiscent of that of the *Breton Girls* by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) [fig.157].⁴⁰⁶ The technique used by Zhou is peculiar: the black contour line of the figures is marked, heavy and clear, as if it were that of a woodcut. Furthermore, Zhou Chunya used various shades of brown to paint the clothes, a colour that most reminded him of the Tibetan people.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 753.

⁴⁰⁴ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Gesheng, shi, zizhiqū qīngnián měizhǎn zuōpīn xuǎn 各省、市、自治区青年美展作品选 (Selected Works of Youth Art Exhibitions of Various Provinces, Cities and Autonomous Regions), *Meishu*, March 2, 1981.

⁴⁰⁶ Zhang Xiaogang, *A New Generation of Tibetans*, Christie's website, retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5751428/?intObjectID=5751428>

⁴⁰⁷ In the same year his daughter was also born, whom he named Hehe 褐褐, which translated means Brown, in honour of this colour he loved so much.

Although in previous paintings Zhou was strongly influenced by Impressionism, in this painting he used the colours of the soil, contrasted with the vibrant and bright colours of the details.

After I left the grassland where I had experienced life in the wilds many of the specific details soon faded from my memory, but I was left with the strong, rich colors of the place and the images of the honest and rough Tibetan people, through which rich lines of color coursed. When I went to the grasslands for the first time, my deepest impression was of the five children in my oil painting 'A New Generation of Tibetans'. I had not intended to paint in any particular style, and if my present work has individuality, that's only because I wanted to make my work different from that of the other painters. The highlighting lines in my paintings and the natural images appear distorted, but my subjects and compositions demanded this, and I was not motivated by subjective ideas. I wanted to be able to touch nature directly with innocence and honesty, like an innocent child looking at the world.⁴⁰⁸

3.3 Zhou Chunya - *Shearing Sheep*, 1981

In 1981 Zhou decided to leave again, this time together with his fellow academician Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚. The two went to the Ruoergai Prairie, a county in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Aba (Sichuan). Here, Zhou and Zhang let themselves be inspired by the uncontested nature and began to paint en plein-air, creating oil paintings that were later recognized among the most important examples of Life-stream Art, such as *Shearing Sheep* [fig.158].⁴⁰⁹ Unlike the artworks by Chen Danqing, in the ones by Zhou Chunya the proportions of academic realism, the three-dimensionality and the contrast between light and shadow are lacking, but the authentic representation of the Tibetan soul is not.⁴¹⁰

Actually, Zhou Chunya's New Generation of Tibetan predates Chen Danqing's Tibetan Series. Further, Zhou's attention is not on the trials of the Tibetans, coloured by politics or

Zhou Chunya, *Radiance of the Sunset*, Sotheby's website, retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/modern-contemporary-asian-art-evening-sale-hk0581/lot.1078.html>

⁴⁰⁸ Quotation of Zhou Chunya in LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 753.

⁴⁰⁹ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 753;

Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit.

⁴¹⁰ WU Yongqiang, Cong rendao guanhuai dao duoyuan tiyan —— Cong Luo Zhongli, Zhou Chunya de yishu daolu kan Sichuan huajia qun chuanguozuo fengge de yanbian 从人道关怀到多元体验 —— 从罗中立、周春芽的艺术道路看四川画家群创作风格的演变 (From Humanitarian Concern to Diversified Experience — Researches into the Changes of Creating Styles of Sichuan Painters Group via Luo Zhongli's and Zhou Chunya's Paths of Going in for Art), *Aba shifan xueyuan xuebao* 阿坝师范学院学报 (*Journal of Aba Teachers University*), March 20, 2008, p.72.

*social concerns. Rather, he focuses purely on the natural and rugged uniqueness of Tibetan people, that which belongs to the realm of the aesthetic. [...]*⁴¹¹

This artwork features four middle-aged Tibetan women shearing a sheep with big scissors and a child watching the scene. Unlike the previous painting, here the figures are not all portrayed frontally, they are not simply motionless and smiling, but the artwork narrates a very specific scene, albeit of everyday rural life. Furthermore, there is already a change in Zhou's technique and style: the use of much brighter and vivid colours, a more pronounced use of chiaroscuro and lighting, greater attention to details. The simple wall of the Tibetan school that forms the background in *A New Generation of Tibetans* contrasts with the flock of sheep in *Shearing Sheep*, locked inside the fence of the paddock, waiting to be shorn. Their white and voluminous wool seems to compose the sky, as if they were white clouds. The figures are less harmonious, less graceful, and more robust than the smiling young students, highlighting the women's experience in manual and field labour. This style is very close to primitivism, in which Zhang Xiaogang - Zhou Chunya's schoolmate and friend - was also very passionate. In subsequent Life-stream Art paintings, Zhou continued to depict the Tibetan people, pursuing this style full of intense colours and more sinuous and curvilinear shapes, as in *Radiance of the Sunset* [fig.159] or *Spring is Coming* [fig.160], an artwork sold at auction in 2020 for 86.25 million yuan (13 million dollars).

*After departing from the experience on the prairie, many of the concrete events receded from my mind. But what remained was the intensity of the grasslands, the thick colours, the purity and coarseness of the Tibetans, as well as the lines that run through these colors and forms.*⁴¹²

3.4 Zhou Chunya - *Radiance of the Sunset*, 1982

In *Radiance of the Sunset* [fig.161] Zhou created a much more sentimental and almost poetic atmosphere than in his previous paintings. The scene portrays a Tibetan shepherd woman, seen from behind, leading her yak home, followed by her faithful dog. The road is

⁴¹¹ 事实上，周春芽的《藏族新一代》要早于陈丹青的《西藏组画》，而且周并不着意藏族是否苦难之类带政治色彩的社会主体，而倾心于藏族那种特有的粗犷这些属于审美范畴的东西。 [...]

LI Xianting, *Zhongyao de bushi yishu 重要的不是艺术 (The Important Thing Is Not Art)*, Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, August 2000, p. 282.

⁴¹² Zhou Chunya, *Somewhere Peach Blossoms Bloom*, Sotheby's website, retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2019/contemporary-art-evening-sale-hk0885/lot.1161.html>

bordered by a fence that leads towards the horizon, between dark mountains set on fire by the last light of the sunset which also warms the yak's black fur. The contour line of the figures created by Zhou is still emphasised and there is no sense of three-dimensionality, a conscious choice by Zhou, precisely to recall the woodcut prints.⁴¹³ Although the atmosphere is dark, this artwork does not convey oppression or sadness, brushstrokes are not heavy and layered. Compared to his previous paintings, the brown and red tones are lightened. As will be discussed in the next chapter, at the end of the 1980s - after he moved to Europe - Zhou totally changed his style, soon abandoning the Tibetan subjects in his artworks.⁴¹⁴

3.5 Zhang Xiaogang - *The Grassland Series*, 1981-1982

Born in 1958 in Kunming, Yunnan, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 [fig.161] is the son of two local government officials. It was his mother who insisted that Zhang and his three brothers use art as a recreational means to avoid getting into trouble. In 1961 his family moved to Chengdu, and only returned to Kunming in 1972. When he was in primary school, the Cultural Revolution broke out: Zhang still remembers how almost every night "People came to our house and asked my parents to make confessions about what they did wrong".⁴¹⁵ Although they had committed no crime, his parents were sent to a re-education camp for three years, leaving him and the other siblings to live with an aunt. After his parents returned to Kunming, her mother began to suffer from schizophrenia that worsened day by day, and doctors interpreted it as the result of abuse suffered in the previous years.⁴¹⁶ As will be discussed later, his mother's illness greatly affected Zhang's life and artistic production. At the age of 14, Zhang was sent to the Second Street Commune in Jinning County, Yunnan, as an *educated youth*.⁴¹⁷ During the years of the Down to the Countryside Movement he produced artworks in a socialist realist style and realized that his true vocation was to be an artist: back from the countryside, he decided to take the admission test for national art academies, even

⁴¹³ Zhou Chunya, *Radiance of the Sunset*, Sotheby's website, retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/modern-contemporary-asian-art-evening-sale-hk0581/lot.1078.html>

⁴¹⁴ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 753.

⁴¹⁵ BARBOZA David, A Chinese Painter's New Struggle: To Meet Demand, *The New York Times*, August 31, 2005. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/31/arts/design/a-chinese-painters-new-struggle-to-meet-demand.html>.

⁴¹⁶ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China, The Updated Edition*, Timezone 8, 2008, p. 280.

⁴¹⁷ VINE Richard, *Zhang Xiaogang's Surprise Sculptures*, March 27, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/zhang-xiaogangs-surprise-sculptures-59338/>.

though he went against the will of his father.⁴¹⁸ In 1977, he tried the test at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts because the possibilities of entering the CAFA in Beijing were scarce. When he arrived at Chongqing, he discovered that many of his classmates were older than him and already well-known local artists [fig.162].⁴¹⁹ Zhang Xiaogang recalls how he felt very insecure producing artworks with such talented classmates and how many of them welcomed him as a younger brother:

Gao Xiaohua was two years older than me. [...] I remember that he taught me how to shave for the first time. [...] He Duoling, ten years older than me, [...] was already a mature artist when he entered the school. He was a brilliant talent in Chuanmei [SFAI]. At that time, people imagined him as the most standard romantic artist with a poet's temperament. Many people were imitating his painting style and his manners, he was the absolute male god of female classmates, every time he painted and sketched, he was watched by a large group of students.⁴²⁰

Students' life at the Academy was tough, there was a lot of competition and in their free time they worked hard on new artworks or sketches. Starting from a proposal by Cheng Conglin - who in the early years of the Academy was creating *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* - Zhang Xiaogang and some students in his class began to pose as models for the works by other classmates: thus, a real "Classmates Group Painting" was created to practice painting figures portrayed en plein-air [fig.163].

I remember that the work schedule at that time was: wake up at 6.30 in the morning, exercise, have breakfast, or finish cultural class homework or draw a small sketch of landscape before 8 o'clock. Classes were from 8 to 11.30, we had classroom drawing homework after lunch and before dinner. If the weather was good, we went out to paint a landscape sketch after dinner. Later in the evening, all the students in the dormitory took turns posing for drawings and sketches, while on Sundays we took turns posing for oil

⁴¹⁸ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 282.

⁴¹⁹ YU Fang, Zhang Xiaogang: Neixin dubai xing de yishujia 张晓刚: 内心独白型的艺术家 (Zhang Xiaogang: An Artist with an Inner Monologue), *Quanqiu shangye jingdian* 全球商业经典 (*Global Business*), April 5, 2015, p. 91;

ZHANG Xiaogang, *Zhang Xiaogang: Chuanmei 77, 78 ji wangshi, cong ji zhang lao zhaopian tan qi* 张晓刚: 川美 77、78 级往事, 从几张老照片谈起 (*Zhang Xiaogang: The Past of Chuanmei Class of '77 and '78, Starting From a Few Old Photos*), October 27, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/427557608_278692.

⁴²⁰ 高小华大我两岁, [...], 记得我第一次刮胡子就是他教的. [...] 何多苓, 大我十岁, [...] 进校时已是成熟艺术家, 川美的大才子, 当时人们想象中最标准的浪漫主义艺术家和诗人的气质, 很多人都在模仿他的绘画风格及其举止言谈, 女同学们的绝对男神, 每次画写生都会被一大群同学围观.
Ibid.

*paintings. This method of extracurricular practice was originally created by the class's student Cheng Conglin. [...]*⁴²¹

As already mentioned, in the early 1980s Zhang Xiaogang went with Zhou Chunya to the Ruergai Prairie in Sichuan. Moreover, being a great lover of Millet and the Barbizon School, together with his friends Mao Xuhui 毛旭辉 (1956-) and Ye Yongqing 叶永青 (1958-) he also returned to Yunnan, in the autonomous county of Nuohei (on the border with Myanmar). Here he took inspiration for some en plain-air artworks, just like the artists of the Barbizon School.⁴²² It was in Nuohei that Zhang began planning his graduation project, *The Grassland Series*:

*This painting from life was very difficult because there was something difficult and froced about extracting works in a 'grey timbre' or with 'a poetic elegance' from the red laterite earth, brilliant blue skies, and wild nature of Yunnan. [...] I was always moved by the tranquillity that seemed to emanate from some unique religion, by the trees and paths, and by the wandering people and sheep who seemed to have some rich sense of music.*⁴²³

Although at the Academy he studied and had to create works according to Soviet socialist realism, Zhang found this style “emotionally and spiritually empty”.⁴²⁴ His real inspiration were European artists such as Jean-François Millet and the Barbizon School, Paul Gauguin, but above all Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Zhang was able to study and observe their artworks thanks to some foreign art catalogues purchased by the SFAI and to the only textbook about Impressionism available at the Academy library:

*The book lay open in a glass display case, a new page being turned every day. After classes students would stand in front of the case to copy the painting on display that day. Deprived of books, students turned to art journals and exhibitions as their main source of information.*⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ 记得那时的作息时间表是这样的：早上 6 点半起床，锻炼，早餐，8 点前或完成文化课作业或画张风景小写生。8 点到 11 点半上课，午饭后一晚饭前教室画作业，如果天气好，饭后出去画一张风景写生。之后晚上在寝室同学们轮流做模特画素描，周日同学轮流做模特油画写生。这种课外练习方式最初是本班学霸程丛林创立的。 [...]

Ibid.

⁴²² LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 753.

⁴²³ *Ibid.* p. 755.

⁴²⁴ Zhang Xiaogang, *Night Wind*, Christie's website, retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5385693>

⁴²⁵ LI Xianting, Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art in DORAN Valerie C. (Editor), *China's New Art, Post-1989*, 后八九中国新艺术, op. cit., p. LIII.

This love of primitivist and post-impressionist art led him to create his graduation project, *The Grassland Series*, consisting of two oil paintings - *Approaching Storm* (1981) [fig.164] and *Clouds in the Sky* (1982) [fig.165] - subsequently recognized as among the best examples of Life-stream Art. Both scenes are set in a prairie and have Tibetan women as protagonists. In *Approaching Storm*, two women are going to finish the work in the fields and tying up the cattle before the storm arrives, already visible in the distance. In *Clouds in the Sky*, three women are resting on the lawn and contemplating the white clouds high in the sky. In both paintings, the atmosphere is sentimental, almost romantic, as if they were visions of a perfect world in which Zhang could take refuge to escape from everyday life and from his family problems.⁴²⁶ The approach adopted by Zhang is that of impressionist and expressionist art: he paid more attention to the landscape, to the relationship between the Tibetan people and nature, rather than to the expressions of faces and figures.

*I discovered that the lifestyle, habits and traditions of the community did not interest me as subject for art alone. I did not want to report what I saw but to use colour and form in terms of the landscapes and the clothing the people wore to explore their state of mind in relation on life on the land. [...] I realised that to express this in paint it was necessary to push the cultural aspects into the background and bring the emotion to the fore.*⁴²⁷

In this series, he took inspiration from Millet's *Les Glaneuses* [fig.74] for the composition and from Van Gogh for the technique of loose, fluid, and thick brushstrokes, to emphasise the volumes of the figures and the sinuous lines of the landscape.⁴²⁸ Finally, he let himself be inspired by Gauguin for the use of intense and vibrant colours blended with the colours of the soil. It was precisely the brushstrokes, totally different from those of socialist realism, which were judged inadmissible by the Academy professors. Zhang Xiaogang was very discouraged, but received a motivational boost when, in 1982, the art critic and *Meishu* editor Li Xianting was invited by the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts to visit young artists nearing their graduation and see their graduation projects. Li found Zhang's compositions and techniques innovative for the time and encouraged him to pursue this direction.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, Li decided to publish *Clouds in the Sky* on *Meishu*, adding an article to the artwork.⁴³⁰ For a short time, Zhang kept creating Life-stream artworks,

⁴²⁶ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 282.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 283.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 283.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 284-285.

⁴³⁰ YU Fang, Zhang Xiaogang: Neixin dubai xing de yishujia 张晓刚: 内心独白型的艺术家, op. cit., p. 92.

continuing *The Grassland Series* [fig.166], but as will be analysed in the next chapter, after graduation his problems with the SFAI did not cease and this had enormous repercussions, not only in his artistic career, but also in his private life.

3.6 Zhu Yiyong – *Mountain Village Shop*, 1981 and 1984

After having moved the audience of the Second National Youth Art Exhibition with *Father and Son* [fig.71], like many of his classmates, in his last years of study at the Academy Zhu Yiyong felt the need to remember and portray the scenes of daily life he had seen during the two years he spent taking part in the Down to the Countryside Movement:

I have been an educated youth in the countryside for two years. Since then, my heart has hidden a deep love for the countryside. [...] Life in the countryside is hard but unforgettable. Life is like this: when memories of the past call you again, it will become more poetic, and our feelings for it will be more sincere and strong. It is such fragmentary remembrances and feelings that drove me to paint some rural subjects.⁴³¹

Zhu therefore abandoned the drama that characterizes Scar Art's paintings to create one of his most famous and appreciated artworks: *Mountain Village Shop* [fig.167]. This oil painting created in 1981 has become one of the emblems of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-Stream Art. Zhu Yiyong decided to depict four women portrayed in different poses and with their back to the viewer, standing in front of a stall of clothes, fabrics and other items. The four women are wearing pastel-toned shirts embellished with floral patterns and dark pants. Their hair is gathered in braids and buns embellished with flowers and clips. They all have straw baskets used for harvesting in the fields, which identifies them as peasants. Behind them a curious dog is approaching, sniffing. This painting shows a scene of common life, which for some may even be trivial, but the simplicity and delicacy with which Zhu Yiyong portrays it makes it sentimental and almost poetic. These young women seem intrigued and amused in a break from the exhausting manual work, taking the act of shopping as a moment of leisure. The attention and the rendering of details - such as the folds in the women's clothes, the grain of the wooden boards, the net of the baskets - express all the mastery of the artist

⁴³¹ 我当过两年的下乡知识青年，从那时起，我心中便盆藏了对农村的深沉的爱。[...] 农村的生活艰苦，但令人难以忘怀。生活就是这样，当对于过去的回忆重新召唤你的时候，它会变得更富诗意，我们对于它的感情也会更加真挚和强烈。正是这样一些零碎的追念和感受，驱使我想画一些农村的题材。ZHU Yiyong, Cong “Fu yu zi” dao “Shancun xiao dian” 从《父与子》到《山村小店》From "Father and Son" to "Mountain Village Shop", *Meishu*, April 1982.

in creating realistic paintings. In a letter published in *Meishu* in 1982 Zhu Yiyong wrote about the genesis of the *Mountain Village Shop*:

When I was in the countryside, the farmers' market was my favourite place. Especially the girls at the market attracted my attention. Once I saw a few girls dressed in bright colours. They wore clean floral blouses on their upper bodies, but their pants were dirty and short. Some were barefoot, but their hair was very neatly combed, and some even inserted some wildflowers or a beautiful hairpin in it. They kept watching this and that at the counter and didn't want to leave for a long time.⁴³²

After graduating in 1982 and earning a professorship at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Zhu Yiyong continued the production of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art. The artist created a second version of the *Mountain Village Shop* [fig.168] between 1983 and 1984. The two paintings differ only in the position and breed of the dog and in other small details. With this last version Zhu participated in the Sixth National Art Exhibition in 1984 and won third prize.⁴³³ The painting was published in the special issue of *Meishu* dedicated to the awarded artworks. The first version was also included in the permanent collection of the Beijing's National Art Museum of China.

3.7 Shang Yang - *Yellow River Boatmen*, 1981

Defined by Lü Peng as one of the most important Life-stream artists,⁴³⁴ Shang Yang 尚扬 (real name Shang Nengquan) [fig.169] was not a student of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. Born in 1942 in Kai County, Sichuan, he graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at the Hubei Art Institute in 1965. During the Cultural Revolution he abandoned painting but worked as an art editor in the Hubei People Publishing House. In 1981 he obtained a master's degree from Hubei College of Art, where he subsequently worked as a teacher. While studying for his degree, he had the opportunity to spend a day in Jia County, Shaanxi, where the Yellow River Basin is, at that time one of the poorest areas in China. This area is called Loess plateau and is famous for its sedimental soil of a typical yellowish

⁴³² 在农村时，农民的集市是我最爱去的地尤集市上的姑娘们尤其引起我的注意。有一次我看到几个姑娘穿戴很鲜艳，他们上身穿着干净的花衣裳，裤子却又脏又短很不讲究，有的打着赤脚，而头发却梳得格外整齐，有的还插些野花或戴着漂亮的发卡。她们在柜台边不停地看这看那，久久不愿离去。

Ibid.

⁴³³ Di liu jie quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan huojiang mingdan 第六届全国美术作品展览获奖名单 (List of Awarded Artworks of the Sixth National Art Exhibition), *Meishu*, February 1985.

⁴³⁴ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 755.

colour. This journey gave way to a creative flow that lasted for decades, inaugurating his first artistic season, that of the colour yellow, which recalls that northern area.⁴³⁵

Yellow River Boatmen [fig.170] was Shang Yang's graduation project and one of the first paintings focusing on the theme of the yellow colour. The style is visibly still very much influenced by the Soviet socialist realism he studied at university, but the theme is close to Life-stream Art. This painting - nearly four meters long - recalls the monumental artworks reproducing a scene that Shang Yang had seen: he depicted the toil of some fishermen, pushing a wooden boat stranded in the muddy soil of the Yellow River.⁴³⁶ Young and old people with leather-coloured skin are sinking into the ground and trying with all their might to move the boat. Their bodies seem twisted, their muscles tense. While all the others are intent on accomplishing the feat, the central figure has his gaze turned towards the viewer. The whole scene is invaded by this dull and soft yellow shade, which creates a surreal atmosphere, and which accentuates the effort of these men [fig.171].

*The unstoppable spirit of these boatmen shocked me. In this lonely corner of the Yellow River, I truly and intimately felt the tremendous power on which human beings depend for survival and development. [...] What I hoped to express was essentially the beauty of the national spirit and the beauty of national characteristics. [...]*⁴³⁷

The painting was published in *Meishu*, bringing Shang Yang's fame to the United States as well. In 1982 the artist was invited several times by the head of the Oriental Art Department of William Klee University in Pasadena, but Shang always refused: he preferred to stay in China and continue his artworks about the Loess area.⁴³⁸ In 2011 *Yellow River Boatmen* was sold at auction for 31,625 million yuan (almost 5 million dollars), setting a record for the artist's works.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 756.

⁴³⁶ *Shang Yang: Huangtu dixia de minzu jingshen, cai shi zhipu er chonggao de yongheng* 尚扬：黄土地下的民族精神，才是质朴而崇高的永恒 (*Shang Yang: The National Spirit Under the Loess Land, Is the Simple and Noble Eternity*), November 1, 2017. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198

⁴³⁷ “这些船夫们无可羸縻的气概是这样地震撼了我。在这落寞的黄河一隅，我真实贴切地感受到人类赖以生存和发展的那种巨大力量。[...] 我所希望表现的东西，其内涵实质上是民族精神之美、民族特质之美。[...]”

Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

3.8 Shang Yang - *Mother of the Loess Plateau*, 1983

Mother of the Loess Plateau [fig.172] is a surprising, enigmatic artwork and is the extreme demonstration of Shang Yang's obsession with the colour yellow in his artistic production. The scene is much simpler than the one in *Yellow River Boatmen*: a mother - wearing rural clothes – is holding her son in her arms, wrapped in blankets. Near them there are two goats and behind them a stone wall, in the distance the hills of the plateau are barely visible.⁴³⁹ The whole artwork is composed solely of shades of yellow, so soft and opaque that it is almost grey, as if the painting were made of sand. There is no depth and there are no contrasts of lighting. The brushstrokes are light and circular, and this gives a sense of tranquillity, although at first glance all this yellow is almost disturbing. This painting expresses Shang's deep love for the people of the Loess plateau and for this land. During those years Shang Yang continued to produce artworks about them [figs.173-174]: he also created oil paintings on very rough and porous Korean paper, such as *The Old Man of Taihang* [fig.175]. In the 1990s Shang approached Modernism, but never lost his passion for the poor and yellow soil of the Loess area.

3.9 Wang Yidong - *Ancient Mountain Village*, 1983

Like Chen Danqing and Shang Yang, another artist who didn't belong to the Sichuan School of Painting and who initially engaged in the creation of artworks focusing on the "stream of life" of rural populations was Wang Yidong 王沂东 [fig.176]. He was born on May 11, 1955 in Linyi, Shandong, in the Yimeng Mountain area.⁴⁴⁰ In the early 1970s, Wang was a worker in an engine factory. Here, he was also employed in the creation of posters and scenic designs of some propaganda theatrical performances staged by other workers. In 1975 he managed to graduate from Shandong Art School. In August 1977 he participated in the Jinian jian jun wushi zhounian meishu zuopin zhan 纪念建军五十周年美术作品展 (Art Exhibition Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Army) with *Spring Came to Yimeng Mountain* [fig.177] and *Laughing at the Paper Tiger*.⁴⁴¹ In 1978 he was admitted to the oil painting department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he immediately expressed a great interest in portraiture [figs.178-179]. He graduated in 1982.

⁴³⁹ LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, op. cit., p. 757.

⁴⁴⁰ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions)*, Hong Kong, December 8, 2020, p. 70.

⁴⁴¹ Wang Yidong's profile, Artron website. Retrieved from <https://wangyidong.artron.net/about>

In the early 1980s Wang travelled to many rural areas of China and concentrated his artistic production on scenes of daily life he had seen and experienced, especially in the Yimen Mountain [fig.180]. In 1984 he won first prize at the Sixth National Art Exhibition with a painting that can be defined as Life-stream Art: *Mother and Daughter* [fig.181]. After winning the Exhibition, this artwork was published in *Meishu*.⁴⁴² In the following year he won second prize at the Third National Youth Art Exhibition with *Ancient Mountain Village*.

Ancient Mountain Village [fig.182] is a view from above of an everyday life scene in a small village perched on a mountain. The setting is very simple: a house made of dark boulders, built on a rocky slope, a path that leads to the foot of the slope where a haystack has been placed. In the open space near the path a man is teaching a woman - or perhaps a girl - to ride a bike. In the gloom of the scene given by the dark stones, two red details stand out: the woman's vest and the auspicious poster with the words “fu” 福 (fortune) inside the house. The atmosphere is very sentimental, thanks to a masterful use of light and chiaroscuro, which does not make the artwork look oppressive but relaxing and romantic, as if it were a nostalgic memory of the artist. After winning second prize at the Third National Youth Art Exhibition in 1985, the painting was acquired by the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. In the 1980s Wang Yidong continued to produce Life-stream Art paintings [fig.183], although his passion for portraits soon led him to approach hyperrealism, reproducing female faces and bodies that brought him to world fame.

3.10 Cheng Conglin - *Woman of Yi Nationality Beside a Road*, 1983

As analysed in the previous chapter, after *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* [fig.59], Cheng Conglin also abandoned the dramatic scenes focusing on the Cultural Revolution and approached Contemplative Painting – in *A Summer Night in 1977* [fig.67] - and Life-stream Art, representing faces of the Yi people. An example of this new style is *Woman of Yi Nationality Beside a Road* [fig.184], which depicts a young woman sitting on a boulder along a dirt road. She is holding a baby in her arms, at her feet there is a cloth with some bananas for sale. There is a wicker basket with other bananas to her left and a black umbrella to her right. The woman is wearing a veil to cover her head and a long and dark traditional Yi dress, of an undefined colour, created by overlapping brushstrokes of blue, grey, black, and brown. This young woman is standing there, motionless, waiting for some traveller to stop and buy

⁴⁴² Nongjia mu nu 农家母女 (Mother and Daughter), *Meishu*, February 1985, p. 73.

her fruit, an action that she probably does every day. The two figures are highlighted by the bright background: the grey sky almost merges with the ground and the bright stone on which the woman is sitting. This, together with the homogeneous lighting, makes the viewer perceive a sense of desolation and slowness that also transpires from the woman's face, with her gaze turned downwards - like the corners of her mouth - as a sign of resignation and apathy. The brushstrokes are still charged with the influences of the Soviet painting, such as the use of soft and opaque colours. The theme, however, is new for Cheng. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it returned to prominence in his later production, especially in the 1990s.

3.11 Cheng Conglin – *A Girl and Her Younger Brother*, 1984

A Girl and Her Younger Brother [fig.185] was an artwork that had a great impact on the public.⁴⁴³ Two very dark figures of children are emerging from a door made with wooden planks. As expressed by the title, they are brother and sister. The girl's clothes are exactly the same as those of the Yi young woman who is selling bananas in *Woman of Yi Nationality Beside a Road*: her hair under a black veil, a dark dress with blue and white stripes at the bottom, a white collar embellished with a bead. Behind her, her younger brother has got messy hair and a dark voluminous jacket, he is holding an apple in his hand. They are sitting at the door of a poor and rural house and seem to be observing the viewer with curiosity and distrust. Their partially visible and dark faces are a sign of a different ethnic complexion but also of the uncertainty they feel. These two children recall the innocence of youth, highlighted by simple and direct details such as the apple or the child's face that appears from his sister's shoulder, as if it were his shield, his protection.⁴⁴⁴ This painting is an example of the peculiarity of the artworks of Rural Realism and Life-stream Art that Cheng created especially in the 1990s: the figures - all of Yi ethnicity - are very dark, the lighting is concentrated above all in the surrounding environment, giving a sense of drama and mystery to the characters. It was soon after the creation of *A Girl and Her Younger Brother* that Cheng began to plan his most monumental work - created after emigrating to Europe - composed by two 62 meters long paintings that represent two of the most important moments in the spirituality of the Yi people: the funeral and the wedding. As will be discussed in the next chapter, it took him seven years to create *People Attending a Funeral* and *People*

⁴⁴³ GALIKOWSKI Maria, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984*, op. cit., p. 205.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Attending a Wedding.⁴⁴⁵ Over the years, Cheng's brushstrokes gradually became more defined, but he never managed to create hyper-realistic artworks like Luo Zhongli.

3.12 Gao Xiaohua – *Catch the Train*, 1982

In 1982 - the year of his graduation - Gao Xiaohua participated in the Sichuan meishu xueyuan youhua fu jing zhanlan 四川美术学院油画赴京展览, an exhibition of oil paintings by the students of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts organized at the China Art Gallery in Beijing. The painting that Gao proposed was *Catch the Train* [fig.186], which unexpectedly became his greatest artistic success. After creating a preliminary drawing of the composition, Gao was forced by his professors to modify some details and characters he depicted, such as petty thieves, widows and orphans.⁴⁴⁶ Just as for Maple's illustrations, the problem was how certain figures and actions should be depicted, and how audiences might react. Gao Xiaohua soon decided to change the painting's composition.⁴⁴⁷ This huge oil painting, rich in detail and with a powerful narration, depicts a normal scene in a Chinese train station from the 1980s. More than eighty people of different social classes and ethnicity are doing different actions [fig.187]. From the heavy clothing of the characters and the greyness of the sky it can be assumed that it is a winter day. The scene is confused, the poses give a sense of dynamism to the picture, in a moment of great agitation such as taking a train. The composition, the expressions on the faces and the colour tones are in stark contrast to those of the typical works of the years of the Cultural Revolution, characterized mainly by luminous figures and heroic poses. In the painting there is no main character, no praise or criticism is expressed, it does not depict a dramatic scene but a scene of everyday life with figures portrayed in a realist style. To create *Catch the Train*, Gao Xiaohua made use of his personal experiences: accustomed to moving and travelling since he was a child, he used to take trains and write down his impressions or draw between one trip and another. Additionally, to faithfully recreate the proportions and details of the train carriages, Gao spent entire days on trains from Chongqing to Wuhan, Henan, and nearby locations to take

⁴⁴⁵ CHENG Conglin, "Songzang de renmen", "Yingqin de renmen" zuozhe fu yan 《送葬的人们》、《迎亲的人们》作者附言 (Postscript from the author of "People at Funeral" and "People at Wedding"), *Meishu*, June 30, 1991.

⁴⁴⁶ DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 60.

photographs and create sketches.⁴⁴⁸ Emblematic is the interpretation of a train station like a place where people start a journey that can change their lives.

*There is no better way to understand Chinese people and Chinese society than when you catch a train. It was an exciting scene. People came from all ethnic groups and all walks of life. They moved south and returned to the north, sending off the old and welcoming the new, joy, anger, sorrow - the various forms of life are almost integrated at this moment - that is the epitome of modern Chinese society.*⁴⁴⁹

As for *Why?*, the use of grey and dark tones, accompanied by the expressiveness of the characters, give a sense of anxiety and agitation to the painting. In opposition to *Why?* however, the view from top to bottom is not so evident and the brushstrokes are not so heavy - indeed, the pictorial style is very close to social realism. Furthermore, although the scene does not depict rural people or different Chinese ethnic groups, for this so authentic representation of an everyday life scene, the critics also defined this artwork as Life-stream Art. Some critics associated *Catch the Train* with a very famous artwork from ancient China, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* [fig.188]. This very long silk handscroll features a city life scene on a Qingming day of celebration. The richness of details, the large number of characters, the faithful reproduction of customs and tools of the time - in addition to the use of a square and ruler for the creation of buildings that perfectly respect the proportions - made this work unique in ancient China's art panorama. That is why, after being exhibited at the Central Art Gallery, Gao Xiaohua's artwork was defined as the "Chinese *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* oil painting".⁴⁵⁰ In 2003, *Catch the Train* was sold at auction in Beijing for 3.63 million yuan, the highest selling price for a

⁴⁴⁸ XU Lu, Gao Xiaohua youhua "Gan huoche" shangxi 高小华油画《赶火车》赏析 (Appreciation of Gao Xiaohua's Oil Painting "Catch the Train"), *Mingri fengshang* 明日风尚 (*Tomorrow Customs*), February 8, 2017, p. 259.

⁴⁴⁹ 没有比赶火车的时候更能了解中国人、中国社会的了，那是一个激动人心的场面，人们来此各个民族、各个阶层、南迁北反、喜怒哀乐、悲欢离合 - 人生百态几乎都融聚于这一刻——那是现代中国社会的缩影。

GAO Xiaohua, Huiyi, zixing yu pipan 回忆、自省与批评 回忆、自省与批判 (Recollection, introspection, and criticism) in AI Zhongxin "Zhongguo xiandai meishu quanji" 《中国现代美术全集》 (*Complete Works of Chinese Modern Art*), Tianjin People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1997.

⁴⁵⁰ 中国油画的《清明上河图》。

AI Zhongxin, WANG Qi, "1982 Sichuan mei yuan youhua fu jing zhan zuotan hui jiyao zhai" 《1982 四川美院油画赴京展座谈会纪要摘》, (*Summary of the Symposium on the 1982 Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts Oil Painting Exhibition in Beijing*), 1982.

Chinese oil painting up to that year.⁴⁵¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, after *Why?* and *Catch the Train* Gao Xiaohua concentrated on portraits of frontier peasants and poor people in artworks of Chinese Rural Realism [fig.189] and Life-stream Art [fig.190] until the late 1980s. In any case, even the oil paintings created in the following years maintained this interest in the faces of ordinary people, however portrayed in urban settings.

⁴⁵¹ XU Lu, Gao Xiaohua youhua “Gan huoche” shangxi 高小华油画《赶火车》赏析, op. cit., p. 259.

Chapter IV

Scar Art after the 1980s

[...] But since 1979, the proofread of realism has made it affirmed in a new sense. As a matter of fact, history after having taken a big turn, returned to the starting point of the uphold of realism during the May 4th period. Like for the traditional painting culture, it corresponds to acquire new life as an evasion of reality and criticism. From this perspective, Chinese realistic painting will not decline due to the rise of the new wave of art, on the contrary, it shoulders the same historical responsibility as the new wave and has a great future. Therefore, I strongly agree with [...] all the painters who are exploring on the road of realism, pursue this way!⁴⁵²

The 1980s saw the apex and at the same time the decline of Scar Art and of almost all its trends. The causes were multiple and undoubtedly linked to the political and social events that China went through in that decade. After their graduation, most of the here analysed young artists experienced a period of great fortune and national media exposure. Creative enthusiasm, however, was partially curbed with the Qingchu jingshen wuran 清除精神污染 (Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign), a campaign promoted by the CCP between October and December 1983. After less than five years of openness and "freedom", the government again launched itself against intellectuals and artists, considered too influenced by the liberal

⁴⁵² 但自 1979 年以来，对现实主义的校正，使写实在一种新的意义上被肯定。事实上，历史走了一个大弯后，又回到了“五四”时期对写实崇尚的起点上，即作为对传统绘画文化——逃避现实批判的意义上获得新的生命。从这个角度上，中国写实绘画不会因为新潮美术的崛起而衰落，恰恰相反，它肩负与新潮同样的历史重任而前途远大。因此，我极力赞同 [...] 所有在写实道路上探索的画家们，坚持走下去！

LI Xianting, Cong dangdai meishu dashi zhong kan Ai Xuan de yishu 从当代美术大势中看艾轩的艺术 (Looking at Ai Xuan's Art from the General Trend of Contemporary Art), *Dangdai youhua* 当代油画 (Contemporary Oil Painting), July 31, 2012, p. COP 34.

ideas of Western origin that were permeating the society.⁴⁵³ This too liberal attitude was defined as polluting the spirit of the population and especially of young people, with the risk of undermining the objectives of the Party.⁴⁵⁴ Inevitably, the artists were imposed new restrictions and limits. Moreover, at the time the official artistic institutions - linked to the government - still had full decision-making power, such as on the participation or not of artists in national exhibitions.⁴⁵⁵

The situation changed quickly when, in the mid-1980s, China went through a period of economic boom thanks to the new policies implemented by the government.⁴⁵⁶ Because of this development and some opening reforms, the social and cultural sphere also re-flourished, not only in the artistic field, but also in the literary, cinematographic, music, dance, and fashion fields.⁴⁵⁷ At the same time, an ever-increasing number of translations of Western books about art, history, literature, psychology and philosophy were circulating throughout the nation.⁴⁵⁸ The situation that arose was very similar to that of the early 1920s: as with the Wusi yundong 五四运动 (May Fourth Movement), intellectuals felt the need to discuss tradition and innovation again.⁴⁵⁹ More and more young artists sought their own individual expressive language, trying to combine Western modernist and postmodernist art techniques and styles with the Chinese ones. In an artistic milieu still managed by the institutions, the only way to exhibit one's art - if not recognised by the authorities - was to rely on other artists, mutually support each other financially but also from any attacks by the government.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, between the mid-1980s and 1989, more than one hundred art groups were born in different areas of the country, each with their own style, philosophy and means of expression. Their main objectives were to organize exhibitions, conferences and write articles to spread their art.⁴⁶¹ Gao Minglu was the first critic to define, in 1986, these "hundred flowers blooming" - which will then be recognized as the first nationwide avant-

⁴⁵³ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁵⁴ STRASSBERG Richard E., *"I Don't Want to Play Cards with Cézanne" and Other Works: Selections from the Chinese New Wave and Avant-Garde Art of the Eighties*, Pacific Asia Museum, July 1, 1991, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁵ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, op. cit., p. 428.

⁴⁵⁶ STRASSBERG Richard E., *"I Don't Want to Play Cards with Cézanne" and Other Works: Selections from the Chinese New Wave and Avant-Garde Art of the Eighties*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴⁵⁷ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 135-136.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 102.

garde group in China⁴⁶² - as a "new wave art movement":⁴⁶³ the Bawu xinchao 八五新潮 ('85 New Wave).⁴⁶⁴

As will be analysed in this chapter, many artists who had previously created artworks of Scar Art, Native Soil Painting, Contemplative Painting or Life-stream Art abandoned the style and the themes of their past creations to pursue this new experimental path, such as Zhang Xiaogang and Wang Chuan. Even the academic environment was affected. At the time, many of the previously discussed artists were working as professors in academies. Their presence made it possible to organize self-financed exhibitions, such as at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, giving visibility to the avant-garde artists.⁴⁶⁵

In 1987, the government launched a new campaign of restrictions: the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalism Campaign.⁴⁶⁶ To protect themselves, artists created abusive circles where, thanks to self-financed exhibitions, the '85 New Wave Movement managed to hold out for a few more years. Its climax was in February 1989 with the China/Avant-Garde exhibition in Beijing, where the exhibited artworks wanted to demonstrate the "no turning back" point of art.⁴⁶⁷ The real point of no return of Chinese art came a few months later: the Tian'anmen massacre of June 4 shocked the country, causing not only the end of the '85 New Wave, but also the emigration of many artists. Some of those who were already abroad to study decided not to return to China again, such as Cheng Conglin. Those who remained in the country did not want to participate in the official art exhibitions organized by the institutions in the following years and withdraw from the scene to the underground.

It is therefore evident that the aforementioned hope Li Xianting had in 1988, supporting the great future of Chinese realism - led by the Sichuan School of Painting - was soon swept away - if not by the '85 New Wave and by the facts of Tian'anmen - by the new influences that artists found once they arrived in the West. In general, artists such as Luo Zhongli maintained a strong interest in popular and local culture throughout their production - even driven by demand and market interest - but abandoned the realist style. Some artists continued to create realist artworks but shifted their attention to urbanization, like Gao Xiaohua. Other artists, after experimenting with Western styles such as neo-expressionism,

⁴⁶² *Ibid.* p. 34.

⁴⁶³ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 440.

⁴⁶⁴ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 141.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 139.

⁴⁶⁷ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, op. cit., p. 257.

felt the need to return to traditional Chinese painting, such as Zhou Chunya. This chapter will analyse how events that occurred in just one decade, but so profound, influenced the life and the artistic production of each of the previously discussed artists from the 1980s up to now, and if Scar Art, Chinese Rural Realism, Contemplative Painting and Life-stream Art came, or not, to an end.

1. Gao Xiaohua

After the extraordinary success of *Why?* [fig.50], *I Love Oil Field* [fig.55] and *Catch the Train* [fig.186], Gao Xiaohua graduated in 1982 and remained at the Academy as a professor. In the following year, he went to the autonomous prefecture of Liangshan, in Sichuan, to portray the faces of the Yi ethnic group, creating the *Butuo Yi People* series [fig.97].⁴⁶⁸ Gao was one of the few artists of the time to produce artworks of Scar Art, Chinese Rural Realism, Melancholy Youth and Life-stream Art at the highest level in just a few years. His fame in the artistic and academic environment grew more and more, until he was able to obtain a professorship at the first studio of the Oil Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. In 1986 he decided to resign and continue his art studies in the United States.

*I studied oil painting, but I have never been to the birthplace of oil painting. I have rarely seen truly high-level Western oil paintings and original works by masters. Therefore, my paintings are often ridiculed as 'soil oil paintings'. I cannot wait to go out and see what a 'real oil painting' is and smell the odour of 'real oil painting'!*⁴⁶⁹

Gao travelled to several cities, including New York where he lived for five years, and worked as a visiting professor at the University of Kansas.⁴⁷⁰ Together with other young Chinese artists who emigrated to the USA such as Chen Danqing, he also had the opportunity

⁴⁶⁸ WAQI Bi-huo, Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), op. cit., p.81.

⁴⁶⁹ “我是学油画的，却从未去过油画的发源地，很少看到过真正高水平的西方油画与大师的原作，因此画出的作品常常被人讥讽为‘土油画’。我迫不及待地想出去看看什么是‘真正的油画’，闻闻‘真正的油画’的味道！”

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in WANG Zhen, Gao Xiaohua: Cong shanghen meishu dao chaoji huihua, jianzheng zhongguo fazhan maibo 高小华：从伤痕美术到超级绘画，见证中国发展脉搏 (Gao Xiaohua: From Scar Art to Super Painting, Witnessing the Pulse of China's Development), *Zhongguo minzu bao* 中国民族报 (*China National News*), October 12, 2018.

⁴⁷⁰ *Portrait of an Artist*, August 26, 2004, China Daily website. Retrieved from https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-08/26/content_369030.htm

to study and see the artworks of the great European masters, some of them unknown to him. Throughout the 1990s Gao continued to produce artworks of Rural Realism and Life-stream Art, which were highly considered by American art circles.⁴⁷¹ However, these paintings were less incisive and expressive than his previous creations: he mainly depicted Yi women and children with softened faces, dressed in traditional clothes and portrayed in rural settings, in scenes of daily life or while strolling among horses. His technique was also different from his previous artworks, with softer brushstrokes, opaque colours, and soft lighting. The main feature of what can be defined as the "Yi People Series" is the almost ubiquitous presence of yellow ochre umbrellas, a colour that the artist juxtaposed with the red and blue of the figures' garments. This attention to primary colours is reminiscent of the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) [fig.191], whom Gao discovered in the United States.⁴⁷² The depictional transition in Gao Xiaohua's production is visible when comparing his late 1980s paintings such as *Going Home* [fig.192] - where the scene is focused on the poor and rural setting and the influence of Rural Realism is still evident - with the paintings of the 1990s such as *Morning Market* [fig.193] or *Warm Winter*, in which the attention is instead placed on the figures and chromatic contrasts - in perfect symbiosis with other Life-stream Art works - and featuring very idealized scenes.⁴⁷³

1.1 *Warm Winter*, 1998

One of Gao Xiaohua's most famous "Yi People series" paintings created during his stay in the United States is *Warm Winter* [fig.194]. In a bare and snowy forest, twelve figures of women and children of the Yi ethnic group are walking, flanked by a donkey and a horse. A dark-barked tree is placed at the centre of the scene: the long-twisted branches divide the space, giving a sense of tension and accentuating its depth. The figures have relaxed faces as they are strolling around and chatting on a warm winter day. The women are using yellow umbrellas to protect themselves from the pale sun, which brings out the ochre colour that harmonizes with the rest of the primary colours present in the decorations of the traditional

⁴⁷¹ WAQI Bi-huo, *Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi* 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), op. cit., p. 82.

⁴⁷² WANG Zhen, *Gao Xiaohua: Cong shanghen meishu dao chaoji huihua, jianzheng zhongguo fazhan maibo* 高小华: 从伤痕美术到超级绘画, 见证中国发展脉搏 (Gao Xiaohua: From Scar Art to Super Painting, Witnessing the Pulse of China's Development), op. cit.

⁴⁷³ WAQI Bi-huo, *Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi* 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), op. cit., p. 82.

garments. In addition, the robes, jewels and umbrellas are further highlighted thanks to the snowy background. The brushstrokes created by Gao are precise and smooth, very different from the Soviet realist ones of *Why?*. The scene instils a sense of tranquillity and serenity also thanks to the use of warm, opaque colours and neutral lighting. With this oil painting, Gao Xiaohua won first prize at the 89th CAC Art Grand Prix in 1998 in California and became a spokesperson for Yi culture abroad.⁴⁷⁴

*After the Americans saw my work, they were very concerned about the background of the Yi people. Since then, while creating Yi paintings, I forced myself to study Yi culture. While holding various exhibitions in the United States with my ex-wife Bai Qian, I also promoted Yi culture so that Americans can understand the cultural and historical background of Yi people, their life customs, the art of silver jewellery, lacquerware, lacquer painting, etc.*⁴⁷⁵

1.2 *New Yorkers* series, 1990s

During the more than fifteen years he spent in the United States, Gao Xiaohua came closer and closer to the American pop style, visible in his *New Yorkers* series, which he began in the mid-1990s. In the five years he spent in New York, Gao tried to reproduce the everyday scenes he had seen walking in the great American metropolis, thus abandoning the rural and poor settings of southern China.⁴⁷⁶ Paintings such as *School Children in Queens* [fig.195] and *Telephone Booths* demonstrate a very caricatural new style: Gao had kept the essence of Life-stream Art, completely changing the subjects of his creations. In the same years, he also produced artworks with a very similar style, where however the figures and urban settings were Chinese [fig.196].

⁴⁷⁴ WANG Zhen, Gao Xiaohua: Cong shanghen meishu dao chaoji huihua, jianzheng zhongguo fazhan maibo 高小华: 从伤痕美术到超级绘画, 见证中国发展脉搏 (Gao Xiaohua: From Scar Art to Super Painting, Witnessing the Pulse of China's Development), op. cit.

⁴⁷⁵ “美国人看了我的作品后, 他们很关心彝族人的背景, 从那时起我一边创作彝人题材的画, 一边逼自己研究彝族文化, 并与前妻白倩在美国办各展览的同时, 也宣传彝族文化, 以此让美国人了解彝族人的文化历史背景、生活习俗、银饰服饰艺术、漆器漆画艺术等。”

Quotation of Gao Xiaohua in WAQI Bi-huo, Qian xi san wei zhuming youhua jia suzao de Butuo yizu adou ren tu shi 浅析三位著名油画家塑造的布拖彝族阿都人图式 (On the Painting Schema of Adu People of Yi Nationality in Butuo County Created by Three Famous Oil Painters), op. cit., p. 82.

⁴⁷⁶ PENG Rong, ZHI Yu, “Zhiyou buduan guanzhu, caineng xingcheng ziji de xiangfa yu zuofa” —— Gao Xiaohua jiaoshou fangtan lu “只有持续关注, 才能形成自己的想法与做法” —— 高小华教授访谈录 (Only by Constantly Paying Attention One Can Form His Own Ideas and Method" —— Interview with Professor Gao Xiaohua), op. cit., p. 97.

1.3 *Red Carpet series, 2000s*

In 2000 Gao Xiaohua decided to go back to China, returning to work as a professor.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, Gao began a completely new series for his artistic production: *Red Carpet* [fig.197]. This series consists of more than ten oil paintings depicting female nudes. The bodies are shapely, and the volumes create harmonious curves. The women are portrayed in various positions, sometimes covered with an open robe, or seated on stools or benches. The key detail - which gives the series its name - is an ever-present red carpet. While the surrounding environment is depicted with very precise realism, the women's bodies are emphasized by the chiaroscuro and strong unnatural lighting. The scenes are all portrayed from top to bottom and the faces of the depicted women are never visible.

1.4 *Back Street series, 2000s*

Despite this thematic change, at the same time as the creation of *Red Carpet*, in the 2000s Gao Xiaohua maintained his interest in the reproduction of urban settings by creating various series of paintings including *City* [figs.198-199]. These artworks show Chinese everyday life, with people and means of transport depicted with bright colours and vigorous brushstrokes. Some of the paintings in this series served as studies for another famous Gao's series, *Back Street* [figs.200-201]. However, unlike *New Yorkers* and *City*, *Back Street* portrays the back streets of Chinese cities, specifically Chongqing, and the anonymous faces that live there in a grey scale, and no longer in colour.⁴⁷⁸ The portrayed figures are always very caricatured and the only hints of colour in these paintings are red, yellow, white and blue - that contrast with the total greyness of the urban background - which Gao used to enhance a few details such as short pants, the lips of some figures, a cell phone, a vest, a pair of shoes. There is no longer the nostalgia and the typical idealization of his paintings on the Yi people. The new compositions created by Gao instil a sense of confusion and slowness: the sloping streets typical of this mountainous city, the labyrinth of narrow and dirty alleys, the skeins of dangling electrical cables, the disorder, the smoke and the dust, the inertia in the lives of the residents who live in these streets now destined to disappear silently with

⁴⁷⁷ WANG Zhen, Gao Xiaohua: Cong shanghen meishu dao chaoji huihua, jianzheng zhongguo fazhan maibo 高小华: 从伤痕美术到超级绘画, 见证中国发展脉搏 (Gao Xiaohua: From Scar Art to Super Painting, Witnessing the Pulse of China's Development), op. cit.

⁴⁷⁸ PENG Rong, ZHI Yu, "Zhiyou buduan guanzhu, caineng xingcheng ziji de xiangfa yu zuofa" —— Gao Xiaohua jiaoshou fangtan lu "只有持续关注, 才能形成自己的想法与做法" —— 高小华教授访谈录 (Only by Constantly Paying Attention One Can Form His Own Ideas and Method" —— Interview with Professor Gao Xiaohua), op. cit., p. 96.

massive urbanization.⁴⁷⁹ It is no coincidence that the scenes and figures are all in grey scale, as if it were an old image, something forgotten and with no future.

1.5 *Hongyan Village Apocalypse, 2004*

Gao Xiaohua's return to China was largely due to the commission of various government-funded projects involving the creation of monumental paintings, all based on the history of the nation and of Sichuan. From February 2001 to January 2004, Gao was involved in the biggest art project of his career, *Hongyan Village Apocalypse*, for the Chongqing Hongyan Revolutionary Memorial Hall.⁴⁸⁰ This project consists of thirty-five huge oil paintings - with a total length of 132.5 meters and an area of 371 square meters - and 14 sculptures.⁴⁸¹ One of the most famous paintings and the largest group portrait in the history of Chinese painting is *Zhou Enlai and His Friends* [fig.202]. This artwork, three meters high and fifteen meters long, features ninety-one figures in a realist style, most of whom are recognizable as prominent historical figures, others are friends and family of Zhou Enlai or foreign people, all portrayed frontally, as in a group photo. The background is dark red and Premier Zhou is the central figure.⁴⁸² Another large oil painting created for this project is *Arousing People, Persist in the War of Resistance* [fig.203], three meters high and nine meters long, featuring more than 400 figures.

1.6 *Chongqing Bombing, 2005*

In 2003 Gao Xiaohua won the tender for another monumental project, commissioned by the China Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing: *Chongqing Bombing* [fig.204].⁴⁸³ The project involved a huge oil painting depicting a scene of the bombings suffered by Chongqing between 1938 and 1943, during the five and a half years of resistance war against

⁴⁷⁹ PENG Rong, "Women hai jiang sangshi shenme?" —— Lun Gao Xiaohua xianshi zhuyi youhua de huayu fangshi yu jingshen qizhi "我们还将丧失什么?" ——论高小华现实主义油画的话语方式与精神气质 ("What Else Will We Lose?" —— On Gao Xiaohua's Discourse and Spiritual Temperament in Realistic Oil Painting), *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studies*), June 10, 2012.

⁴⁸⁰ DENTON Kirk A., *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China*, University of Hawaii Press, 2013, pp. 80-82.

⁴⁸¹ ZHANG Chunxia, *Gao Xiaohua: Bei shang yishu de shizijia* 高小华: 背上艺术的十字架 (*Gao Xiaohua: Carrying the Cross of Art*), May 25, 2007. Retrieved from <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/p/2007-05-25/095813074469.shtml>

⁴⁸² LIAO Hui, Gao Xiaohua – Yishu zhi lu de chaosheng zhe 高小华 – 艺术之路的朝圣者 (*Gao Xiaohua Goes on a Pilgrimage to Arts*), *Chongqing yu shijie* 重庆与世界 (*The World & Chongqing*), October 15, 2004, p. 53.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

Japan. In those years, tens of thousands of people lost their lives and the city was razed to the ground. For this detailed historical reproduction of his hometown, Gao asked help to another artist and friend, Lei Zhuhua 雷着华 (1946-), also from Chongqing, with whom he had previously collaborated for *Zhou Enlai and His Friends*. Together, the two spent months studying the historical artifacts and interviewing survivors and witnesses, and it took them two years to finish the artwork.⁴⁸⁴ This painting is huge, ten meters high and thirty-six meters long.⁴⁸⁵ The key points of the creation, as well as the greatest difficulties, are the composition and the perspective chosen by the two artists: after more than twenty sketches,⁴⁸⁶ Gao and Lei decided to reproduce the typical mountainous landscape of Chongqing from a mezzanine, focusing more precisely on a view of the Yuzhong district, nowadays the most famous and central point of the megalopolis, where the Jialing River meets the Yangtze River. *Chongqing Bombing* presents an obsessive attention to detail: the direction of the wind and the sun according to the season (late spring or summer),⁴⁸⁷ the ruins of more than a thousand buildings, a Japanese plane bombarding the district of Shancheng, citizens who seek survivors and fearlessly help the wounded.⁴⁸⁸ The use of bright colours and the masterful play of light and shadow brought to exasperation also lend great depth and drama to the painting. The intent of Gao and Lei was not only to reproduce such an important historical event, but above all to show the resilient spirit of the Chinese people even in the face of brutal foreign aggression. This intent is perceptible in the pyramidal composition in the central part of the artwork, where the buildings are increasingly dense, a sign of the unity and strength of the city.⁴⁸⁹ In the following years Gao Xiaohua continued to collaborate with Chinese institutions in historical monumental paintings and dedicated himself to personal projects always pursuing the realist style. Therefore, the years in the United States were for

⁴⁸⁴ ZHOU Xi, Ganzhi Gao Xiaohua de “da hua” yishu 感知高小华的“大画”艺术 (Perception of Gao Xiaohua’s “Big Painting” Art), *Wenyi zhengming* 文艺争鸣 (*Literary Controversy*), November 15, 2011, p. 159.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 158.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 159.

⁴⁸⁷ YANG Fan, ZHANG Jie, Da hua chuanqi Gao Xiaohua yi ku wei le 4 nianhua 7 lou gao “Huaihai zhanyi” 大画传奇高小华以苦为乐4年画7楼高“淮海战役” (The Legend of Big Paintings: Gao Xiaohua Takes Pain for Pleasure Painting the Seven Floors Tall “Battle Of Huaihai” for Four Years) *Huaxi dushi bao* 华西都市报 (*West China Metropolis Daily*), October 27, 2012.

⁴⁸⁸ Gao Xiaohua: Da hua zhi meng — “Chongqing da hongzha” ban jing hua chuanguo tan 高小华: 大画之梦—《重庆大轰炸》半景画创作谈 (*Gao Xiaohua: The Dream of Big Painting — On the Creation of Half-Scenery Painting of “Chongqing Bombing”*), March 12, 2009. Retrieved from <http://artist.tsys123.com/showinfo.php?id=10&aid=6>

⁴⁸⁹ WANG Zhen, Gao Xiaohua: Cong shanghen meishu dao chaoji huihua, jianzheng zhongguo fazhan maibo 高小华: 从伤痕美术到超级绘画, 见证中国发展脉搏 (*Gao Xiaohua: From Scar Art to Super Painting, Witnessing the Pulse of China's Development*), op. cit.

him the last moment of creation of Life-stream artworks: with the advent of the new millennium, he abandoned the theme of the Yi people.

2. Cheng Conglin

2.1 *Chinese Workers' Boat and Stairs on the Wharf, 1984*

After graduating from SFAI, Cheng worked at the Academy for a few years as a professor. In 1984 he was admitted to the CAFA oil painting course, where he graduated in 1986. As already analysed, during those years Cheng depicted the Yi people in Life-stream Art works, but he also created two very expressive and powerful paintings that portray a historical phase of the Chinese nation and its people: *Chinese Workers' Boat* and *Stairs on the Wharf* (also known as *Pier Steps*). These two oil paintings created in 1984 are complementary. *Chinese Workers' Boat* [fig.205] depicts the so-called coolers - Asian workers who were hired by foreign settlers in the nineteenth century - all crowded on a large wooden boat that has just set sail from a pier.⁴⁹⁰ The view of the boat is partial and the point of view chosen by Cheng is slightly from above, as if to underline the wave motion of the sea. The more than one hundred portrayed figures - all men - are turned towards the viewer but are looking at a point lower than them.⁴⁹¹ They all have skeletal faces and they are tired, sad, and scared. Some are crying, others are seeking a foothold, but most of them are motionless and helpless. Nobody is looking at the horizon and therefore to the future: everyone is staring at what they are leaving behind. The marked brushstroke, the thick black contour line, the use of dark and opaque colours but above all the reddish lighting adopted by Cheng give a sense of extreme drama to the painting.

The scene portrayed in *Stairs on the Wharf* [fig.206] features another group of more than a hundred figures - this time they are women, children and elderly people - huddled on the steps of a pier. Their faces are just as skeletal, their looks distressed and sad. They are observing their husbands, fathers and sons who have just sailed and perhaps they will never see them again. Some women are praying with incense, others are crying, some no longer have the strength to witness the scene.⁴⁹² The focus of the painting is the child in the foreground: his gaze is incredulous and full of pain, as if he had been abandoned. Barefoot,

⁴⁹⁰ Cheng Conglin, *Chinese Workers' Boat*, Artron Auctions website. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art49320074/>

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹² CHENG Conglin, Wo he wo de liang zhang hua 我和我的两张画 (Me and My Two Paintings), *Jiangsu hua kan* 江苏画刊 (*Art Monthly*), January 1985.

he is about to take a last step to continue towards the quay, as if he had not yet resigned himself to the farewell of a family member. The point of view with which Cheng portrayed these undernourished and dirty people is that of the coolers on the boat: the gaze of those who remained on land is in fact slightly oriented upwards, towards the boat.⁴⁹³ Unlike *Chinese Workers' Boat*, the scene in *Stairs on the Wharf* is much darker, full of figures that leave no room for a background: the only free area is made up of the stone boulders of the pier steps. The lighting is less intense, and the red is barely hinted at, the figures are less defined, mixing and blurring in the upper part of the painting. After approaching Life-stream Art, Cheng Conglin again ventured into group scenes such as *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* [fig.59] and *A Summer Night in 1977* [fig.67]. Unlike these artworks, however, the style adopted by Cheng is so dramatic that it is reminiscent of expressionism. In 2007, *Chinese Workers' Boat* was sold at the Guardian Autumn Auction for 22.96 million yuan (3.5 million dollars), setting a record for Sichuan oil paintings at the time.⁴⁹⁴ *Stairs on the Wharf*, on the other hand, was sold at auction in 2014 for 28.75 million yuan (4.5 million dollars), setting a personal best for Cheng Conglin.⁴⁹⁵

2.2 *Woman Dressing Up, 1986*

From the mid-1980s on, Cheng Conglin returned to creating artworks centred on the Yi people, a theme that prevailed in all his artistic production even in the 1990s. *Woman Dressing Up* [fig.207] is, however, an example of how in 1986 Cheng's style already had strong influences from Western art, such as fauvism and symbolism.⁴⁹⁶ This oil painting depicts a Yi woman as she is getting dressed, wearing her jewellery and doing her hair. The brushstrokes and the style are completely different from those he used a few years earlier in artworks such as *Woman of Yi Nationality Beside a Road* [fig.184]. The lighting is cold and uniform, there is no play of light and shadow, but the chiaroscuro is given only using more marked brushstrokes. The opaque colours recall the soil and the traditional clothing of Yi

⁴⁹³ Cheng Conglin, *Chinese Workers' Boat*, Artron Auctions website, op. cit.

⁴⁹⁴ XU Li, "Huagong chuan" pai chu 2296 wan chuang Sichuan youhua zuigao paimai jia 《华工船》拍出 2296 万 创四川油画最高拍卖价 ("Hua Gong Ship" sold for 22.96 million, the highest auction price for Sichuan oil paintings), November 7, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2007/11-07/1071259.shtml>

⁴⁹⁵ Huajia Cheng Conglin "Matou de taijie" pai chu 2875 wan yuan 画家程丛林《码头的台阶》拍出 2875 万元 (Painter Cheng Conglin's "Stairs to the Dock" sold for 28.75 million yuan). Retrieved from <http://www.huaxia.com/zhwh/wwtd/2014/06/3916170.html>

⁴⁹⁶ Cheng Conglin, *Woman Dressing Up*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5751472>

women, but are brighter than those of the previous paintings. The background is made up of a light bricks wall where a cloth is hanging. At first glance it may seem like a tapestry with ethnic decorations, but this detail is also present in Cheng's later paintings and it is a typical cloth used by the Yi people for the display and sale of silver jewellery [fig.208]. It is this dark brown detail behind the woman that weighs down the atmosphere of the scene. In addition, the use of dark colours and marked brushstrokes to reproduce the features of her face give the impression that those of the woman are not red cheeks, but bruises.⁴⁹⁷

2.3 *People Attending a Funeral and People Escorting the Bride to the Wedding, 1984-1990*

In 1987 Cheng Conglin emigrated to Germany where he worked for some years as a professor at the University of Osnabrück. In 1990 he finished a monumental project he had been working on for seven years: *People Attending a Funeral* [figs.209-211] and *People Escorting the Bride to the Wedding* [figs.212-214]. This pair of paintings, sixty-two meters long and two meters high, shows the two most important moments in the spirituality of the Yi people: the funeral and the marriage.⁴⁹⁸ Both scenes take place outside, in a desolate and whitewashed land in the harsh winter. However, the narration is not continuous: Cheng divided the canvases into various sections, as if they were frames, spaced out by the depiction of various lunar and solar phases.⁴⁹⁹ The choice to expose the joys and sorrows of the cycle of life is also expressed thanks to this cosmic symbolism that emphasizes and strengthens Cheng's vision of the spirituality of the Yi people. The artist wanted to arrange the two paintings facing each other, leaving a central corridor, to allow the viewer to participate in the processions together with the portrayed figures.⁵⁰⁰ In *People Attending a Funeral* men, women, and children in traditional clothes are huddling in pain [fig.210], led by a priest who is preceding the wrapped body of the deceased person [fig.211]. A few frames further on, there are snow-white sheep resting. The scene is quite dark, the lighting is soft, the colours are those of the soil. The figures are portrayed sideways, the contour line is marked, and the brushstrokes are more vigorous than in the second artwork, recalling *Steps on the Wharf*. In *People Escorting the Bride to the Wedding*, on the other hand, the scene is clearer, the tones

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ CHENG Conglin, 'Songzang de renmen', 'Yingqin de renmen' zuozhe fuyan 《送葬的人们》、《迎亲的人们》作者附言 ('People Attending a Funeral', 'People Escorting the Bride to the Wedding' Author's Postscript), op. cit., p. 41.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

are those of grey for the background while the figures are emphasized by soft and opaque colours. The centrepiece of the scene is the bride, accompanied by an entourage of Yi women who are embellishing her with jewels as she is covering her head with a decorated veil [fig.213]. In the distance, along the small path in the snow, she is approaching her young husband, portrayed from the front, and covered by a cloak of light fur [fig.214]. A few frames later, Cheng drew a cow nursing a calf, a symbol of the new life that awaits the couple. Given the size of the artworks, this project was exhibited only a few times, including in Germany and Taiwan. In the seven years of preparation and production of these two paintings - but also throughout the 1990s - Cheng produced smaller Life-stream Art creations, also focusing on the Yi ethnic group or Tibet [figs. 215-216].⁵⁰¹ In the early 2000s he ventured into surrealist artworks [fig.217], still life and female nude. From 1987 on, Chen Conglin lived in Germany, never losing his interest in the Yi people and in the creation of Life-stream Art paintings.

3. Luo Zhongli

After achieving national fame and his 1982 SFAI diploma, Luo Zhongli was offered a teaching position at the Academy. His most famous painting, *Father* [fig.73], however, only marked the beginning of the continuous creative evolution of Luo's vision of the rural world. In the same year as he graduated, he began a process of changing his pictorial style: while maintaining the theme of rural populations, he came closer and closer to expressionism.⁵⁰² In fact, Luo began a gradual abandonment of realism, to dwell on an almost poetic and lyrical expression of the essence of peasants' life and their harmony with nature. Luo's subsequent artworks show less accuracy in depiction but convey the intimate and pure aspect of rural life in a more profound way. The portrayed scenes are those of everyday life, with the habits and customs of these people.⁵⁰³ The settings are still totally different from those of urbanized cities of the time, demonstrating a need on Luo's part to create a parallel vision of life, to fully express the spirituality and uniqueness of the farmers. Stylistically speaking, in recent years Luo Zhongli's painting also came close to primitivism and fauvist art, which well-

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² WU Yongqiang, Cong rendao guanhuai dao duoyuan tiyan —— Cong Luo Zhongli, Zhou Chunya de yishu daolu kan Sichuan huajia qun chuanguozuo fengge de yanbian 从人道关怀到多元体验 —— 从罗中立、周春芽的艺术道路看四川画家群创作风格的演变 (From Humanitarian Concern to Diversified Experience — Researches into the Changes of Creating Styles of Sichuan Painters Group via Luo Zhongli's and Zhou Chunya's Paths of Going in for Art), op. cit., p.72.

⁵⁰³ Baoli Xianggang, Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions), op. cit., pp. 56-57.

expressed all the vitality, tenacity and resilience of rural life. This notable change in style is due to his emigration to Europe: in 1984 Luo went to Belgium to attend a master's degree in oil painting at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp.⁵⁰⁴

3.1 *Leopard and Luo Nu*, 1984

The years in Europe forever changed Luo's artistic vision, and he was finally able to visit museums, galleries and Western art exhibitions. The influence of Western expressionist paintings is already visible in *Leopard and Luo Nu* [fig.218], an oil painting from 1984 which clearly demonstrates a first phase of his artistic change. The artwork portrays a curvy woman bathing naked in a river, immersed in an idyllic atmosphere. Behind her, among the vegetation, a leopard is watching her. Although the woman is in a situation of total relaxation - her gaze is sweet, her rotundity instils a sense of serenity and well-being - the viewer perceives a growing tension given by the leopard, which has got ice blue eyes, an attentive gaze and a contracted position. Compared to previous artworks, Luo began to focus more on the use of bright colours, while maintaining his typical strong lighting. In *Leopard and Luo Nu* time and place are indefinite, but the title shows that the one referred to by Luo Zhongli is Luoshui 洛水, the goddess of waters in Chinese mythology.⁵⁰⁵ The artist plays on the meaning and sound of the characters: the character that makes up the name of the divinity and the title, 洛 luò, is a homophone of 裸 luǒ, which means naked. The artwork can therefore also be interpreted as "Leopard and a Naked Girl".⁵⁰⁶ The nude of a curvy woman, with divine powers, portrayed in a bucolic setting is a characterizing element of classic European paintings. It is precisely in this that Luo Zhongli's attempt at fusion between East and West consists, together with primitive expressionism.⁵⁰⁷ Luo's arrival in Europe also led to his first solo exhibitions abroad, in Brussels in 1984 and in Cambridge (MA), Boston and New York in 1985. After his master's degree in Belgium, Luo Zhongli came back to China in 1986 to teach at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts.

⁵⁰⁴ Luo Zhongli, *Leopard and Luo Nu*, Artron Auctions website. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5160391392/>

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

3.2 *Sunset*, 1990

In the 1990s, Luo's process of artistic mutation led him to have a highly personal but still transitional style. In *Sunset* [fig.219], painted in 1990, Luo portrays a scene from real life, a moment of pause for a peasant family. After an exhausting day of work in the fields, the three stops along a stream as they return home to water the cattle. The man and the woman are both tired, absorbed in their thoughts, barefoot. The woman is holding her sleeping son on her back. They are waiting for the animals to quench their thirst, without haste, with the wind caressing their skin and moving their hair. Behind them some geese are scratching around. The sun is setting, the evening shadow has already enveloped them, but the last ray of light is still illuminating the field behind them and it is shining in the water. The colours used by Luo are warm, lively and bright, typical of folk art.⁵⁰⁸ The brushstrokes are thick and layered. Luo Zhongli portrays these figures as tired but dignified. Their bodies are very far from the realistic model, almost deformed and caricatured, but they emanate all the strength of the peasant people. Luo's deep love for these people, his admiration and empathy with their sufferings, make the scene sentimental and almost poetic, in a mix of bitterness and nostalgia.⁵⁰⁹ Although the style is completely different, *Sunset* once again demonstrates Luo's passion for the artworks by Western realist artists that he had been able to study and see personally in Europe: the rural scenery and the colours of the sunset are reminiscent of Millet's *The Angelus* [fig.220].⁵¹⁰ Luo's style was not yet fully personal.

3.3 *Taken Shelter from Rain #2*, 1995

Taken Shelter from Rain #2 [fig.221] represents a further step in the evolutionary process of Luo Zhongli's pictorial style. This oil painting, created in 1995, depicts a peasant couple sheltering from the rain under a tree. Unlike artworks such as *Leopard and Luo Nu* and *Sunset*, the background of the scene is undefined, the surrounding environment and the portrayed figures are no longer realistic.⁵¹¹ On a night of pouring rain, a flash of lightning is breaking through and illuminating the darkness, frightening the ox on the field, the birds perched on the branches and the dog behind the couple of farmers. The two are portrayed

⁵⁰⁸ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit., pp. 56-57.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Luo Zhongli, *Take Shelter from Rain #2*, Ravenel Art website. Retrieved from <https://www.ravenelart.com/en/auCal/lotsIn/c04b7bb9-5aff-4f01-a031-d8781aad4055/e0a2fbd4-d808-4378-bc09-8e408cfcfbc9>

sitting on the ground, their eyes absorbed and sad. He is collecting a bit of rain in his hands and she is sitting on a wicker sieve while covering her head with a garment. The features of their faces are different from those of the previously portrayed figures, increasingly in an expressionist style and even more characterizing.⁵¹² The colours used by Luo are mainly blue, light blue, grey and white, which have defined all his production from the late 1990s onwards. Compared to previous artworks, the figures' contour line fades, in some cases it disappears. The lighting is very intense, even though it is night. The brushstrokes are marked, energetic and they intersect to form the patterns of the fabrics, skin, vegetation but above all to recreate the effect of the pouring rain. In this painting, Luo Zhongli manages to express all the simplicity of peasant reality.

3.4 *Crossing the River*, 2007

The third creative phase of Luo Zhongli began in the 2000s. In paintings such as *Crossing the River* [fig.222] his expressionist style of the 1990s is taken to the extreme: on a completely black background Luo creates a complex scene only by juxtaposing long and short lines of various colours and thicknesses. The lighting is given exclusively using bright and lively colours.⁵¹³ Unlike *Father* or *Sunset*, the figures are not emphasized by chiaroscuro and are portrayed in an even more caricatured and deformed way, with a primitive stroke. In those years Luo exasperated the physical elements of the subjects of his portraits: in men he emphasized facial expressions and increased muscle mass and tension, in women he accentuated the breasts and thighs.⁵¹⁴ The contour line is thicker, while within the figures the lines are faded and interconnected, creating a texture. The theme is always that of rural life and in *Crossing the River* Luo describes the crossing of a river by a couple of farmers.⁵¹⁵ The man is holding the woman on his back to keep her from getting wet, while they are also taking their animals with them. All the lines and bright colours that Luo uses give the painting a sense of dynamism and energy. The scenes created by Luo Zhongli in the 2000s further express the essence of the peasant people, abandoning the depth of his early artworks of Chinese Rural Realism. Luo's new paintings therefore became "a celebration of the

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit., p. 263.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

'peasant' class and a declaration of solidarity and compassion, promoting the sentiment of 'flow of life'".⁵¹⁶

*As a contemporary Chinese artist, how should I create and what kind of painting should I paint? [...] One way out for our contemporary art is to return to the local area, to our own roots, and come back to our traditional culture to find our contemporary art.*⁵¹⁷

3.5 Sculptures, 2000s

Since 2005 Luo Zhongli has explored new artistic means, approaching sculpture. One of his best-known series of sculptures is the reproduction of *Crossing the River*, a theme on which he had already produced several oil paintings. The statues of Luo not only render three-dimensional the characters only depicted on canvas before, but they reproduce the same liveliness and eccentricity with bright colours and marked brushstrokes. In the *Crossing the River* sculpture [fig.223], a man is fording a river while holding a woman on his shoulders. She is carrying a pig with its legs tied over her head. The artwork portrays a couple returning from the city market and trying to save their goods from the water of the river that divides their home from the rest of the village:

*Going to the market used to be a big deal in country life. Sometimes after it rained, the creeks flooded, and people would have to wade across. Life was hard in the country. Now things are much different, but the natural bonds between people and nature are still the same, and will remain the same, I believe.*⁵¹⁸

As analysed, in the more than forty years of his artistic career, Luo Zhongli has reproduced pure rural scenes, while modifying his own painting style. However, his vision of the environment and peasant life is utopian: Luo has never portrayed the social, technological advancement or partial urbanization of the Chinese countryside - except when he inserted a ballpoint pen over *Father's* ear - but he has always faithfully reported the memory of the people of the Daba mountains with whom he lived in the 1960s. Luo Zhongli has been the dean of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute since 1998, where the Luo Zhongli Art

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ “作为一个中国当代艺术家究竟该怎样去创作，究竟该画什么样的画。[...] 我们当代艺术的一个出路，那就是回归本土，回到自己的根基，回到自己的传统文化里面去寻找我们的当代艺术。” Quotation of Luo Zhongli in LIANG Ying, Zhenzheng de Luo Zhongli cong “Guxiang zuhua” kaishi 真正的罗中立从《故乡组画》开始 (The Real Luo Zhongli Starts from "Hometown Group Painting"), *Shenzhen shang bao* 深圳商报 (*Shenzhen Commercial Daily*), September 25, 2016.

⁵¹⁸ ZHANG Kun, *Holding the Roots*, July 7, 2015, China Daily USA website. Retrieved from http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2015-07/07/content_21200922.htm

Museum was created [fig.224] and where a scholarship was established in his name. In addition, he is a representative of the National People's Congress, one of the executive directors of the Chinese Artists Association and the Chinese Oil Painting Association, as well as the president of the Chongqing Artists Association.

4. Zhu Yiyong

4.1 *Mountain People*, 1988

After winning third prize at the 1984 Sixth National Art Exhibition with *Village Mountain Shop* [fig.167],⁵¹⁹ while working as a SFAI professor, Zhu Yiyong continued his production of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Excellent examples that express Zhu's passion for the rural world and the peoples of different Chinese ethnic groups are *Mountain People* and *The Village Entrance*. Unlike *Father and Son* [fig.71] or *Village Mountain Shop*, his new creations feature only one subject. Created in 1988, *Mountain People* [fig.225] depicts an elderly craftsman in his workshop carving a large circular stone that looks like a section of a grain mill. The man is sitting on a wooden bench, bent and surrounded by scraps. Although his face is partially visible, he looks tired. He is wearing an orange turban and glasses, a detail never found in the previously analysed paintings of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art. The glasses could serve as an element to suggest the economic and social advancement of the peasants of the time, like the ballpoint pen in *Father* [fig.73]. The setting chosen by Zhu is gloomy, created thanks to the dark wood of the man's workshop walls, but the scene is intensely illuminated, like some artworks created in previous years by Luo Zhongli. This lightening emphasizes the figure of the man and the materials he works on. Overall, the painting expresses the fatigue and tiredness of this old man in an almost theatrical way. Zhu Yiyong uses layered brushstrokes and soft, dull colours to recreate details such as the creases on worn and dirty clothes, the roughness of the stone, the waste material on the ground. This oil painting not only demonstrates the influences that the artworks of Zhu's classmates had on his creations, but also those of Western Impressionist and Expressionist paintings.

⁵¹⁹ Di liu jie quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan huojian mingdan 第六届全国美术作品展览获奖名单 (List of Awarded Artworks of the Sixth National Art Exhibition), op. cit.

4.2 *The Village Entrance*, 1990

The influence on him produced by the creations of other fellow academics, such as Cheng Conglin, is instead visible in artworks such as *The Village Entrance* [fig.226]. Created in 1990, this Life-stream Art oil painting depicts a beautiful Yi young woman, recognizable by the decorations on her dress and jacket. She is standing, with her eyes turned towards a point not visible to the viewer, one hand under her chin, the other one holding a branch to control the cattle. Not far from her there is a pig. The background is composed by a reddish stone wall and in the distance trunks and some buildings are visible. Although this painting is very different from the previous one - the brushstrokes are much more defined and subtle, the colours are also those of the soil but warmer, the scene is outdoors - Zhu Yiyong's mastery in emphasizing the figures thanks to an intense and warm lighting makes the scene appear almost surreal. It seems that the woman is finishing working, she is at the entrance village and coming home while the sun is setting and colouring everything in red. The scene is not dramatic, but full of the tranquillity that characterized the lives of these rural communities in total harmony with nature.

4.3 *Memories of China series*, 2000s

Even in the early 1990s, Zhu continued to create Life-stream Art works that portray Tibetan people, such as *High Noon* [fig.227]. From 1995 onwards, new themes and subjects appeared in his realist paintings: figures of young Chinese women dressed in classical clothes, posing in front of the windows of traditional Chinese gardens [fig.228], while playing ancient instruments or while styling their hair in the pavilions of traditional houses [fig.229]. These delicate paintings depict solitary figures or groups of women, often accompanied by lit Chinese lanterns. His production of these paintings with a sentimental and poetic atmosphere continued into the first half of the 2000s. As one of his old Academy mates, Zhang Xiaogang, had already begun to do in the previous decade, in the new millennium Zhu Yiyong ventured into another type of realist painting, that of portraying figures in some way linked to memories. One of his most important series is *Memories of China*, which includes dozens of oil paintings depicting the faces of men, women, but above all Chinese children [figs.230-231].⁵²⁰ These figures are all in grey and black scale, some of them wearing a cap similar to that of the communist uniform and do not have expressionless faces like those of the androgynous figures painted by Zhang Xiaogang in *Bloodline Series*:

⁵²⁰ GILES Oliver, *Zhu Yiyong on the State of China*, December 12, 2016, op. cit.

their looks are serious or curious. The only coloured element is a blood-red string that the characters weave on their fingers, forming a star. This is the detail that recalls the communist red star, iconic symbol of the Cultural Revolution, and also of the troubled past of China.⁵²¹

That so-called 'past' in our memories was an era of red idealism, it is actually not that far away at all from our lives today. The 'Red Five Star' is the icon representing red China and is still inextricably intermingled with our 'today'.⁵²²

These figures can only observe the reality around them through the holes in the weave, as if it were a net that disturbs their view. At the same time, even the viewer of the painting cannot eliminate this element, as if while observing and understanding these people one could not discern from analysing their past, or perhaps, just as Zhu argues, also their present.

The 'Memories of China series' is filled with my striving for the spirit of care in humanity. Through the innocent eyes of the children, I want to link yesterday, today and tomorrow, and to find a new way to interpret our past, present, ideology and reality.⁵²³

Again, like Zhang Xiaogang, Zhu Yiyong over the years also began producing miniseries with other characters, such as *Miss China Series* and *Family Memory Series* [fig.232], maintaining the theme and element of the red star and depicting young Chinese women or parents and children in what appear to be traditional family photos. In these oil paintings, the red string may not be placed in front of the faces of the portrayed figures, but it is always the first thing that meets the viewer's gaze. In the 2010s, these scenes became more and more sombre and dark: Zhu created almost imperceptible faces on a black background, enhancing the red star even more [fig.233]. This would seem to suggest the greater oppression that the government has implemented against the people in the last decade. Although the sufferings endured by the Chinese people over the years are expressed in a more veiled way than in Zhang Xiaogang's *Bloodline Series*, *Memories of China* can also attest to the new need on the part of some artists to re-analyse the painful past and the scars of the nation.

⁵²¹ HU Yiting, *Zhu Yiyong gezhan 10 yue liangxiang Xianggang shijie hualang* 朱毅勇个展 10月亮相香港世界画廊 (*Zhu Yiyong's Solo Exhibition at Hong Kong World Gallery in October*), September 1, 2014. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20140901/n649076.html>

⁵²² *Zhu Yiyong in Memories of China: Artworks by Zhu Yiyong*, Schoeni Art Gallery Ltd., Hong Kong, 2001, p. 9.

⁵²³ Ibid.

4.4 *The Realm of the Heart*, 2010s

Like another great Life-stream artist, Shang Yang, over the past decade Zhu has also focused on the topic of pollution. Having had numerous health problems related to it,⁵²⁴ he decided to move away from the realistic portraits that made him famous, to produce *The Realm of the Heart* series, presenting problems such as excessive urban development and the lack of attention to sustainability.⁵²⁵ What Zhu reproduced are views from above of urban landscapes or close-ups portraits of citizens, where the sky, cities and figures are completely grey, as if everything were submerged in fine dust and smog [fig.234]. Many of these paintings feature figures of children or white clouds:

*The air pollution in China is so bad that you hardly ever see white clouds. So the white cloud creates a bit of distance between the viewer and the work because anyone who knows Chinese cities knows that white clouds don't exist like that. But it's also a symbol of hope. And the clouds are like kids – they look pretty but at the same time are very fragile.*⁵²⁶

These oil paintings force the viewer to reflect on the serious environmental problems that China, but also other world Countries, are going through:

*It will take a very long time before we will see an improvement in the environment. It won't be the government alone who can fix this problem, it will require each and every person in China to make changes.*⁵²⁷

After having hence approached Life-stream Art and Chinese Rural Realism, Zhu Yiyong abandoned rural themes while maintaining the production of portraits of Chinese people, creating artworks that expose the nation's "new scars". Since 1982, in addition to his career as a painter, Zhu has also continued his work as a professor at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts.

5. Wang Hai

After the sensational and unexpected success of *Spring* [fig.99], Wang Hai felt the need to change his means of expression: he therefore decided not to try to outdo himself in other paintings. After responding to over a thousand of praise letters sent by Fifth National

⁵²⁴ GILES Oliver, *Zhu Yiyong on the State of China*, December 12, 2016, op. cit.

⁵²⁵ HU Yiting, *Zhu Yiyong gezhan 10 yue liangxiang Xianggang shijie hualang* 朱毅勇个展 10 月亮相香港世界画廊 (*Zhu Yiyong's Solo Exhibition at Hong Kong World Gallery in October*), op. cit.

⁵²⁶ GILES Oliver, *Zhu Yiyong on the State of China*, December 12, 2016, op. cit.

⁵²⁷ Quotation of Zhu Yiyong in CHUI Timothy, *Urban Blight Transformed as Art*, *China Daily*, October 17, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2014-10/17/content_18757544.htm

Art Exhibition viewers and *Meishu* readers, Wang found himself interested in writing.⁵²⁸ During the last years at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, he began to write novels and articles. He unwittingly returned to the spotlight when in 1982, after graduation, the Academy professors assigned him a postgraduate job in a small town, which he flatly refused. He was one of the very few students in the history of the SFAI to have refused an assignment. This unleashed the wrath of the professors, who decided not to assign him further positions for the next five years.⁵²⁹ Wang Hai's story ended up on the front page of the Sichuan newspapers. For a young artist who had just graduated, it was not a great publicity: Wang could not have worked in the art field for years and was in danger of thus being forgotten, but he did not give up. He decided to start the first art training course in his hometown, Chengdu, and while he was teaching his fifty students the techniques of drawing and painting, he continued to study and write novels for the next five years.⁵³⁰

In 1987 he followed his fiancée and future wife to Hong Kong. Here, with no money and no job, but above all without knowing Cantonese, Wang was forced to take the brush again and collaborate with an art gallery creating ten reproductions of original artworks. He managed to earn 30,000 yuan in one month, when his normal mainland salary would have been a few hundred yuan.⁵³¹ Among these reproductions there was also a painting of the old Hong Kong copied from a photograph. The governor of the region liked it so much that he put it in his studio and Wang Hai became famous again, becoming the first independent professional painter in Hong Kong.⁵³² In the 1990s he opened the Private Kitchen with his wife, one of the most renowned Sichuan cuisine restaurants in Hong Kong, entirely family-run. In the same years Wang Hai returned to be part of the artistic world, working on architectural and design projects also in Chengdu and Chongqing. Even today, although he no longer paints, Wang collaborates with young artists, designers and architects, infusing them with his own artistic flair and personality.⁵³³

⁵²⁸ ZHANG Yuanling, Wang Hai: Chengshi meiyou jiyi, jiu hui buliao jiale 王亥: 城市没有记忆, 就回不了家了 (Wang Hai: If the City Has No Memory, You Cannot Come Back Home), op. cit.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ KONG Lingqiang, Wang Hai: Cong shanghen meishu dao sifang cai taidou 王亥: 从伤痕美术到私房菜泰斗 (Wang Hai: From Scar Art to Private Kitchen Master), op. cit.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

6. Wang Chuan

In the mid-1980s, after the fame achieved with his *Melancholy Youth* painting *Goodbye! Little Path* [fig.102] and having approached a more contemplative painting with *Old Man and Child* [fig.135], Wang Chuan decided to abandon realism and expressionism to experiment with abstractionism with oil colours and ink [fig.235].⁵³⁴ After all, Wang had a degree in Chinese painting at SFAI, so he was used to working with materials typical of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. This new challenge was fuelled by the enormous change in the art milieu following the rise of the '85 New Wave Movement. In fact, in 1986, Wang participated in the Shenzhen Zero Exhibition, so called because it was organized totally without funds or aid from the artistic-governmental institutions.⁵³⁵ The artworks were exhibited for two days in the streets of Shenzhen and Wang Chuan took part in the artwork *Hanging Coffins* [fig.236].⁵³⁶ Moreover, in those same years Wang was one of the first Chinese artists to mix the traditional Chinese technique of ink-and-wash painting with the abstract expressionism of Western artworks.⁵³⁷ The models he referred to were mainly by the American painters Franz Kline (1910-1962) - of whom he had the opportunity to see an exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in 1981 [fig.237] - and Robert Motherwell (1915-1991) [fig.238]: Wang's goal, however, was to differentiate himself from Western abstract painting, to create one with Chinese characteristics.⁵³⁸

In the late 1980s he signed a ten-year contract with Hanart TZ Gallery, becoming one of the first Chinese artists - if not the first - to sign a contract with a foreign gallery and his artworks began to be exhibited in New York, Taipei and Hong Kong.⁵³⁹ In 1989 Wang participated in the well-known China/Avant Garde Exhibition organized at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. In 1990 Wang organized the Ink-Dots solo show in Shenzhen. The entire exhibition space was covered by huge sheets of white fabric, while on the ground, on the ceiling and on the walls the artworks were exhibited – they were completely white and each of them featured a huge dot of black ink placed in the centre of the canvas [fig.239]. It is peculiar how he himself stated that the disease that struck him in 1998 - a stomach tumour - had already manifested itself in the previous decade through the forms he

⁵³⁴ DORAN Valerie C. (Editor), *China's New Art, Post-1989*, 後八九中國新藝術, Hong Kong, Hanart T Z Gallery, 1993, p. V.

⁵³⁵ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 118.

⁵³⁶ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵³⁷ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., pp. 496-497.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Yilang yishujia - Wang Chuan* 艺琅艺术家 - 王川 (*Yilang Artist - Wang Chuan*), April 15, 2018, op. cit.

reproduced in these artworks.⁵⁴⁰ In the 1990s Wang gradually returned to creating artworks also with oil colours, mixing styles and materials typical of Western art, such as minimalism, material painting and collage [fig.240]. In the late 1990s, Wang Chuan emigrated to the United States. Here, in 1998 he suffered from a severe tumour and returned to China. The doctors gave him little hope, but he did not give up and managed to recover thanks to the treatment. During the years of convalescence, Wang almost had an epiphany and felt how ephemeral life is.⁵⁴¹ From that moment on, he transformed his painting into a personal spiritual practice, producing large quantities of abstract artworks in ink, oil and acrylic, with a more curvilinear and softer stroke than those of the 1980s [figs. 241-242].

7. He Duoling

After the success achieved with *Youth* [fig.105] at the Sixth National Art Exhibition, in 1985 He Duoling was invited to lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Art. Arriving in the United States, he finally had the opportunity to personally see the original works by the artist who had most influenced him in his life, Andrew Wyeth. Once he saw *Christina's World* [fig. 110], however, He was deeply amazed: "I realized that *Spring Breeze Has Awakened* [fig.107] has nothing in common with [*Christina's World*]"⁵⁴² He understood that Wyeth had not portrayed the objective reality of the United States but had loaded the artwork with psychological nuances dictated by a personal inner vision of the scene and reality.⁵⁴³ This discovery, together with an ever-growing interest in poetry, led He Duoling to try to recreate the settings, actions and characters narrated in the verses he read in a completely subjective way, adding strong symbolic elements.

My painting is very consistent with a certain element of poetry and music, which is uncertainty. Although I am painting a person who feels very realistic, I am particularly uncertain about what this person is going to do and what he wants to express. You can't see the connection, and I can't even tell you what this painting wants to express. Although the title is guiding, the painting itself has no plot, which is very similar to poetry and music - they may also contain stories, but these stories cannot be told in words. Sometimes, I put

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² Quotation of He Duoling in LÜ Peng, Taste, Image, and Identity: He Duoling and Andrew Wyeth; Wang Guangyi and Andy Warhol. A Comparative Analysis of the Role of Artistic Approaches and Directions in Art History, op. cit., p. 669.

⁵⁴³ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), April 14, 2011. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20110414/n161598.html>

*my understanding of poetry into my creation, but most of the time I improvise. When I found an action and a scene, after I painted it, I suddenly thought of a poem, so I gave it a title.*⁵⁴⁴

An example of this is *Blue Bird* [fig.243], created in the few months he remained in the United States. The oil painting portrays a woman of Yi ethnicity in a snowy and hilly landscape, with a dark bird flying nearby - an element that He began to reproduce often in his artworks.⁵⁴⁵ She is raising one of her arms as if to cover her face, wrapped in her light and bulky cloak that protects her from the cold. Both the woman and the bird are looking towards the right of the painting, giving a sense of movement to the scene emphasized by He's long, horizontal brushstrokes. The tones of the painting are cold and the lighting, created by mixing yellow, brown and purple, makes the scene unreal. *Blue Bird* was inspired by some verses of the poem *Thirteen Ways to Observe Blackbirds* by the American poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955):⁵⁴⁶

*Among twenty snowy mountains,
the only moving thing
was the eye of the blackbird.*⁵⁴⁷

In those years, literature and poetry became He's main source of inspiration, as evidenced by the 1986 *lianhuanhua* composed of forty-four illustrations *House with Attic* - inspired by the homonymous novel by the Russian writer Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) - and the *Little Zhai* painting.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁴ “我的绘画与诗歌、音乐的某种要素很一致，就是不确定性。虽然我画的是一个感觉很写实的人，但是这个人要干嘛、要表现什么，就特别不确定，你看不出有什么联系，甚至连我都说不清楚，这幅画要表现什么。虽然标题有引导性，但是画本身是没有任何情节的，这点很像诗歌和音乐——它们可能也隐含着故事，但这些故事无法用言语讲述。有时候，我会把对诗歌的理解放进创作中，但大多数时候我是即兴的。发现一个动作、一个场景，我画下来后，再忽然联想到一首诗歌，就以此为它取一个标题。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Shenghuo yue pingdan, jiu geng you jingli qu chuangzuo* 何多苓：生活越平淡，就更有精力去创作 (*He Duoling: The Plainer Life Is, the More Energy to Create You Have*), December 7, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.artdesign.org.cn/article/view/id/942>

⁵⁴⁵ SHAO Dazhen, Aishang er shuqing de, du He Duoling de hua 哀伤而抒情的，读何多苓的画 (Sad and Lyrical, Reading He Duoling's Paintings), *Yishu shenghuo-Fuzhou daxue xuebao* 艺术生活-福州大学学报 (*Art & Life-Journal of Fuzhou University*), November 5, 2005.

⁵⁴⁶ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), op. cit.

⁵⁴⁷ STEVENS Wallace, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, 1879-1955*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1989 (first edition 1954), p. 92.

⁵⁴⁸ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), op. cit.

7.1 *Little Zhai*, 1987

Little Zhai [fig.244], created in 1987, is an oil painting inspired by the poem *Jing'an Village* by Zhai Yongming,⁵⁴⁹ a poet and friend whom He Duoling had already portrayed in *The Third Generation* [fig.122] and who is also the protagonist of this artwork. The young woman is in the foreground, barefoot and sitting in an empty room with sloping walls ruined by time and humidity and with no windows. It does not appear to be an inhabited room. The woman is looking towards the viewer with her head slightly bowed, her lips tightened, in an almost submissive or intimidated attitude, also underlined by her body position and with her joined hands. At her feet there is a metal object with a strange shape: it looks like a bronze brazier.⁵⁵⁰ Her body is partly illuminated by an intense light that seems to come from an open door and partly darkened by the shadow of a bare tree. The rest of the room is also bright thanks to a hole in the ceiling that lets the light in.⁵⁵¹ The whole painting is made with brushstrokes of blue, grey, white, brown and black, creating a cold atmosphere, giving a sense of emptiness and an aura of mystery. From this point on, Zhai became He's muse for many other artworks. *Little Zhai* won numerous awards, both in China and abroad, and was included in the permanent collection of the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan.⁵⁵² The simplicity with which He Duoling can change in forms, styles and themes is clearly visible in his creations of 1988, considered among the most beautiful of his career. He continued the production of artworks depicting Yi women, as in *The Raven is Beautiful* [fig.245], but he also created paintings that were closer to surrealism, such as *Stolen Child* and *Life*.

7.2 *Stolen Child*, 1988

Stolen Child [fig.246] is an oil painting inspired by the homonym poem by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939),⁵⁵³ which is based on an Irish legend about the custom of some fairies to kidnap children by convincing them to escape with them.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ DU Xiyun, *From Sorrow to a Mind Like Sky: He Duoling's Art Career*. Retrieved from <http://www.artdepot.cn/artist/interview/id/111>

⁵⁵¹ Dongzhou she: rang ren zhaomo de meili huajia —— He Duoling 东周社: 让人着迷的魅力画家 —— 何多苓 (Dongzhou she: An Enchanting and Charming Painter —— He Duoling), [Video], op. cit.

⁵⁵² LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), op. cit.

⁵⁵³ DU Xiyun, *From Sorrow to a Mind Like Sky: He Duoling's Art Career*, op. cit.

⁵⁵⁴ FINNERAN Richard J., YEATS William Butler, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume I: The Poems*, (Revised Second Edition), Scribner, 2010, pp. 18-19.

*Poetry may be my clue. At that time, I liked a poem by Yeats called "The Stolen Child", so I would definitely reproduce it into a painting. Of course, there have always been a lot of artistic creations based on concepts, but this is not what I want to express. I still like to use pictures to speak.*⁵⁵⁵

Stolen Child presents a single human figure: a child, alone, wearing a white robe - a symbol of innocence - sitting on a dirt road in a deserted and inhospitable landscape. He is looking straight at the viewer and is holding a red apple in his hands. Behind him the dirty road divides the landscape in half, acting as a vanishing point for the viewer, and seems to continue indefinitely. Just above the horizon line, there is a strange circular and grey shape that resembles the sun. On the left side of the artwork, a kite is flying off from the field of soil and dry grass. The tension and drama of the scene are also emphasized by the cold and soft light and the brown colour that evens out the whole work and brings out the child's white dress. The deserted path that no one knows where it begins and where it leads inevitably recalls two other paintings of Melancholy Youth and Contemplative Painting: *Goodbye! Little Path* [fig.102] by Wang Chuan and *Stranger* [fig.133] by Ai Xuan. Unlike these two masterpieces, however, *Stolen Child* does not have an understandable theme and has surreal and symbolic elements, such as the white sphere on the horizon and the apple in the child's hands.⁵⁵⁶ It seems that the child will remain there alone forever, perhaps waiting for someone, in a surreal scene reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) *Waiting for Godot*. This feeling of loneliness is the main characteristic of all of He's artistic production. In 1989 *Stolen Child* was selected for the Di qi jie quanguo meizhan 第七届全国美展 (Seventh National Art Exhibition).⁵⁵⁷

7.3 Life, 1988

Life [fig.247] (also known as *Dead Child*) is one of He Duoling's most enigmatic artworks. Created in the same year as *Stolen Child*, like the previous painting it features the

⁵⁵⁵ “诗歌可能是我的线索。当时，我很喜欢叶芝的一首诗，叫《偷走的孩子》，那我就一定会把它画成一幅画。当然，一直也有很多基于观念而来的艺术创作，但这都不是我想表现的，我还是喜欢用画面说话。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Shenghuo yue pingdan, jiu geng you jingli qu chuanguo* 何多苓：生活越平淡，就更有精力去创作 (*He Duoling: The Plainer Life Is, the More Energy to Create You Have*), December 7, 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.artdesign.org.cn/article/view/id/942>

⁵⁵⁶ DU Xiyun, *From Sorrow to a Mind Like Sky: He Duoling's Art Career*, op. cit.

⁵⁵⁷ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), op. cit.

figure of a child. Against a background of various shades of cold-toned brown, He paints two horses with light coats, soiled with grey, blue, and black brushstrokes - this fusion of cold and gloomy colours is typical of many of his creations. The animals are portrayed in two complementary halves. On the back of the horse on the right lies the body of a child, motionless and with his eyes closed. He seems to be asleep but the waxy colour of his skin - obtained with the same brushstrokes of the horses' coat - lets the viewer suppose he is dead. The beauty and expressive power of this painting reside in the very fine strokes and masterful chiaroscuro created by He. The light comes from the left, illuminating the back of the animals, their manes and tails, but above all the child. The shading, on the other hand, emphasizes the might of the two horses and hides the only visible horse's face. It therefore seems that the three figures are continuing towards darkness. There is no time, no space and it seems that the two parts of the horses correspond to the same animal. He Duoling's particular composition was dictated by his new interest in deconstructionism.⁵⁵⁸ This artwork took part in the Xinan xiandai yishu zhan 西南现代艺术展 (Southwest Modern Art Exhibition), organized in 1988 in Chengdu, in which Zhang Xiaogang, Ye Yongqing 叶永青 (1958-) and Mao Xuhui 毛旭辉 (1956-) also took part.⁵⁵⁹

7.4 A Horse in Red Weather, 1991

In 1989 He married Zhai Yongming. A few years later he returned to the United States again, this time to collaborate with a New York gallery. The gallery's interest fell on his creations depicting the Yi people, a theme that was having some success at the time also thanks to the artworks by He's other former fellow academics who emigrated like him. He Duoling, however, felt that on the other side of the world his inspiration had failed, and he stopped his production about ethnic minorities for a few years.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ He Duoling, *Life*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5803250>

⁵⁵⁹ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling qimeng yu fengge xingcheng (1948—1989)* 何多苓启蒙与风格形成 (1948—1989) (*He Duoling's Enlightenment and Style Formation 1948-1989*), op. cit.

⁵⁶⁰ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit. p. 252.

*When I arrived in the United States, I was still painting this kind of artworks. But at that time, my life had become farther and farther away from such subjects. [...] New York and Sichuan's Daliang Mountain, this psychological distance was difficult to overcome.*⁵⁶¹

One of the latest creations depicting Yi women was *A Horse in Red Weather* [fig.248]. Created in 1991, this oil painting depicts a Yi woman, portrayed on the right side of the scene, not frontally and in an open space like in He's other artworks, but in profile and in an enclosed space with dark walls. The woman is wearing the traditional cape and headdress, she is looking expressionless in front of her. On the left side, He depicts the head of a horse with a long mane and a pure white coat, also portrayed in profile while looking straight ahead, in a surreal setting with a dark red background. This second figure is inside a light wooden frame of which only two sides are visible, as if it were a painting or a window.⁵⁶² The viewer therefore remains uncertain about the real existence of the animal. In the painting He plays on opposites, juxtaposing human and animal elements, reality and fiction, open and closed spaces, warm and cold colours, curved lines and broken lines, geometric elements and volumes.

7.5 *What Year Is This Night*, 1992

During the years he spent in the United States, He continued his depiction of female figures (including nudes), his passion since the Academy, always portraying his beloved Zhai Yongming. Once again, in paintings such as *Spring* [fig.249] and *What Year Is This Eve* [fig.250] - created in the same year - He demonstrated his great versatility, contrasting artworks with impressionist features and romantic themes with strongly symbolist and surrealist creations. *What Year Is This Night* is a surprising painting. In the foreground, the figure of a beautiful young girl, once again Zhai Yongming, is seated in front of a wooden table with an open newspaper. On the newspaper sheets her face is reflected in a small round mirror. It looks like she is styling her hair and getting ready. The girl is wearing a red dress and is holding the long black braid which is falling on her left shoulder. Her very large, black eyes are looking towards the viewer. Behind her, He painted a four-poster bed with pure

⁵⁶¹ “到了美国, 我还是在画这类的画。但是这时候我的生活与这类题材已经离得越来越远了。[...] 纽约和四川大凉山, 这种心理上的距离是很难克服的。”

Quotation of He Duoling in BAO Zhong, He Duoling, wo xuanzele Chengdu 何多苓我选择了成都 (He Duoling, I Chose Chengdu), *Chengdu ribao* 成都日报 (*Chengdu Daily*), January 27, 2005.

⁵⁶² Baoli Xianggang, Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit., p. 252.

white sheets. The peculiarity of this artwork lies in the background. Most of He's paintings are indoor or outdoor scenes with an indefinite background: here, instead, what looks like a bedroom is recreated in a boundless and waste land. Behind the bed the moon is shining and illuminating some thatched roof houses.⁵⁶³ This kind of "double background" in the same painting, in addition to giving a surreal feeling, takes up traditional Chinese paintings.⁵⁶⁴ In fact, in the same year that he created *What Year Is This Night*, He Duoling was delighted to see some traditional Chinese paintings and Buddhist statues at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.⁵⁶⁵ What struck the artist most was the depth and beauty expressed with simple but at the same time powerful brushstrokes of the Song dynasty (960-1279) paintings and of the traditional *hua niao hua* 花鸟画 (flowers and birds paintings).⁵⁶⁶ One of the peculiarities of traditional paintings is precisely the continuous landscape narration, with compositions on several levels. This is where He got the idea of creating two different settings one after the other, thus creating a surreal environment. The title of this artwork also takes up classical Chinese poetry, referring to a verse from the poem *Shuidiao getou · Mingyue jishi you* 水调歌头·明月几时有 by the poet of the Song dynasty Su Shi 苏轼⁵⁶⁷ (1037-1101).⁵⁶⁸ In 1993 He Duoling returned to Chengdu and resumed portraying the female faces of the Yi ethnic group, as in *Woman and White Horse* [fig.251]. Throughout the 1990s he alternated among portraits of Zhai Yongming, female nudes, surrealist artworks and paintings of the Yi people. The leitmotif of all these creations was once again the female subject.

7.6 Rear Window series, 1990s-2000s

At the end of the 1990s He changed style again by creating the *Rear Window* series, in which he once again took up traditional Chinese art, while maintaining the theme of the female nude. *Rear Window #2* [fig.252] shows a naked woman lying on a bed while sleeping. Behind her, the feet of a man are visible. The sinuous body of the woman is placed in the

⁵⁶³ Dongzhou she: rang ren zhaomo de meili huajia —— He Duoling 东周社: 让人着魔的魅力画家 —— 何多苓 (Dongzhou she: An Enchanting and Charming Painter —— He Duoling), [Video], op. cit.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ BAO Zhong, He Duoling, wo xuanzele Chengdu 何多苓我选择了成都 (He Duoling, I Chose Chengdu), op. cit.

⁵⁶⁶ LUO Lijuan, *He Duoling gaobie xiangtu —— Chengqianqihou (1990-1999)* 何多苓告别乡土 —— 承前启后 (1990-1999) (*He Duoling Bids Farewell to the Homeland - A Link Between the Past and the Future 1990-1999*). Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20110414/n161623.html>

⁵⁶⁷ Also known as Su Dongpo 苏东坡.

⁵⁶⁸ Dongzhou she: rang ren zhaomo de meili huajia —— He Duoling 东周社: 让人着魔的魅力画家 —— 何多苓 (Dongzhou she: An Enchanting and Charming Painter —— He Duoling), [Video], op. cit.

centre of a sort of pyramid formed by the edge of the mattress and a fold of the sheet, which is divided by the black thread of a light bulb hanging from the ceiling. This naturalist-style scene is enclosed in a frame on a white wall, as if it were an open window.⁵⁶⁹ In the lower area of the painting, He portrays a man and a woman during a sexual act, lying on a bed reminiscent of those of ancient China. This couple is in fact portrayed in smaller proportions, according to the style of traditional Chinese painting: the faces and the body are very stylized and flat, there are few hints of colour and chiaroscuro. Although it is an oil artwork, He Duoling's mastery allowed him to create a series of pictures that reproduced the delicacy and elegance of classic ink painting.⁵⁷⁰ At the beginning of the new millennium, He continued this kind of creations, mixing traditional Chinese art with more contemporary images and themes. In addition, he resumed using brighter tones in his paintings, while maintaining the shades of blue, grey, and brown that have always characterized his art [fig.253].

7.7 Youth, 2007

In the 2000s, He Duoling seemed to rethink his past and his first creations, reproducing his famous *Youth* [fig.105] and *Christina's World* [fig.110] by Wyeth in a contemporary way. The new *Youth* [fig.254] seems to no longer have any connection with the dramatic painting of 1984: four figures of young adults, men and women are standing at the centre of the scene. They are turning their backs to the viewer showing their buttocks with their pants down and looking at the horizon. The landscape that surrounds them is not the steep and arid mountain he painted in 1984, but it is a wonderful green meadow, surrounded by clear streams that reflect the blue sky and large white clouds. There is nothing around the figures, only freedom. And it seems exactly what He wanted to convey: a new freedom, the possibility of being able to transgress, to live lightly - not as the young people of his generation had. Or maybe He, almost sixty at the time, believed that he had not lost the spirit of his youth yet. *The World After Christina* [fig.255] also demonstrates a new confidence and vitality, expressed by He Duoling by replacing Wyeth's hill of dry grass and polio-sick woman with a young naked girl who seems to be floating in the lush grass.

⁵⁶⁹ He Duoling, *Rear Window No. 2*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6000942>

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

7.8 *The Russian Forest Series (Golden Age) - Chekhov Nightingale, 2017*

In 2014 He Duoling fulfilled a dream and went to Russia for the first time, invited by the Repin Academy of Fine Arts. Travelling around the country, he was shocked by the vastness of the Russian forest. According to He, the Russian artists he had studied over the years at the Academy and the poets, writers and musicians he loved so much had drawn inspiration for their works from the forest, just as the masters of calligraphy, painting and classical Chinese poetry had been inspired by the mountains.⁵⁷¹ As soon as he returned to China, He began *The Russian Forest Series*, which is divided into *Golden Age* and *Silver Age*, referring to the flowering eras of Russian poetry and literature. *Chekhov Nightingale* [fig.256] is a representative painting of this series. Chekhov, one of He's favourite Russian writers,⁵⁷² is pictured in a small path near a white house in the Russian forest. The man is portrayed from the front as an elderly man, leaning on a stick. This artwork, with the neutral and cold tones typical of He and with soft and light brushstrokes, blends his delicate and profound style with his love for literature and nature.⁵⁷³

Over the past decade, He Duoling has also created a studio-museum in Chengdu, the Blue Roof, entirely designed by him. The building is surrounded by a large garden planned to have plants flowering all year round, so that He can depict the female bodies that made him famous even among the luxuriant vegetation.⁵⁷⁴ During the 2020 pandemic He created the *Miscellaneous Flower Sketch* series [fig.257], where he reproduces the flowers of his garden with a brushstroke he himself defines as “shorthand”.⁵⁷⁵ He Duoling became famous in the 1980s for expressing the bewilderment and melancholy of young Chinese people returning from the Down to the Countryside Movement, but over the years he has abandoned those feelings of the past. He has diversified his artworks in style, themes and influences, gradually detaching himself from reality and creating a totally personal artistic world, but equally expressive and profound:

⁵⁷¹ Yu He Duoling tongxing 与何多苓同行 (Walking with He Duolin), Xiwang Chengdu 西望成都 (Looking West to Chengdu), November 25, 2017, [Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ7xI525cUk>

⁵⁷² As already discussed, in 1986 He Duoling created a *lianhuanhua* based on Chekhov's short story *House with Attic*.

⁵⁷³ Baoli Xianggang, Aomen lianhe paimai 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit., p. 252.

⁵⁷⁴ Yu He Duoling tongxing 与何多苓同行 (Walking with He Duolin), Xiwang Chengdu 西望成都 (Looking West to Chengdu), [Video], op. cit.

⁵⁷⁵ He Duoling's profile on Pearl Art Museum website. Retrieved from <http://www.pearlartmuseum.org/cn/category/person-list/detail!he-duo-ling>

*I have always had a stubborn idea that reality is not expressed in paintings. I like to paint things that transcend reality. They shape another world — a world where I can hide, my safe haven.*⁵⁷⁶

8. Ai Xuan

Ai Xuan, along with Luo Zhongli, was the only artist among those discussed in this research who has never strayed from the theme of his paintings from the 1980s to the present. Unlike Luo, however, Ai has not changed his own pictorial style for more than thirty years. The Tibetan people in the desolate tundra and in the harsh winter therefore remained the subject of his paintings, which he has always portrayed in a realist style. In fact, Ai Xuan did not allow himself to be influenced even by the upheaval of the Chinese art scene after the advent of the '85 New Wave and continued his own path. As Li Xianting wrote in his 1988 article *Cong dangdai meishu dashi zhong kan Ai Xuan de yishu* 从当代美术大势中看艾轩的艺术 (*Looking at Ai Xuan's Art from the General Trend of Contemporary Art*):

*In today's surging trend of new-wave art, realist China has strengthened its position. As the sedan chair on this battlefield, Ai Xuan is immersed in it without hesitation. This is a phenomenon worth pondering.*⁵⁷⁷

Now famous in China for his artworks of contemplative realism, in April 1987 Ai, together with Wang Yidong, was invited to the United States to participate in the Zhongguo dangdai youhua zhan 中国当代油画展 (Contemporary Oil Paintings From the People's Republic of China) at The Harkness House in New York, where he exhibited *Stranger* [fig.133] and in which Luo Zhongli also participated. Ai Xuan remained in the United States as visiting student at the Oklahoma City University for a year, being able to exhibit his artworks in numerous galleries and receiving praise by the press. His reputation grew more and more, until in 1988 he finally managed to meet his idol: Andrew Wyeth [fig.258].

⁵⁷⁶ “我一直有一个顽固的想法，现实不是在画中表现的，我喜欢画超越现实的东西，它们塑造了另一个世界——我可以躲藏起来的世界，我的避风港。”

Quotation of He Duoling in *He Duoling: Shenghuo yue pingdan, jiu geng you jingli qu chuanguo* 何多苓：生活越平淡，就更有精力去创作 (*He Duoling: The Plainer Life Is, the More Energy to Create You Have*), op. cit.

⁵⁷⁷ 在新潮美术风起云涌的今天，写实主义中国反而愈加固守自己的阵地，艾轩作为这块阵地上的轿子，义无反顾的沉浸在其中，这是一种值得深思的现象。

LI Xianting, *Cong dangdai meishu dashi zhong kan Ai Xuan de yishu* 从当代美术大势中看艾轩的艺术 (*Looking at Ai Xuan's Art from the General Trend of Contemporary Art*), op. cit., p. COP 36.

In 1988, Wyeth's son came to New York and saw my painting at the Haffner Gallery. He went home and told his father: 'There is a Chinese painting that resembles your style.' Wyeth was surprised and asked his son if he could invite me to meet him. He looked at my painting and said: 'You draw with the help of photos. Many people in the United States draw like this, but you are different from them. They copy photos, but you create with personal emotions and control the photos.' He spoke very wisely and had a great influence on my concept of painting.⁵⁷⁸

As much as Ai Xuan's life and career in New York was booming, he felt that the power and emotions aroused by the source of his creations - the snowy plateau of Tibet and its people - could not be reproduced from the other part of the world. In 1988 Ai decided to return to China.⁵⁷⁹ Back home, he resumed his production trying to combine the psychological power of Wyeth's artworks with his personal sentimental and almost poetic style in portraying the inhabitants of Tibet.

Tibet seems to exert a transcendental and insurmountable power over man. The place is immutable, unchanging, and solemn; one often feels helpless and powerless against it. [Paradoxically,] being under this state lends me the power to express how I feel.⁵⁸⁰

As analysed by Li Xianting in the aforementioned article, Ai initially depicted lonely, thoughtful and tired Tibetan shepherds, with their gaze always directed towards the horizon, wrapped in heavy leather coats to shelter from the extreme cold and snow, emphasizing all their dignity and heroism with an almost hyper-realistic style [figs.259-260].⁵⁸¹ The second phase identified by Li Xianting began as early as 1983, but materialized in the 1990s, when Ai shifted his attention more to the expression of the deep feelings and reflections these figures aroused in him than to technique,⁵⁸² mainly creating close-ups of Tibetan girls' faces

⁵⁷⁸ “1988年怀斯的儿子到纽约来，在哈夫那画廊看见了我的画，回家告诉他爸爸说：有一个中国人画的画很像你的风格。怀斯顿感惊奇，问他的儿子能不能把我请去见见面。他看了我的画后说：你是借助照片在画画，美国很多人都这么画，可你和他们不一样，他们是抄照片，而你用个人的情感去创作，又驾驭了照片。他说得很智慧，对我的绘画观念影响很大。”

Quotation of Ai Xuan in ZHANG Yuan, Guanyu Ai Xuan de shi ge wenti 关于艾轩的十个问题 (Ten Questions About Ai Xuan), *Yishu shichang* 艺术市场 (Art Market), June 1, 2004, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ai Xuan: Ren zai tiandi jian ruci miaoxiao ren ziran roulin yu cuihui* 艾轩：人在天地间如此渺小任自然蹂躏与摧毁 (*Ai Xuan: People Are So Small in the World, and They Are Naturally Ravaged and Destroyed*), op. cit.

⁵⁸⁰ Quotation of Ai Xuan in Ai Xuan, *Tundra*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5691192/?intObjectID=5691192>

⁵⁸¹ LI Xianting, Cong dangdai meishu dashi zhong kan Ai Xuan de yishu 从当代美术大势中看艾轩的艺术 (Looking at Ai Xuan's Art from the General Trend of Contemporary Art), op. cit., p. COP 34.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.* p. COP 35.

who became the emblem of his production also abroad [fig.261]. On a few occasions Ai portrayed two figures in his artworks, one of them is *Waiting for the Sun in Winter*.

8.1 *Waiting for the Sun in Winter*, 1994

This oil painting [fig.262], created in 1994, depicts a Tibetan man sitting on a snowy meadow. He is portrayed in profile while looking towards the horizon - his dark face has features very similar to those of other figures in his previous artworks. The man has his legs crossed, next to him a traditional hunting knife. He is holding a few months old baby in his arms, trying to protect him from the cold with his coat of leather and fur. There is nothing around them. They are there, waiting for the sun to return to warm their souls. The father's dark skin, which looks like leather, is contrasted with the son's reddish and luminous skin, as if it were a glimmer of hope. The man's concern for the child, whom he is trying to protect and warm with his own body, makes the scene moving and poetic. In this artwork, the chromatic choice that Ai Xuan carried out throughout his artistic production is evident: shades of grey, blue and white in strictly cold tones. Furthermore, the distorted horizon given by the sloping ground is still very reminiscent of the artworks by Wyeth and He Duoling.

8.2 *Tibetan Girl*, 1995

Tibetan Girl [fig.263] is part of the second creative phase of Ai Xuan and is slightly different from his other paintings. In the 1990s, the artist used to portray Tibetan girls in open spaces, in the snowy and desolate lands that characterized his depictions of shepherds. Some artworks of those years, however, show the girls indoors, inside a house. This painting is about a beautiful girl with long black hair, a reddish complexion and large dark eyes. The peculiarity of Ai's creations depicting girls is in fact the colour of the eyes of his characters: the typical black of the eyes of Chinese people becomes almost blue, as if reflecting the whiteness of the snowy landscapes and the rays of the warm winter sun. The girl is sitting near a window, wearing a traditional dress and the typical Tibetan coloured beaded necklace. Around her Ai places a metal jug and a terracotta amphora.⁵⁸³ Her gaze is turned upwards, while she is observing something or someone. She seems to show a sense of concern. Her face is also emphasized by the strong lighting coming from the window behind her. The light is very bright, accentuated by the glow of the snow that covers the hill near the house.

⁵⁸³ Ai Xuan, *Tibetan Girl*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6001917>

The charm of Ai's artworks lies not only in the expressive power of the portrayed subjects - and in the extreme situation in which the viewer imagines themselves living - but also in the use of chiaroscuro and shades, thanks to which the artist manages to perfectly render the folds of the leather coats, the Tibetan people's sun-damaged skin and the darkness of their hair. Furthermore, Ai manages to paint the Tibetan plateau as a peaceful, empty and silent territory, but at the same time cruel and inhospitable, where nature still commands, leaving the viewer destabilized. Another feature of Ai Xuan is the almost total monochromaticity in his production. In fact, all his artworks play on shades of grey and blue, and even if other shades of colour are present, the overall tone of the paintings is always cold. As discussed above, this is also a characteristic of the artworks by his friend He Duoling. Furthermore, as He did with Zhai Yongming, Ai Xuan also repeated some faces in numerous paintings [fig.264], but unlike the first artist, he did not change his theme for decades.

The choice of portraits, for the most part very young figures, alone and with a melancholy and sad gaze, is not accidental. Ai Xuan said that all the painful events experienced first-hand as a child, such as the ferocity of the government against his father and the violence of the years of the Cultural Revolution, have come back to the surface thanks to his art, and have been expressed thanks to the faces of the little girls in his artworks.⁵⁸⁴

I have consciously emphasized this kind of psychological contrast, but its visual or psychological effects are particularly strong, and of course I cannot do without my experience. Things in life gave me a very strong psychological hint. My family has suffered misfortune. Everyone knows the troubles Comrade Ai Qing had in our family. I have been discriminated since I was a child, coping with family discord, fighting, and quarrelling everywhere. At that time, I felt that other children were very bright and full of sunshine, while there was always a cloud floating around on my head, so in my paintings, there is always the theme of loneliness.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ ZHANG Yuan, Guanyu Ai Xuan de shi ge wenti 关于艾轩的十个问题 (Ten Questions About Ai Xuan), op. cit. pp. 92-93.

⁵⁸⁵ “我有意识强调这种心理对比，但它的视觉或心理效果特别强，当然还离不开我的经历。生活中的事给我一种很强烈的心理暗示。我的家庭遭遇不幸，大家都知道艾青同志与我们这个家庭的麻烦。我从小受到歧视，再加上家庭不和，到处都在打架、吵架。那时感觉别的孩子挺灿烂，充满阳光，而我头上总有一块云在飘来飘去，所以在我创作的画面上，... 总是有一种孤独感的主题。”
Quotation of Ai Xuan in *Ibid.*

It was only in 2008 that Ai began to produce artworks with ink on paper, first only in black [fig.265], and then in colour.⁵⁸⁶ What he created were again paintings focusing on the subjects that made him famous, with a very accurate stroke and a different medium. *Tibetan Girl* [fig.266], painted in 2012, shows with refined brushstrokes all the beauty of a girl from Tibet, in a plateau no longer covered with snow, but covered with grass with grazing horses. Ai's brushstroke then became looser, the contour line almost imperceptible, and the shades of colour became blotches of washed-out ink, a technique reminiscent of watercolour.⁵⁸⁷ In any case, Ai Xuan never abandoned oil paintings and continued his original production, creating artworks that met with considerable success both in China and abroad, such as *The Sacred Mountain* [fig.267], sold at auction in 2011 for 20.72 million yuan (more than 3 million dollars).⁵⁸⁸ In recent years, however, the artist has continued also to produce ink paintings, not changing the theme but modifying the typical compositions of his creations and portraying various figures while performing different actions [fig.268]. As claimed by Michael Sullivan, after the uproar that caused his artworks exhibited in New York in the 1980s, "what began as the expression of intense personal experience declined after mid-1980s into the expert repetitions of a successful formula".⁵⁸⁹

9. Chen Danqing

After graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 1980, Chen Danqing was hired as a professor in the Academy's Oil Painting Department, where he remained for several years.⁵⁹⁰ In 1982, however, he decided to leave for the United States. He was therefore the first artist among those here analysed to emigrate. In the first decade spent in New York, Chen had some financial difficulties and continued his production of Life-stream Art paintings for a living, using a large number of sketches and drafts that he had created in his travels to Tibet and that he had brought with him overseas: "I have always missed China in the United States. [...] Only sketches of Tibetan paintings were by my side

⁵⁸⁶ Ai Xuan: *Ren zai tiandi jian ruci miaoxiao ren ziran roulin yu cuihui* 艾轩：人在天地间如此渺小任自然蹂躏与摧毁 (*Ai Xuan: People Are So Small in the World, and They Are Naturally Ravaged and Destroyed*), op. cit.

⁵⁸⁷ Ai Xuan, *Winter Snow*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5899768/?intObjectID=5899768>

⁵⁸⁸ Ai Xuan, *Longing*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/20th-century-chinese-art-hk0458/lot.528.html>

⁵⁸⁹ SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, op. cit., p. 238.

⁵⁹⁰ SONG Min, Cheng Danqing: yishu jiaoyu, meishenme hao tan de 陈丹青：艺术教育，没什么好谈的 (*I Have Escaped, and Now I Am Free*), op. cit.

- which is why I cherished them so much".⁵⁹¹ Chen thus began to combine the typical portraits of his *Tibetan series* with reproductions of evocative views of the Tibet tundra and buildings [figs.269-270]. Some of the artworks produced in the very first years after his arrival in the United States began to have more neutral tones, much more marked brushstrokes and less defined figures, which came close to that of the European impressionist artworks that he had had the opportunity to admire in the greatest museums of New York. In any case, this slight change in Chen's style did not last long: from the mid-1980s, his brushstrokes became defined again and charged with the bright colours that distinguish the Tibetan people.

9.1 *Two Young Shepherds*, 1986

Two Young Shepherds [fig.271] takes up one of his most famous artworks: *Shepherds* [fig.147]. As in the 1980 painting, two Tibetan shepherds, a man and a woman, are portrayed in front of a low wall of soil and stones. Behind them flocks of sheep are grazing, with the mountains of the plateau as background. Unlike the previous painting, however, the two shepherds are not two elderly people who show signs of affection, but two young people who enjoy a simple moment of pause.⁵⁹² The position of the two figures is also opposite to the artwork of 1980: in *Two Young Shepherds* it is the man who is leaning against the wall, while the woman is standing not far from him. The major difference between the two paintings lies in the choice of colours and lighting. The artworks of the *Tibetan Series* played on neutral tones of brown and grey, emphasized by a cold, uniform and weak light. Given the colours and heavy clothing of the figures, the scenes seemed to have been portrayed in winter. In this painting, created six years later, Chen always maintained the colours of the soil, but in warmer shades and accentuated the brightness, the shadows, and the intense blue of the sky as if it were a late spring or summer day. Chen Danqing seems to have abandoned the neutral style of his first artworks to enter a new creative and expressive phase.⁵⁹³ In fact,

⁵⁹¹ “在美国我一直想念中国。[...] 只有西藏画的速写陪在身边——这也是为什么我非常珍视它们。” Quotation of Chen Danqing in ZHOU Xinxin, *Chen Danqing “Yi dui nianqing de muyang ren” yi 1038.4 wan gangyuan chengjiao* 陈丹青《一对年轻的牧羊人》以 1038.4 万港元成交 (*Chen Danqing's "Two Young Shepherds" sold for 10.384 million Hong Kong dollars*), November 24, 2011. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20191124/n1065516.html>

⁵⁹² Chen Danqing, *Two Young Shepherds*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/boundless-contemporary-art-hk0704/lot.902.html>

⁵⁹³ ZHOU Xinxin, *Chen Danqing “Yi dui nianqing de muyang ren” yi 1038.4 wan gangyuan chengjiao* 陈丹青《一对年轻的牧羊人》以 1038.4 万港元成交 (*Chen Danqing's "Two Young Shepherds" sold for 10.384 million Hong Kong dollars*), op. cit.

the artist created more detailed paintings, with more elements, smaller figures and more complete scenes, demonstrating the influence of Western artworks that he had analysed and copied for hours in the New York museums.⁵⁹⁴ *Two Young Shepherds* was sold in 2019 for 10,384 million Hong Kong dollars (1.338 million dollars).

9.2 *Wasteland Wind*, 1988

Wasteland Wind [fig.272] is a particular painting. As previously discussed, when creating the 1980 *Tibetan Series*, Chen made a very particular choice: unlike the artworks made during the Cultural Revolution and those by many of his fellow academics, he decided to produce small paintings, which he continued to make for years also in the United States. *Wasteland Wind*, on the other hand, is 107.95 x 141.61 cm, almost double than the measures of his previous artworks, making it one of the largest paintings ever created by the artist on the theme of Tibet.⁵⁹⁵ Furthermore, this painting presents both the magnificent landscape of the Tibetan plateau and a portrait of the people who live there, fully combining the elements that had characterized Chen's production up to that time. In a boundless meadow, three girls are walking holding hands, forming a chain. They are portrayed in the foreground, all of them in different poses. They are wearing colourful and heavy Tibetan traditional clothes, and two of them have their heads covered with a veil. Behind them, in the distance, the figures of shepherds and animals are visible. The background is mainly composed of tundra, while the cloudy and grey sky covers only a narrow band at the top of the painting. Chen's extreme mastery renders the simplicity and genuineness of these three main figures in a refined and poetic way. Unlike other previous portraits, in fact, thanks to the slightly shaded brushstrokes and the use of vibrant colours, Chen gives a sense of movement and liveliness to the scene, also transmitted by the grass moved by the wind and the posture of the girls. After spending six years away from the lands he loved so much, Chen expressed all his nostalgia and memories in this splendid painting, one of his latest creations on the theme of Tibet.⁵⁹⁶

*Thoughts about the almost primitive life of the herdsmen and their sonorous singing voices often reduced me to tears.*⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ *Baoli Xianggang, Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit. p. 70.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 71.

⁵⁹⁷ Quotation of Chen Danqing in *Ibid.*

Unlike other artists here analysed who rode the wave of the success of their first artworks by repeating themselves throughout their career, with the beginning of the new decade, Chen's production changed considerably, abandoning the depictions of Tibet and its people. In the first half of the 1990s, he focused on the production of nude paintings - mostly female - which he continued into the 2000s. The portrayed women were Caucasian, with diaphanous skin, with beautiful and curvy bodies, often lying on sheets or sitting on comfortable nineteenth-century style sofas and accompanied by small objects such as a book, cushions, or a pair of shoes [fig.273]. Initially, the style adopted by Chen was hyper-realistic, as if the artworks were nude photographs taken in a studio. Over time, the brushstroke gradually softened, and the poses became less rigid and less structured [fig.274].

My approach to figurative painting has been unwavering. Having relinquished the thematic subject matter on Tibet, it's unfathomable that the juxtaposition and sketches I tempered with were in fact warped influences from Pop Art and the new Euro-American paintings from the 1980s.⁵⁹⁸

9.3 Art Book as Still Life, 1990s

At the same time as his nude studies, from the mid-1990s Chen also began to create still life paintings. The new *Still Life* artworks portrayed open and superimposed volumes, together with other objects and small statues, paying great attention to the accurate reproduction of the images portrayed in the pages.⁵⁹⁹

At that time, [I needed] to satisfy the desire of sketching, but I couldn't find anyone to sketch. The picture album was an object and it was very good, so I [depicted it and] called [the new artwork] a still life as if I were painting fruits and flowers.⁶⁰⁰

Initially, the depicted books showed paintings of Western art, such as Van Gogh's portraits or sunflowers, artworks by Velazquez, and nude art images [fig.275]. From 1997,

⁵⁹⁸ CHEN Danqing, *Chen Danqing: Why New York*, September 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.shanghaigalleryofart.com/en/chen-danqing-why-new-york>

⁵⁹⁹ WANG Chen, Silence and Wander – Still Objects, Chen Danqing's Exhibition at Suzhou Museum 寂静而彷徨 — 苏州博物馆陈丹青《静物》, *Meishu wenxian* 美术文献 (*Fine Arts Literature*), August 15, 2014, p. 37.

⁶⁰⁰ “当时为了满足写生的欲望，我找不到人写生，画册是个物件，很乖，所以我叫它静物，我等于在画水果、花朵。”

Quotation of Chen Danqing in PEI Gang, *Chen Danqing: Wo you hui dao dang zhiqing shi hua hua de zhuangtai* 陈丹青：我又回到当知青时画画的状态 (*Chen Danqing: I Am Back to the State of Painting Like When I Was an Educated Youth*), November 7, 2019. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20191107/n1064303.html>

however, the open books Chen copied also began to be those of traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. Thus, also some provocative compositions were born, such as those that included Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303–361) calligraphic or landscape painting masterpieces and erotic paintings [figs.275-277]. The peculiarity of these artworks is that Chen reproduced Chinese calligraphy artworks and ink paintings with oil paints. He therefore played on the juxtaposition of East and West, ancient and modern, “sacred” and profane, copy and original but above all reality and illusion. In fact, the artist reproduced artworks by other artists, exactly as they would have done, but which are photos in catalogues or books, not original pieces. Chen Danqing was no stranger to copying works of art: as discussed in the previous chapter, having started as a self-taught, as a young man his only way to study drawing and painting was copying the images he saw in books and catalogues. His still life artworks were also published in 1998 in a catalogue entitled *Chen Danqing: Art Book as Still Life*. In recent years, the artist has explained his concept of reality in these works - which he continued to produce throughout the 2000s - saying that:

The master's picture album has devalued and turned into a group of still life by me; but they have changed from printed matter to 'original artworks' in my hands. I painted them, but at the same time they are not my paintings.⁶⁰¹

In 2000 he was offered a professorship at the Academy of Arts and Design at the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing and Chen decided to return to China after almost twenty years. Here, in addition to being a professor, he was also the supervisor of the PhD students. For four years Chen was unable to follow any doctoral students because the rigid Chinese education system also provided for an entrance exam based largely on the English language and this blocked many young artists, although they were talented.⁶⁰² In 2004, in protest of this too rigid system, Chen Danqing resigned calling himself “lucky to escape”⁶⁰³ and ending up in all the newspapers for claiming to be:

⁶⁰¹ “大师的画册贬值了，变成我摆的一组静物；但它们又在我手上从印刷品变成‘原作’，是我画的，又不是我的画。”

Quotation of Chen Danqing in ZHAO Qiang, Cuowei yu guannian—— Chen Danqing “Jingwu xilie” guangan 错位与观念——陈丹青“静物系列”观感 (Misplacement and Perception —— Impressions of Chen Danqing's “Still Life Series”), *Yangzhou zhiye daxue xuebao* 扬州职业大学学报 (*Journal of Yangzhou Polytechnic College*), December 30, 2002, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁰² SONG Min, Cheng Danqing: yishu jiaoyu, meishenme hao tan de 陈丹青：艺术教育，没什么好谈的 (I Have Escaped, and Now I Am Free), op. cit.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

*Unable to endure the art education evaluation system that regards foreign languages as the only standard. [...] I have never opposed foreign language education itself, but I believe that foreign language education should not be used as a rigid standard, or the only standard, for admission and graduation.*⁶⁰⁴

Meanwhile, back in China, Chen continued his artworks on female nude, but this time also portraying Chinese and foreign women wearing high-heeled shoes, surrounded by traditional Chinese-style furniture [fig.278]. In these paintings Chen once again mixed ancient and modern, East and West, tradition and change. In the last decade, Chen Danqing's attention has focused almost exclusively on portraiture, taking inspiration from the artist Liu Xiaodong 刘小东 (1963-),⁶⁰⁵ famous for his neorealist artworks that portray ordinary people in scenes of everyday life. Chen himself pointed out that, compared to the paintings of his *Tibetan Series*, over the years he felt the need to paint real people as a model for him.⁶⁰⁶ In recent years, it was also to satisfy this need that Chen, in collaboration with the stylist Xie Xing 谢星, began to portray real models [fig.279]. The artworks produced are very large (even 2 x 4 meters), an unusual choice for him: "The height of the model prompted the artist to create large-scale sketches for the first time".⁶⁰⁷ These paintings were exhibited at the Chen Danqing: Disguise and Paintings from Life exhibition at Tang Contemporary Art in Hong Kong in 2019.⁶⁰⁸ As discussed, at the end of the 1980s Chen Danqing also abandoned Life-stream Art, but he never ceased to create realist-style artworks.

⁶⁰⁴ “无法忍受将外语等作为唯一标准的艺术教育考评体制。[...] 我从来没有反对过外语教育本身, 而是我认为不应该将外语教育作为录取和毕业的硬性标准, 或者说是唯一的标准。”

Quotation of Chen Danqing in HAN Yuting, Chen Danqing: Dui yishu jiaoyu de qi ji 陈丹青: 对艺术教育的期冀 (Chen Danqing: Expectations for Art Education), *Yishu jiaoyu* 艺术教育 (*Art Education*), January 1, 2015.

⁶⁰⁵ PEI Gang, *Chen Danqing: Wo you hui dao dang zhiqing shi hua hua de zhuangtai* 陈丹青: 我又回到当知青时画画的状态 (*Chen Danqing: I Am Back to the State of Painting Like When I Was an Educated Youth*), op. cit.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ 模特儿的身高促使艺术家第一次创作大型写生画。

TAN Wei, 2019 Nian 5 yue AAC yishu Zhongguo yuedu guancha baogao zhi niandu yishujia: Chen Danqing 2019年5月AAC艺术中国月度观察报告之年度艺术家: 陈丹青 (*Artist of the Year in AAC Art China Monthly Observation Report in May 2019: Chen Danqing*), May 18, 2020. Retrieved from <https://news.artron.net/20200518/n1076442.html>

⁶⁰⁸ *Chen Danqing: Disguise and Paintings from Life*, Tang Contemporary Art website. Retrieved from <https://www.tangcontemporary.com/2019-chen-danqing>

10. Zhou Chunya

Zhou Chunya's artistic production can be divided into four periods, referring to the four most important and recurring themes of his artworks. As already analysed in the previous chapter, the first theme and period correspond to the Tibetan series, which ended in the early 1990s. The production of him from the mid-1980s to the present day gave birth to other series - *Green Dog*, *Taihu Rocks* and *Peach Blossom* - created by Zhou almost simultaneously and which made him one of the most famous and acclaimed contemporary Chinese artists worldwide. After graduating from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1982, Zhou Chunya was admitted as a professional painter to the Chengdu Art Academy. This institution, founded in 1980, is reserved exclusively for the best artists in the nation and serves as a support in their artistic production and research. In 1986 he decided to go to West Germany to study, enrolling at the Gesamthochschule Kassel Fachbereichkunst and taking his wife and daughter with him.⁶⁰⁹ Here, he had the opportunity to travel and visit the best museums of Western art, coming into contact with German expressionism and neo-expressionism.⁶¹⁰ Zhou's favourite artists at the time were Georg Baselitz (1938-), A. R. Penck (1939-2017) and Anselm Kiefer (1945-).⁶¹¹ The first year in Germany was not profitable for his production because he devoted himself to study German. This was a difficult period for him: he left China thinking he could live on his art, but he had to work as a porter at a train station to earn a living. In addition, he created pencil or oil portraits for his new friends' relatives.⁶¹² From the following year Zhou created a series of artworks that still portray the Tibetan people and landscapes, but which show a marked change in his style of depiction, with surrealist, expressionist and fauvist influences [figs.280-281]. In 1987, while Zhou was still in Germany, he overheard a series of songs played with the *guzheng* 古筝 and the pipe, instruments of traditional Chinese music, and it was like an epiphany.⁶¹³ From that moment on he became passionate about traditional Chinese culture, a passion which greatly influenced his subsequent production.

⁶⁰⁹ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 17.

⁶¹⁰ ZHOU Chunya, *Shengming zai secai zhi zhong* 生命在色彩之中 (*Life in Colour*), May 17, 2007. Retrieved from https://zhouchunya.artron.net/news_detail_32379/

⁶¹¹ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 17.

⁶¹² ZHANG Xia, Zhou Chunya: Shi yu ziran 周春芽: 始于自然 (Zhou Chunya: Starting from Nature), *Zhongguo cishan jia* 中国慈善家 (*China Philanthropist*), May 10, 2019, p. 36.

⁶¹³ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 611.

After graduating, he returned to China in 1989 and resumed collaboration with the Chengdu Art Academy. That year he not only divorced his first wife but was deeply moved by the Tian'anmen incident.⁶¹⁴ In the early 1990s, Zhou's artworks completely lost the connection with the realist and impressionist style that characterized his paintings of the previous decade, turning more and more towards neo-expressionism. Typical of his creations from this period are broad and undefined brushstrokes, thick layers, dark colours, deformed faces and bodies [fig.282]. The themes of these paintings were mainly human faces, flowers and rocks. Unlike the artworks of the 1980s, the outline of the subjects portrayed began to be more and more imperceptible, a far cry from the sharp and black line reminiscent of woodcuts in artworks such as *A New Generation of Tibetans* [fig.156]. Simultaneously with his neo-expressionist style production, Zhou Chunya deepened his study of traditional Chinese culture more and more, becoming passionate about Neo-Confucianism, Chinese traditional gardens, the artworks by Bada Shanren 八大山人⁶¹⁵ (1626-1705) - one of the greatest painters and calligraphers of Chinese art - and by Huang Binhong 黄宾虹 (1865-1955).⁶¹⁶ It was in the early 1990s that Zhou inaugurated one of the most important themes of his production, that of the rocks.

In 1992 Zhou married his second wife. Thus, a very positive period in his life began: the following year he participated in the China's New Art Post-1989 Exhibition, organized between January and February 1993 in Hong Kong,⁶¹⁷ and in the Chinese Experience - Chinese Art from the 1990s exhibition at the Sichuan Art Museum in Chengdu. The Southwest Art Group of his friend Zhang Xiaogang also participated in this last exhibition. The artworks presented by Zhou Chunya are part of the *Rocks* series. This series presents reproductions of strange and colourfully shaped rocks, surrounded by indefinite vegetation that contrast with the sea blue background created with wide and horizontal brushstrokes [fig.293]. In these paintings it is even more visible how the rocks are not defined by a contour and the volumes are recreated by the artist only thanks to a skilful use of lighting and oil colours.⁶¹⁸ It is no coincidence that Zhou chose to depict these rocks in an environment that seems underwater: this choice is reminiscent of one of Bada Shanren's most famous paintings,

⁶¹⁴ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 18.

⁶¹⁵ Pseudonym of Zhu Da 朱耷.

⁶¹⁶ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 611.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 553.

⁶¹⁸ DEMATT Monica, *The sense of Contradiction—The Story of Zhou Chunya and His Dog*, November 21, 2006. Retrieved from https://zhouchunya.artron.net/news_detail_28498

Fish and Rocks [fig.294]. The theme of rocks remained present throughout Zhou's production from the 1980s onwards, changing over the years in colours and shapes as in 1994's *Red Stone - Ya'an Shangli* series, and arriving at increasingly defined compositions as in *Taihu Rocks* series.⁶¹⁹

10.1 *Heigen Playing on the Roof*, 1996

1995 was a defining year for Zhou Chunya. That year, after taking a German shepherd, whom he called Heigen 黑根 (Black Root), Zhou began to portray the dog in an expressionist style, individually or accompanied by other figures, in the *Heigen's Family* series [fig.295].⁶²⁰ *Heigen Playing on the Roof* [fig.296], painted in 1996, is an oil diptych showing a sequence of actions performed by the dog, by Zhou himself and by his second wife. The scene is made up of various shades of grey and black and is set on an outdoor terrace, from which the urban landscape below is visible. The imposing black figure of Heigen stands out in the central area of the left painting, on two legs while it is playing with a piece of dark cloth together with Zhou Chunya's wife.⁶²¹ She is wearing an intense yellow summer dress - the only colourful element of the diptych. Above her there is a large black cloud, which seems to come from her head. Below, to the left of this main scene, a man and a dog are depicted - presumably Zhou and Heigen themselves - waiting. On the right side of the diptych, in the distance on the parapet of the terrace, two people can be seen, but there is no trace of Heigen.⁶²²

10.2 *Green Dog series*, 1997-

In 1997 Zhou portrayed Heigen completely in green for the first time [fig.297] in the series that made him famous all over the world and which corresponds to another fundamental theme - and period - in his artistic production: the *Green Dog* series.⁶²³ Zhou described the decision to use green instead of black as a completely random experiment,

⁶¹⁹ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 613.

⁶²⁰ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 19.

⁶²¹ DEMATT Monica, *The sense of Contradiction—The Story of Zhou Chunya and His Dog*, op. cit.

⁶²² *Ibid.*

⁶²³ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 19.

dictated by a sudden inner need.⁶²⁴ The first paintings in this series depict a sitting or standing German shepherd, with a perspective from above and distorted proportions: the body is very elongated, but more defined than its previous reproductions in black. The only hint of a colour other than green is the sharp white teeth and blood-red mouth. The muzzle is more accurate, while in the rest of the body the brushstrokes gradually amalgamate, up to the small nuanced tail - certainly not similar to that of a German shepherd. In each painting, the dog is depicted in the centre of the white canvas, as if floating, and this again recalls some artworks by Bada Shanren, whom Zhou greatly admired [fig.294].⁶²⁵ The peculiarity of this series is the intense, almost fluorescent green: Zhou's favourite colour, Italian Classico Verde 290.⁶²⁶ According to critic Li Xianting, green expresses all of Zhou's positivity, in a happy and fortunate period of his life such as during the 1990s.⁶²⁷ In confirmation of this interpretation, Zhou Chunya also said that: "The green dog is an emblem, a symbol. Green represents a quiet, romantic, and lyrical expression – it is portentous, symbolic of the lull before the storm".⁶²⁸ Before long, Zhou Chunya began composing larger paintings, still centred on Heigen. Unlike the first artworks of the series, however, the background is always an anonymous and bare landscape, the dog always has the same pose and is flanked by other deformed and grey figures or by people with oriental features portrayed while walking or during sexual acts [fig.298].

In 1997 Zhou went to the United States for the first time. Here, he travelled between New York, San Francisco, Washington, Los Angeles and visited all kinds of museums and art galleries. It was in San Francisco that the following year the LIMN Gallery organized the exhibition *Zai xifang xianghui de dongfang* 在西方相会的东方 (East Meets East in the West), where Zhou presented the *Green Dog* series and the *Red Body* series.⁶²⁹ In 1999 Zhou lost his beloved Heigen. The pain of his death did not make him paint for months, during which he travelled and studied Western art in more depth. When he returned to China, he was appointed Vice-President of the Sichuan's Artists Association and in 2000 Vice-

⁶²⁴ ZHOU Chunya, *Lu gou shige yiwai* 绿狗是个意外 (*Green Dog Is an Accident*), August 7, 2007. Retrieved from https://zhouchunya.artron.net/news_detail_32391/

⁶²⁵ DEMATT Monica, *The sense of Contradiction—The Story of Zhou Chunya and His Dog*, op. cit.

⁶²⁶ Zhou Chunya, *Green Dog*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2019/moutarderie-nationale-the-gillion-crowet-collection-hk0916/lot.1106.html>

⁶²⁷ Zhou Chunya, *Rocks Series*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2006/chinese-contemporary-art-hk0230/lot.557.html>

⁶²⁸ Quotation of Zhou Chunya in *Green Dog*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

⁶²⁹ Zhou Chunya nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunya Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 19.

President of the Chengdu Art Academy.⁶³⁰ In 2001 Zhou resumed portraying green dogs individually or in compositions of several expressionist-style figures, which however moved further and further away from Heigen's physiognomy. Even its poses were no longer so static and ferocious but expressed the dog's affection. Furthermore, the figures were no longer totally green, but in mixed tones of brown, purple, red and white.

10.3 *Taihu Rocks series, 2000s*

Back from the United States, Zhou began to travel often to Suzhou, a city renowned for its wonderful traditional gardens from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).⁶³¹ These artificial gardens, an integral part of some houses in southern Chinese cities, were a miniature reproduction of natural landscapes, in a perfect fusion of water, rocks and vegetation. One of the peculiarities of these places - as well as the fundamental element - is the presence of Taihu rocks, limestone rocks typical of the Tai Lake area in Suzhou. They could be very large and positioned alone or smaller in compositions, often placed in the middle of the house pavilions to be admired from various angles. Their use as an ornament has much older origins, as demonstrated by some traditional paintings [fig.299] and literati painters' artworks,⁶³² but they became an essential element in the design of traditional gardens during the Ming dynasty. In fact, they represented the strength of the erosive effects of water - which gave them their particular shape - and, in the garden scenery, they were considered as representations of the mountains. The *Taihu Rocks* series of the early 2000s was one of the most important creations of Zhou's career.

*The stone has been an unfailing subject in traditional Chinese art. Its staunch solidity and its texture provide the artist a perfect medium to present their spirit and technical method. Rocks from the Taihu Lake, in particular, is even more affluent and complicated. Its smooth contour demonstrates an artificial, implicit, and flinty feel, with which an artist could produce a complete image without any beautification.*⁶³³

The paintings in this series come in two different types: pale rocks on a black background and pale rocks on a lighter background. In both cases the rocks have twisted and very elongated shapes and have the classic holes of the Lake Tai rocks. However, the

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶³¹ Zhou Chunyan nian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunyan Chronology – 1955-2000), op. cit., p. 18.

⁶³² LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 611.

⁶³³ Quotation of Zhou Chunyan in *Rocks Series*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

background is not the only difference between the paintings: the rocks on a black background - created first - are more realistic and are partially visible [fig.300]. Those on a lighter background, on the other hand, are depicted in an expressionist style, they do not seem to have a base or a support. For this reason, they are interpreted as Zhou's suspension between past and present but above all, given the style, between West and East [fig.301].⁶³⁴ In both cases, Zhou tried to recreate the volumes and the grain of the stone thanks to a material painting. In addition, all the rocks have red or orange spots dripping from the holes. The rocks on a black background seem to recall the diaphanous skin torn by bleeding wounds,⁶³⁵ but the artist has never been able to explain why he decided to insert these splashes of colour in his paintings:

*I didn't think too much about it, yet, once when I was lecturing at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, a student pointed out that my Taihu Rock series appeared to be bloody and violent, at that moment I realized the charisma of Taihu Rock, as well as its contradictory nature.*⁶³⁶

Once again Zhou combined a unique element and a "conventional symbol of the Chinese traditional culture"⁶³⁷ such as Taihu rocks with one of the styles of Western art, creating his own totally personal style.

10.4 Peach Blossom series, 2000s

Since the 1980s, one of the themes of Zhou Chunya's creations has been flowers, often presented in pots and expressionist-style compositions. In the early 2000s, Zhou inaugurated the fourth great period of his artistic production: the *Peach Blossom* series. In his paintings, branches of peach blossoms intertwine in a bucolic and luxuriant landscape with naked red figures portrayed in sexual acts [fig.302]. It is precisely the beauty and intense colour of the flowers that become a metaphor for eroticism and sensuality, emphasized by the presence of men and women who are unable to hold back their carnal and primitive desire, in perfect harmony with nature.⁶³⁸ According to Zhou Chunya:

⁶³⁴ DEMATT Monica, *The sense of Contradiction—The Story of Zhou Chunya and His Dog*, op. cit.

⁶³⁵ Zhou Chunya, *Red Stone of Ya'an*, Ravenel Art website. Retrieved from <https://ravenelart.com/en/auCal/lotsIn/d1cfa822-8149-4ffc-8b81-be78f12af7e6/9b6ee03f-831b-4ada-8f41-2e0d37c643e6>

⁶³⁶ Quotation of Zhou Chunya in *Rocks Series*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

⁶³⁷ WU Hung, *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art*, Hong Kong, Timezone 8 Ltd., 2008, pp. 60-61.

⁶³⁸ Zhou Chunya, *Blooming Love*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2010/contemporary-asian-art-hk0328/lot.656.html>

*My paintings are all related to passion and romance. Desire is a component of being human, it's something innate. More importantly, our feelings and desire towards sex are a manifestation of vitality, and they symbolise a life in flourish.*⁶³⁹

This series is the perfect synthesis of the previous series: the flower is a symbol that recurs frequently in traditional Chinese painting, like the Taihu rocks; some shades of green of the leaves are the same shade of green of *Green Dog*; the brown of the branches and trunks recalls that of artworks about Tibet such as *A New Generation of Tibetans* [fig.156] while the reddish, naked figures who are performing sexual acts are taken from his *Red People* series.⁶⁴⁰ Zhou worked on the *Peach Blossom* series for more than ten years, moving from an expressionist stroke to an increasingly realistic and defined one, even eliminating the red figures from the landscape.

*I think you have reached a new height in your art achievement with the peach blossom series. You successfully reflect the tradition of the literati painting through oil painting. Traditional literati artists have always been painting bamboos, the chrysanthemum, plum flowers, and orchids... [while] peach blossoms were not traditionally praised. It is your biggest achievement to love, to accept love, thus creating these peach blossoms so affectionately and create these works in a modern way.*⁶⁴¹

In the last twenty years, Zhou has changed not only his own style, but also his artistic medium again, without however abandoning the themes of his previous artworks. Keeping the theme of *Green Dog*, he began to create three-dimensional reproductions of green dogs - some with peach branches painted on them [fig.303] - first on bronze, up to large figures in stainless steel. In addition, in 2019 he took up the theme of traditional Chinese gardens and Taihu rocks in the *Yu Garden* series, *Picture of Taibai Mountain* [fig.304] - where he depicts various phases and people he loved in his childhood - and in the *Garden* series [fig.305], where he reproduces the famous style and compositions of Wang Meng 王蒙 (1308-1385) [fig.306], one of the greatest masters of landscape painting in the history of Chinese art. In 2012, Zhou returned to Germany to meet some old friends. He was very surprised to see that one of them still had old sketches and drawings that Zhou had left him

⁶³⁹ Quotation of Zhou Chunya in Zhou Chunya, *Somewhere Peach Blossoms Bloom*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2019/contemporary-art-evening-sale-hk0885/lot.1161.html>

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Quotation of Li Xianting in *Ibid.*

before returning to China as a token of gratitude for the help received over the years.⁶⁴² This friend was unaware of the real value that these artworks had acquired over time but above all of Zhou's worldwide fame: they were auctioned at Christie's for 20 million yuan (3 million dollars).⁶⁴³

11. Zhang Xiaogang

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1982 Zhang Xiaogang's graduation project was harshly criticized by professors from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. It was only with the support of Li Xianting - who published *Clouds in the Sky* [fig.165] on *Meishu* - that Zhang redeemed himself and graduated. After graduating, the Academy denied him a professorship that he had so much hoped to obtain. The greatest humiliation, however, was when he discovered that the works proposed for him by the Academy had nothing to do with art, they were instead tasks in a factory.⁶⁴⁴ Zhang refused the assignments and therefore, just like for Wang Hai, he would be forgotten and excluded from the artistic and academic environment for years and consequently also from participation in national art exhibitions. After years of independence, Zhang was forced to return to live in Kunming and then to immerse himself again in family problems, especially to experience his mother's illness closely. This led him to fall into a period of severe depression, which lasted a few years, during which he abandoned the artworks of Life-stream Art and worked as a construction worker and art director for a dance company in Kunming.⁶⁴⁵ They were extremely hard years for him, in which he found solace only in alcohol. Because of this abuse, in 1984 he was hospitalized for two months for an intestinal haemorrhage. While he was in hospital, Zhang began to feel a kind of morbid surrealism that led him to create *The Ghost Between Black and White* series [fig.307]. The series consists of sixteen compositions in pencil on paper, where Zhang portrayed the apparitions he saw during the night visions, all concerning despair, illness, love, life and death. Zhang depicted figures of ghosts as crumpled sheets with anthropomorphic appearances performing habitual actions such as talking, kissing, sleeping, just like the patients hospitalized with the artist.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴² ZHANG Xia, Zhou Chunyu: *Shi yu ziran* 周春芽: 始于自然 (Zhou Chunyu: Starting from Nature), op. cit., p. 36.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 285.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁶ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 538.

*Illness affords us that unique experience whereby we are allowed to wander in the borderlands between life and death. Only then can one really learn the meaning of dreams... It is at this point that our love is cleft in two: on one hand there is a longing for the rich mosaic of life, while on the other there is an irresistible urge to die. It is our humanity that transforms death into a type of religion.*⁶⁴⁷

In 1985, Zhang Xiaogang began to recover. In the same year, the '85 New Wave Movement exploded in China. This upset the art landscape and Zhang Xiaogang was finally able to participate in the New Concrete Realism exhibition in Shanghai where he exhibited his graduation project and other artworks.⁶⁴⁸ It was precisely under the influence of the '85 New Wave that Zhang - along with other friends and artists such as Mao Xuhui, Pan Dehai 潘德海 (1956-) and Ye Yongqing - founded the Southwest Art Group, which became one of the most influential art groups in the nation.⁶⁴⁹ This group of artists aimed to create artworks different than those of Scar Art, Native Soil Painting and Life-stream Art, to be guided by a more psychological and personal realism.⁶⁵⁰ The name of the group did not refer exclusively to the origin of the artists, but more precisely to the aesthetic and cultural traits typical of the folk art of that area, full of Primitivism and a naive style.⁶⁵¹ In June 1985, the group organized the New Figurative Painting Exhibition, one of Southwest China's first self-financed art exhibitions in Shanghai [fig.308]. In 1986 Zhang returned to the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, finally as a professor, taking over from friend and former classmate Ye Yongqing. It was at the Academy that Zhang managed to organize the Fourth New Figurative Exhibition in December of the same year.⁶⁵² During these years of convalescence from alcoholism and depression, in addition to having found some luck, Zhang read treatises on Chinese philosophy and religion, which led him to a deeper introspective analysis. This manifested itself in the creation of small watercolours and oil paintings. Zhang's new style combined elements of African art, native folklore, symbolism and the figurative art of Chinese ethnic minorities. Thus, he began to no longer feel expressionism as his personal style of painting.⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁷ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in DORAN Valerie C. (Editor), *China's New Art, Post-1989*, 後八九中國新藝術, op. cit., p. LXXIX.

⁶⁴⁸ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 289.

⁶⁴⁹ GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese*, op. cit., p. 128.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 174.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 448.

⁶⁵³ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 290.

11.1 *Forever Lasting Love, 1988*

Forever Lasting Love [fig.309] is the first triptych ever produced by Zhang Xiaogang. The three paintings that compose it were created specifically for the Southwestern Modern Art Exhibition in 1988 and express a reflection by Zhang on humanity, life, love and death.

I was reading quite a bit about Eastern philosophy at the time, theories on Mysticism as well Surrealism. The thematic basis of this painting is built upon the dichotomy of life and death, thus I gave it the name 'Forever Lasting Love'.⁶⁵⁴

In the three scenes - which have no narrative continuity - there are various figures, but the main characters are a man and a woman, who correspond to the artist and his wife. In general, the faces of the figures are not relaxed, but express a sense of uncertainty and concern. The scenes are outdoors and the background is made up of an arid and empty landscape.⁶⁵⁵ There are bare trees, cages, animals, carpets with repeating geometric patterns, bovine skulls and in the central artwork there are pits with bodies ready for burial. The colours are those of the soil, opaque and emphasised by light chiaroscuro. The style is highly symbolist and primitivist, also mixing elements of Western and Eastern art and philosophy.⁶⁵⁶ In 1989, one of the three paintings in the triptych was also exhibited at the famous China/Avant-Garde exhibition held at the National Art Gallery in Beijing. In 2011, after reassembling the triptych, *Forever Lasting Love* was auctioned by Sotheby's for a record amount of more than 10 million dollars.

11.2 *Three Black Songs – Terror, Contemplation, Melancholy, 1989-1990*

1989 was a turning point for Zhang Xiaogang's production and career. After the Tian'anmen incident following the protests between April and June of that year, Zhang sank again into anxiety and anguish: "It felt as if we had come full circle back to the mood of the late 1970's".⁶⁵⁷ During the first part of the year, Zhang was working on a triptych inspired by the Chinese painter Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之 (ca. 344-406) and the French artist Odilon Redon (1840-1916). After June, however, his style changed dramatically. The final version of the *Three Black Songs* [fig.310] triptych is inspired by German neo-expressionism and the

⁶⁵⁴ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in Zhang Xiaogang, *Forever Lasting Love* (triptych), Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2011/the-ullens-collection-the-nascence-of-avant-garde-china-hk0373/lot.808.html>

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 291.

surrealism of the Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies (1923-2012).⁶⁵⁸ In all three paintings there are dissected heads and limbs, as if to indicate impotence in the face of government and political violence, depicted indoors, as if to express oppression and censorship.⁶⁵⁹ Zhang had therefore abandoned the dreamy and romantic themes:

*After the second half of 1989 I began a huge, soul-searching introspection. It seemed as though there were lots of things I couldn't escape. At that time, I had a strong feeling we were repeating history. My artwork took on a sense of the absurd, set within a fictional space, emphasizing the symbolism of intention.*⁶⁶⁰

The first two paintings are titled *Terror* and *Contemplation* and Zhang created them to express all the pain of the tragic end of the 1989 protests. After finishing them, however, he felt the need to add *Melancholy*. This painting contains a collage of a real letter envelope:

*During that period, we were completely cut off from the world. In the space of one night we were returned to a state of isolation; we could only maintain communication through writing letters.*⁶⁶¹

In 1991 Zhang participated in the I Don't Want To Play Cards With Cezanne: Exhibition of Chinese Avant-Garde Paintings From The 1980s⁶⁶² organized by the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California, in which he exhibited *Melancholy*. In 1992 he decided to visit his wife who was studying in Germany for a few months. In Europe, Zhang finally had the opportunity to see the largest museums of Western art and closely analyse the artworks by the artists he had always admired. Also, in the early 1990s he began to be interested in old photographs. It was precisely the photographic-style paintings by the German Gerhard Richter (1932-) [fig.311] that provoked in him great reflections and ideas for subsequent artworks.⁶⁶³ From 2005 on, Zhang created the *In-Out* series [figs.312] taking inspiration from Richter:

⁶⁵⁸ Zhang Xiaogang: 'Painting Is a Slow Process, It Takes Time to Find Inspiration', Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/features/Zhang-Xiaogang-7402-1.aspx>

⁶⁵⁹ DORAN Valerie C. (Editor), *China's New Art, Post-1989*, 後八九中國新藝術, op. cit., p. VIII.

⁶⁶⁰ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in *Zhang Xiaogang: 'Painting Is a Slow Process, It Takes Time to Find Inspiration'*, op. cit.

⁶⁶¹ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁶² Buxiang he Saishang wan pai: Bashi niandai Zhongguo xinchao yu qianwei yishu xuan zhan 不想和塞尚玩牌：八十年代中国新潮与前卫艺术选展.

⁶⁶³ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 291.

*I had no idea how to express the feeling they [photos] imparted to me within a painting until I saw the work of Gerhard Richter in Germany. Before going to Germany my favourite artist was Anselm Kiefer. Seeing original works, it was Richter's paintings that were more thought-provoking.*⁶⁶⁴

11.3 Bloodline Series, 1993 -

1993 was a very important year for Zhang Xiaogang: not only did he participate in the China New Art Post-1989 Exhibition, but he had the inspiration for the series that made him one of the most famous Chinese artists in the world, *Bloodline Series* [fig.313].⁶⁶⁵ That year, Zhang's interest in photographs increased more and more when, after returning from Germany, he found some old family photos that he had never seen before. What troubled him most was seeing his mother - at the time increasingly ill and unrecognizable - as a young woman with delicate features. The feeling that prevailed over Zhang was nostalgia, although the faces in the photos were now unknown to him. What connected each black and white photo were the serious expressions and stiff poses of the people, typical of portraits of the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁶⁶ During the 1960s and 1970s, family photos followed rigid standards that included the positioning of the father on the right, the mother on the left and the son in the centre and also the poses and expressions were canonized "offering an idealistic model of society":⁶⁶⁷

*Moreover, family portraits should be categorized as symbols of privacy, but they have instead been standardized and turned into ideology.*⁶⁶⁸

Given Richter's influence on him and the strong emotions aroused by the newly found photos, Zhang abandoned the expressionism and primitivism of his previous artworks, styles that in his opinion could not fully express his new interest in the soul and psychology of the Chinese people.⁶⁶⁹ He then decided to convert photography into painting in a series of creations that for years were the emblem of contemporary Chinese art abroad. Begun in 1993, *Bloodline Series* today includes hundreds of oil paintings. The scenes are all very similar to each other: a series of figures - or in some cases individuals - with Chinese physiognomy are

⁶⁶⁴ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., p. 553.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 541-542.

⁶⁶⁷ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 21.

⁶⁶⁸ Quotation of Zhang Xiaogang in WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 191.

⁶⁶⁹ LÜ Peng, *Fragmented Reality: Contemporary Art in 21st-Century China*, Edizioni Charta, 2012, p. 323.

depicted as if they were posing for a portrait photo. Their faces are all the same, although their ages are very different, and they all have an androgynous appearance. Their clothing is also unisex, most of the time they are portrayed in uniform, in perfect revolutionary style. The scenes are all in grayscale, except for some completely coloured faces, some spots on the skin and almost imperceptible broken red lines that connect all the figures to each other. It is precisely these lines that suggest to the viewer that the figures, all so identical and at the same time inexpressive, have some connection between them. For some, these are reminiscent of the lines in the artworks by another great artist that Zhang esteemed, Frida Kahlo (1907-1954).⁶⁷⁰ But while in the case of Kahlo these links symbolized love and pain, it is not known what kind of ties are between Zhang's figures: perhaps ethnic, cultural, ideological or familiar. It is only thanks to the title of the series that Zhang suggests that the figures are connected by blood ties. The coloured spots on the faces are interpreted as birth spots or as the sign of a physical or psychological illness: Zhang Xiaogang himself feared that his mother's schizophrenia - which turned out to be genetic - and his past of depression and alcohol abuse could be transmitted to his new-born daughter.⁶⁷¹ According to critics, however, these spots could be an indelible wound, a sign of social stigma or of the individual's inner self-affirmation.⁶⁷² They are the only details that make some figures unique: this interpretation derives from the cancellation of personality, sexuality and individuality put in place by the Chinese government during the years of the Cultural Revolution, pushing to create a united nation, as if it were one big family.⁶⁷³

*Compared to the West, Chinese people's individuality is hidden; in China we emphasize 'relationships' (guanxi).*⁶⁷⁴

In this regard, Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen made an interesting analysis: Zhang recreates a strange lighting on the portrayed faces, as if to divide them in half. This division is associated with the distinction between the private sphere - non-existent at the time - and the public one, as if the painted figures were wearing masks to hide and protect themselves.⁶⁷⁵ Among the first artworks created for *Bloodline*, there are some paintings where Zhang

⁶⁷⁰ Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline Series - The Big Family No. 2*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-6296705/?intObjectID=6296705>

⁶⁷¹ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 297.

⁶⁷² Zhang Xiaogang's profile in Saatchi Gallery London. Retrieved from https://saatchigallery.com/artist/zhang_xiaogang

⁶⁷³ WANG Peggy, *The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art*, University of Minnesota Press, 2021, p. 66.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ ANDREWS Julia F., SHEN Kuiyi, *The Art of Modern China*, Berkeley, op. cit., p. 264.

depicted his closest relatives: one of his younger brothers is in fact slightly cross-eyed from birth and this detail is also present and recognizable in some of the children and adults portrayed by Zhang [fig.313].⁶⁷⁶ In 1994 Zhang expanded this series by adding two more representational themes: *Comrades* and *Big Family*.⁶⁷⁷ In the *Comrades* series [fig.314], the portrayed young men and women look healthy and strong, very reminiscent of the standards of representation typical of Maoist propaganda. The choice to depict the young comrades in arms - or the *educated youth* - is not accidental: during the Cultural Revolution, the comrade identified all the Chinese people and the unity of China because it represented the image that everyone was obliged to keep.⁶⁷⁸ *Bloodline's* first artworks were presented for the first time at the São Paulo Biennale in 1994 and three paintings were also exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1995, forever marking Zhang's rise in the contemporary art scene worldwide.⁶⁷⁹ One of the artworks selected for the 46th Venice Biennale was *The Big Family No.2*.

11.4 *Bloodline Series - The Big Family No. 2, 1995*

This painting [fig.315], created in 1995, shows a Chinese family made up of three people: mother, father and a few months old baby. As in the other *Bloodline* artworks, the background is indefinite, wrapped in a grey mist that makes the figures stand out. The painting technique is based on a series of thin layers of colour, created by meticulous and light brushstrokes, to make the surface of the painting smooth and give the opaque finish typical of photographs.⁶⁸⁰ For the spots on the faces, however, Zhang used denser pigments, to reproduce the streaks of old photos.⁶⁸¹

*The Big Family series, from 1993 to the present, represents not just Zhang Xiaogang's own period of artistic maturity, but a certain maturity in Chinese contemporary art as well. [...] Even if he employed the language of Western contemporary art, he still, through expressing the feelings of contemporary Chinese people, successfully transformed it into a personal language.*⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁶ SMITH Karen, *Nine Lives: The Birth of Avant-garde Art in New China*, op. cit., p. 293.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 296.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 294.

⁶⁷⁹ WANG Peggy, *The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art*, op. cit., pp. 68.

⁶⁸⁰ WU Hung (Cur.), WANG Peggy (Coll.), *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, op. cit., p. 191.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² Quotation of Li Xianting in Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline Series - The Big Family No. 2*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

The Big Family No. 2 is a particularly significant painting because Zhang mixes elements of his own personal memory with those of the collective Chinese history, also documenting the socio-political situation of the time. In particular, he represents his experience as a re-educated young man and that of his parents during the Cultural Revolution - the man and woman in the painting are in fact wearing uniforms. The only child depicted, yellow like the emperor's colour, is a reference to the one-child policy, established in the late 1970s, which inevitably changed the composition of the family photos.⁶⁸³ In addition, the open trousers worn by the child are the emblem of the customs and traditions typical of Chinese culture.⁶⁸⁴ It is thanks to these simple symbolic elements that Zhang's artworks are enveloped in an almost spiritual aura, evoking memories and emotions common to all Chinese society.

In the early 2000s Zhang partially modified his portraits: he gradually abandoned references to the Maoist era, lightened the grey tones of the artworks, accentuating the red spots on the faces, more and more like bruises. Zhang's success in China and abroad grew, but the *Bloodline Series* did not only get praise and awards. These reproductions of faces that are all the same and inexpressive - as if they were precisely created in series - were interpreted by critics as an adaptation to the art market by the artist. For decades, Zhang continued this series, but if initially his paintings were exhibited in galleries around the world and set various records at auction sales, what he achieved was a collapse in demand and interest from the public and collectors. In recent years, Zhang has also changed the setting of his paintings, also portraying full-length men, women and children [fig.316]. Furthermore, since 2008 he has dedicated himself to sculpture, producing artworks in painted bronze, but while changing the artistic medium he has not changed the theme of his creations, reproducing three-dimensionally the faces that made him famous [fig.317]: "I don't see these pieces as sculptures, but rather as three-dimensional paintings".⁶⁸⁵ In certain ways, *Bloodline Series* can be considered a continuation of the first Scar Art, as the artworks once again demonstrate, albeit subtly, the psychological damage of the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s Zhang Xiaogang diversified from his fellow academics by creating artworks of Life-stream Art, but he was one of the two only artist among those here treated – with Zhu Yiyong

⁶⁸³ JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁶⁸⁴ Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline Series - The Big Family No. 2*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

⁶⁸⁵ HEATHER Russell, *Artist Q & A with Zhang Xiaogang. Heather Russell sits down with Chinese contemporary artist Zhang Xiaogang*, April 5, 2013. Retrieved from <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artist-q-amp-a-with-zhang-xiaogang-50359>

- to feel the need to retrace the dramatic events of the past after several decades, making his scars resurface.

12. Shang Yang

After creating Life-stream Art masterpieces inspired by the Loess Plateau, at the end of the 1980s - partly due to the aftermath of the '85 New Wave influences - Shang Yang drastically changed his pictorial style: he began to use compositive material and thus started a period full of intense artistic experimentation. In fact, if before his artworks were close to expressionism, after 1988 they became more and more abstract, as evidenced by the *State* series [fig.318], which was exhibited at the National Art Museum of China in April 1989.⁶⁸⁶

*During the transitional era of Chinese art from “modern” to “contemporary”, I started to anchor my work to environmental issues, especially the relationship between human beings and the environment. This began, to be exact, at the beginning of the 1990s. The political disturbance in 1989 marked an end of the political enthusiasm of the 1980s.*⁶⁸⁷

The 1989 Tian'anmen Incident left many artists dismayed, including Shang Yang. At the same time, however, it was a fundamental event for his artistic maturity:

*The year 1990 witnessed a silent period in the Chinese art circle. The artists ceased to work in groups and retreated to their own studios; therefore, art experiment became more individual.*⁶⁸⁸

Throughout his subsequent production, the focus of Shang's creation shifted from the yellow soil of the Loess Plateau, to the government-caused environmental problems and destruction of the environment through exploitation, massive urbanization, and carelessness. What Shang described as "an inexplicable passion running, expanding restlessly and upsetting people's daily life"⁶⁸⁹ was the spark that in 1990 led him to design the *Big Scenery*, one of Shang Yang's most important series.

⁶⁸⁶ CHEN Jianlan, Beimi, fanfeng yu shenti de lishi —— Lun Shang Yang 悖谬、反讽与身体的历史 —— 论尚扬 (Paradox, Irony, and the History of the Body – Discussing Shang Yang), *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studies*), August 10, 2017, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁸⁷ Quotation of Shang Yang in YANG Jing, *The Collapsing World Landscape: A Conversation with Artist Shang Yang*, March 5, 2016.

⁶⁸⁸ Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

12.1 *Big Scenery* series, 1991-

Big Scenery is the largest series in Shang's production and consists of oil paintings depicting a landscape that appears to be hilly, whose sloping land is divided into various plots [fig.319]. The plots look like scraps of fabric sewn together to form a larger fabric. Each plot is different for colours, textures, and shape, but above all for the style with which it is decorated. In some artworks, stylised human figures are portrayed, in geometric or abstract forms, in others there are airplanes flying in the sky and reflecting their magnified shadow on the ground - as if to underline the severity of the pollution produced by them [fig.320]. The colours used by Shang Yang are very different from the yellow of the Loess, but they are still based mainly on the neutral tones of the soil. In an interview, Shang explained the genesis and meaning of these artworks:

*When I was waiting for my father at the outpatient department of the best hospital in Wuhan, I saw a chaotic scene of people coming and going. I suddenly obtained a visual impression from the rushing crowds of a landscape that had been whole being torn into pieces and then stitched together — the social, psychological, and cultural landscapes all torn into pieces and stitched together. With this impression that came to my mind, I worked hard in my studio every afternoon and soon the first *Big Scenery* came out.⁶⁹⁰*

Without doubt these creations marked a point of caesura in Shang's production, which he himself defined "my personal transformation towards the contemporary".⁶⁹¹ This series was also produced throughout the 1990s. The background of the artworks was always composed of a daytime sky with soft and dull colours, rarely nocturnal, and the decorative pattern turned more and more on abstractionism and symbolism:

Big Scenery provided me with an appropriate and perceivable concept and a symbolic flat image style for expressing my critical thinking about society, which was drawing a line from the direct expression of my previous paintings.⁶⁹²

In 1992 Shang Yang participated in the Guangzhou Biennale with the *Big Scenery* series, obtaining numerous acclaims and compliments by the critics.⁶⁹³ In the following year he took part in the China's New Art Post-1989 Exhibition held in Hong Kong.⁶⁹⁴ After the Biennale he lived in Guangzhou for four very difficult years, in which he had serious health

⁶⁹⁰ Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹² Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁹³ LÜ Peng, *Fragmented Reality: Contemporary Art in 21st-Century China*, op. cit., p. 411.

⁶⁹⁴ LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, op. cit., pp. 553-554.

problems.⁶⁹⁵ It was thanks to his illness that Shang began a profound reflection, associating his problems with the damage of the economy and social development on the environment.⁶⁹⁶ During this period, he created other series of artworks, which he continued to produce throughout the 1990s, including *Volcano*, *Deep Breath* and *Diagnoses* [fig.321].

12.2 Dong Qichang Project – 2000s

Simultaneously with the *Big Scenery* series, in the second half of the 2000s Shang Yang began the *Dong Qichang Project*. Defined by himself as the natural continuation of the first series, *Dong Qichang Project* consists of thirty-eight paintings that include “the juxtaposition of traditional painting style with new digital media”.⁶⁹⁷ The artworks are all very different from each other. In the case of *Dong Qichang Project #12* [fig.322], the juxtaposition was expressed by Shang by dividing the figure of a mountain vertically into two parts: the left half “was the vivid image taken from the original appearance of natural landscapes through photographing and inkjet painting”,⁶⁹⁸ while the right half reproduced the “erosion, cracking and even destruction”⁶⁹⁹ caused by the action of man. The artworks in this series are all monumental, to raise the viewer's awareness even more. Shang Yang recreated landscapes reminiscent of traditional *shanshuihua* 山水画 (water and mountain paintings), in particular the artworks by the master calligrapher and painter Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636) - hence the name of the project - to demonstrate the destructive effects of society and development on nature, reproducing the past and the present of it.⁷⁰⁰

*The real landscape doesn't exist anymore; it has been destroyed by power and capital. What I paint is not the natural landscape, but the social, cultural, and psychological landscapes which have changed a lot.*⁷⁰¹

After 2010, Shang Yang went even further trying to combine traditional elements of Chinese culture such as silk and bamboo with natural elements such as clay and modern industrial materials like steel, resin, felt, tar. *Washing Bamboo* [fig.323] is a composition of

⁶⁹⁵ CHEN Jianlan, *Beimiu, fanfeng yu shenti de lishi —— Lun Shang Yang 悖谬、反讽与身体的历史 —— 论尚扬* (Paradox, Irony, and the History of the Body – Discussing Shang Yang), op. cit., p. 17.

⁶⁹⁶ *Shang Yang, 13 Sep— 3 Nov 2018 at the Chambers Fine Art in New York*, United States, Wall Street International, July 14, 2018. Retrieved from <https://wsimag.com/art/40505-shang-yang>

⁶⁹⁷ Quotation of Shang Yang in YANG Jing, *The Collapsing World Landscape: A Conversation with Artist Shang Yang*, op. cit.

⁶⁹⁸ Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ LÜ Peng, *Fragmented Reality: Contemporary Art in 21st-Century China*, op. cit., p. 411.

⁷⁰¹ YANG Jing, *The Collapsing World Landscape: A Conversation with Artist Shang Yang*, op. cit.

burnt bamboo on a black canvas: it is completely covered with tar. The elegance of bamboo is scarred by tar, in other artworks by resin, as the uncontrolled advance of Chinese industry has scarred the environment forever. As in all Shang Yang's artworks, the juxtaposition and contrast of elements of completely different nature, origin and meaning make his creations deep and enigmatic. In 2018, the artist started a new project, *Decayed Landscapes* [fig.324], combining all the elements of his previous series in huge paintings that again take up the *shangshui* artworks. When Shang Yang was asked why he abandoned the creation of Life-stream Art and has always continued to focus on the theme of environmental destruction for thirty years, he replied:

*Is there anything more important than this? The relation between humanity and the environment is not only a personal issue – it involves with everybody on this planet. This is much more important than a regional conflict, a political action or social thinking. Although it is a universal issue, it is the most significant one and it worth the concern of my whole life.*⁷⁰²

13. Wang Yidong

Wang Yidong continued to create realist-style Life-stream artworks throughout the 1980s, despite the '85 New Wave and even after emigrating to the United States in 1987. At the invitation of Robert A. Hefner III, Wang left with Ai Xuan for New York, and like him was admitted as a visiting student at Oklahoma City University.⁷⁰³ It was at the Hefner Galleries in New York that Wang was able to exhibit his paintings in a solo exhibition. One of these was *Tobacco Curing House* [fig.325].⁷⁰⁴ The artwork features a large rural house of pale stones in the Yimeng Mountains. In front of the entrance door there are yellow tobacco leaves left to dry and not far away there is a girl dressed in red - girl and clothes that returned in Wang's later artworks - together with two little lambs. Although the artist exaggerates the proportions of the house and the hill, which are flat and inclined, and paints the dark grey sky of thunderstorms, *Tobacco Curing House* conveys a sense of tranquillity, silence and nostalgia. This artwork is very distant from the paintings that Wang began producing after

⁷⁰² Quotation of Shang Yang in *Ibid.*

⁷⁰³ LIU Xiaodan, ZHANG Dali, Guxiang qing·hongse meng·dongfang yun —youhua dajia wang yi dong de zuopin ji shichang 故乡情·红色梦·东方韵 —油画大家王沂东的作品及市场 (Hometown Affection, Red Dream, Oriental Charm — Works and Markets of the Great Oil Painting Master Wang Yidong), *Shoucang jie* 收藏界 (*Collection World*), July 1, 2011, p. 92.

⁷⁰⁴ Wang Yidong, *Tobacco Curing House*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-wang-yidong-5751475/?from=salesummary&intObjectID=5751475&lid=1>

returning from the United States, where the influences of Western painting forever changed his artistic perspective. In fact, the artist almost completely abandoned the reproductions of buildings and rural landscapes, to focus mainly on very realistic portraits of women and girls from his area of origin. His production from the 1990s onwards can be divided into *Black or White Series* and *Red Series* based on the main colour of his artworks, series that he carried on at the same time.

13.1 *A Yimen Girl, 1994*

A Yimen Girl [fig.326] is a representative artwork of one of Wang's typical subjects up to the mid-1990s and is part of the *Black or White Series*. A little girl with two braids and a deep gaze is portrayed in the foreground, leaning against a light brick wall that stands out towards the horizon, divides the scene and acts as a vanishing point for the viewer. The young girl is wearing a flowery shirt and holding a small wildflower in her hands. To her left there is a field of yellowish grass where sheep graze. Although the sky is grey, the scene is clear thanks to various white elements. Each element is in harmony, giving a sense of tranquillity and simplicity that make the scene poetic. Wang portrayed the little girl with her head slightly lowered and her innocent gaze: it is impossible not to contemplate her big dark eyes and feel immersed in the bucolic landscape that surrounds her.⁷⁰⁵ The realism adopted by the artist is more accurate and powerful than his previous paintings, the scene has more depth, although the figures are still slightly flat.

13.2 *A Married Woman in the Mountains, 1995-1996*

A Married Woman in the Mountains [fig.327] is part of the Wang's *Red Series*. This large oil painting (190 x 180 cm) shows a scene from the wedding of a couple, portrayed full-length and in natural size, recurring figures in Wang Yidong's artworks. The man is sturdy, dressed in a traditional black suit and has a red drape tied to the bust that crosses on the chest. He is a bit clumsy while with his right hand he is holding an oil lantern and with the left one he is gently taking his wife's hand. The beautiful young woman is completely dressed in red, with one hand she is joining her husband, with the other she is holding a red cloth that is falling to the ground. Wang's painting plays on a series of contrasts: the red and black of the bride and groom's clothes, warm and cold tones, the man's gaze turned towards

⁷⁰⁵ Baoli Xianggang, *Aomen lianhe paimai* 保利香港、澳門聯合拍賣 (*Poly Auction Hong Kong and Macau Joint Auctions*), op. cit., p. 43.

his wife as if to seek her eyes while she is looking straight at the viewer without showing expressions. Even the positions of each of them - diametrically opposite but complementary - form a chiasmus also taken up by the cloth tied around the groom. The white wall in the background is also contrasted with fabrics and sheets with tribal and traditional Chinese decorative elements on a red background - the latter studied by Wang at the Academy and reproduced with masterful care and precision.⁷⁰⁶

*Perhaps there is a twinge of sadness buried within the scene's joyousness, a shred of nostalgia within the tranquillity, some degree of unease communicated by the fiery red colour, or perhaps some loneliness is being stifled by the brilliant sunlight... I long to use the simplest colours and the plainest language to precisely express these feelings and emotions.*⁷⁰⁷

The portrayed scene is apparently simple, but Wang Yidong's extreme realism makes it profound and full of symbolism - the peonies, the goldfish, the lamp. The colours are vivid, and the lighting is strong and uniform. Wang does not express time and space, reproducing a scene that embodies the past, traditions, and future of the new couple.⁷⁰⁸ It is interesting to note how the traditional Chinese motif of the fabric in the background seems discontinuous and divides the painting in half: the artwork thus appears to be the union of two individual portraits.⁷⁰⁹ What gives stability to the artwork is the position of the two young people, who find balance in their instability in each other. For the wedding theme, the presence of numerous symbolic details, the arrangement of the spouses and their hands joined at the centre of the scene *A Married Woman in the Mountains* recalls *The Arnolfini Portrait* by the Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (1390-1441),⁷¹⁰ whose artworks were also exhibited in the American museums seen by Wang.⁷¹¹ This once again demonstrates the great influence of Western art in Wang Yidong's painting, which the artist however blends perfectly with elements of Chinese culture. Throughout his artistic production, Wang Yidong has combined

⁷⁰⁶ Wang Yidong, *A Married Woman in the Mountains*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2014/beijing-modern-contemporary-chinese-art-cn0014/lot.15.html>

⁷⁰⁷ Quotation of Wang Yidong in *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Wang Yidong, *A Married Woman in the Mountains*, Christie's website. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-wang-yidong-5385656/?from=searchresults&intObjectID=5385656>

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ Wang Yidong, *A Married Woman in the Mountains*, Sotheby's website, op. cit.

⁷¹¹ YU Jingbo, Yimeng wenhua yu Wang Yidong de youhua yishu 沂蒙文化与王沂东的油画艺术 (A Study of Wang Yidong's Oil Paintings), *Linyi daxue xuebao* 临沂大学学报 (*Journal of Linyi University*), February 15, 2008, p. 34.

the superfine technique of Western realism with a theme dear to him such as the faces and scenery of Yimen Mountain:

*I have created rural artworks from 1977 until now. I like the clothes and the simplicity of rural people. Moreover, the sense of form in the countryside is relatively strong, and people and the environment are integrated. On the contrary, the buildings in the city made me feel more icy emotions.*⁷¹²

Over the years, he has developed an increasingly hyper-realistic style, reproducing young and beautiful girls in the snow [fig.328], indoors or in wedding scenes, as in *Teasing the Newly Weds No.2 - Lucky Cigarettes* [fig.329], sold at auction in 2008 for nearly 13 million Hong Kong dollars (1.670 million dollars).⁷¹³ The bright red typical of China remained omnipresent in Wang's paintings, becoming his "iconic" colour, and making him one of the most acclaimed Chinese realist painters in the world.⁷¹⁴

*I don't like red very much, but [I use it] because of the particularity of red in the rural areas of northern China. In rural areas, the only opportunity for women to wear scarlet is when they get married. Red is very dazzling, and it represents the colour of China.*⁷¹⁵

Over the last decade Wang has in a certain sense changed his Life-stream Art, creating portraits of other ethnic minorities by replacing the girls of Yimen Mountain with young Uyghur women in their beautiful traditional dresses, once again red [fig.330]. This new theme was inspired by memories of a 1981 trip to Xinjiang organized by the Central Academy of Fine Arts.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² “我从 1977 年开始创作乡村题材的作品一直到现在。我喜欢农村老百姓的装束、单纯和朴素，而且农村的形式感比较强，人和环境融为一体；相反，城市的大楼让我体会到更多的是冰冷的情感。” Quotation of Wang Yidong in FENG Qi, Wang Yidong: wo ai de shenqie 王沂东：我爱得深切 (Wang Yidong: I Love Deeply), *Zhongguo xibu* 中国西部 (*Western China*), October 5, 2013, p. 120.

⁷¹³ Wang Yidong, *Teasing the Newly Weds No.2 - Lucky Cigarettes*, Sotheby's website. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2008/modern-and-contemporary-asian-art-evening-sale-hk0292/lot.31.html>

⁷¹⁴ YU Jingbo, *Yimeng wenhua yu Wang Yidong de youhua yishu* 沂蒙文化与王沂东的油画艺术 (A Study of Wang Yidong's Oil Paintings), op. cit., p. 34.

⁷¹⁵ “我并非对红色十分喜欢，而是因为大红色在中国北方农村的特殊性。在农村，女性唯一可以穿戴大红的机会就是结婚，红色很刺眼，也是代表中国的颜色。”

Quotation of Wang Yidong in JIANG Jiawen, *Xiangtu xieshi zhuyi youhua de shouwang zhe* ——Wang Yidong 乡土写实主义油画的守望者 ——王沂东 (The Watcher of Rural Realism Oil Painting-Wang Yidong), *Xiandai zhuangshi* 现代装饰 (*Modern Decoration*), p. 182.

⁷¹⁶ WANG Yidong, Huiyi 1981 nian Xinjiang zhi xing de xiasheng ke 回忆 1981 年新疆之行的写生课 (Reminiscences of the Lesson on Sketching During the Trip to Xinjiang in 1981), *Chinese Art*, November 15, 2015.

Conclusions

This work has researched how the phenomenon of Scar Art and the artistic trends connected to it was generated and how they evolved. The research focuses on the three main tendencies of academic realism born between late 1970s and early 1980s: Scar Art, Native Soil Painting or Chinese Rural Realism and Contemplative Painting. A fourth trend, Life-stream Art, was also treated as it is related to Chinese Rural Realism. Appearing mainly in the oil paintings by the young students of the '77 class of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in Chongqing, later identified by critics as the Sichuan School of Painting, Scar Art shook the Chinese art scene, becoming a watershed between the art subjugated by Maoist politics and the avant-garde art of the mid-1980s. Scar Art is also a way of understanding the psychological processes that some Chinese artists went through after 1976, seeking more and more to distance themselves from political ideology.

In the first place, this dissertation investigated what caused the appearance of artworks later defined Scar Art. Their creation took place in one of the most important moments in the history of contemporary China. The end of the Cultural Revolution had in fact multiple consequences: artistically speaking, previously purged or incarcerated artists were rehabilitated, official art magazines resumed their publication, foreign artworks not only began to circulate in catalogues, books and magazines, but they were also showed in numerous exhibitions. A very important factor for the birth of Scar Art was the reopening of art academies in 1977: young Chinese people came from very difficult years, in which almost all of them had to take part in the Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement. This campaign was organized by Mao Zedong to re-educate young people through manual labour in rural and remote areas of the nation. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, many of them tried to resume their studies and thus also the reins of their lives by attempting the admission tests. Among these, there were also students who would have become among the most famous contemporary artists in China and abroad. Another very important factor for the genesis of Scar Art was a phase of greater political, social and artistic freedom inaugurated in 1978 thanks to Deng Xiaoping's reforms. One of the requests that Deng made to the people is contained in the motto he himself promoted "Seek the truth from facts": after more than three decades of impositions and indoctrination by the government, people were encouraged - but above all authorized - to analyse the objective reality of things, events and therefore also of the past. This prompted artists and writers to change the style

and thus to create works that showed the reality and the real extent of the tragedy that had swept through China from 1966 to 1976. They felt the need, above all moral, to produce works that would serve as a personal, and at the same time collective, testimony of the sufferings experienced in the previous decade: topics up to then absolutely considered as a taboo. These new creations, which for the first time expressed the physical and mental scars left on the people, were soon named by scholars and critics as Scar Art and Scar Literature.

Subsequently, this research discussed how some critics, such as Lü Peng, identify a first manifestation of Scar Art also in the artworks depicting the April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident of 1976, created by artists who witnessed the clashes of that day or who simply wanted to remember what happened. Although some artworks focusing on this event were created in 1976 - the depicted scenes were blurred such as in *Tragedy of the People* by Zhao Wenliang - it was only after the new 1978 opening period that some artists appealed to direct realism to show what happened without ambiguity, as demonstrated by *The Road of Truth* by Cai Jingkai and *Blood and Heart* by Shen Yaoyi. The research highlighted how, in the same year, other paintings, sculptures, woodcuts appeared on the Chinese art scene, this time created in honour and in memory of Zhang Zhixin. This woman was an official in the Liaoning Party Propaganda Department accused of being a dissident and killed in 1975 for having criticized Mao Zedong's idolization and the Gang of Four's policies. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Zhang was defined as a "revolutionary martyr" and following Deng's opening policies, the details of her tragic death came to the surface, also thanks to unofficial journals, upsetting public opinion. Artists who depicted her made her become the symbol of the struggle for truth and freedom. *Red and Black* by Li Shuang shows Zhang tied up, barbarously tortured and slaughtered. Other artworks portray her in prison, perhaps already aware of the fate that was awaiting her, but with a determined gaze turned towards the viewer, ready not to give up. Other oil paintings show Zhang Zhixin's lifeless body, lifted by the spirits who are leading her to heaven as *The Song of the Loyal Ghost* by Luo Zhongli or placed on a hill holding a red flower, the colour of truth, as *Daughter of the Earth. In Honour of the Martyr Zhang Zhixin* by Wen Lipeng. Artists hence began to portray stories and events considered the scars of the nation.

Fundamental for a complete analysis of the Scar Art phenomenon was the study of how all the aforementioned factors simultaneously influenced not only the artistic milieu but also the literary one. Writers and young university students also felt morally obliged and partly authorized to produce written works that in some way testified to the reality of the

past. The first example is *The Teacher* by Liu Xinwu, which through the thoughts of Teacher Zhang exposes the heavy indoctrination done by the Gang of Four towards the Chinese youth of the time. *The Teacher* was one of the earliest examples of literature aimed at condemning and publicly talking about the excesses and psychological effects of the Cultural Revolution. However, the work thanks to which the term Scar Literature was coined in December 1978 was *Scar*, by Lu Xinhua. Telling the experiences of the young Wang Xiaohua, this short story is focused on how, during the Cultural Revolution, personal relationships were outclassed by the values of the regime, even going so far as to disintegrate entire families. *Scar* became a real literary case, encouraging other writers to compose works about the tragedies of the "disastrous decade". One of them was *Maple*, a short story written by Zheng Yi, which was the first literary work to bring to light the violent clashes among Red Guard factions that occurred between 1966 and 1968. The analysis of these literary works was crucial for the research because what sanctioned the transition from Scar Literature to Scar Art was the adaptation with illustrations (*lianhuanhua*) of works already known to the public, like *Scar* and *Maple*. It was then extensively examined how after the publication of *Maple's* picture-story book some criticisms were raised regarding two illustrations depicting Lin Biao and Jiang Qing, considered enemies of the people and guilty of the barbarity committed during the Cultural Revolution. Their portraits on *Maple* were seen by the public and some critics as too humanized and realistic. This criticism, albeit with different connotations and for different reasons, was also moved on some oil paintings - such as *Father* by Luo Zhongli - created by the so-called Sichuan School of Painting artists.

A substantial part of this research was dedicated to investigating the new creative impetus that was born in 1978 among the students of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. A primary cause of it was identified in their need to introspectively re-analyse and visually expose what they had experienced during the Cultural Revolution. Their production was divided into Scar Art, Native Soil Painting and Contemplative Painting, which correspond to the three major tendencies of Chinese academic realism of the late 1970s. One of the purposes of this research was also to analyse how the production of each artist has initiated, influenced and modified the development of these trends. Scar Art early paintings, such as *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968* by Cheng Conglin, also taking inspiration from literary works such as *Maple*, testify to the tragedy that took place across the nation between 1966 and 1968 during the clashes among Red Guards factions. Other creations recall how the obsession of many young people with the Party dogmas led them to denounce their families,

as in *Father and Son* by Zhu Yiyong. An oil painting was analysed for its complete estrangement from these dramatic themes, depicting the real conditions of the Chinese peasants of the time, exhausted, undernourished, poor and exploited: by creating *Father*, Luo Zhongli became the progenitor of the Chinese Rural Realism. The peculiarity of its artworks is that they did not respect any aesthetic canon, showing the lowest class of society and subjects of various ethnic groups often deformed, toothless, dirty. Furthermore, these paintings style was no longer close to socialist realism, but to social realism. At the end of the 1970s, thanks to paintings such as *Father*, but also *Butuo Yi series* by Gao Xiaohua, the Academy young artists tried to restore the importance of these people, which they themselves had seen during the years of Down to the Countryside Movement, portraying all their dignity and resilience.

Subsequently, it was examined how other artists of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts focused on another phase of the emotional and psychological journey to remember the past that the young people of the time had undertaken: the one linked to the nostalgia of the rural places in which they had lived and their expectation of the future. These feelings were expressed above all in the artworks of Contemplative Painting. Among the most famous creations of this trend are *Spring* by Wang Hai, *Goodbye! Little Path* by Wang Chuan and *Youth* by He Duoling, which show the so-called Melancholy Youth, while paintings such as *A Summer Night in 1978* by Cheng Conglin, *Spring Breeze Has Returned* by He Duoling and *High Aspirations* by Ai Xuan express the new feeling of hope born in the soul of Chinese youth after the end of the Cultural Revolution. It was then discussed how, unlike the paintings of Scar Art and Chinese Rural Realism, Contemplative Painting artworks do not show dramatic scenes or people forgotten by society, but mainly young women or girls with an enigmatic gaze turned towards the viewer, who can only contemplate it and seek answers. The peculiarity of these paintings - and one of the most frequent criticisms - is in fact the almost lack of specific themes.

Fundamental to a complete understanding of the developments of academic realism between the late 1970s and early 1980s was the analysis of Life-stream Art. This trend, very similar to Chinese Rural Realism, was not initially manifested by the artists of the Sichuan School of Painting, but by Chen Danqing, a student of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. As with his SFAI colleagues, Chen shares his past as an *educated youth*, and the oil paintings he produced were inspired by his experiences in the most remote areas of the nation. The seven creations that make up his *Tibetan Series* became models for other students,

including those of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, such as Zhang Xiaogang, Zhou Chunya, Zhu Yiyong. These young artists began to return to the rural places where they had lived in order to create their artworks en plein-air, as the great masters of the Barbizon School had done, whom they had discovered at foreign art exhibitions organized from 1977 onwards. Analysing the paintings by these students, similarities and differences between the major paintings of Chinese Rural Realism and Life-stream Art were here discussed. Unlike the first, the artworks belonging to this second trend feature men, women, the elderly, children of different Chinese ethnicities, portrayed in daily actions in a style very much influenced by Western impressionism, expressionism and primitivism. The focus is placed on the human beings in total harmony with nature, no longer on the characterization of their faces and the meticulous depiction of their defects. The Life-stream Art artists aimed to visually reproduce the “flow of life” that animated the people, mainly in rural, but also in urban contexts, as shown by *Catch the Train* by Gao Xiaohua.

After researching the genesis and the apex of these trends, the question arose as to whether they have been exhausted over time or not, after the advent of which factors and at what historical moment. In order to do this, a historical analysis of the artistic-political events that China went through in the 1980s was necessary. It has been highlighted how a first setback occurred after the numerous policies moved by the government that aimed to restrict the individual and expressive freedom of people and intellectuals, such as the 1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign and the 1987 Anti-Bourgeois Liberalism Campaign. This new attempt to centralize art under political control made many artists suffer, generating a first phase of emigration to the West. A second factor was then identified that significantly slowed the production of Scar artworks: the birth of avant-garde art with the ‘85 New Wave Movement, in which some of the aforementioned artists took part, such as Wang Chuan and Zhang Xiaogang. Indeed, during the mid-1980s, more and more young artists sought their own individual expressive language, trying to combine Western modernist and postmodernist art techniques and styles with the Chinese ones. The third factor, which also caused the end of the artistic experimentation of the ‘85 New Wave, was the 1989 Tian'anmen Incident, which cast a dark halo over China, leaving people dismayed. This event, which could be interpreted as a new scar of the nation, gave rise to another great migratory flow of artists, while many of those who already lived abroad decided never to return to their homeland. Hence, almost all the artists discussed in this research emigrated to Europe and the United States during the 1980s, some for a few years, some for more than a

decade. The only ones not to leave China were Shang Yang, Wang Chuan and Zhang Xiaogang (both emigrated in the 1990s). The main reason for their departure was the possibility to continue their studies in foreign universities and academies and therefore to be able to get in touch with new styles, meet new artists, expand their knowledge and painting skills. The artistic environment in which they found themselves was teeming with innovative influences: for some of them the gradual abandonment of the styles and trends that had characterized their production up to that time hence was a natural process.

During the research, after observing the life of the artists and their production after the 1980s, various scenarios were found. Luo Zhongli, although he has totally changed his painting style over the years, has always kept rural subjects in his artworks. Wang Yidong approached hyperrealism, portraying young women from his area of origin. Ai Xuan continued his production of Contemplative Painting artworks, without renewing his subjects and receiving some criticisms for this reason. He Duoling has specialized in depictions of women, of the Yi ethnic group, who have always been his passion, maintaining the melancholy and mysterious aura that characterized his early productions. Zhou Chunya and Gao Xiaohua moved towards urban subjects for a period and returned to classical pictorial style creations or historical monumental paintings in the new millennium. Chen Danqing has broadly ranged between subjects and themes, while maintaining a realistic approach. After taking part in '85 New Wave, Wang Chuan continued his artistic experimentation, as did Shang Yang. As previously mentioned, some of these artists never returned to China, such as Cheng Conglin who continued the creations of Life-stream Art in Germany and Wang Hai who went to Hong Kong and soon even stopped being an artist. Great attention was given to the only two artists who in the 1990s-2010s felt the need to create artworks that demonstrate a "new Scar Art": Zhang Xiaogang and Zhu Yiyong. Their oil paintings, with many similarities, are based on the memory of the Cultural Revolution years and feature Chinese figures linked by a red thread. For Zhang, the thread connects people from the same family nucleus or comrades who pose in family photos, for Zhu the red thread creates the star shape between the fingers of children, men and women, some of them wearing the Maoist uniform hat. Their paintings may have been driven by an ever-increasing market demand, but they are also testimony that the psychological and physical scars left by the Cultural Revolution are still visible after decades and have not healed.

Scar artworks and the ones of its related trends have proved to be unique and fundamental for various reasons. After decades, official art freed itself from the shackles

imposed by the government and ceased to be exclusively at the service of politics. Far from the dogmas established by Mao Zedong during the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature, these artworks showed for the first time the tragic scenes that occurred during the "disastrous decade" or the people's real physical and mental conditions after it. Leaving the Maoist revolutionary style, young artists gradually returned to a social realism, to show a true reality. Scar Art demonstrates how some artists and young people of the time felt the urge to focus on individuality, on the humanity and the spirituality of people. Much could still be said about the trends that emerged in the academic environment at the end of the 1970s: although the artworks of the artists analysed in this dissertation are recognized as being among the most representative of this genre, they are certainly not the only ones that appeared in the nation in that period. Furthermore, the analysis of how the aforementioned trends have been received and studied in China and abroad over the years would also be interesting for the study of this phenomenon in its entirety. Ultimately, this research aimed to try to make Scar Art more easily understandable and to concretely contribute to further academic studies of a phenomenon that is certainly unique in its kind, perhaps unrepeatable and which has definitely changed the Chinese art scene in the late 1970s.

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Glossary of Chinese names and terms

Ai Qing 艾青 (1910-1996)

Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (1957-)

Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-)

Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626-1705)

Bai Jingzhou 白敬周 (1946-2011)

Bawu xinchao 八五新潮 ('85 New Wave, Chinese avant-garde art movement born in 1985)

Bentu huihua 本土绘画 (Native Soil Painting)

Cai Jingkai 蔡景楷 (1946-)

Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-)

Chen Yifei 陈逸飞 (1946-2005)

Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-)

Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-)

Chensi huihua 沉思绘画 (Contemplative Painting)

Chuban guanliju 出版管理局 (Bureau of Publications)

Dazibao 大字报 (big-character posters)

Deng Pingxiang 邓平祥 (1947-)

Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904-1997)

Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914-1973)

Fandaodi 反到底 (Rebel to the End, one of Chongqing's Red Guards factions)

Feng Fasi 冯法祀 (1914-2009)

Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-)

Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之 (ca. 344-406)

Guzheng 古筝 (Chinese traditional instrument)

He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-)

He Rong 何溶 (1921-1989)

Heigen 黑根 (Black Root, Zhou Chunya's beloved dog)

Hong weibing 红卫兵 (Red Guards)

Hou Yimin 侯一民 (1930-)

Hua niao hua 花鸟画 (flowers and birds painting)

Hua Ti 华提

Huang Binhong 黄宾虹 (1865-1955)

Huang Rui 黄銳 (1952-)

Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991)

Lei Zhuhua 雷着华 (1946-)

Li Bin 李斌 (1949-)

Li Huanmin 李焕民 (1930-2016)

Li Shangyin 李商隐 (813-858)

Li Shaoyan 李少言 (1918-2002)

Li Shuang 李爽 (1957-)

Li Xiaoming 李小明

Lianhuan manhua 连环漫画 (serial cartoon or comic book)

Lianhuanhua 连环画 (picture-story book)

Lianhuanhua bao 连环画报 (*Journal of Illustration, or Serial Pictures Gazette*)

Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915-2006)

Lin Biao 林彪 (1906-1971)

Liu Borong 刘伯荣 (1952-)

Liu Chunhua 刘春华 (b. 1944)

Liu Jiakun 刘家琨 (1956-)

Liu Xiaodong 刘小东 (1963-)

Liu Xinwu 刘心武 (1942-)

Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997)

Lu Xinhua 卢新华 (1954-)

Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936)

Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-)

Luoshui 洛水 (the goddess of waters in Chinese mythology)

Ma Dasheng 马德升 (1952-)

Manhua 漫画 (cartoon)

Mao Xuhui 毛旭辉 (1956-)

Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976)

Meishu 美术 (*Fine Arts*, Chinese official art magazine)

Mingxing ban 明星班 (the Class of Stars)

Minzhuqiang 民主墙 (Democracy Wall)

Pan Dehai 潘德海 (1956-)

Pan Lingyu 潘令宇

Qin Zheng 秦征 (1924-2020)

Qingchu jingshen wuran 清除精神污染 (1983 Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign)

Qingming jie 清明节 (Qingming Festival, Chinese traditional festival to honour the memory of the ancestors and the deceased)

Renmin ribao 人民日报 (*People's Daily*)

Renmin wenxue 人民文学 (*People's Literature*)

Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), real name Shang Nengquan

Shanghen wenxue 伤痕文学 (Scar Literature)

Shanghen yishu 伤痕艺术 (Scar Art)

Shangshan xiexiang yundong 上山下乡运动 (Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside Movement)

Shanshuihua 山水画 (water and mountain painting)

Shao Dazhen 邵大箴 (1934-)

Shao Yangde 邵养德 (1934-)

Shen Yaoyi 沈尧伊 (1943-)

Shenghuo liu yishu 生活流艺术 (Life-stream Art)

Shijie meishu 世界美术 (*World Art*)

Shikan 诗刊 (*Poetry Periodical*)

Shinian haojie 十年浩劫 (disastrous decade, referred to the Cultural Revolution)

Si da ziyou 四大自由 (Four Freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of debate, freedom to put up posters of criticism)

Sichuan hua pai 四川画派 (Sichuan School of Painting)

Sichuan meishu xueyuan 四川美术学院 (Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, now known as Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, SFAI)

Sige xiandaihua 四个现代化 (Four Modernizations: Deng Xiaoping's policy to improve science and technology, agriculture, industry and defence)

Sirenbang 四人帮 (Gang of Four, composed by Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing 江青, Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元, Wang Hongwen 王洪文)

Siwu Tian'anmen shijian 四五天安门事件 (1976 April Fifth Tian'anmen Incident)

Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101, real name Su Dongpo)

Tang Wen 唐雯

Wang Chuan 王川 (1953-)

Wang Hai 王亥 (1956-)

Wang Hongwen 王洪文 (1935-1992)

Wang Keqing 王克庆 (1933-)

Wang Liuqiu 王流秋 (1919-2011)

Wang Meng 王蒙 (1308-1385)

Wang Shikuo 王式廓 (1911-1973)

Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361)

Wang Yidong 王沂东 (1955-)

Wei Jingsheng 魏京生 (1950-)

Wen Lipeng 闻立鹏 (1931-)

Wenhuibao 文汇报 (*Wenhui Daily*)

Wu Zuoren 吴作人 (1908-1997)

Wuming hua hui 无名画会 (No Name Group)

Wusi yundong 五四运动 (May Fourth Movement)

Xiangtu xieshi huihua 乡土写实绘画 (Chinese Rural Realism)

Xie Xing 谢星

Xin shiqi wenxue 新时期文学 (Literature of the New Period)

Xingxing 星星 (The Stars Group)

Yang Qian 杨千 (1959-)

Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 (1931-2005)

Ye Qianyu 叶浅予 (1907-1995)

Ye Yongqing 叶永青 (1958-)

Yin Guoliang 尹国良 (1931-)

Youyu qingnian 忧郁青年 (Melancholy Youth)

Yu Luojin 遇罗锦 (1946-)

Zhai Yongming 翟永明 (1955-)

Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥 (1917-2005)

Zhang Guilin 张桂林 (1951-)

Zhang Tongyun 张彤云 (1928-)

Zhang Wang 张望

Zhang Wei 张伟 (1952-)

Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-)

Zhang Zhixin 张志新 (1930-1975)

Zhao Wenliang 赵文量 (1937-2019)

Zheng Yi 郑义 (1947-)

Zheng Ziyang 郑子燕 (1951-)

Zhiqing 知青 (*educated youth*, young people came back from the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement)

Zhongguo gongchandang 中国共产党 (Chinese Communist Party, CCP)

Zhongguo minzhu yundong 中国民主运动 (Chinese Democracy Movement)

Zhongguo wuchan jieji wenhua dageming 中国无产阶级文化大革命 (Chinese Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976)

Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美术学院 (Central Academy of Fine Arts, CAFA)

Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-)

Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976)

Zhu Yidong 朱毅勇 (1957-)



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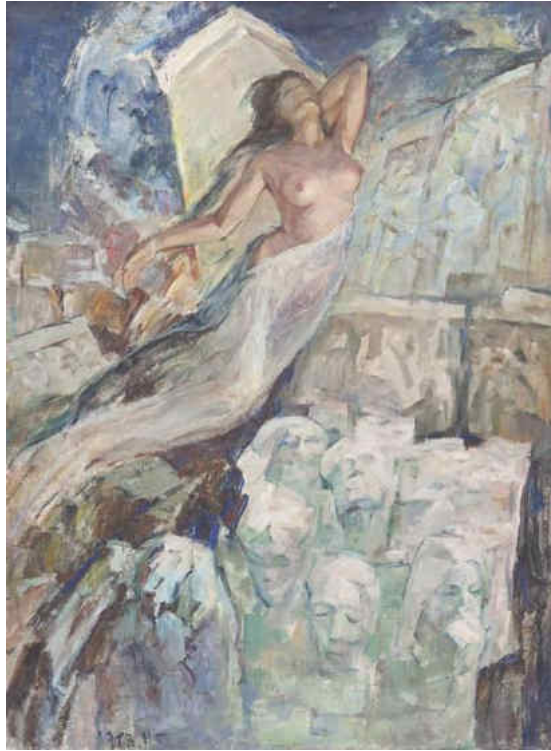
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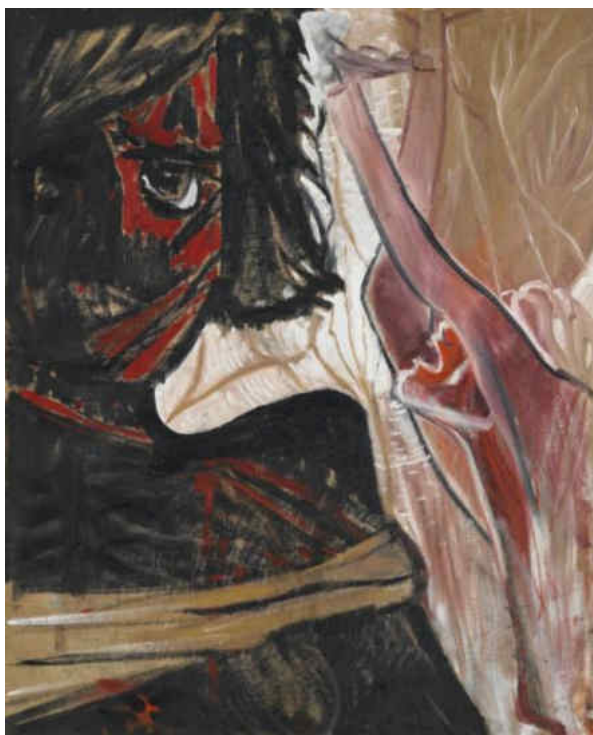
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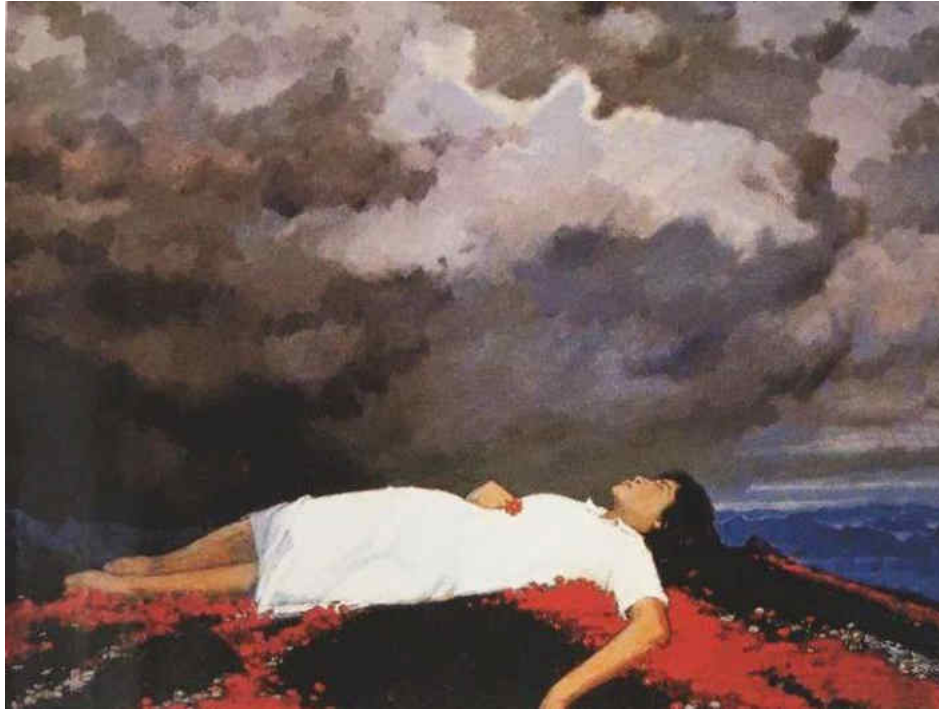
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伤痕文学的代表作——连环画《伤痕》

——改革开放30年优秀连环画作品回顾

原作首发于1979年3月号《连环画报》



根据卢新华同名小说 陈宜明 刘宇廉 李斌 编绘

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[24] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Scar* #1, 1979. Retrieved from http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0504/21/43123_208692765.shtml
The text of the illustration is: 我已经坐了两宿车了。时针刚过了零点，现在应该是一九七八年春节了。
I've already been on the train for two nights. The watch hand has just passed 12 o'clock pm, and it should be 1978 Chinese New Year (Spring Festival).



5 已经整整九年了。可是那梦一般的一切，时时那样清楚地浮现出来。……九年前，我还多小呵！……

[25] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Scar* #5, 1979. Retrieved from http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0504/21/43123_208692765.shtml

The text of the illustration is: 已经整整九年了。可是那梦一般的一切，时时那样清楚地浮现出来。……九年前，我还多小呵！……

It's been nine years. But everything that was like a dream appeared so clearly from time to time. ...Nine years ago, how young I was! ...



8 可是，这好象都是真的，我的红卫兵被撤了。

[26] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Scar* #8, 1979. Retrieved from http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0504/21/43123_208692765.shtml

The text of the illustration is: 可是，这好象都是真的，我的红卫兵被撤了。

However, it seems to be true, my Red Guards are scattered.



10 这都是因为她——因为妈妈——因为她历史上的软弱和可耻。这耻辱象一条条深深的伤痕刻在我的脸上，我恨她，我从心底里恨她。

[27] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Scar #10*, 1979. Retrieved from http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0504/21/43123_208692765.shtml
The text of the illustration is: 这都是因为她——因为妈妈——因为她历史上的软弱和可耻。这耻辱象一条条深深的伤痕刻在我的脸上，我恨她，我从心底里恨她。

It's all because of her - because of mom - because of her weakness and the shame in her life. This shame is like a deep scar on my face, I hate her, I hate her from the bottom of my heart.



我和你，也和这个家庭彻底决裂了，你不用再找我。
晓华
六月六日

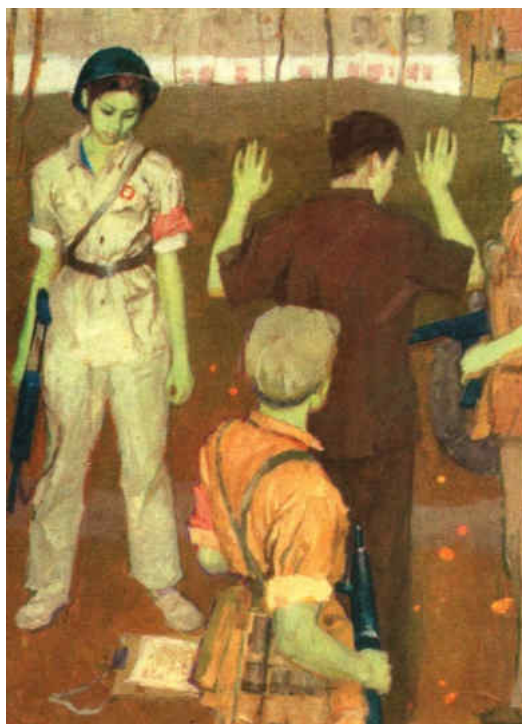
13 妈妈现在一定看到桌上纸条了……她也许会哭，也许伤心极了，她一直那样的爱抚我……可是，不！不应该可怜她，她是叛徒！

[28] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Scar #13*, 1979. Retrieved from http://www.360doc.com/content/12/0504/21/43123_208692765.shtml
The text of the illustration is: 妈妈现在一定看到桌上纸条了……她也许会哭，也许伤心极了，她一直那样的爱抚我……可是，不！不应该可怜她，她是叛徒！

Mom must have seen the note on the table now... She may cry, she may be very sad, she has always been loving and helping me so much... But no! I should not pity her; she is a traitor!

On the wall: 我和你，也和这个家庭彻底决裂了，你不用再找我。晓华，六月六日。

You and me and the family have broken up, and you don't have to look for me anymore. Xiaohua, June 6.



[29] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple* #3, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 我刚胆战心颤地画完一幅特殊的水彩，突然背后一声呵斥：‘不许动，举起手来!’ 我的心一下停止了跳动。

I drew a special watercolour with a trembling heart, but suddenly someone yelled from behind: “Don't move, raise your hands!” My heart stopped beating.



[30] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple* #21, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: ‘要是我能亲眼看到文化大革命的最后胜利，那该多好啊！……红刚，你快醒醒吧！快回到毛主席革命路线上来吧！’李红刚忍住泪水，背过了脸，：‘不——你，你——投降吧！’

“If I could see the final victory of the Cultural Revolution with my own eyes, how good it would be! ……Honggang, wake up! Come back to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line!” Li Honggang held back his tears and turned his face away, saying, “No - you, you - surrender!”



[31] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple #25*, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>
The text of the illustration is: 她静静地躺在一层战火摧落的枫叶上。许久，我才想起把信及并蒂的枫叶递给红刚。She was lying quietly on a layer of maple leaves that were devastated by the war. After a long time, I remembered to give the letter and the maple leaf to Honggang.



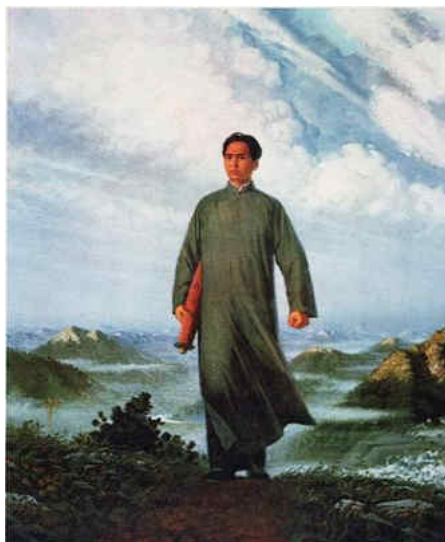
[32] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple #32*, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>
The text of the illustration is: 那天，刑车从人群中驶过。我没有去看，我只是在一条静僻的路上漫步沉思。路的两边，枫叶又红了，像一丛丛烧得旺旺的火。那火红的树冠，简直像刚从伤口喷射出来的血，浓艳欲滴.....
That day, the vehicle with the convict drove past the crowd. I did not go to see it, I just wandered and meditated on an isolated road. On both sides of the road, the maple leaves were red again, like fire. The fiery red tree crowns were almost like blood poured from a wound.



[33] Li Jingyang, *Revolutionary “Flag Bearer”*, 1977. Retrieved from GAO Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*, The MIT Press, 2011, p. 73.



[34] Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914-1973), *Birth of a Nation*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 230 x 405 cm. Retrieved from https://en.chnmuseum.cn/collections_577/collection_highlights_608/a



[35] Liu Chunhua 刘春华 (1944-), *Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan*, 1967. Oil painting, 180x220 cm. Collection of China Construction Bank. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 877.



[36] Anonymous, *The Gang of Four*, 1977. Ink and colour on paper. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/382VmKK>



[37] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple #4*, 1979. Gouache painting on paper, 27.6×17.8cm. Collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 为首的姑娘审视了我一番，忽然扭头对同学们说：‘你们干你们的去吧，我押他上主楼！’拐了两个弯，她突然轻声说：‘王老师，您不认识我啦？...我是卢丹枫。’我想起来了。 The leader girl looked closely at me for a while, and suddenly turned her head and said to the comrades: “Go and do your deeds, I’ll take him to the main building!” After they went away, she suddenly whispered: “Teacher Wang, don’t you recognize me? ...I am Lu Danfeng”. I remembered.



[38] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple* #5, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 以前，她是高三丙班的团支书，全校学毛选的积极分子，也是一个标准的好学生。

In the past, she was the Communist Youth League secretary of Class C of Year Three, an active member of the school's Mao selection, and a good student.



[39] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple* #8, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 听说她和李红刚极好。运动开始后也一直在一起，没想到后来却成了针锋相对的两派。...李红刚原叫李黔刚，因为黔字拆开是‘黑’‘今’，改成红刚了。

I heard that she and Li Honggang were excellent. Since the beginning of the movement, they have been together, but unexpectedly they joined two diametrically opposed factions... Li Honggang's original name was Li Qiangang: since the word Qian is composed by the words 'black' and 'now', it was changed to Honggang.



[40] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple #1*, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 一九六七年十月，在北京的汇报会上，中央文革首长旗帜鲜明地表态支持我们‘造总’。并重申了江青‘九·五讲话’的文攻武卫原则：‘谁要对我武斗，我一定要自卫，我一定还击。’ In October 1967, in the report about the meeting in Beijing, the head of the Central Cultural Revolution made a clear statement in support of our 'general chief'. He also quoted Jiang Qing's "May Fifth Speech" principle of cultural attack and military defence: "Whoever wants to fight me, I must defend myself, I will fight back".



[41] Liu Yulian 刘宇廉 (1948-1997), Li Bin 李斌 (1949-) and Chen Yiming 陈宜明 (1950-), *Maple #14*, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>

The text of the illustration is: 冲过泼水般的弹雨，那个人终于爬到了机枪打不着的死角 - 原来她是丹枫。 After rushing under the pouring rain, that person finally climbed to a place where the machine gun could not hit him or her. It turned out that it was Danfeng.



[42] Cover of *Maple* after winning the first place at the Exhibition to Celebrate the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic, 1979. Retrieved from <https://kknews.cc/zh-sg/story/kv2m4zb.html>



[43] Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915-2006), *Flower Blossoms Must Face Upward*, 1957. Liao's criticism of dogmatism. Retrieved from LENT, A. John, YING Xu, *Comics art in China*, University Press of Mississippi, 2017, p. 96.



[44] Liao Bingxiong 廖冰兄 (1915-2006), *Self-Mockery*, 1979. Retrieved from LENT, A. John, YING Xu, *Comics art in China*, University Press of Mississippi, 2017, p. 108. The text of the cartoon is: After the destruction of the Terrible Four I composed this piece mocking myself and others of my kind. The year 1979, Bingxiong.



[45] Picture of the “Class of Stars”, the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts’ oil painting class of 1977. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/38TGoqS>
 In the first row are the teachers, in the second row from left to right: Gao Xiaohua 高小华, Zhou Mingxiang 周鸣祥, Luo Xiaohang 罗晓航, Huang Tongjiang 黄同江, Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚, Huang Jia 黄佳, Li Shan 李珊, Mo Ye 莫也, Luo Qun 罗群, Cheng Conglin 程丛林. In the last row from left to right: Chen Hong 陈宏, Lei Hong 雷虹, Yang Qian 杨千, He Duoling 何多苓, Qin Ming 秦明, Luo Zhongli 罗中立, Li Li 李犁, Hua Ti 华提.



[46] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3ocDiof>



[47] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), family portrait. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3dKJFes>



[48] Gao Xiaohua during his years in the army, 1972. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/385v0ZB>



[49] The interview team of the "*Zhanxi Daily*", newspaper of the Wuhan Military Area. Summer, 1973. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/385v0ZB>



[50] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), *Why?*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 107.5 × 136.5 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/>



[51] Gelij Michajlovič Koržev (1925-2012), *Picking up the Banner*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 174 x 231 cm. Russian Museum. Retrieved from <https://rusmuseumvrm.ru/data/collections/painting>



[52] Picture of Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-) painting *Why?*, 1979. Retrieved from PENG Rong “Women hai jiang sangshi shenme” —— lun Gao Xiaohua xianshi zhuyi youhua de huayu fangshi yu jingshen qizhi “我们还将丧失什么” —— 论高小华现实主义油画的话语方式与精神气质 (“What Will We Lose” —— On Gao Xiaohua's Discourse and Spiritual Temperament in Realistic Oil Painting), *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studie*), June 2012, pp. 177-183.



[53] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), *I love Oil Field* sketch draft, 1978, charcoal on paper. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/gao-xiaohua/woaiyoutian>



[54] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), *Why?* sketch draft, 1978, charcoal on paper. Retrieved from PENG Rong “Women hai jiang sangshi shenme” —— lun Gao Xiaohua xianshi zhuyi youhua de huayu fangshi yu jingshen qizhi “我们还将丧失什么” —— 论高小华现实主义油画的话语方式与精神气质 (“What Will We Lose” —— On Gao Xiaohua's Discourse and Spiritual Temperament in Realistic Oil Painting), *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studie*), June 2012, pp. 177-183.



[55] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), *I Love Oil Field*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 162 x 70 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from PENG Rong “Women hai jiang sangshi shenme” —— lun Gao Xiaohua xianshi zhuyi youhua de huayu fangshi yu jingshen qizhi “我们还将丧失什么” —— 论高小华现实主义油画的话语方式与精神气质 (“What Will We Lose” —— On Gao Xiaohua's Discourse and Spiritual Temperament in Realistic Oil Painting), *Wenyi yanjiu* 文艺研究 (*Literature & Art Studie*), June 2012, pp. 177-183.



[56] Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2L8SvII>



[57] Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-), *Struggle for Spread the Dazhai County Model*, 1960s-1970s. Gouache on paper, 74 x 103 cm. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art36001974/>



[58] Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-), Zhou Chunyu 周春芽 (1955-), Hua Ti 华提, *Warmly Celebrate the Victory of the 11th National Congress of the Party*, 1976. Gouache watercolour, 68 x 109 cm. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art36001972/>



[59] Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-), *Snow on X Day X Month in 1968*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 196 × 296 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201307/t20130723_256767.htm



[60] Vasily Ivanovich Surikov (1848-1916), *The Morning of Streltzi's Execution*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 218 x 379 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Retrieved from <https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/en/collection/utro-streletskoy-kazni/>



[61] Vasily Ivanovich Surikov (1848-1916), *Boyarina Morozova*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 304 x 587.5 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow. Retrieved from <https://artsandculture/boyarina-morozova>



[62] Wang Shikuo 王式廓 (1911-1973), *The Bloodstained Shirt*, 1959, pencil and charcoal on canvas. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <https://arts.umich.edu/news-features>



[63] Qin Zheng 秦征 (1924-2020), *Home*, 1957. Oil on canvas. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 809.



[64] Wang Liuqiu 王流秋 (1919-2011), *Redeployment*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 175 x 233 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 808.



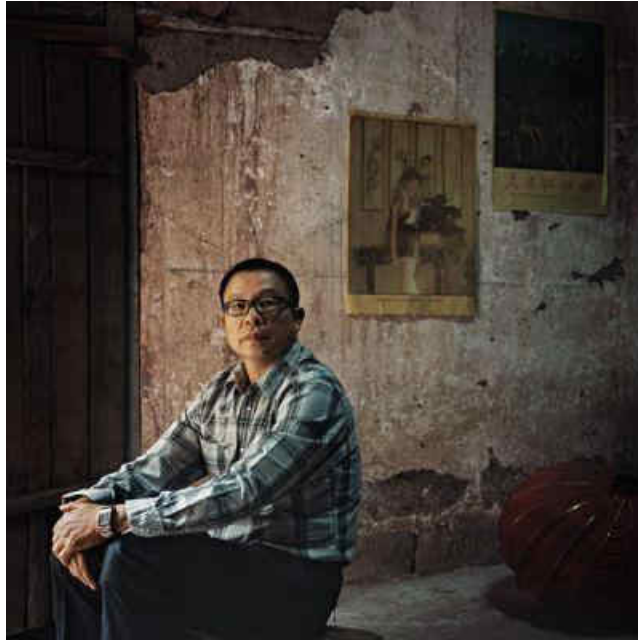
[65] Feng Fasi 冯法祀 (1914-2009), *Liu Hulan*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 230 x 426 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/t201>



[66] Hou Yimin 侯一民 (1930-), *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Miners*, 1960. Oil painting, 160 x 322 cm. National Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 826.



[67] Cheng Conglin 程丛林 (1954-), *A Summer Night in 1978 - I Feel the Yearning of the People*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 177 x 415 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, pp. 990-991.



[68] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-). Retrieved from <http://www.artlinkart.com/en/artist/overview>



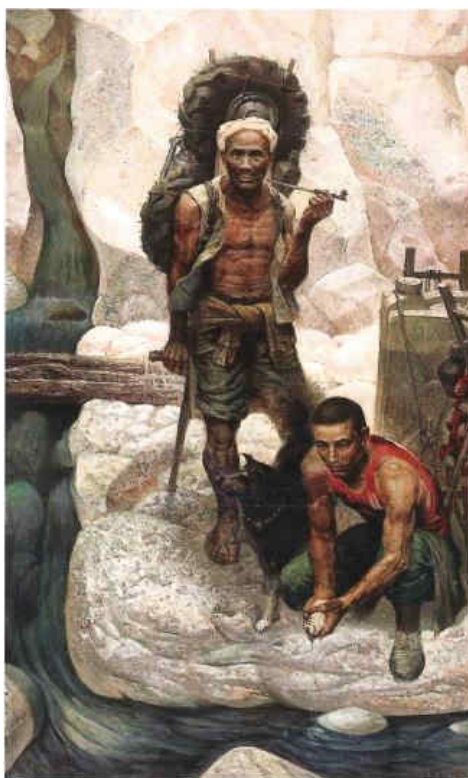
[69] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), Yang Qian 杨谦 (1959-), Lei Hong 雷虹 (1961-), Chen Hong 陈虹, *Orphan*, 1980, oil on canvas. Retrieved from *Sichuan Wenxue* 四川文学 (*Sichuan Literature*), May 1980, Sichuan People's Publishing House.



[70] Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 (1957-). Retrieved from <https://www.scfai.edu.cn/bhx/info/1013/1066.htm>



[71] Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 (1957-), *Father and Son*, 1980. Oil on canvas (coloured), 270 x 210 cm. Retrieved from SULLIVAN Michael, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p. 236.



[72] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *People of Daba Mountain*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 145 x 88 cm. Retrieved from DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture, Volume II, Brill Academic Pub., p. 49.



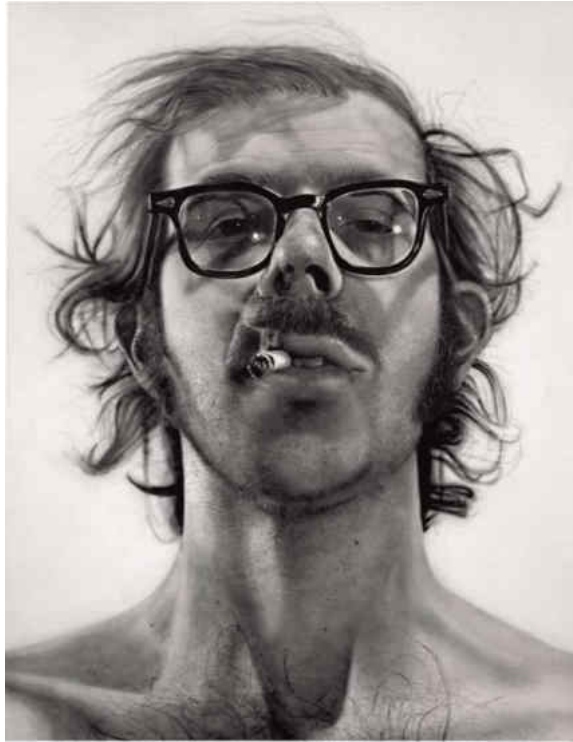
[73] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Father*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 217 x 152 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306>



[74] Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), *Les Glaneuses*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 83,5 x 110 cm. Musées d'Orsay, Paris. Retrieved from <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/>



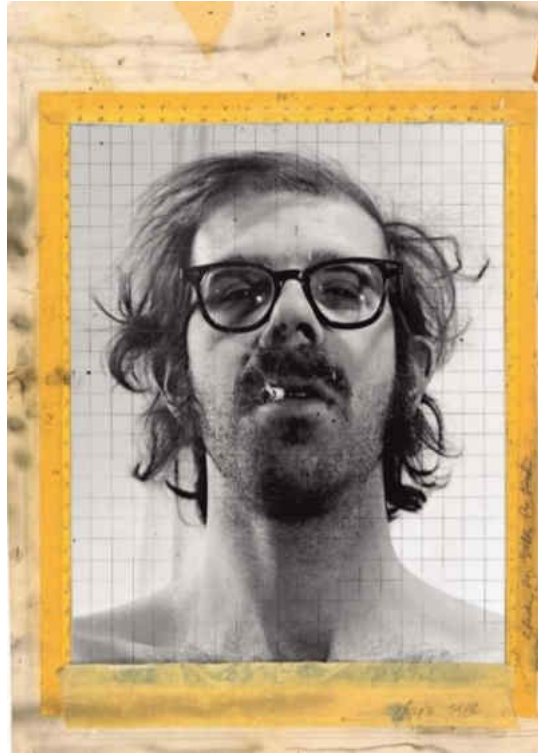
[75] Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669), *Self-portrait as the Apostle Paul*, 1661. Oil on canvas, 91cm × 77cm. Retrieved from <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-A-4050>



[76] Chuck Close (1940-), *Big Self-Portrait*, 1967–1968. Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 273.1 x 212.1 cm. Retrieved from <http://chuckclose.com/work007.html>



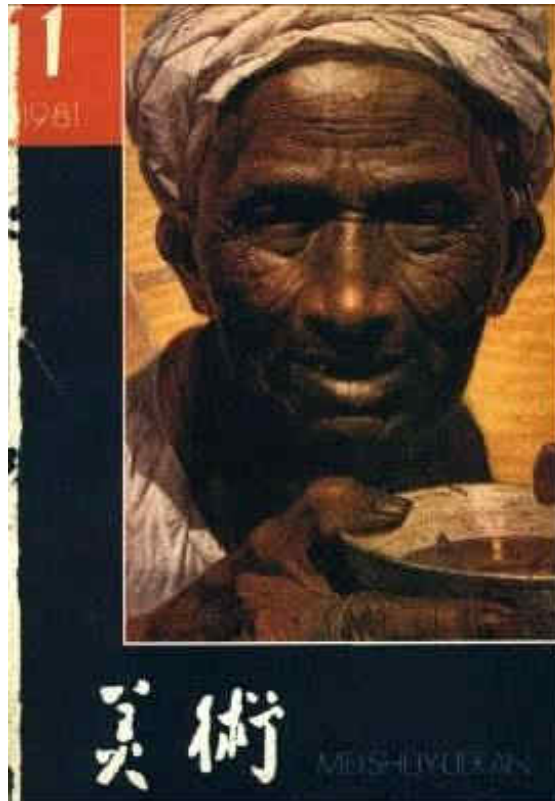
[77] Chuck Close (1940-), *Linda*, 1975-1976. Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 274.3 x 213.4 cm. Retrieved from <http://chuckclose.com/work059.html>



[78] Chuck Close (1940-), preparatory grid for the creation of *Big Self-Portrait*, 1967–1968. Retrieved from <http://chuckclose.com/work007.html>



[79] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), draft of *Father*, 1980. Retrieved from KÖPPEL-YANG Martina, *Semiotic Warfare: the Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989. A Semiotic Analysis*, Timezone 8 Limited, 2003, p. 99.



[80] Front cover of *Meishu*, January 1981. Retrieved from <https://oversea.cnki.net/KNavi/JournalD>



[81] Zhejiang Worker-Peasant-Soldier Art Academy (浙江工农兵美术大学) - Chi Changyao 池长尧, *Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman, Waging Revolution Depends on Mao Zedong Thought*, 1969. Propaganda poster, 53.5x77 cm. Retrieved from <https://chinese posters.net/posters/e15-507>



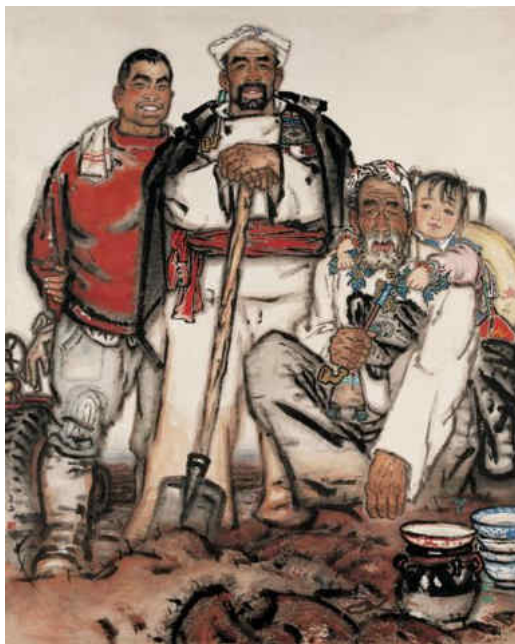
[82] Liu Wenxi 刘文西 (1933-2019), *Old Shaanxi Farmer*, 1975. Ink on paper, 45,5 x 34 cm. Retrieved from DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture, Volume II, Brill Academic Pub., p. 50.



[83] Wang Zhiping 王志平 (1947-), *Photograph of elderly woman of Mosuo minority from the Lugu Lake region of Yunnan Province*, 1980. Retrieved from DEBEVOISE Jane, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture, Volume II, Brill Academic Pub., p. 50.



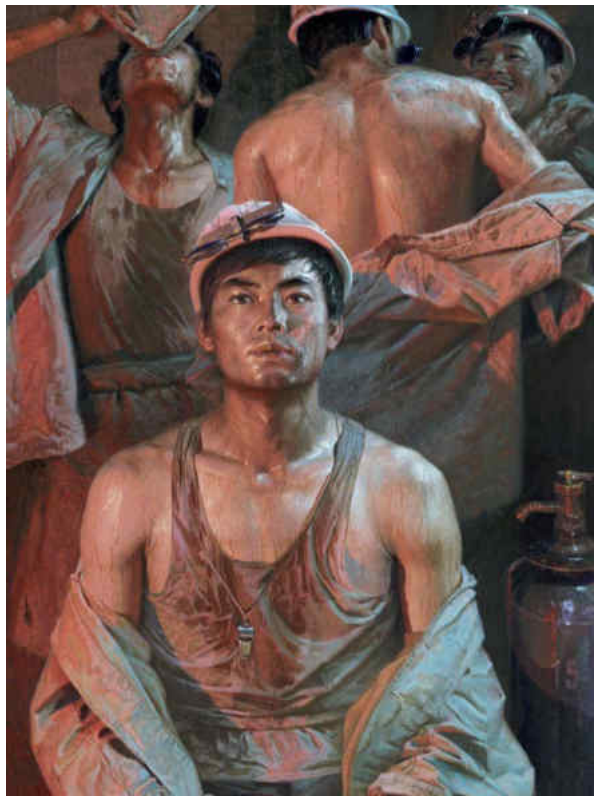
[84] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Spring Silkworms*, 1980. Oil on canvas 205.7 x 124.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-luo-zhongli-chinese-b-1948-5751408/>



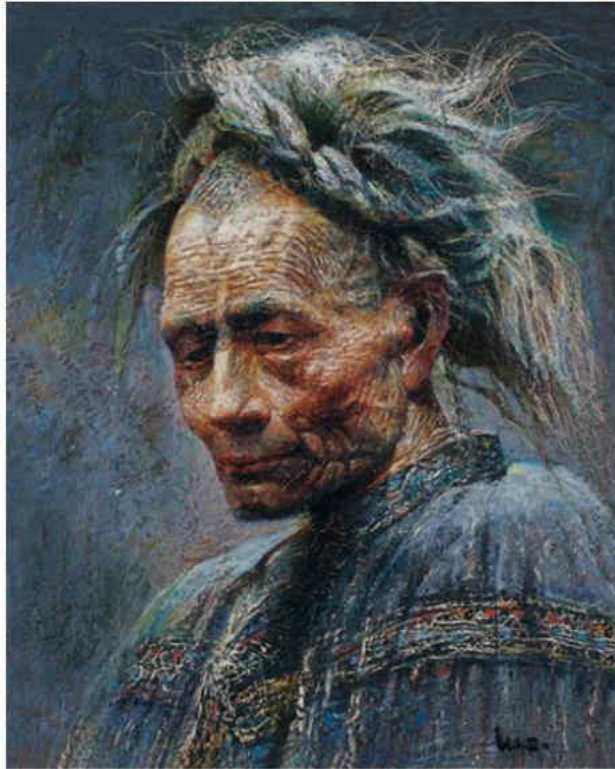
[85] Liu Wenxi 刘文西 (1933-2019), *Four Generations*, 1962. Chinese-painting style, 119 x 96,6 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/t20130619_253776.htm



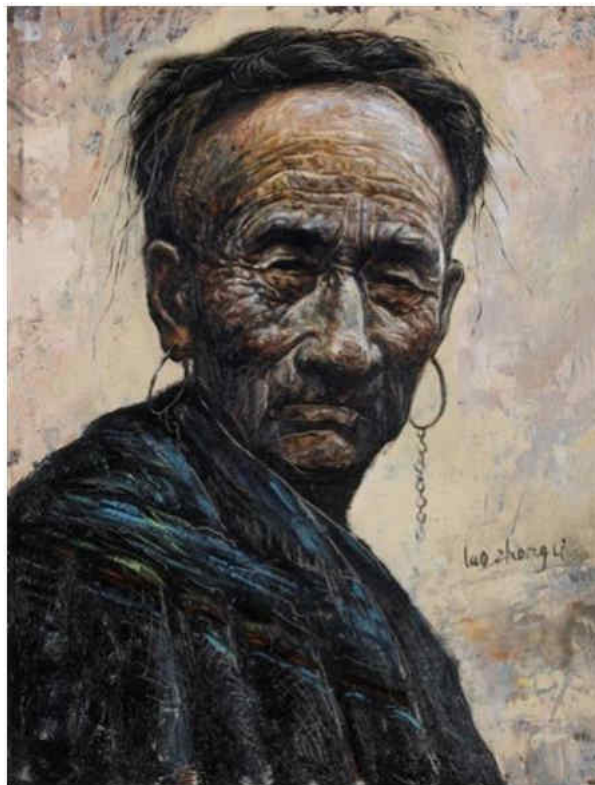
[86] Wu Qizhong 伍启中 (1944-), *Hearts High Above the Flow*, 1973. Chinese-style painting, 130 x 178cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, pp. 928-929.



[87] Guang Tingbo 廣廷渤 (1938-), *Molten Steel and Sweat*, 1981. Acrylic on canvas, 260 x 168 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <https://ab.co/2X1g6NO>



[88] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Old Woman of Yi Nationality*, 1980. Oil on paperboard, 28 x 23 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/yizulaofu>



[89] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Portrait of old man*, 1982. Oil on paperboard, 22 x 17 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/yizulaoren>



[90] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Years*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 147.7 x 96.5 cm. Retrieved from http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/years-Nr515ePgO_B4_oUWofy2_A2



[91] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Silent Snowfield*, 1980s. Oil on canvas, 101 x 75.5 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/silent-snowfield-vfyLL3QnGgpPznWEVVJPgg2>



[92] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Autumn*, 1989. Oil on canvas, 77.5 x 98 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/autumn>



[93] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Kids in the Village*, 1980s. Oil on canvas, 63 x 75 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/luo-zhongli/the-kids-in-the-village>



[94] Luo Zhongli 罗中立 (1948-), *Crossing the River No. 2*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 94 x 120 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5803311>



[95] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), *Herdsman*, 1983. Oil on board, 35.5 x 45.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art0013880076/>



[96] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), Portrait of Yi Girl, 1983. Oil on canvas, 53 x 37 cm. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art61230231/>



[97] Gao Xiaohua 高小华 (1955-), four paintings of *Butuo Yi People* (series of 6), 1983. Oil on board, 87 x 65 cm each. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/gao-xiaohua/butuo-yi-people>



[98] Wang Hai 王亥 (1956-). Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/329615488_720180



[99] Wang Hai 王亥 (1956-), *Spring*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 159 x 78cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306>



[100] Wang Chuan 王川 (1953-). Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/228333759_100144056



[101] Wang Chuan 王川 (1953-), one of the first sketches at Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, October 5, 1978. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/228333759_100144056



[102] Wang Chuan 王川 (1953-), *Goodbye! Little Path*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 80 x 150 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China*, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 747.



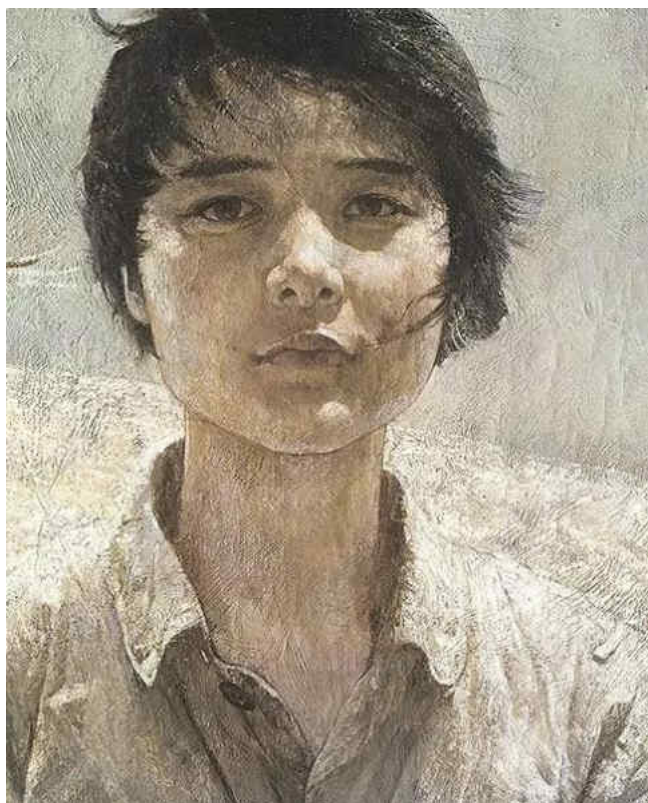
[103] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-). Retrieved from <https://heduoling.artron.net/about>



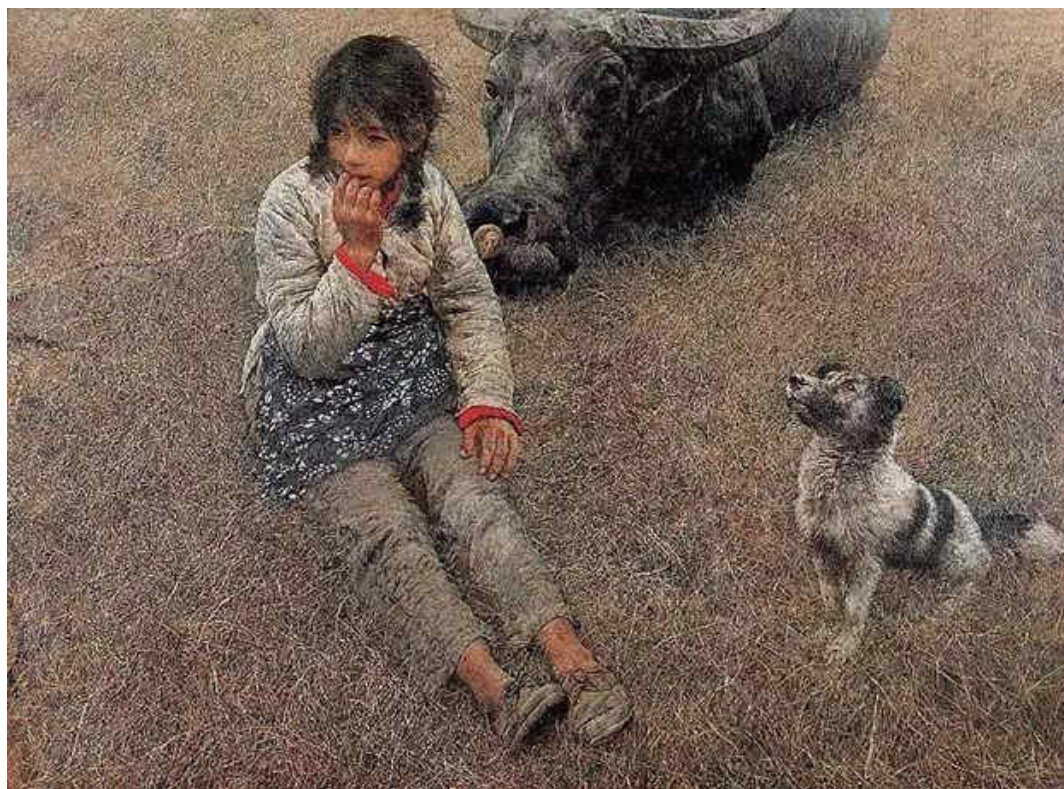
[104] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), Tang Wen 唐雯, Li Xiaoming 李小明 e Pan Lingyu 潘令宇, *A Song We Used to Sing*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 102 x 171 cm. Retrieved from JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, Hong Kong University Press, 2007, p. 100.



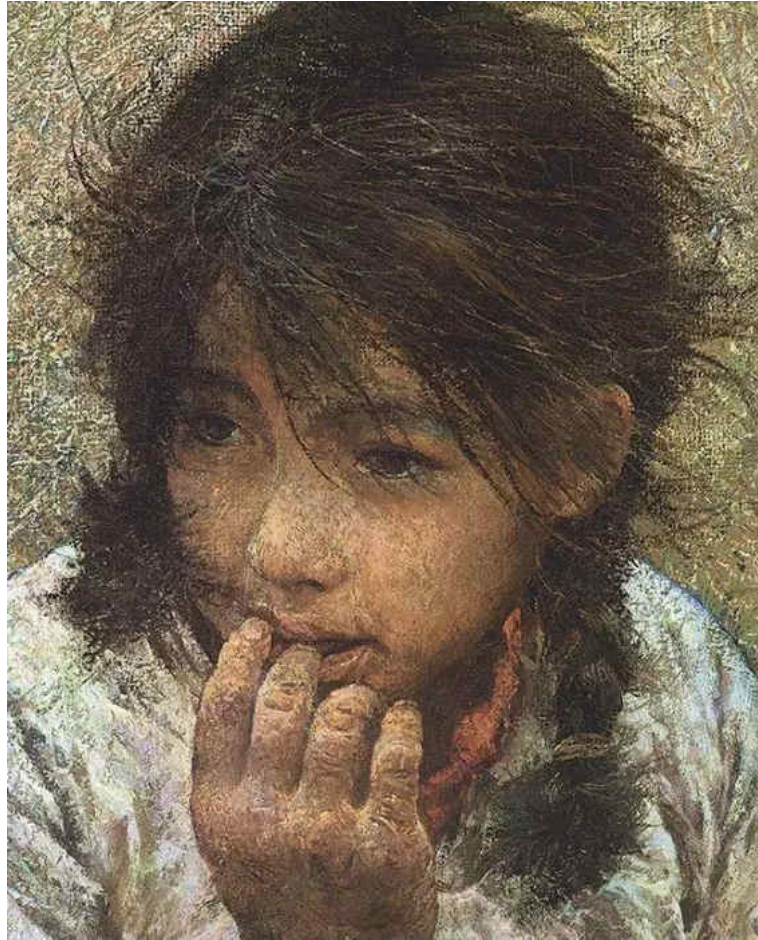
[105] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Youth*, 1984. Retrieved from JIANG Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From the Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art*, Hong Kong University Press, 2007, p. 100.



[106] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), detail of *Youth*, 1984.



[107] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Spring Breeze Has Returned*, 1982. Retrieved from http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/t20130619_253640.htm



[108] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), detail of *Spring Breeze Has Returned*, 1982.



[109] Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009). Retrieved from <https://andrewwyeth.com/>



[110] Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009), *Christina's World*, 1948. Tempera on panel, 81.9 x 121.3 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>



[111] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Ancient Wall*, 1982. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3g1YUIQ>



[112] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #1*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 英格兰北部沿海，有一片沼泽。这里广袤、荒凉，只有一座废弃的灯塔，显示出曾经有过人的踪迹。

There is a swamp on the coast of northern England. It is vast and desolate, with only an abandoned lighthouse, showing that there have been traces of people.



[113] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #2*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 1930年春末，一个年轻人——菲利普·雷亚德尔。在这里找到了爱的归宿，畸形的身体使他远离了社会，沼泽迎接了他。

End of the spring of 1930, a young man – Philip Rhayader. Here he found a home: his deformed body kept him away from society, but the swamp greeted him.



[114] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #6*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 三年来，从未有人来看望他。然而有一天，一个女孩抱着一只白色大鸟，怯生生地向灯塔走来。

In three years, no one has come to visit him. But one day, a girl holding a big white bird walked timidly towards the lighthouse.



[115] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #7*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: “什么事，孩子？”那个“怪人”的声音却低沉而慈祥。“它受伤了，先生。它还活着吗？”那还胆怯地问。“活着，活着。进来吧，孩子，进来吧。”

"What's the matter, child?" That "weird" voice was low and kind. "It's hurt, sir. Is it still alive?" The girl asked timidly. "It's alive, it's alive. Come in, kid, come in."



[116] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #17*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3p13pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 年复一年，雪雁飞来又去。弗丽丝渐渐长大了……
Year after year, the snow goose flew back. Fritha was growing up...



[117] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #28*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3p13pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 弗丽丝呆呆地望着暮色中的大海。她看见一个白色的影子跟着小船飞去。
“保佑他吧，雪雁。”

Fritha stared blankly at the sea in the twilight. She saw a white shadow flying away with the boat. "Bless him, snow goose."



[118] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose* #30, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 他驾着一条小帆船，冒着德国人的轰炸，往返于营救船与海滩之间。
He steered his small sailboat defying the German bombings between the rescue boat and the beach.



[119] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose* #33, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 那叫声扑打她的心，她仿佛听见那个灵魂在呼唤：“永别了，我的爱。”
The cry beat her heart, she seemed to hear the soul calling: "Farewell, my love."



[120] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #34*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 弗丽丝望着雪雁。她的心在呼喊：“菲利普，我爱你。”
Fritha looked at the snow goose. Her heart was shouting: "Philip, I love you."



[121] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Snow Goose #36*, picture-story book, 1984. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3pI3pEm>

The text of the illustration is: 后来有一天，一架德国轰炸机把灯塔当成了军事目标。这座古老的灯塔从沼泽地上消失了。完.....

Then one day, a German bomber made the lighthouse a military target.
The old lighthouse disappeared from the swamp. Gone.....



[122] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *The Third Generation*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 180x190 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.thelongmuseum.org/en/list-319/1210.html>



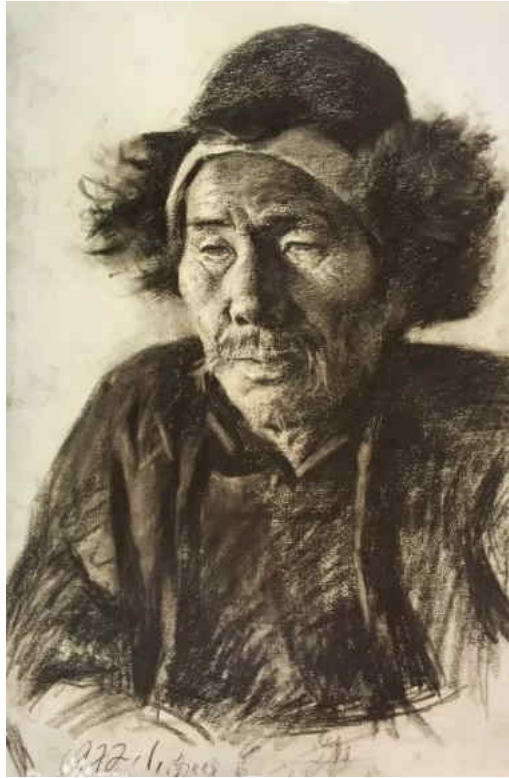
[123] He Duoling 何多苓 (1948-), *Winter*, 1983, oil on canvas. Retrieved from <http://ycarts.com/ycartwork.asp?id=826>



[124] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). Retrieved from <https://asianartplatform.com/artists/ai-xuan/>



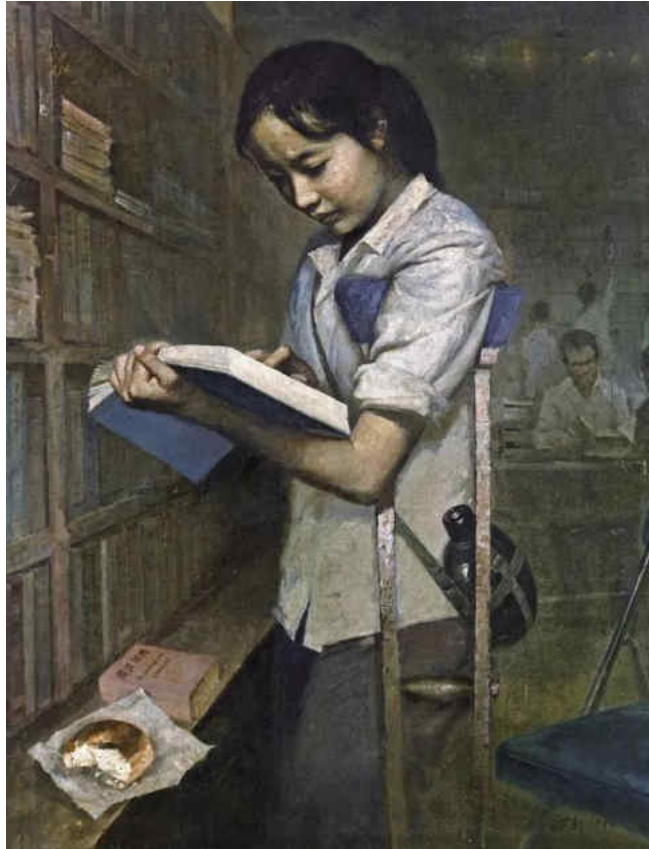
[125] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). Ai Xuan (first from left, bottom) as a painter in the Chengdu Army, Sichuan, 1973. Retrieved from <https://m-news.artron.net/news/20200710/n1130017.html>



[126] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). *Portrait of an Old Man*, January 1972. Charcoal pencil on paper, 42 x 28 cm. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Mu34Xx>



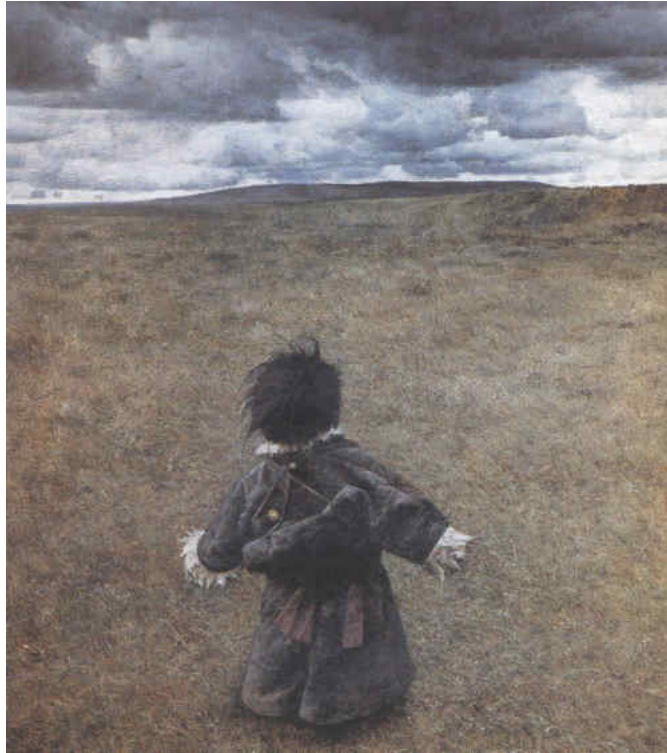
[127] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). *A Girl*, 1975. Oil on paper, 58.4 x 40.6 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.hefnercollection.com/hefnercollection/portfolio.cfm?aid=1>



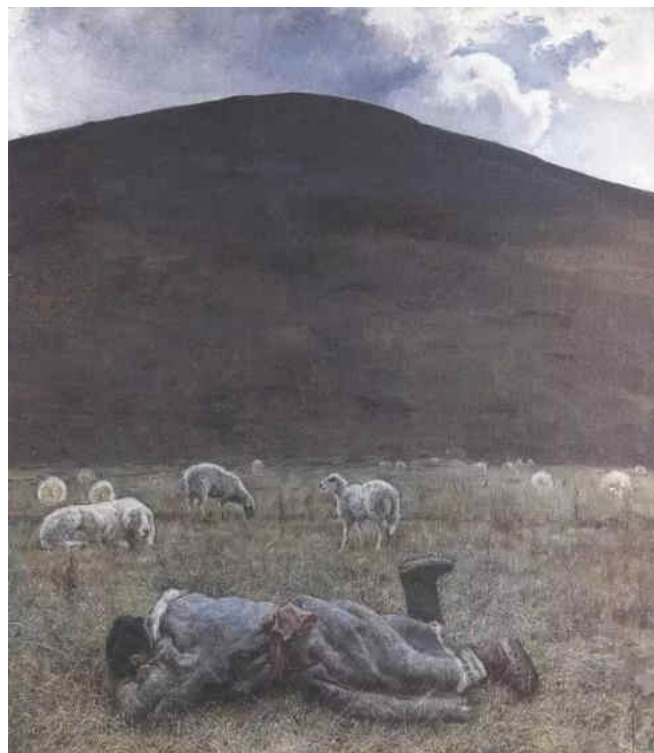
[128] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *High Aspirations*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 94.5 × 74.5 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.cnzihua.cn/shuhuaazatan/13295.html>



[129] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *Grass*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 53 x 66 cm. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Yw6gEx>



[130] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). *Cold Rain*, 1983, oil on canvas. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/348778442_740896



[131] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-). *Someone Sings Behind the Mountain*, 1983, oil on canvas. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/348778442_740896



[132] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *Perhaps the Sky is Still Blue*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 88 x 79 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/contemporary-art-asia-china-korea-japan-n08343/lot.91.html>



[133] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *Stranger*, 1984. Oil on canvas laid on panel, 77 x 53.5 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/ai-xuan/stranger-LqIXSgKi71RtgpN-lbd84w2>



[134] Ai Xuan 艾軒 (1947-), *Norgay*, 1985. Oil on canvas, 65 × 52.5cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201306/t20>



[135] Wang Chuan 王川 (1953-), *Old Man and Child*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 34.5 x 45.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5060180412/>



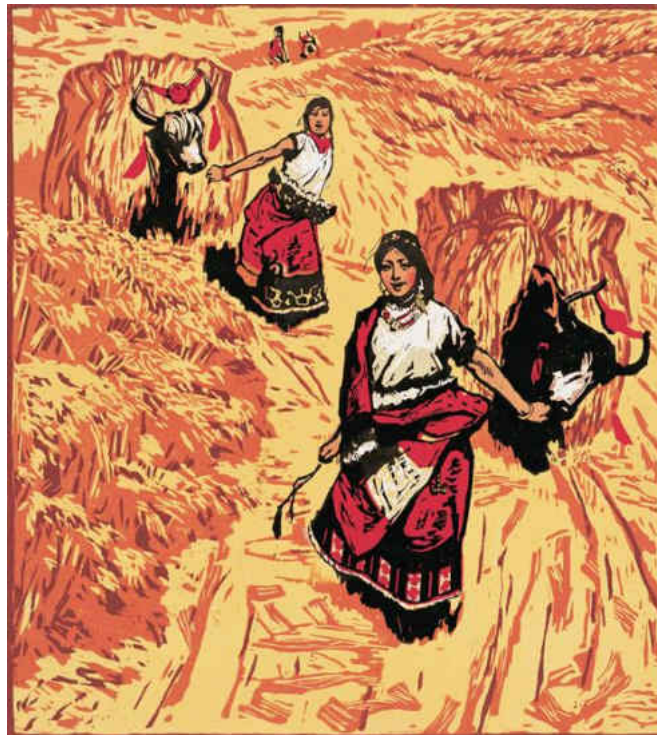
[136] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-). Retrieved from <https://www.tangcontemporary.com/chen-danqing>



[137] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Tears Fill the Bumper Harvest Fields*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 120 x 200 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.tangcontemporary.com/2019-chen-danqing-bj?lightbox=dataItem-k28izxvn>



[138] Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), *Hay Making*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 180 x 195 cm. Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Retrieved from https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting.html?no_cache=1&zoom=1&tx_damzoom_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=2285



[139] Li Huanmin 李焕民 (1930-2016), *First Step on the Golden Road*, 1963. Block print, 54.3 x 49 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from http://www.namoc.org/en/collections/201404/t20140418_275819.htm



[140] Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914–1973), *Labuleng Temple*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 99.6 x 99 cm.
Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/dong-xiwen/labuleng-temple-LQ7H>



[141] Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914–1973), *Spring comes to Tibet*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 65 x 102 cm.
Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/dong-xiwen/spring-to-tibet-MqGN>



[142] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Mother and Son*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 75 x 100 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[143] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Going to Town #1*, 1980. Oil on paper, 52.5 x 78.4 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[144] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Going to Town #2*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 78.2 x 54.5 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[145] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Khampa Men*, 1980, oil on canvas. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[146] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Pilgrimage*, 1980, oil on canvas. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[147] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Shepherd*, 1980. Oil painting on wood, 79 x 52 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[148] Chen Danqing 陈丹青 (1957-), *Girls Washing Their Hair*, 1980, oil on canvas. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/121019012_438041



[149] Zhou Chunyu 周春芽 (1955-). Retrieved from <https://zhouchunya.artron.net/about>



[150] Photo of students of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, 1978. Retrieved from Zhou Chunyanian biao (1955-2000) 周春芽年表 (1955-2000) (Zhou Chunyan Chronology – 1955-2000), *Yishujie* 艺术界 (*Art Life*), February 28, 2011, p. 17.

Yang Qian is the first person from the left, Zhou Chunya is the second person from the left in the back row, and He Duoling is the second person from the left in the front row.



[151] Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-), *Young Girl*, 1979. Watercolour on paper, 38 x 25.5 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhou-chunya/student-1O7JzCJFLPnNrUJF8Tpt4w2>



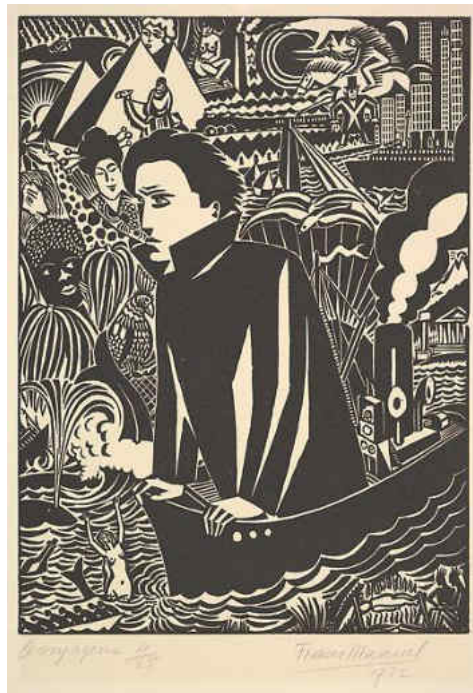
[152] Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-), *Shade of Tree*, 1979. Ink and colour on paper, 22 x 34 cm. Retrieved from http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhou-chunya/shuyintu-_D4--0w



[153] Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-), *Yi Woman*, 1978. Watercolour on paper, 49 x 35 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhou-chunya/yizufunv-PhJdzSkfM6Kj5-3DcVoDNQ2>



[154] Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-), *Half of the Life* series, 1980-1981. Woodcut prints, 16 × 11 cm each. Retrieved from http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhou-chunya/rehengdeyibanbanhua-20-works-pZSV4xM-jz_fRpapz4ITUQ2



[155] Frans Masereel (1889-1972), *The Voyager*, 1922. Woodcut, 26.5 x 19.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/369714>



[156] Zhou Chunyu 周春芽 (1955-), *A New Generation of Tibetans*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 149.3 x 198.4 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5751428/?intObjectID=5751428>



[157] Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), *Breton Girls Dancing, Pont-Aven*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 73 x 92.7 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.61369.html>



[158] Zhou Chunyu 周春芽 (1955-), *Shearing Sheep*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 170 x 236 cm. Retrieved from http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/se/txt/2012-06/07/content_457990.htm



[159] Zhou Chunyu 周春芽 (1955-), *Radiance of the Sunset*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 79.5 cm. Retrieved from <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/modern-contemporary-asian-art-evening-sale-hk0581/lot.1078.html>



[160] Zhou Chunya 周春芽 (1955-), *Spring is Coming*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 163 x 186.5 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhou-chunya/chuntianlaile>



[161] Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-). Retrieved from <https://www.pacegallery.com/artists/zhang-xiaogang/>



[162] On the second day of enrolment, Zhang Xiaogang with his classmates at the gate of Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, March 1978. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/427557608_278692
From left: Huang Tongjiang 黄同江, Li Li 李犁, Yang Qian 杨谦, Chen Hong 陈宏, Gao Xiaohua 高小华, He Duoling 何多苓, Chen Anjian 陈安健, Lei Hong 雷虹, Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇, Qin Ming 秦明, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚.



[163] Cheng Conglin and Zhang Xiaogang in front of one of "Classmates Group Painting" artworks - Zhang Xiaogang was the model in the painting - 1981 ca. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/427557608_278692



[164] Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-), *The Grassland Series: Approaching Storm*, 1981. Oil on paper, 83 x 110 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/427557608_278692



[165] Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-), *The Grassland Series: Clouds in The Sky*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 67 x 117 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, pp. 998-999.



[166] Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 (1958-), *Night Wind* (from *The Grassland Series*), 1984. Oil on canvas, 78 x 95.3 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhang-xiaogang/night-wind-from-the-grassland-series-JMI-53WbWOqU4bD1bnofmg2>



[167] Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 (1957-), *Mountain Village Shop*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 132 × 160 cm. National Art Museum of China, Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.cnzihua.cn/mhxs/cnyouhua/27310.html>



[168] Zhu Yiyong 朱毅勇 (1957-), *Mountain Village Shop*, 1983-1984. Oil on canvas, 132 × 160 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 1001.



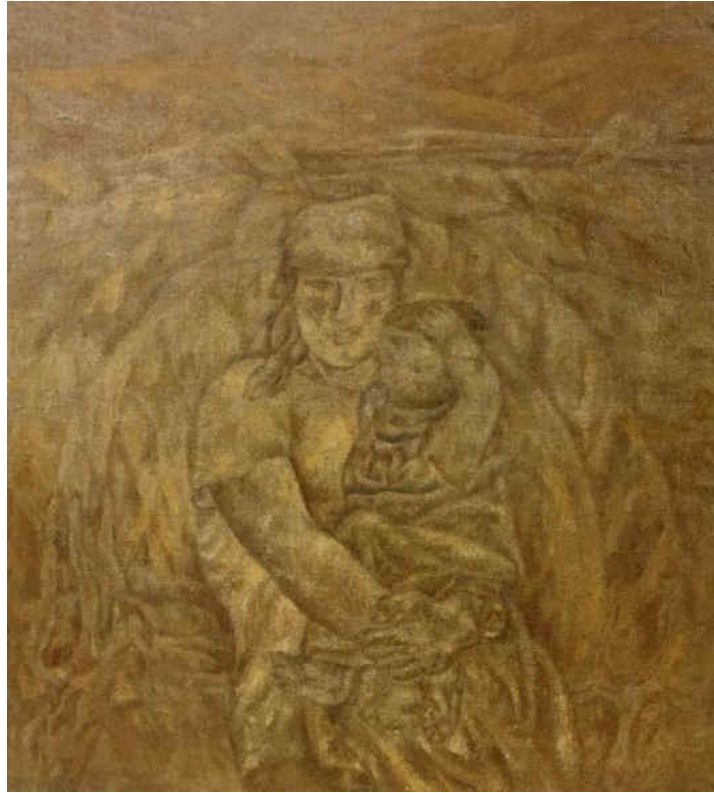
[169] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-). Retrieved from <https://www.chinesenewart.com/chinese-artists14/shangyang.htm>



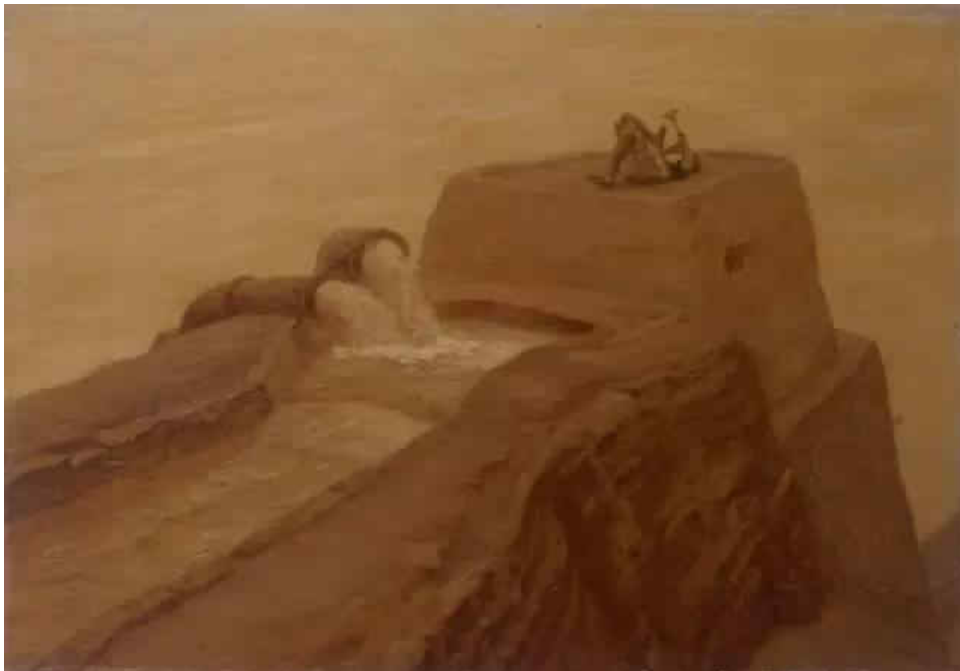
[170] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), *Yellow River Boatmen*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 140 x 381 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198



[171] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-) painting *Yellow River Boatmen* from the sketch, 1981. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198



[172] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), *Mother of the Loess Plateau*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 120 x 115 cm. Retrieved from LÜ Peng, *A Pocket History of 20th Century Chinese Art*, Milano, Edizioni Charta, 2010, p. 1000.



[173] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), *Yellow River May*, 1984. Oil on paper, 58 × 78 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198



[174] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), *Grandpa's River*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 100 × 150 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198



[175] Shang Yang 尚扬 (1942-), *The Old Man of Taihang*, 1984. Oil on paper, 103 x 105 cm. Retrieved from https://www.sohu.com/a/201577920_265198



[176] Wang Yidong 王沂东 (1955-). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3d1s5DX>



[177] Wang Yidong 王沂东 (1955-), *Spring Came to Yimeng Mountain*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 150 x 110 cm. Retrieved from https://wangyidong.artron.net/works_detail_BRT0



[178] Wang Yidong 王沂东 (1955-), *Portrait of Li Luwei*, 1978. Oil on paper, 39 x 30 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/wang-yidong/li-luwei-li-luwei-vIw>



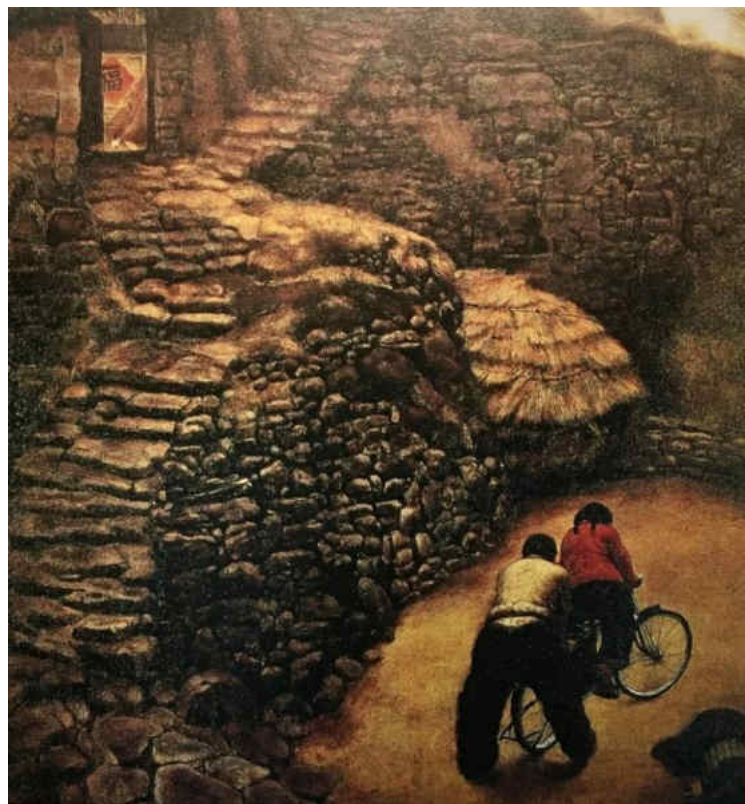
[179] Wang Yidong 王沂东 (1955-), *Old Man on Guard*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 61.2 x 41.3 cm. Retrieved from <http://www.artnet.com/artists/wang-yidong/shouwangdelaohan-U4>



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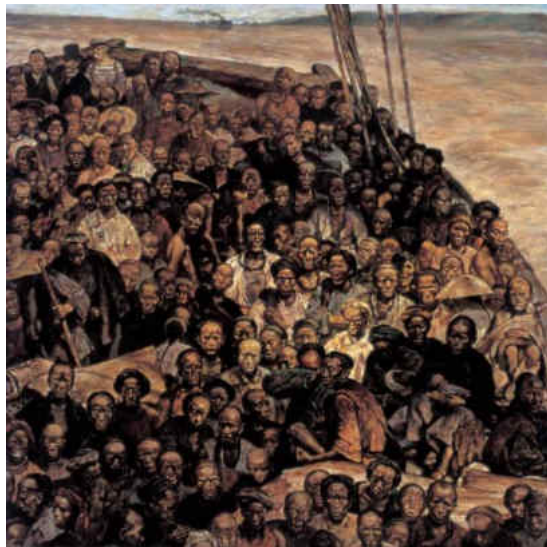
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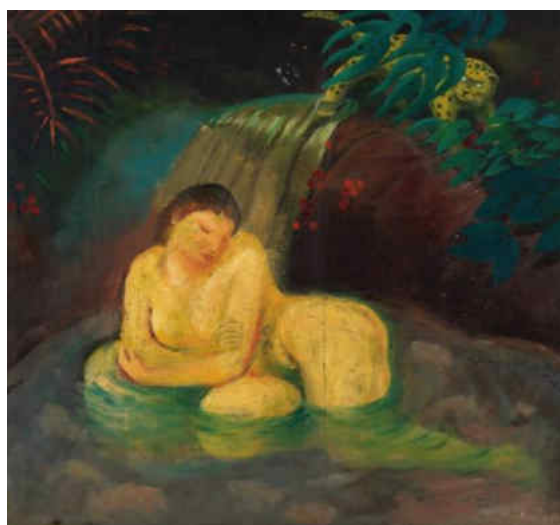
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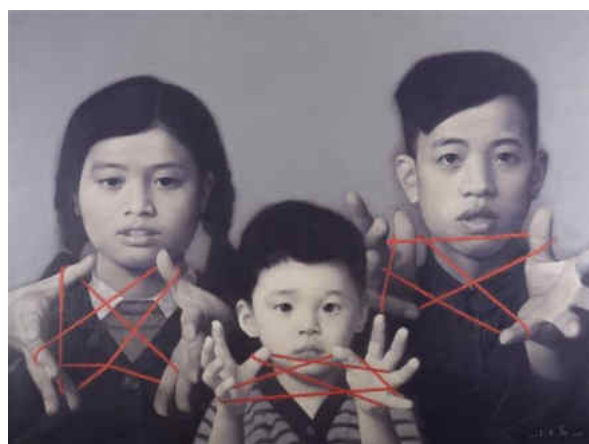
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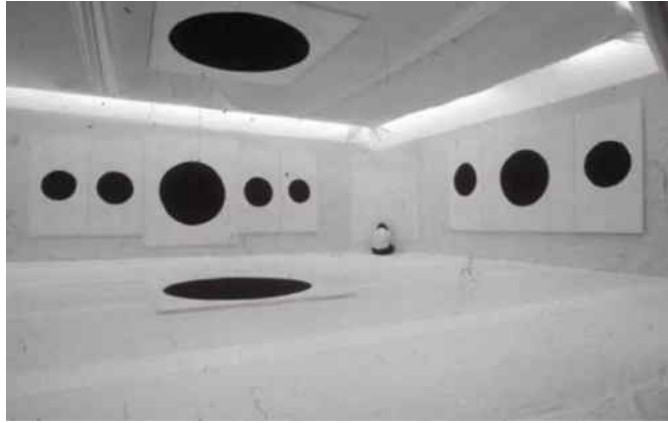
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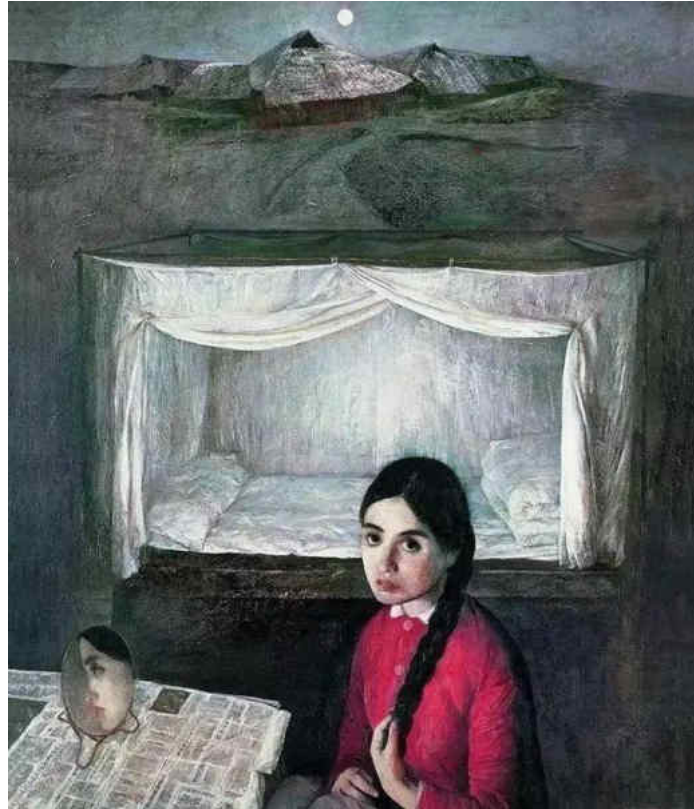
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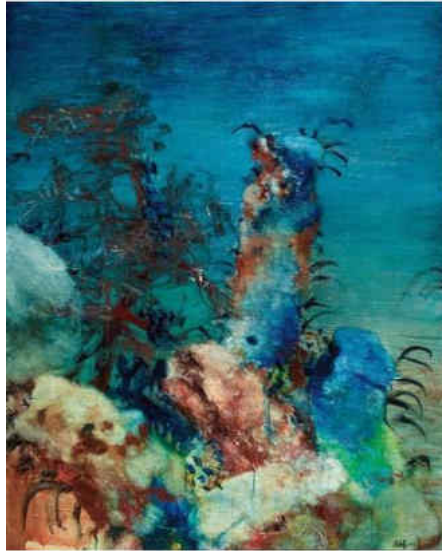
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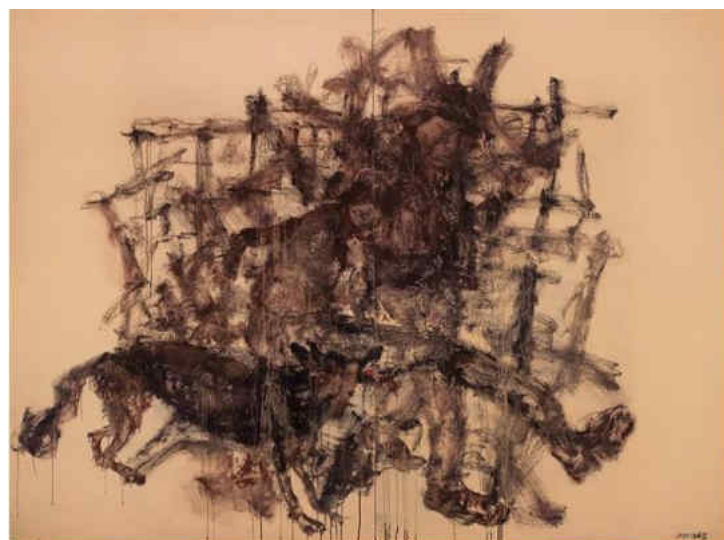
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