

POSTMODERNISM, GLOBALIZATION AND THE CONNECTIONS
TO CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART

by

NICOLE E. COMBS

A THESIS

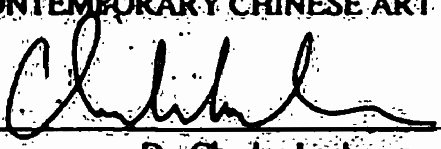
Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 1999

Copyright 1999 Nicole E. Combs

An Abstract of the Thesis of
Nicole E. Combs for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies
to be taken June 1999

Title: POSTMODERNISM, GLOBALIZATION AND THE CONNECTIONS
TO CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART

Approved: 

Dr. Charles Lachman

The reopening of China's economic and cultural doors in the 1970s provided the fundamental stage for development of a new art. The Chinese government, focusing its efforts on economic development, created policies that actually encouraged an awareness of global culture, leading to an environment conducive to artistic change. The 1980s supplied artists with an introduction to, or reintroduction to Western art theory and practice. Many artists continued to work in traditional style and technique, but others, under the influence of non-Chinese modern art, began infusing their works with a dramatically different feel inspired by the changing society. As a dialogue between global culture and China, Chinese contemporary artists are creating a discourse on the transformations taking place within their society over the past two decades. It is therefore important to look at their art as a "registering apparatus" and realize that its production stems from a reaction to the postmodern, global culture.

CURRICULUM VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Nicole Elizabeth Combs

PLACE OF BIRTH: Omaha, Nebraska

DATE OF BIRTH: April 25, 1972

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon

University of Puget Sound

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts in Asian Studies, 1999, University of Oregon

Bachelor of Arts in Asian Studies, 1994, University of Puget Sound

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Contemporary Chinese Art

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, East Asian Languages and Literature, University of Oregon, Eugene, 1996-97 and 1998-99

Internship, Red Gate Gallery, Beijing, P.R. China, 1997-98

AWARDS AND HONORS:

Chinese Cultural Scholarship, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, P.R. China, 1997-98

PUBLICATIONS:

Combs, Nicky. "Blending Tradition and Contemporary." Asian Art News
July-Aug. 1998: 76-78.

— "Reaching for Cultural Continuity." Asian Art News Sept-Oct 1998:
76-78.

— "Struggle for the New." Asian Art News May-June 1999: 56-61.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the three faculty advisors, all of whom encouraged different aspects of the thesis. My advisor Dr. Charles Lachman, as well as the other committee members Dr. Richard Kraus and Dr. Maram Epstein, provided valuable advice in the preparation of this thesis. Shen Kuryi, a visiting professor at the University of Oregon, also provided inspiration while the thesis was in its earliest phase, just a topic of discussion. The bulk of the research was completed while I was studying in Beijing as a recipient of a scholarship from the Chinese Education Commission, to which I am grateful for. While in Beijing I held an internship at the Red Gate Gallery, and I owe a sincere thank you to both the director, Brian Wallace, and to the artists, who unselfishly gave of their time to answer my questions and listen to my opinions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP OF ART AND POLITICS	9
The CCP and Art	11
The Post-Mao CCP and Art	17
III. THE 1980s	25
Cultural Debates: Official Versus Avant-Garde Art	27
The '85 Movement	33
1989	42
IV. THE DISCOURSE OF POSTMODERNISM AND THE 1990s	51
Su Xiping and the Inner Self	56
Xie Dongming and Commercialization	62
Wang Lifeng - Tradition Versus Modern	71
Liu Qinghe - Tradition Coexisting with Contemporary	75
Zhang Yajie and "Gray Culture"	79
V. CONCLUSION	86
FIGURES	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	136

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Wang Keping, <i>Idol</i> , 1979, Wooden Sculpture	89
2. Wang Keping, <i>Blind and Silent</i> , 1979, Wooden Sculpture	90
3. Huang Yongping, <i>The Haystack</i> , 1983, Multi-Media	91
4. Gu Wenda, <i>Pseudo-Characters Series: Contemplation of the World</i> , 1984, Ink on Paper	92
5. Geng Jiamyi, <i>The Second Situation, Nos. 1-4</i> , 1987, Oil on Canvas	93
6. Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, <i>Archaeological Excavations on a Waste Disposal Site</i> , 1986, Performance	94
7. 21st Century Group, <i>The Big Earthquake</i> , 1988, Performance	95
8. Wang Guangyi, <i>Mao Zedong No. 1</i> , 1988, Oil on Canvas	96
9. Wang Guangyi, <i>Post-Classical Series: Death of Marat</i> , 1987, Oil on Canvas	97
10. Ren Mengzhang, <i>General Zhu De at the Art Show</i> , 1984, Oil on Canvas	98
11. Li Xiushi, <i>The Past, the Present, the Future</i> , 1981, Oil on Canvas	99
12. Qin Ming, <i>Portrait of the Artist</i> , No Date, Oil on Canvas	100
13. Chang Ming, <i>Black Hair, Black Eyes, and Yellow Skin</i> , No Date, Oil on Canvas	101
14. Xiao Lu and Tang Song, <i>Dialogue</i> , 1989, Installation	102
15. Fang Lijun, <i>Sketch No. 2</i> , 1989, Sketch on Paper	103
16. Fang Lijun, <i>Group I No. 5</i> , 1990, Oil on Canvas	104
17. Gao Shen, Gao Qiang and Li Qun, <i>Inflationism</i> , 1989, Installation	105

Figure		Page
18.	Wang Guangyi, <i>Great Criticism - Kodak</i> , 1990, Oil on Canvas	106
19.	Li Shan, <i>The Rouge Series, No. 22</i> , 1992, Acrylic on Canvas	107
20.	Liu Wei, <i>New Generation</i> , 1991, Oil on Canvas	108
21.	Fang Lijun, <i>No. 16B</i> , 1996, Woodblock Print	109
22.	Zhang Peili, <i>Hygiene No. 3</i> , 1991, Installation: Video	110
23.	Zhang Huan, <i>To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond</i> , 1997, Performance	111
24.	Su Xiping, <i>Grasslands in Spring</i> , 1989, Lithograph	112
25.	Su Xiping, <i>Dialogue</i> , 1990, Lithograph	113
26.	Su Xiping, <i>Dialogue</i> , 1998, Lithograph	114
27.	Su Xiping, <i>Silent Town Series, No. 4</i> , 1990, Lithograph	115
28.	Su Xiping, <i>The Rising Sun</i> , 1991, Lithograph	116
29.	Su Xiping, <i>Sea of Desire No. 6</i> , 1996, Oil on Canvas	117
30.	Su Xiping, <i>Sea of Desire No. 8</i> , 1996, Oil on Canvas	118
31.	Xie Dongming, <i>Tibetan Girl No. 2</i> , 1987, Oil on Canvas	119
32.	Xie Dongming, <i>Standing Nude Woman</i> , 1991, Oil on Canvas	120
33.	Xie Dongming, <i>Downing No. 1</i> , 1992, Oil on Canvas	121
34.	Xie Dongming, <i>Sob No. 3</i> , 1994, Oil on Canvas	122
35.	Xie Dongming, <i>Untitled</i> , 1997-98, Oil on Canvas	123
36.	Xie Dongming, <i>Untitled</i> , 1997-98, Oil on Canvas	124
37.	Wang Lifeng, <i>Hui Series</i> , 1995, Mixed Media on Canvas	125
38.	Wang Lifeng, <i>Sole Series</i> , 1990, Mixed Media on Canvas	126

Figure		Page
39.	Wang Lifeng, <i>Brilliance Series</i> , 1998, Mixed Media on Canvas	127
40.	Liu Qinghe, <i>Mr. Wang</i> , 1994, Ink and Wash on Paper	128
41.	Liu Qinghe, <i>Golden Wedding</i> , 1994, Ink and Wash on Paper	129
42.	Liu Qinghe, <i>The Waltz</i> , 1997, Ink and Wash on Paper	130
43.	Liu Qinghe, <i>Evening Breeze</i> , 1998, Ink and Wash on Paper	131
44.	Zhang Yajie, <i>Street Scene</i> , 1991-94, Oil on Canvas	132
45.	Zhang Yajie, <i>Bus</i> , 1991, Oil on Canvas	133
46.	Zhang Yajie, <i>Untitled</i> , 1995, Oil on Canvas	134
47.	Zhang Yajie, <i>One Day</i> , 1997, Oil on Canvas	135

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By the 1970s, an awareness in the transformation to the approach in defining academic and artistic disciplines in relation to society was detected in the West. A decade later, coinciding with modernism's collapse, the term "postmodernism" emerged and was applied to a reconstructed dialogue between art and contemporary theory supplying an objective, accurate account of the cultural formations in the West. Postmodernism in art marked an awareness of problems in representation determined by the situations of history, politics, culture and the economy. In contrast, 20th century Chinese art, and specifically art produced within the past two decades, has yet to be properly referenced in these terms. Maybe that is because Western theorists have pinpointed postmodern characteristics to nations that have reached a phase of late capitalism, and as some critics argue, "Chinese economic, cultural and artistic conditions are immature and cannot support postmodernism."¹ But, as Fredric Jameson said in response to the reintroduction of Western theory to China:

New Theory in China arrives simultaneously with postmodernism. Unlike modernism, however, which was specifically Western and marked as an import, postmodernism in its very nature can be and always is home-grown, its pluralist celebration of difference constituting an immediate authorization of local cultural production over imports, whether from the outside or from the national power centers themselves.²

¹ Wang Dagen as cited in Ellen Johnston Laing, "Is There Post-Modern Art in the People's Republic of China?" *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark (Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993) 214.

² Fredric Jameson, foreword, *Politics, Ideology and Literary Discourse in Modern China*, eds. Liu Kang and Xiao Bingtang (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 6.

It is important to take into consideration the arguments proposed by both camps and in particular understand that "China does not fit into the (Western) postmodern framework neatly."³ For China, Jameson defended using the term postmodern. "We therefore need a global or geographical term for the ways in which chronological nonsynchronicity manifests itself in a spatial and even a national form."⁴ The West adopted "postmodernism" as a term to describe a particular historical period and the cultural transformations that went along with it. As China reopened her doors in the late 1970s, the system of globalization began to impact cultural production, fusing foreign and local forms creating new discourses. Rather than labeling the new discourses as postmodern, Jameson argues that postmodernism is "the force field [for any nation] in which very different kinds of cultural impulses must make their way."⁵ His usage is critical to China, as he identifies that postmodernism is always "home-grown," and that applied to any nation, a postmodern environment is where new cultural productions must result.

As we are preparing ourselves for the approaching 21st century, we witness a development in China's economy that is creating an environment conducive to artistic change. Most of coastal China, specifically the Special Economic Zones, is increasingly modern, and this is allowing for various forms of participation in a postmodern, global culture. It is the reaction to the rapid economic development that has played an increasingly influential role, both positive and negative, on the art produced in China within the last two decades. Whether conscious of it or not, Chinese artists are infusing

³ Liu Kang, "Is There an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate About Modernity in China," *The Culture of Globalization*, eds. Masao Miyoshi and Fredric Jameson (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 167.

⁴ Jameson, foreword 3.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 57.

their works with the emotions of what is taking place around them and creating a new language of art. Postmodern ideologies are encouraging these changes resulting in distinct divisions between cultural productions on the local and transnational level. It is this issue that needs to be addressed, and specifically the function of art as a discourse of a transforming culture, which we shall see, is influenced by global pressure and cultural exchanges.

Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and the reopening of China by Deng Xiaoping two years later, artists found themselves in an unexpected situation. Deng's economic reform policies actually encouraged the awareness of a global culture, therefore granting a greater degree of personal freedom, individual material growth and economic independence. This situation, added to the "retreat of the state" (this phrase I borrow from Julia Andrews and Gao Minglu⁶), resulted in the lifting of the monotonous styles that had suppressed the arts for last 20 years. "China's opening to the West in 1979 lead to a flood of translated publications on Western philosophies, aesthetics, art theory, and art history."⁷ Chinese publications began printing images of such Western artists as Picasso, Botticelli, Duchamp, Warhol, Rothko, and Mondrian. Art acad recently reopened in 1979, began purchasing Western art books for use mostly by faculty and graduate students. As artists faced the reopening of China and issues such as globalization and economic expansion, a new artistic environment exploded. The homogeneous past lost all relevance to many artists, and instead there was a creative freedom and a feeling of rebellion, not only against traditional art, but the past political situation as well. Rather than refueling their art with traditions of the past, many Chinese

⁶ Julia F. Andrews and Gao Minglu, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art," *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*, eds. Deborah S. Davis et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 222.

⁷ Julia F. Andrews, "Fragmented Memory: An Introduction," *Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile*, eds. Julia F. Andrews and Gao Minglu (Columbus: Weimer Center for the Arts, Ohio State U. 1993) 6.

artists began playing the same role Western avant-garde and, later, postmodern artists did in the 1950s and 60s and still do today.

What has been labeled as the Avant-Garde, or New Wave Movement by Western and Chinese artists and critics alike, received its foundations in the mid 1980s with artists radically experimenting with non-Chinese traditions. By highlighting works of this period, we will see how this movement can be understood as incorporating elements of Western art movements, but more importantly, having characteristics that could only be influenced by the climate in China. It is also this period where we witness themes of postmodern art emerging. While avant-garde and postmodern art share the same idea of breaking down the division between high art and pop culture, avant-garde art tactics include shocking the audience with radical styles, techniques and images, which was characteristic of the new art in the 1980s. While the 1980s incorporated such avant-garde characteristics, the confrontation of the notions of traditional style, form and technique with modern ideology resulting in appropriation, quotation, mimicry, and reworking of cultural (non-Chinese) materials, are key features of postmodern art. In the spirit of anti-modernist art, Chinese artists have reintegrated art and life displaying a desire to create an international contemporary art.

1989 marked an historical year as Chinese voices, particularly the voices of students, were heard around the world in a call for political reform emphasizing the right to individuality, freedom of expression, and human nature.⁸ These demonstrations began in April of 1989 and ended in violence in June as the government opened fire on the demonstrators. Just four months prior to the Tiananmen Incident, in February, the avant-garde, experimental artists advanced their legitimization as true artists at the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition held in the prestigious China National Art Gallery.

⁸ Liu Binyan, *Tell the World What Happened in China and Why*, trans. Henry Epstein (New York: Pantheon, 1989) 34.

Beijing. This exhibition was a landmark development for China's avant-garde artists. Organization for this exhibition began in 1987, and in the end it displayed the diverse media contemporary Chinese artists had been experimenting with since the reopening of China in 1979. The exhibition was also considered an acceptance of sorts by the official art world, being held in the China National Art Gallery. A seminal Chinese art critic best explains the atmosphere in relation to this show. Li Xianting says, "In an idealistic wave of elation and pride, the avant-garde artists stepped into the highest temple of Chinese art. These artists wanted to create a new culture through their works and wanted to explain through their means of portrayal that their dependence on Western art was over and that they had already achieved their own results."⁹ Unfortunately this exhibition was interrupted, suspended and reopened twice by authorities during its two week run. The first time was only three hours after the exhibition had opened. The officials were forced to close the exhibition because one of the exhibitors, Xiao Lu, converted her work into a performance piece by firing two gun shots at the installation, thereby completing the work. Both she and her boyfriend, who helped in the planning, were arrested immediately following the performance, but released three days later. Commenting on this performance, both Xiao Lu and Tang Song said they did this "with the intention of finding out how far the phenomenon 'modern art' was accepted and understood in China."¹⁰ Although the exhibition completed its two week run and most artists felt a sense of accomplishment, others were wary of the renewed government interest in the arts. The question of the exhibition's success, in addition to the controversial government response to the student led movement in June, many artists ended the decade

⁹ Li Xianting, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Chinese Art," *China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture*, eds. Jochen Noth, et al. (Oxford, Oxford UP, 1994) 44.

¹⁰ Hans van Dijk, *China Avant-Garde* 310.

in a state of disillusionment, confronted once again by a tightening of restrictions on the style of art they could produce, and also on their private lives.

The art of the early 1990s is dominated by the feelings of the unbalanced relationship between art and politics. Placed in this uneasy environment, artists created works infused with dramatic attacks on the government, both past and present. Two well-known styles of the early 1990s, Political Pop and the less aggressive style of Cynical Realism, portray the critical mood many artists had toward society. Other artists retreated inward and produced works that were more self-reflexive. For example, one of the artists of this study, Su Xinpang, began creating works with themes from his childhood memories. The overwhelming feeling of nostalgia, whether good or bad memories, is confidently portrayed in the art of early to mid 90s.

It is the later 1990s where I believe China's artists have solidified their awareness of the changing society, and are producing a more grounded quest for identity in an increasingly transnational environment. As records of their observations on reality and daily lives, artists are exploring issues such as gender, population (family planning), and the environment, all highly relevant in a global society. Through an in-depth analysis of the works of five artists, this paper will demonstrate that contemporary Chinese art has progressed from reckless experimentation and appropriation to a settled, mature reflection on society creating a language that is competitive on an international scale.

Chapter four introduces these five artists and their works, both figurative and abstract. Through traditional Chinese medium, collage, lithography and oil painting their works are supplying a "social commentary"¹¹ on the political, economical and cultural transformations within contemporary Chinese society. The selected artists, born between 1956 and 1963, come from different artistic backgrounds, but share in the success of

¹¹ This term was first suggested to me by Brian Wallace, director of the Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.

exhibiting in key international exhibitions, having their works collected by international institutions and private collectors from all across the globe, thereby creating a role for themselves in a new China. Three of these artists are teachers at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, one is a teacher of photography and art history at another Beijing university, and one makes his living as a professional artist. These artists are represented by galleries in Beijing, London and the U.S. and continue to sell their works to Western, overseas Chinese or others Asian collectors. Their works have expressed personal emotions, philosophies and desires producing a voice for Chinese artists and enabling the world to grasp a clearer understanding of contemporary Chinese society.

As stated above, a need to address the transformation in Chinese art has arisen, because artists are producing works that explore the complex relationship between culturally specific issues and the larger developments of the global postmodern age. As Fredric Jameson defends, "the form of a work of art... is a place in which one can observe social conditioning and thus the social situation. And sometimes form is a place where one can observe the concrete social context more adequately than in the flow of daily events and immediate historical happenings."¹² Thus, art production is important to the understanding of contemporary Chinese culture and society. Contemporary Chinese artists are working with with ~~various~~ ^{new} and mediums such as performance art, oil painting, installation, video, and multi-media, and I would maintain that they have set forth and accomplished the goal of placing themselves on equal footing with their Western and other Asian counterparts in an amazing two decades.

Important to the understanding of this thesis will be the delicate application of Western theories of avant-garde, postmodernism, and globalization. I would argue that adopting the strict definition of these Western theories toward Chinese art will only

¹² Xudong Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *New Literary History* 29 (1998): 360.

subtract from an original meaning, the response to the environment in China. I argue against taking the works out of context without grasping a clear understanding of China's cultural, political and societal situation. While this is a difficult position to take, it will be by supplying a background to the past official and transitional stages of art beginning in the late 1970s, and highlighted studies of individual artists that I will use the model of postmodernism as a discourse to define the context of contemporary Chinese art.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP OF ART AND POLITICS

Before discussing specific works of art and artists, significant to understanding the contemporary situation is an introduction to the complex history of the relationship between politics and art. From a survey of political chronology it is easy to conclude that the relationship between art and politics differs from time to time, such as may be exemplified by the demands of artists to perform a political service for the state. Praise and legitimacy of a leader or party often times requires participation from the art community, and this has been an important factor of the changing environment of Chinese art. Propaganda is most easily spread to large populations through art, whether painting, literature or film. Therefore, artistic content and style varies due to political demands.

Politics has always played an interesting role on the development of art in China. Freedom to create what an artist wants changes via patronage. During the Qing dynasty (17th century) the Manchu rulers recognized and approved of art through a strong showing of patronage by the court, which empowered an official "orthodox" style. The 18th century brought a shift in styles as the patronage transferred to merchants. Art became less decorative and more individualistic showing a diversity of styles suited to the tastes of the common people. But in the 1920s and 30s as part of the May Fourth tradition, a movement of reintegrating art and intellectual theory called for the modernization of culture. In order for China to modernize, artists felt that art must be "Westernized" which meant abandoning old ideas, ethics, and culture from the feudal past. The value of traditional art was questioned in response to the call for

modernization. It was during this period that a large number of artists and students were sent abroad by the government to France, the U.S. and Japan, returning to China with Western theories and styles of painting. Debates on the value of non-Chinese art traditions were encouraged by these exchanges.¹ (We will see this theme reemerging in the 1970s. As part of the outcome in sending students abroad, those returning to China having experienced Western traditions not only in art, but also theories on education and economic ideology, desired to introduce the new to tradition). During the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45 artists increased the anti-Japanese propaganda by creating heroic portrayals of Chinese with patriotic slogans, infusing a nationalistic mood into art production.² Unfortunately, much of this pre-Mao art, traditional and modern alike, was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution's campaign against the "four olds" (old customs, culture, thinking and habits) and will be discussed below in more detail. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s the course of art shifted even more dramatically toward a forced submission to the state's prescribed styles. These themes and styles were some of the most reacted against once Deng Xiaoping reopened China. While this background is over-simplified, it is important to establish a foundation for the turbulent relationship art production (including the influence of Western art) has experienced with China's changing political climate.

¹ Shen Kuyi, "On the Reform of Chinese Painting in Early Republican China," 20. *Shimin Zhongguo shi* [Commoners of China: *Guoji xueshu yanjiu duihua huicun*] [Chinese Painting and the Twentieth Century: Creativity in the Aftermath of Tradition], eds. Cao Yiqiang and Fan Jingzhong. (Hangzhou, Zhejiang renmin yishu chubanshe, 1997) 602-622. See also, *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, ed. Muryching Kao (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 130-160.

² Chu Tsing Li, *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting* (Ascom: Arbibus Asiae, 1979) 3.

The CCP and An

Jumping ahead to 1972, Deng Xiaoping returned to office following his first purge from the Party during the Cultural Revolution. In 1975, after a rapid series of political leaps, Deng was appointed to the Politburo's Standing Committee and became chief of staff of the PLA.³ With these two appointments, and understanding his potential within the Party would only increase by the support of the ailing Premier Zhou Enlai and his camp, Deng adopted the crusade to modernize China's economy.

In a speech given to Party secretaries of industrial affairs in March of 1975, Deng dictates the necessity of everyone's cooperation within the Party to push for economic development. He outlines his goal in two stages, "The first stage is to build an independent and relatively comprehensive industrial economic system by 1980. The second will be to turn China into a powerful socialist country with modern agriculture, industry, national defense and science and technology by the end of this century, that is, within the next 25 years."⁴ Deng understood the potential for China's future with the help of Western technology. He led the drive for the approval of the "Four Modernizations" for three more years until they were officially adopted in 1978. Deng Xiaoping made numerous speeches to diverse groups in the areas of industry, military and of course to the Party itself. The image of Deng Xiaoping during the 1970s, with in the public and the Party, was united with a fierce drive to modernize and develop China.

³ Maurice Meisner, Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic (New York: Free P, 1986) 416.

⁴ Deng Xiaoping, Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982), trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (Beijing: Foreign Languages P, 1983) 14.

particularly granting China a role in the global world by the 1980s. The later half of the 1970s proved to mean continued success for Deng's personal goals of promotion within the Party. He not only began to symbolize the restoration of purged comrades, but also looked to be the successor of Zhou Enlai.⁵

In 1976 with the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng slide into position as the new Party Chairman. His stability as Chairman was quite unsettled as Deng's camp was also contending for a stronger political comeback. Successful as the most active member to bring down the "Gang of Four", Hua, under the guise of being a true Maoist, also began cautiously to question some of Mao's late political decisions.⁶ As Deng Xiaoping was aggressively promoting the Four Modernizations, Hua began outlining plans to develop China's industrial production. Slowly, the establishment for revisions in cultural and educational policies were implemented by the late 1970s.⁷ These policies ended the restrictions placed on all artistic aspects of Chinese culture that had been part of the history for over 20 years, granting artists a new found freedom. But, the historical see-saw relationship of art and politics would be repeated.

The restrictions on art, theater, and film had been especially serious during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), due in part to the active role of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, and her partners (collectively labeled the "Gang of Four"). While all four members of the "Gang" were Party officials, it was Jiang Qing who played the most active role in the destruction of culture brought about by policies and ideology throughout the Cultural Revolution. While these policies played a dominant role in the loss of culture and art for

⁵ Meisner, 418.

⁶ For more details on the specifics of Hua Guofeng's role in politics, see Meisner, 448-457.

⁷ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990) 654-656.

China, important to the history of the relationship between art and politics can be traced back to 1942 when the foundation of Maoist ideology on art began.

In 1942 with the civil war raging between the Nationalists and Communists and the resistance against Japanese occupation as a back drop, Mao Zedong, the soon to be leader of the Chinese Communist Party, gave his famous talks on art and literature in Yan'an. In the two day forum, Mao set forth the role art was to play in society, who the target audience was to be, and provided strict definitions of art's content. Mao began the forum by welcoming:

Comrades! You have been invited to this forum today to exchange ideas and examine the relationship between work in the literary and artistic fields and revolutionary work in general. Our aim is to ensure that revolutionary literature and art follow the correct path of development and provide better help to other revolutionary work in facilitating the overthrow of our national enemy and the accomplishment of the task of national liberation.⁸

While affirming the importance of both literature and art in reflecting the problems of society, Mao urged art to become a tool of the government with the goal to serve the people. Art and revolution went hand and hand. Mao was not an "art-hater," but firmly believed that art and literature would play an important role in his ideology of a cultural revolution. Mao believed that by changing the priority of art, its message would reach a wider audience and raise artistic standards.⁹ The prescribed formula for art was to be Soviet Socialist Realism learned via cultural and technological links to Russia. Shortly following the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Realism, as it is called by Chinese, was adopted as the official art style.¹⁰ This

⁸ Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) 458.

⁹ Julia F. Andrews, *Printers and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994) 19.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of artistic exchanges between China and Russia, as well as illustrations of the

technically superb style, monumental works painted in oil, has a patriotic function. Socialist Realism is a "means of reflecting life in art particular to socialist society. It demands the true portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development."¹¹ From the early 1950s until about 1979, with the exception of Chinese art students studying Russia, and the few Russian artists that were invited in exchange, China's cultural doors were closed isolating artists from developments of the international art world. One can imagine the confining, restrictive role this must have played on individual motivation and creative senses. Traditional values of Chinese painting techniques and media were all but outlawed by the mid-1950s. The level of government tolerance for traditional art by such masters as Xu Beihong, Qi Baishi, and Fu Baoshi could not only serve as uninspirational, but more likely frightening.¹² Enforcement of Mao's doctrine did eventually lead to persecution and deaths of thousands of artists, writers and philosophers.¹³ By the mid-60s, the environment had shifted even more dramatically. Edmund Capon describes this as:

a time when unbridled political dogma bordered on obsession and unleashed a totally incomprehensible passion for the extinguishing the past. Creative expression, creative ability, and, of course, individuality and, if you like, the elitism that comes with individual ability and vision, counted for nothing at that time. It was a totally imported style and concept [Socialist Realism] which bore no relation whatsoever to the essential philosophical and literary traditions of personal expression that characterize Chinese painting traditions.¹⁴

Social Realist style, see Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, chaps. 2, 3.

¹¹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics* 119. Andrews quotes R. N. Cresswell, "Communist Jargon," *Readings in Russian Civilization*, ed. Thomas Riffe (Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1965) 680-681.

¹² Edmund Capon, "A Sense of Unreality: Painting in the People's Republic of China," *Kao, Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting* 165.

¹³ Roger Garside, *Coming Alive: China After Mao* (New York: McGraw, 1981) 396.

¹⁴ Capon 165.

What the Maoist dogma did was to suppress artistic inclinations toward individualism, creativity, and vitality, which included traditional and historical characteristics of Chinese art. Art critic Li Xianting, a strong supporter of the unofficial art of the 1980s, has commented that while this period of Maoism was a form of devastation to the creative spirit of the arts, it plays the most significant role in aspects of rebellion in art seen in the early to mid 1980s.¹⁵

In 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing established her foothold on culture. As part of a group of Party officials involved in the discussions on the political purposes of art, literature and performing arts, Jiang Qing was invited to create new cultural policies that eventually led to the purging of more liberal figures in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.¹⁶ In the 1950s and 60s, Chinese artists were limited to three basic styles of art: oil paintings in the Socialist Realist style, folk painting, and traditional monochrome ink and wash painting. The latter facing the strictest criticism during the Cultural Revolution, forcing many artists to either destroy their works themselves, or watch as the young Red Guards did.¹⁷ Maurice Meisner likens the artistic situation during the Cultural Revolution as that of "a dark and obscurantist age." He further elaborates:

Artists did not paint and actors and musicians did not perform, save for those few involved in Chiang Ch'ing's [Jiang Qing's] "revolutionary" ballets and operas, the main "cultural" product of the Cultural Revolution. Few new films were produced, and those made prior to 1966 were not

¹⁵ Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art," *China's New Art, 1982-1989*, ed. Valerie Doran (Hong Kong: Hanan TZ Gallery, 1993) XIII.

¹⁶ Spence 602-603.

¹⁷ Gary Garrels and Colin Mackenzie, introduction, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993), 11.

shown. Most museums holding traditional or modern works of art were closed to the public. Bookstore shelves were largely empty, having been purged of most Chinese as well as foreign literature.¹⁸

An English journalist who lived in China from 1968 to 1970, and moved frequently back and forth from Hong Kong and China, describes his return in 1976 to "a nation half alive". According to Roger Garside aspects of culture were "turned into weapons of political struggle. As a result, grace, beauty, humor, tenderness, and sensuality had all been eliminated from novels, films, television, plays, ballet, opera, poetry, music and sculpture. Painting had been reduced to the level of poster art, and a generation of talented painters inherited from pre-Communist China had disappeared without a trace."¹⁹ Garside notes the abundance of portraits and statues of Mao still being commissioned in 1978-79, littering public buildings in cities all across China. He remarked that the "cult of Mao" continued even though the revolution was over and some Party officials were questioning the outcome of Mao's reign. "For many people, the spontaneity and sincerity must have gone out of their reverence for Mao. Surely they must resent being bombarded with his quotations and image at every turn."²⁰ The resentment observed by Garside, as well as the icon of Mao, will become a key feature in art produced during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

During the late 1970s, released from the restrictive climate of the Cultural Revolution and the preceding two decades, Chinese citizens and artists alike found themselves in an incredible position now that the once banned Western plays, films,

¹⁸ Meisner 388.

¹⁹ Garside 88-90.

²⁰ Garside 101.

operas, literature, and of course art were allowed again with the Party's new policies during the late 1970s.²¹

The Post-Mao CCP and Art

In 1977 Deng Xiaoping was once again promoted, this time to Vice-Premier and Party Vice-Chairman. In February 1978 a new constitution was adopted and granted

freedom of speech, correspondence, the press, demonstrations and the freedom to strike, and the right to "speak out freely, air their views fully, hold great debates and write big character posters."²²

These were privileges that Chinese citizens had not seen for over 30 years. Along with the new constitution's guarantee of participation by the people, in November 1978 the Party announced the "reversal of verdict" that cleared the names of those who had participated in the 1976 demonstration in Tiananmen Square (following Zhou Enlai's death) appealing for a more open government. Also that fall at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee Deng succeeded in gaining the official acceptance of the program of the "Four Modernizations" (agriculture, industry, science and technology) thus focusing all efforts on China's modernization.²³ Deng promised sweeping changes for China. He played a political balancing act encouraging everyone and anyone whom he felt would promote his ideas. Even after the approval of the Four Modernization program, Deng still campaigned for the development of China's economy.

²¹ Meisner, 449.

²² Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: U of California P., 1986) 6. Nathan paraphrases and quotes the new constitution.

²³ Nathan, 9-11.

While plans for the industrial and agricultural development were rapidly progressing, liberalization in the cultural world began too. In 1978 in Beijing, a national congress was formed in order to deliberate the outcome of the Cultural Revolution and in particular, on Mao's ideology. This meeting promoted the understanding that citizens could safely voice their complaints against society and express their desire for more individual freedom.²⁴ Along with meetings within China, Deng's policies reopened China to the West, and he began traveling to other nations to reengage in foreign affairs. After President Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, Deng made his trip to the U.S. in 1979 and established full diplomatic relations. It was on this trip that trade agreements with such companies as Boeing and Coca-Cola were made.²⁵ Chinese citizens were enjoying increased economic freedom, more consumer goods, like Coca-Cola, and a better lifestyle. Citizens liked what they were experiencing and in return praised Deng Xiaoping's programs. More and more big-character posters (*dazibao*) began going up on a wall near Tiananmen Square, cleverly labeled the "Democracy Wall" most likely in reference to the earlier Hundred Flowers Campaign.²⁶ The excitement of a better future for citizens as individuals, and also their country, paved the way for the Democracy Movement of 1978-79 to begin. Deng was pleased with the praise and legitimacy he was receiving and commented, "the Democracy Wall is good." He even told a foreign reporter, "We have no right to deny this or criticize the masses for making use of democracy. If the masses feel anger let them express it."²⁷

²⁴ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 235.

²⁵ Spence 659.

²⁶ For specific details on the "Hundred Flowers Campaign" of 1957, in which Mao Zedong called for the people to express their feelings toward the government, and the subsequent movement that went along with it, please refer to Spence, 569-574, 660.

²⁷ Lowell Dittmer, *China's Communist Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch 1949-1981* (Berkeley, U of California P. 1987) 232.

This movement went on for five months before the popular criticism began to get out of Deng's control. For many, this new found freedom to criticize was so overwhelming that they forgot about China's history of suppressing "dissident" voices. Realizing while the economy was changing, the political institutions that had been in place for 30 years were not, and the people demanded change. 1978 began with people's faith in the Party for a better future, but it turned into radical demands that Deng was not expecting. During the five months of the Movement thousands of citizens came to the Democracy Wall to read poems, short stories and the big character posters that stated people's political views. Many unofficial journals also began publishing selections of the posters. In an autobiographical account of the student movement of 1989, a participant elaborates on the meaning of the 1978-79 movement to his family, "My father and thousands of other Beijing residents furiously copied the writings on the monument because this was a way in which they could read contemporary Chinese works of real literary value and because the poems were an expression of the dissatisfaction they felt."²⁸ Shen Tong emphasized that the popularity of this movement increased as people were once again exploring individual creative thoughts through writing. The literary value of the Democracy Wall posters was made apparent by the flourishing of the unofficial journals that published the posters' contents, and sold out daily in front of the Democracy Wall.²⁹ According to David Goodman, "For the activists - be they writers of wall posters, producers of an unofficial magazine or newspaper, or poets who read their works in public - The Democracy Movement represented the right to have opinions, to discuss opinions, to experiment, and to self expression."³⁰ Much of the movement was

²⁸ Shen Tong with Marianne Yen, *Almost a Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990) 24-25.

²⁹ David S. G. Goodman, *Beijing Street Voices: The Poetry and Politics of China's Democracy Movement* (Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981) 3.

³⁰ Goodman 9.

formed around criticism of the political system, but cultural implications were also present.

What began as recognition and praise of Deng's ascendancy to power, rapidly expanded into a larger movement involving petitioning for more participation by the people in the government. The intellectual groups published journal articles attacking individual Party members stating that the government needed popular supervision.³¹ Deng Xiaoping was surprised by the people's reaction to the increased freedom he had originally supported, and even more so by the radical demands for democracy.

In October 1979 a group of artists joined the movement calling for "artistic democracy". In what has become the first "avant-garde" exhibition of this period, and one that artists in the early 1980s took as a model, took place on September 27, 1979, the "Stars" (*Xingxing*) exhibition. Julia Andrews acknowledges that the exhibition title was a mischievous reference to a line from an article by Mao Zedong that was frequently quoted during the Cultural Revolution, "A tiny spark can set the steppes ablaze" (*Xingxing zhihuo, keyi liao yuan*).³² The artists' choice of this title added to the tone of political criticism and opposition apparent in their works. On that September day this group of amateur artists hung their works and sculptures on the fences outside the China National Art Gallery in Beijing. There was no official authorization for their exhibition, and many of their works had politically critical qualities to them. By holding their exhibition outdoors, they also created a challenge to the art establishment, as if they were invading the art world from the outside. With their motto, "Picasso is our banner, Kollwitz is our model,"³³ the exhibition began. The most famous piece is the wooden sculpture by

³¹ Nathan 19.

³² Andrews, *Painters and Politics* 396, 428.

³³ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 235.

Wang Keping, *Idol* (Figure 1). In a work that demonstrates influence of historical Buddhist sculpture, the mask-like face bears a strong resemblance to Mao Zedong, suggesting a parody of the deification of Mao. Wang Keping's other works were equally satirical, and he describes the work *Blind and Silent* (Figure 2) as, "my image of myself and of all the Chinese people who have been oppressed." See how one eye is shut so we can't see much of what's going on around us, and the mouth is corked, like a Thermos bottle, so we cannot speak."³⁴

The 29 artists displayed styles and techniques ranging from impressionism, abstraction and realism, with the majority showing influence of art and ideology of the West. Their works expressed the return to individually inspired art, a personal language, nothing of styles imposed by China's past history.³⁵ They reflected a call for artistic freedom and reform. The exhibition drew the attention of the public (in part due to the location being near a large bus stop) but also the attention of the police, resulting in the exhibition only lasting three days.³⁶ The members of the "Stars" group continued their drive for artistic democracy by posting a notice on the Democracy Wall demanding an apology from the police for an infringement of rights. When they did not receive an apology, they joined the advocates from the Democracy Wall in a demonstration on October 1, 1979.³⁷

³⁴ Wang Keping as quoted in Joan Lebold Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting, 1949-1986* (New York: Abrams, 1987) 60.

³⁵ For illustrations of other works from the first "Stars" exhibition, as well as detailed accounts, see *The Stars: 10 Years* (Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1989).

³⁶ Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 398.

³⁷ Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 398.

The government had been responding somewhat quietly throughout the movement. In March 1979, Deng began warning other cadres that the posters were "excessive and that there [were] 'bad elements' among the authors."³⁸ When one writer, Wei Jingsheng, posted a personal attack on Deng, the arrests began.³⁹ The official crackdown involved arrests, banning the unofficial journals, and labor reform for those convicted. Deng even called for the abolition of the "four greats": the freedom to write big-character posters, the rights to speak out freely, hold great debates and air views fully.⁴⁰ This has been labeled a "soft-handed" crackdown because the participants early on had legitimized Deng's reascension within the Party, the fact that foreign journalists and diplomats had paid increasing interest, and because many of the officials were not sure of the policy toward the participants.⁴¹

But the manner in which Deng Xiaoping handled the movement and crackdown illustrated his personal interest in maintaining power within the Party and remaining on top. On October 30, 1979 just a few weeks after the "Stars" exhibition, in his speech at the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists, he continued to encourage the growth of individual expression and exchange with Western theories. His introduction welcomed the participants and casually, almost sheepishly, as if there were no such atrocities in China's history of art and literature, began, "[The delegates] are gathered here to sum up their basic experience over the past 30 years and to discuss ways of building on their successes, overcoming shortcomings and thus make literature and art

³⁸ Geremie Barne and John Minford, eds., *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988) 343.

³⁹ More information on Wei Jingsheng, including reproductions of his writings, see Barne and Minford, *Seeds of Fire* 277-289.

⁴⁰ *Meisner* 456, 485n.7.

⁴¹ *Nathan* 41-42.

flourish in the new historical period. This is a happy and historic occasion.⁴² Deng also pointed out that many of the previously forbidden art and literary works are once again available, and he placed the blame for the past "absurdities" on the Gang of Four's policies. Deng advocated the advancement of China's cultural level through the growth of individual technique and style, yet incorporated Mao's Yan'an philosophy that art should continue to stimulate the masses through depictions of social life. He elaborated, "We should encourage the unhampered development of different forms and styles in literature and art... [Writers and artists] should earnestly study, assimilate and expand upon all that is best in the literary and artistic techniques of every land and every age and perfect art forms with the distinctive features of our own nation and our own time."⁴³ Deng was actually calling for a blending of Chinese tradition with non-Chinese elements. In conclusion he said:

We must get rid of all stereotypes and conventions and study new situations... it is essential that writers and artists follow their own creative spirit. What subjects they should choose for their creative work and how they should deal with those subjects are questions that writers and artists themselves must examine and gradually resolve through practice. There should be no arbitrary meddling in this process.⁴⁴

Simultaneous with the Democracy Wall crackdown Deng continued to encourage a freedom of expression within the arts. He specifically addressed the "younger generation," placing an emphasis on the need to increase their means of expression, and to debate theories related to art and literature. With his position within the Party relatively secure, Deng committed to reopening China allowing for a wealth of

⁴² Deng Xiaoping, 200.

⁴³ Deng Xiaoping, 203-205.

⁴⁴ Deng Xiaoping, 206.

information to return. Within all fields of culture, art, film, literature, performance art, and television, China was an open market that was absorbing anything foreign. Economic development meant turning global, supplying artists with much more than inspiration.

Exemplified by the "Stars" exhibitions was the growing feeling of resentment the artists had toward the Yan'an legacy, and the strong desire to remedy it. Li Xianting places importance on the emotional impact of the Maoist policies on art, and expressed that the demise of the legacy was inevitable:

As a cultural background and cultural point of reference it set the stage for the eagerness with which artists welcomed the influx of modern Western art and philosophy after 1979, and in itself holds the key to their desire for choice and social transformation. The loss of the Maoist model's value structures in the post-Cultural Revolution period caused artists of necessity to begin the quest for a new set of values to support their development. They expressed their rejection of the now-discredited Maoist values in a widespread enthusiasm for modern Western culture.⁴⁵

Deng's ascendancy was played out through a succession marked by brilliant diplomacy. He catered to the needs of different groups, and roused and motivated ideas of an economically independent China that allowed for individualism, and freedom of expression. His charismatic desire to see China succeed, could not help but give citizens a new pride in their country. This nation-building ideology led to the encouragement of people to speak out, the rehabilitation of many artists and writers, and even addressed contemporary issues facing artists. Moving into the 1980s, artists began to take advantage of this patriotic feeling, and new availability of Western things.

⁴⁵ Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art," XIII.

CHAPTER III

THE 1980s

Artists began the decade of the 1980s with an attitude toward artistic creation characterized by a "retreat of the state". Although the Democracy Movement of 1978-79 was suppressed by the government, Deng Xiaoping personally encouraged artists to express individual freedom in choice of style and technique. In August 1980, Jiang Feng, director of Beijing's CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Arts) and the Chairman of the Chinese Artists Association authorized an exhibition for the "Stars" at the China National Art Gallery. Jiang's personal history as a Party member and artist himself are quite relevant to this event. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Jiang was a practicing printmaker creating works that promoted the Communist Party. His ideology included a revolution within the arts promoting a national form, but not in an anti-Western spirit. Instead, Jiang's ideology required development of Western styles and techniques. He did set standards as to which styles were appropriate, but also increased interest in international exchange.¹

In an interview with a foreign scholar prior to the 1980 "Stars" opening, Jiang said he authorized the exhibition because he believed "when these people [the artists] realize that the mass of the people don't understand their work, they will learn and change their ways."² Prior to the exhibition opening, Jiang inspected the works, finding some pieces unsuitable for exhibition. This did not deter the group, and they ended up

¹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, 24-25.

² Michael Sullivan, "Bliss Was it in That Down to Be Alive!" *The Stars: 10 Years*, 6.

showing all the planned works. Attendance was record setting as some estimated at least 200,000 visitors came. The "Stars" exhibited works employing the techniques and styles of Cezanne, Warhol, and Duchamp's ready-made art, specifically selecting these modern and postmodern styles. Once the styles were appropriated and blended with themes relevant to the Chinese society, the works not only criticized the foundation behind the Cultural Revolution, but also the past orthodoxy of imposed art styles. While the works may have been ambiguous and esoteric in representation, resulting in comments by the common viewer that there was not much skill or talent in evidence, therefore, part of what Jiang had suspected was true.³ While the viewers may not have fully understood comments these artists were making, they did know that they were witnessing an historical event. Commenting upon the exhibition, a non-participating artist from Chengdu said, "What is important is not whether their art is good, but the fact that the authorities allowed the exhibition to take place at all."⁴

Praise for the diversity exhibited also was met by an equal amount of official criticism. The group was forced into self-criticism, and further denied exhibition space. The "Stars" group disbanded, but their legacy has continued.⁵ This exhibition set the stage for challenging the values of traditional and official art exemplified by the diverse, intense, dramatic, and expressive works that made up the unofficial art of the 1980s. The use of the term "unofficial" suggests that there was also an official art scene. In order to reach a full understanding of the unofficial art movement, I believe it is important to contrast and introduce elements of official art as well. During the 1980s the government

³ Sullivan 7-8

⁴ Sullivan 6

⁵ During the early 1980s members of the "Stars" immigrated to Japan or Western countries where many of them now make a successful living as professional artists. see The Stars 10 Years

was still a major patron of the arts, and permission to hold exhibitions was still needed from them.

Cultural Debates: Official Versus Avant-Garde Art

As the 1980s solidified the term postmodernism as the defining theory for the emergence of cultural shifts in the West begun in the 1960s, China was waking up once again to the influence of Western ideology on culture, economics and politics. 1979 proved to be a year of awakenings. The ambiguity of the Party line toward an official position on the outcome of Mao's Cultural Revolution intensified factionalism within the Party, as well as debates on how much of a voice to grant citizens. This became an even more difficult notion to debate with the flood of new thought, art, literature, and commercial products entering China. In October 1979, while covering the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic, a journalist for *Newsweek* noted, "[The] wall posters that once displayed Mao's sayings and poems have begun to be replaced by American-style billboards carrying commercial messages."⁶ Accompanying the article is a photo of two billboards with large Chinese captions, one with an advertisement for the drink 7-UP, and the other, Marlboro cigarettes. This is quite different from the China Roger Garside described upon his return in 1976. The combination of the 1978-79 Democracy Movement, the Party reassessing Mao's role in China's development, and the increased amount of Western consumer items produced a dramatic effect on some citizens, encouraging groups of intellectuals, artists and politicians to question the correct

⁶ Angus Deming, Andrew Nagorski and Bernard Krushner, "Mao: A Misguided Mortal," *Newsweek* 15 October 1979: 85.

path of Chinese culture in a developing country. As we recall, Deng wanted to build an independent economic system by 1980.

In the world of the arts, this debate took an aggressive course. Artists of the 1980s can be easily divided into two groups, those who rejected anything to do with the tradition of Chinese art, and others who continued to work in traditional media, whether ink, or oil painting in the realist manner.

As there has been an increased interest in contemporary Chinese art on an international level over the past 10 years, many people may be most familiar with the unofficial style of contemporary art. Possibly, because this art labeled as "avant-garde" contains deeply satirical undertones, it has generated more interest. Another factor is that this type of art is being vigorously marketed on an international level, mostly through dealers in Hong Kong. Either way, with the international interest growing stronger, a maturing, clearer understanding of the motivation behind unofficial art is produced. As we shall see, during the 1980s Chinese society was faced with an interesting transformation. China, behind the leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, was becoming more global, causing institutions that had been in place for years to change. This transformation increased the desire to create a dialogue with the rest of the world, and the art was a major part of that.

In 1999, a decade later, we can now address the unofficial art of the 1980s in theoretical terms. I will be referring to this art as avant-garde, and view it as possessing many of the characteristics of postmodern art as defined in the West. Globalization, economic expansion, and the reopening of China provided the opportunity for a new artistic environment. The discourse it has created provides a way to periodize the transformations within society. It is this point where not only the domestic environment created change, but the globalized extended pressure increased the availability to the outside market.

Artists feeling encouraged by Deng's 1979 speech took advantage of the freedom to create. Their energy to rebel collided with the increasing trade and interaction with foreign countries. Van Gogh, Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol's art, not to mention theory of Freud and Nietzsche, were presented to China and immediately began inspiring and encouraging a self-recognizing response in the art. Artists were either reintroduced to, or for the first time were experiencing, new cultural discourses and ways of thinking from them. These new theories and philosophies encouraged questioning of humanism, "human nature, human position, human dignity, human rights and human freedom."⁷ Gao Minglu states, "intellectuals began questioning the foundations of Maoist ideology with philosophical and cultural debates regarding the nature of reality in China and the value of the individual human being. This questioning spirit and the concurrent influx of Western ideas influenced the occurrence and development of Chinese avant-garde art."⁸ This period of awakening reached a peak in 1983, and eventually culminated in the '85 Movement.

During this time artists were busy interpreting these new thoughts and ideologies aesthetically. Dramatically and radically using previously forbidden Western styles to portray their strong feelings of contempt toward the state, artists worked in styles such as post-impressionism and abstract impressionist painting, photography, sculpture, installations, and performance art.⁹ But, as Gao Minglu explains, "the art practice using various western-originated forms was self-oriented and not involved with the western mainstream for either direct impute or evaluation; it was internal dialogue answering

⁷ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 236.

⁸ Gao Minglu, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art, 1979-1993," *Fragmented Memory* 14.

⁹ Gao, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art" 14.

only to its own social and cultural demands."¹⁰ There were definite connections to the Western forms, but Chinese cultural tradition was still relevant. Artists continued to incorporate deeply embedded traditions allowing for a new, dramatic art. The experimentation with non-Chinese styles and techniques grew into China's own avant-garde art movement. This movement, throughout its development "faced in two directions: one toward society as a whole and the other toward the art world."¹¹ It exemplified the ideas of art as a vehicle challenging the previous political control the state had over the arts.

In 1983 in Xiamen, Fujian, Huang Yongping (born 1954) organized an exhibition entitled *A Modern Exhibition of Five Artists*. Works from this exhibition represented this new form of art incorporating Western styles as their model, but were dominated in the arena of philosophy and theory in combination with Chinese culture. Huang, a member of the Xiamen Dada group, displayed his painting *The Haystack* (Figure 3). This version had been painted after a copy of his teacher's, whose had been a copy after the original *Les Foins* by the French realist Jules Bastien-Lepage.¹² Huang, rather than strictly imitating the oil painting, turned his piece into a multi-media work by attaching a portion of a plaster face and a wooden foot. He cropped the painting and placed it within the frame so the woman's leg is not shown in totality. He affixed the wooden foot to the outside of the frame, to give the impression that it is distended from the picture. This

¹⁰ Gao Minglu, "Toward a Transitional Modernity: An Overview of *Freddie Ouzi: New Chinese Art*," *Inside Out* 17.

¹¹ Gao Minglu, "What is the Chinese Avant-Garde?" *Fragmented Memory* 4.

¹² Hans van Dijk, "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution: Stylistic Development and Theoretical Debate," *China Avant-Garde* 19. van Dijk notes that in 1978 as part of an exhibition of European art in Beijing, Bastien-Lepage's *Les Foins* had been one of the most popular works and was copied by many of the visitors. It was later used in many art academies as an exercise for students to copy.

piece drew critical recognition from extremes of both art camps due to its originality, appropriation of a Western modernist's work, and use of media.

Li Xianting best sums up this period by stating that, "artists sought a dialogue with modern Western culture, a rediscovery of their native cultural identity, and an awakening of a 'humanist' consciousness with its inherent element of cultural reflection and critique."¹³ The strong motivation behind the Chinese avant-garde was both conveyance of political ideology and artistic innovation.

The questioning of both the political and cultural aspects of Chinese society presented a challenge to the government, and in 1982 an anti-Western political movement, the "Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement", was implemented to "counteract the Western influences the authorities feared were 'polluting' the Chinese people's spirit and commitment to communism."¹⁴ Themes such as individualistic values and abstract art were major concerns for the government. After graduation in 1981 from the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Gu Wenda created a series of paintings with fake Chinese writing. In his *Pseudo-Characters Series: Contemplation of the World* (Figure 4), Gu tells that the inspiration came as he was studying Chinese seal carving and reading books on the philosophy of Western languages. He admits there was no dissident meaning at all to the words, he was working with notions of conceptual ink painting. His found his exhibitions repeatedly closed down by the government in the early 1980s.¹⁵ In 1987 Gu moved to New York where he currently resides as a full time artist.

¹³ Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art," XIII.

¹⁴ Gao, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art" 15.

¹⁵ Gu Wenda, artist presentation, Panel Discussion: The Future of Chinese Art, Traditionalism Vs. Modernism, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, 26 Feb. 1999.

In late 1984 the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement, called by some a "Mini-Cultural Revolution", ended. Members in the Party feared that the campaign would prevent foreign investment by threatening economic reform policies.¹⁶ Coinciding with the end of the government's movement was the *Sixth National Art Exhibition* held in Beijing. Holding true to the officially sponsored exhibitions, this one too remained backward-looking.¹⁷ Of the 150 oil paintings exhibited, the works selected maintained the standards set by the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement and displayed none of the provocative aspects of the avant-garde work also produced at this time. The exhibition was composed of narrative works displaying themes of rural and urban life, industrialization, and stories from classical novels. All were painted in the style of Socialist Realism. *Chinese Literature*, an official journal printed in English, gave a review of this exhibition claiming it to be rich in theme and style. Li Tianxiang, the author of the article described one work as, "a simple painting but the images of the two ordinary peasants are strikingly realistic and impressive. The appeal of the work is not merely in its vividness but in the artist's obvious love of country life and people."¹⁸ Not only was this a straight party-line interpretation of the work, which for all intents and purposes is rather uninspiring, the entire exhibition only held more of the same.

¹⁶ Barne and Minford, *Seeds of Fire*, 345.

¹⁷ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 236.

¹⁸ Li Tianxiang, "Oil Works at the Sixth National Fine Arts Exhibition," *Chinese Literature* Autumn 1985: 85.

The '85 Movement

While 1984 continued to be a disappointing year for avant-garde artists, 1985 marked the greatest momentum for their movement, which came to be referred to as the '85 Movement. The personal efforts of the artists involved in this movement were to prove Chinese culture as part of the international contemporary world. In line with the pluralism of art projects, the state once again began to support the exchange of ideas with the West, and the number of foreign art exhibitions began to increase. North Korean and Yugoslavian propaganda art was exhibited in the mid-1970s, due to the better foreign relations China had with the two countries. Also, traditional Japanese art made an appearance. With the exhibition of Kathe Kollwitz in 1977 the Chinese were able to view art that combined high aesthetics with social comments. This exhibition of woodblock prints proved to have a particular amount of influence over some of the movements in the later part of the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1978 in Beijing and Shanghai there were exhibitions of Western European art, that included many French landscapes, including the Bastien-Lepage work previously mentioned.¹⁹ But it was not until 1985 that the Chinese experienced Western postmodern art at an exhibition of the American pop artist Robert Rauschenberg. In 1986 *Time* magazine repeated their 1979 naming of Deng Xiaoping as "Man of the Year", prompting Rauschenberg to use a reproduction of the cover photo in a work entitled *China*. He later commented, "It is great being in China today, since there has been a kind of new emotion, new spectacle which had not existed three years ago."²⁰ While both Rauschenberg and Warhol's works

¹⁹ van Dijk, "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution" 19.

²⁰ Gao Minglu, "Chronology: Mainland China," *Inside Out* 199.

heavily influenced China's Political Pop movement that flourished during the early 1990s, it appears as though Chinese culture was also an influence on their work.²¹

Debates, conferences, journal articles, and informal discussions regarding Chinese culture reached its most intense period during 1985. Attitudes on the acceptance, appropriation or rejection of Western styles continued. With the debates as a backdrop, the avant-garde artists reasserted themselves with more organization and commitment to challenge the need for freedom of expression. Over eighty self-organized avant-garde groups held exhibitions and conferences throughout twenty-six different provinces.²² Their works, more mature than the earlier period, began creating interest world wide. They continued to work in Western media but with a touch of something one could only find in China. As Gao Minglu noted, themes emphasized "the value of individual human beings in Chinese culture, freedom of creation in art, and a radical overhaul of artistic concepts and forms. To do this [artists] selected ideas from Western modern and postmodern art, such as surrealism, dada, pop art, and conceptual art."²³

Representative of this period is the work by Geng JIANYI. Geng, born in 1962 in Henan province, studied at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, and received his degree in 1985. He continues to reside in Hangzhou and teaches at the Zhejiang Institute of Technology. As part of the '85 Movement, he has been considered a representative of what critics have labeled the "Rational Art" group. Rational art was highly influenced by the style of surrealism, but rather than images from the subconscious these artists depict experiences from real life.²⁴ In 1985 when his

²¹ Reference to Warhol's 1972 pop image of Mao Zedong.

²² Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 236-7.

²³ Gao, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art" 16.

²⁴ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 245.

in 1989, displayed official portraits of Mao Zedong with superimposed red grids serving to cancel out the icon (Figure 8). Prior to these well known styles, during the mid-1980s, Wang completed his *Post-Classical Series*. Also influenced by Western surrealism, this series appropriated and abstracted famous examples of Western works forming and manipulating them to create an image of new social order.²⁸ Exemplified by this series is *Death of Marat* (Figure 9) in which Wang perverts Jacques-Louis David's 18th century depiction of the martyred revolutionary. Important to Wang is the participation of the viewer with his art, and for them to draw their own conclusions to the either political or religious images without the interference of aesthetics.²⁹

The '85 Movement proved a great success for unofficial avant-garde exhibitions, activities and journal publications. The spirit continued into 1986 with avant-garde events across China's cities.³⁰ In July the first large-scale symposium in relation to the '85 Movement was held in Zhuhai, Guangdong. Individuals and groups of avant-garde artists from all across China attended to discuss the accomplishments of the avant-garde movement thus far, and to detail the direction in which it should progress. One session at this conference was a slide show of over 1,300 works that had been sent in from many different provinces. At this conference the participants decided to organize a national avant-garde exhibition and began the preparation.³¹

Occurring simultaneously with the exhibition planning were student demonstrations calling for further political reform and democracy. While the Party, in particular Deng Xiaoping, had called for reforms that would open the political system

²⁸ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 244.

²⁹ Andreas Schmid, *China Avant-Garde* 151.

³⁰ Gao, "Chronology: Mainland China" 199.

³¹ Gao, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art" 17.

and increase the participation within the government by the people, students and intellectuals had not seen these reforms solidified. The protests began in Hefei and quickly spread to Wuhan, Shanghai and Beijing. Posters demanding more democracy as well as others with complaints of poor living conditions sprang up on many campuses.³² While the display of posters was forbidden after the 1979 Democracy Wall Movement, these students continued their drive for democracy and freedom. The government crackdown was not only aimed at the students. Intellectuals that had publicly supported the students were also arrested and sent to prison. The government purged well known democracy supporters from the Party, such as the outspoken physicist Fang Lizhi, and writer Liu Binyan.³³ In January 1987 Deng ordered a nation-wide renewed struggle against bourgeois liberalization. The Party placed the blame on the General Secretary, Hu Yaobang, forcing him to resign under allegations that he supported the increased liberalization. Deng Xiaoping defined this liberalization under the terms of "rejection of the Party's leadership."³⁴ Hu Yaobang had been a well known supporter of the intellectual movements by recognizing the importance of their role in society. Deng Xiaoping was also quoted at this time as saying

The problem is that there has been some confusion in our ideological work and students have not been given strong, effective guidance... We should expose those people who have acted out of ulterior motives, because this time they have adopted slogans that clearly express opposition to Communist Party leadership and the socialist road. Certain individuals have made exceedingly pernicious statements, trying to incite people into action.³⁵

³² Spence 723-4.

³³ Spence 725.

³⁴ Barne and Minford, *Seeds of Fire* 350.

³⁵ Barne and Minford, *Seeds of Fire* 348.

Once again China was faced with restrictions on the new forms of political and cultural thought. The Party created a new agency that was to oversee the publications and press sectors of society. New laws were also implemented that demonstrations needed to be applied for five days in advance with a list of the names of demonstrators.³⁶ The Party's Propaganda Department issued a declaration prohibiting the organization of activities such as scholarly conferences or symposia by any professional group, especially by young people.³⁷ The Anti-Bourgeois Liberation Campaign cast a dark shadow over the plans for the avant-garde art exhibition. Due to the repressive cultural circumstances, the group immediately halted the preparation for what was being called the *Chinese Modern Art Exhibition* planned for July 1987.

While the political climate toward avant-garde philosophies were fluctuating, in 1987 in the U.S., two exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art were shown. The first was organized as a collaboration between the Chinese Ministry of Culture and Artists Association with a private U.S. gallery. This exhibition exemplified the official realm of contemporary art. The second exhibition was from the collection of ARCO International Oil and Gas Company, and displayed a diverse array of unofficial art. The officially sponsored exhibition, *Contemporary Oil Paintings From the People's Republic of China*, was held for three weeks with the blessing of the Chinese Ambassador and Henry Kissinger. Han Xu, the Ambassador, diplomatically said that this was a remarkable exchange between the U.S. and China and would enhance the friendship of the two countries and improve the peace and harmony of the global family.³⁸ Dr. Kissinger

³⁶ Barne and Minford, *Seeds of Fire* 348; and Spence 726

³⁷ Andrews and Gao "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 239

³⁸ *Contemporary Oil Paintings From the People's Republic of China* (Oklahoma City: Heffner Galleries, 1987) 3.

highlighted the importance of China's growing economy, and said, "The paintings in this collection will offer the Western audience a highly personal insight into the dramatic economic, political and cultural changes now in progress in China. The dynamic fusion of artistic styles and ideas... is evidence of the sense of experimentation and individualism currently awakening throughout Chinese society as a result of post-1979 reforms."³⁹ The gallery owner, Robert Hefner, also described the historic moment Chinese artists were experiencing, and how they realized the freedom of the ability of expressing the great changes going on in Chinese society. He elaborated that the paintings represented "a cross section of artists who today are passionately expressing their newfound freedom on canvas... breaking away from thousands of years of traditional style and recent political repression, they are pouring out their emotions with a passion only rarely experienced in the history of art."⁴⁰ As enticing and descriptive as these gentlemen were about the works, it seems only appropriate that since the exhibition was sponsored by the Chinese government, the paintings were no more exciting than the works described above from the 1984 *Sixth National Art Exhibition*. The monotonous themes of narrative works were identical to the 1984 exhibition in China. In fact this collection displayed one of the award-winning paintings from the earlier exhibition, *General Zhu De at the Art Show* (Figure 10). Of course, as the paintings were selected by members of the Chinese Artists Association one may expect to find predominantly official works, but reviewing the catalogue, there were a few that slipped past the censors.⁴¹ The theme of the future is illustrated rather ambiguously in Li Xiushi's *The Past, the Present, the Future* (Figure

³⁹ *Contemporary Oil Paintings* 4.

⁴⁰ *Contemporary Oil Paintings* 1-2.

⁴¹ Andrews, *Painters and Politics* 7. While Julia Andrews may unofficially link the CAA as an organ of the Party, more correctly may be her statements on the benefits associated with the organization such as exhibitions and publications.

11), a cold landscape of floating icebergs. And one painting that could be described as cynical and maybe even hopeless is *Portrait of the Artist* (Figure 12) by Qin Ming. In what is possibly a self-portrait, Qin depicts an artist standing in front of a blank canvas, his expression neither smiling or frowning. It too is blank. By drawing an imaginary diagonal across the painting, the viewer finds that over half of the work is dark, concealing the figure's body making it almost indistinguishable from the background. Qin has stated that the blank canvas is symbolic of the infinite number of choices the artist now has before him,⁴² but why should that be depicted in a somber, blackened mood? It is almost as if the artist is not pleased by this freedom, could it be that he is afraid to allow the excitement guide his creative talents for fear that the government will once again take them away? I include the information on this exhibition because I feel it is important to realize that even outside of China, the government's hand was taking a role in the type of works allowed to be exhibited.

The second exhibition to take place in the U.S. in 1987 was entitled *Beyond the Open Door*. Henry Kissinger once again wrote the foreword, and repeated the marvel at the rapid modernization that China was experiencing "under good leadership."⁴³ Highlighted by the director of the museum was that ARCO's collection, assembled through the assistance of the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange of Columbia University, provided the Western viewer with examples of what the new generation of Chinese artists were producing. He acknowledged the fact that one-third of the exhibiting artists were women, and that the works represent the ability of artists to use their individual expression to create works that might have once been viewed as going

⁴² Contemporary Oil Paintings 138.

⁴³ Henry Kissinger, foreword, *Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings From the People's Republic of China* (Pasadena: Pacific Asia Museum, 1987) 7.

against the status quo.⁴⁴ The exhibition having no connection to the Chinese government, embodied a stronger spirit of the avant-garde and the '85 Movement. Not only the choice of multiple media, oils, traditional ink and wash, lacquer on wood panels, and collage, but also the styles, abstraction, surrealism, expressionism, and traditional landscape, all proved to accurately portray the experimentation during the 1980s. One work, *Black Hair, Black Eyes and Yellow Skin* (Figure 13) painted in oil by Chang Ming, is highly exemplary of the '85 Movement. The artist has portrayed nine figures, all of whom appear to be in their twenties. The figures are not interacting with one another, and all but two are looking back at the viewer. In a realistic style, Chang depicts the youth wearing typical Western clothing, looking very fashionable. Particularly, the young man on the right side wearing sunglasses and a dark jacket looks hip and trendy. While the viewer sees the figures in very contemporary terms, Chang has interposed ancient Chinese script, originally found on ancient oracle bones or tablets. What sets this painting as unique, is the global setting. This could be a portrait of youth in the U.S., Europe, or Asia, but Chang identifies it with Chinese culture not only with the title, indicating ethnicity, but also with the ancient Chinese script. This individualistic aesthetic approach was no doubt inspired by the many debates taking place during the mid-1980s. The work shows obvious influence from Western painting styles and techniques, but also characteristics relevant only to China and its historical culture. Chang challenges traditional art styles by using a Western medium, and also challenges the previous realistic style in the manner of his portrayal of the figures. There are no indications of propaganda, which dominated the Socialist Realist works of the previous decade, and each figure carries their own identity and expression, coy, chic, or elite.

⁴⁴ David Kamansky, introduction, *Beyond the Open Door* 10.

Although these two exhibitions took place in the U.S., I see them as important in two ways. First, I would argue that the Chinese government still held a majority of control over styles they considered to be representative of China during the early to mid 1980s, and second, it marks an awareness and interest abroad in the newness and freshness of the more dramatic works being produced at the same time. Even the title of the second exhibition, *Beyond the Open Door*, suggests an emphasis on a somewhat concealed or unofficial art (which always draws the attention of outsiders). Of course, without the outward facing policies of the government implemented to develop China's economy, these exchanges would not have taken place. These two exhibitions of 1987, along with a handful of others in Canada and Japan around the same time, began the introduction of Chinese contemporary art to the international art world.

1989

In mid-1988 the government's attention to culture once again eased. The campaign against bourgeois liberalism ended, and avant-garde activities began again. On February 5, 1989 under a new name, the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition opened at the China National Art Gallery. Marking the culmination and unification of the many artistic currents of the '85 Movement, the avant-garde artists proudly exhibited over 290 works (paintings, sculptures, videos, installations, and performances) in the honored space that holds China's national collection. As mentioned in the introduction, this exhibition did not proceed without difficulties. After the first suspension, due to Xiao Lu firing gunshots at her installation, the exhibition was once again suspended as anonymous bomb threats were called in to the gallery, municipal government, and the Beijing Public

Security Bureau.⁴⁵ These two suspensions and the subsequent criticism from the official art world did not deter the artists from continued artistic statements about Chinese society and the situation of the culture with this two week exhibition.

While the contract between the gallery and the curators stated there were to be no performances, the artists' emotions were so high that many of them did not consider it. Addressed above was the performance by Xiao Lu with her collaborative work, *Dialogue* (Figure 14). By claiming that they had wanted to see how much acceptance China had for "modern art", Xiao Lu and Tang Song created a challenge to the bureaucracy of the institution of art.⁴⁶ By "completing their work" in such a way, and to perform it within the National Art Gallery's walls, the two artists could be viewed as attacking the institution usually reserved for exhibitions of official works, therefore criticizing the government's authority. Other performances proved just as critical. One artist tossed thousands of condoms down the gallery's staircase, and another brought in fresh shrimp and actually sold them to viewers. Commenting on suppression of sexuality, and the business of modern art and society, respectively, both artists dramatically displayed their views on conditions in contemporary China.⁴⁷ Characteristic of postmodern theories, these artists were reacting against established forms of "high culture".

The logo for this exhibition was "No U-Turn", marking the commitment of these artists not to return to the repressive environment previously experienced, but to continue forward with their new forms of art. As discussed above, Wang Guangyi displayed *Mao Zedong No. 1* (Figure 8), placing the leader under strict analysis similar to a scientist conducting an experiment, charting and graphing results. In 1988 the state began

⁴⁵ Gao, "Chronology: Mainland China" 200.

⁴⁶ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 258.

⁴⁷ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 258.

sanctioning the removal of many of the public statues of Mao,⁴⁸ so the rationalization of integrating the icon of Mao into his works was less sacrilegious than it may appear. But it did reflect on the current situation in China regarding the ability to criticize Maoism publicly.

While not so overtly political in appearance but continuing as a form of social criticism none-the-less, is the work of Fang Lijun. Fang, born in 1963, was only just preparing for his graduation later that year from the Printmaking Department of CAFA when he exhibited his sketches. He belongs to a unique generation of young artists in China. This generation experienced the confusion of the ten year Cultural Revolution as young children, reducing its severity to mostly indirect experiences. Thus, their view and reaction to the modernization of Chinese society has been played out in a different role in their art and identity as artists. Rather than visual expressions against past politics, the Cynical Realists, among whom Fang is placed, embody an irreverence and malaise depicted toward contemporary China. While Fang exhibited sketches of figures in a village setting at the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition (Figure 15), he expands on the theme of de-individualized figures in the medium of oil painting in the early 1990s. *Group 1 No. 5* (Figure 16) was completed in 1990. Fang painted two figures, in muted shades of gray, one, who stares off vacantly into the distance, while the other looks at the first with a rather mischievous grin. Their duplicated bald heads and similarity in facial features strip them of their identity. Gao Minglu comments, "the men might refer to the artist himself in a gesture of indifference, self-mockery, and powerlessness."⁴⁹ What the viewer senses, however, is a bit of humor as the artist works through the situation of

⁴⁸ Geremie Barbe, *Shades of Mao: the Postmodern Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996) 44.

⁴⁹ Gao Minglu, "From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transnational Avant-Garde in Mainland China," *Inside Out*, 156.

reality in context to the changing role individuals play in Chinese society. Fang classifies the themes in his work as, "the absurd, the mundane and the meaningless events of everyday life."⁵⁰ The over-exaggeration of the theme of boredom and apathy toward society continues to mature in Fang's works, as is common to Cynical Realists' works. Investigations of the notion of self and individual dominate this genre and supply the viewer with an insight onto life in contemporary China.

Many of the works from the 1989 exhibition dared to address the issue of sexuality. Ever since Mao's talks at Yan'an, the question of the appropriateness of painting nude figures had been a cause for criticism within the arts, and even carried over into social behavior that was easily defined as a "bourgeois Western phenomenon."⁵¹ While Wang Deren commented by tossing out condoms, therefore challenging the embarrassment around the subject, three other artists collaborated on the multi-media installation *Inflatism* (Figure 17). The artists used blown-up condoms, balloons and rubber gloves to create a large scene involving sexual imagery. In an artists' statement accompanying this work they claimed that it was praising masculine power, which they believe is something Chinese people need more of. The artists interpreted the use of sex in a nationalistic manner in terms of their race and the potential for it in the future.⁵² By using the balloons as symbols of genitalia, they created a vehicle for attacking the societal suppression of humanity.⁵³

The success of this exhibition was reflected in the diversity of works that were interwoven with the desire to attain artistic freedom, challenge the role of tradition in

⁵⁰ Fang Lijun as quoted in Doran, *China's New Art* 69.

⁵¹ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 248.

⁵² Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 250.

⁵³ Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" 249.

Chinese art, and to prove that contemporary Chinese artists were not dependent upon Western styles alone to create new art that dovetails with societal changes. Each work was original, individual, representative of contemporary China, and summarized the art movement of the 1980s.

While this exhibition marked a huge step forward for the avant-garde artists in China, the events taking place between April and June once again set things back. On April 15, 1989 the death of Hu Yaobang, former General Secretary, took many people by surprise, and prompted students in Beijing to begin demonstrations against government corruption and lack of political reform.⁵⁴ At the time no one could have imagined that the protests would last for six weeks and have the outcome that they did, but by May not only had many artists joined in, but also students from other cities and provinces traveled by train to participate. In larger cities across China there were demonstrations in support of the group in Beijing. The demonstrations received an overwhelming amount of sympathy and support throughout its entirety. It was the students from the Oil Painting Department of CAFA who produced the large painting of Hu Yaobang that was placed against the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square. In late May, students of CAFA's Sculpture Department unveiled the *Goddess of Democracy*, strategically placed opposing the domineering portrait of Mao Zedong that hangs over the entrance to the Forbidden City.⁵⁵ The manifesto prepared by the student artists read:

Today, here in the People's Square, the people's goddess stands tall and announces to the world: a consciousness of democracy has awakened among the Chinese people! The new era has begun!... We believe strongly

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, "Student Protests and the Chinese Tradition, 1919-1989," *The Chinese Peoples' Movement: Perspectives of Spring 1989*, ed. Tony Saich (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990) 6.

⁵⁵ For a detailed account of the creation of the Goddess of Democracy see, Tsao Tsing-yuan, "The Birth of the Goddess of Democracy," *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China*, eds. Jeffrey Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry (Boulder: West View P., 1994) 140-147.

that this darkness will pass, that the dawn must come. On the day when real democracy and freedom come to China, we must erect another Goddess of Democracy here in the Square, monumental, towering, and permanent.⁵⁶

This was May 30, and on the morning of June fourth, the statue toppled easily under the government's tanks. After six weeks of big-character posters, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger strikes aimed at attacking the Party's corruption, the government had had enough. Throughout the 1989 Democracy Movement the Party had repeatedly ignored the students' requests for dialogues, and did not officially comment on its progression. But, as witnessed through history, when the threat of the people becomes too severe, the Party will crackdown. Deng Xiaoping imposed martial law in late May in the hopes of ending the movement, but when the students continued with their demands, the order was given to suppress it.⁵⁷ The altercations between the military and demonstrators outside of Tiananmen Square began on the afternoon of June 3rd, and by the middle of the night the troops had surrounded the Square and began to forcibly reoccupy it, resulting in thousands of deaths.

The mood of the art community following the Tiananmen Incident can simply be described as disillusionment, as artists were once again faced with the situation of censorship and conquered idealism. The Party's recognition of some of the more "absurd and bizarre works"⁵⁸ from the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition in February, together with the confusing results of the Democracy Movement caused the government to reassess the amount of freedom the art community should have. The '89 exhibition and its organizers were targeted by the press as an example of bourgeois liberalism and within the

⁵⁶ Tsao Tsing-yuan, 145.

⁵⁷ Han Minzhu, ed., *Crisis for Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) Chapters 5, 6.

⁵⁸ John Clark, "Official Reactions to Modern Art in China Since the Beijing Massacre," *Public Affairs* 65.3 (1992): 339.

government the meetings began to start a renewed campaign against it.⁵⁹ The official press opened new attacks on the '85 Movement placing malicious blame on its criticism of traditional art, the tendency to adopt Western styles and techniques, and what one author called, "the movement towards 'bourgeois liberalism' caused by the demands of the movement for 'intellectual enlightenment' which positioned the arts above politics."⁶⁰ Deng Xiaoping's 1979 speech at the Fourth Congress of Chinese Writers and Artists was ignored, and the official Party line was that art should once again demonstrate Chinese and socialist characteristics.⁶¹ The cultural and ideological crackdown placed heavy restrictions on exhibitions and journal publications. Even the China National Art Gallery was closed for "renovations" following the November exhibition, *Baptism of Blood and Fire*, artworks honoring the performance by the military in suppressing the student led movement in June.⁶² Avant-garde activities ceased as a movement, and while some of the most active avant-garde artists moved abroad, the ones still in China began working in individual directions. The February exhibition, originally intended as a retrospective of the flourishing strength of new art that had appeared throughout the 1980s, served as the end of this particular stage in unofficial art. The goals of the '85 Movement and the later half of the decade were pure, through the partnership with intellectual activities, inspired by new Western ideologies, to rethink Chinese cultural attitudes and concepts, and create commentary through art. In 1990 the official concern was, "those who proclaim that literature and art needs to 'express the self' and be 'centered on the self'." They deny the splendid tradition of our literature and art and

⁵⁹ Gao, "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art" 18.

⁶⁰ van Dijk, "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution" 37.

⁶¹ Clark, "Official Reactions to Modern Art" 338.

⁶² "Beijing: Martial Art," *ARTforum* March 1990: 91.

consider the literature and art of the masses before them to be of a lower stratum, and that which no-one can understand they consider of a higher stratum."⁶³

Li Xianting, one of the organizers of the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition admitted, "Pre-'89, we thought that with this new art we could change the society and make it free. Now, I think only that it can make the artists free. But for anyone to be free is no small matter."⁶⁴

Whether aware of it or not, many of China's avant-garde artists have picked up on techniques of postmodern art, appropriation, quotation, and revision of cultural (non-Chinese) materials, and in theory, the emergence of new cultural features correlated with the changing social scene.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1980s, and more so in the 1990s, artists have progressed with an art that is reflexive and full of meaning. In the spirit of anti-modernist art, Chinese artists have reintegrated art and life displaying a keen awareness of the social changes China was experiencing due to the "open door" policies encouraging economic development. While there are definite Western-defined postmodern characteristics in the above exemplified artworks, more so than not, I would argue that Chinese postmodern art contains much more than dead parodies of past styles. Their art was self-oriented, an internal dialogue that Western postmodern concepts helped realize. The 1980s proved to be a difficult yet inspiring decade politically, culturally and economically. The official acknowledgment of negative results of Maoism, the "retreat of the state" on culture, and the violent crackdown in June 1989 all had a dramatic impact on art production. Artists went from optimistic to disenchanted

⁶³ Clark, "Official Reactions to Modern Art" 339.

⁶⁴ Andrew Solomon, "Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China," *New York Times Magazine* 19 December 1993, sec. 6: 48.

⁶⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (New York: Verso, 1998) 3.

almost overnight. For many young artists who were still studying in 1989, the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition held a particular meaning for them. Li Xianting addressed the pessimistic view the students had. He stated, "[T]hey had visited for themselves the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition and seen first-hand the dreams of 'saving Chinese culture' evaporate into thin air. Whether in terms of social or artistic ideals, the only legacy left to them from the hopes and struggles of the last ten years consisted of nothing but broken fragments."⁶⁶ The 1990s will begin with these feelings of disillusionment followed by cynicism, malaise, and nostalgia, but have expanded into an emotional, individual art.

⁶⁶ Li Xianting, "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art" XX.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISCOURSE OF POSTMODERNISM AND THE 1990s

While an introduction to the recognized "spin-off styles" or trends of the avant-garde in the 1990s is important to the understanding of the development of contemporary Chinese art, it will play a secondary role in this chapter. The primary focus will be on the study of five artists who currently reside in Beijing. As addressed above, following the violent conclusion to the 1989 Democracy Movement, the avant-garde as a group factionalized, and artists began to solidify more personal styles. In the early 1990s, we witness themes and issues of self-mockery, personal suffering, feelings of repression, isolationism, and a larger view of individual and environment taking shape. Many avant-garde artists turned away from the larger cultural issues and instead inward toward a more personal self-expression. Artistic observations on reality and daily lives in the 1990s have included exploring issues such as gender, population (family planning), and the environment (all which are highly relevant in a global society). While not as high profile as the above mentioned avant-garde artists, the artists discussed below have been affected by the decades of the 1980s and 1990s in a number of ways. The social commentary these artists are creating provides a discourse on Chinese culture of a specific time. In order to introduce the five mentioned artists, I will begin with the setting and reemerging styles of avant-garde artists as they found themselves in a new environment. Two of the above mentioned artists, Wang Guangyi and Fang Lijun are most noteworthy here.

For Wang, the 1990s brought a renewed interest in the use of the American Pop art as a vehicle for criticism. While continuing with the theme of political analysis (as

exemplified with Figure 8: *Mao Zedong No. 1*), Wang's well known series *Great Criticism* (Figure 18) pronounces the high point of the Political Pop Movement, the conversion of political icons into Pop images.¹ In this series, Wang skillfully juxtaposes political and cultural icons in the style of propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution with popular Western commercial names, such as "Coca-Cola" and "Marlboro". He has chosen to comment on the aspects of commercialization, a product of China's economic reforms, but in a less than serious manner. By combining these product names with the reference to the Mao era, with formatting similar to a commercial advertisement, he creates a satirical commentary on past and present society. The use of primary colors, particularly red, adds a hint of cynicism toward the historical dominance of the color in socialist propaganda art. One cannot help but notice the influence of American Pop art, but the strong culturally specific material and rationalist feel inject a truthful comment on China. His works can well be argued as an example of the rapid growth of consumer society, Western aesthetic culture becoming more dominant, and the postmodern approach of simulation. By resurrecting the image of Mao and a reference to that era in a manner that "no longer conveys any 'revolutionary' meaning or 'socialist values' whatsoever,"² Wang substitutes meaning for the sign.

Many artists began using traditionally sacred icons in this postmodern fashion in order to criticize society. Both Li Shan and Liu Wei pose Mao Zedong in uncharacteristic manners. Li, who also works in the Political Pop style, incorporates portraits of an eroticized Mao with sexual imagery (Figure 19), thereby addressing the two taboo subjects of political power and sexuality.³ Liu Wei has depicted children, his

¹ Barne, *Shades of Mao* 219.

² Xiaoping Lin, "These Parodic Images: A Glimpse of Contemporary Chinese Art," *Leonardo*, 30 (1997): 114. Lin's article also draws from Jean Baudrillard's article on simulation in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) 253-281.

father and friends in front of posters of Mao Zedong. Many times the figures appear oddly shapen and wear blank expressions. In *New Generation* (Figure 20), the large standard size portrait of Mao is set as the background for the two children. It awkwardly crowds over them and, it appears, even frightens the children. This sharp contrast to early periods where the image of Mao was sacred, now seems humorous, but also politically uncomfortable.

Liu Wei (born 1965) graduated from the Mural Painting Department of CAFA in 1989. In an interview with an American journalist, Liu said, "In 1989, I was a student, I joined the democracy movement, like everyone, but didn't have an important part of it. After June 4, I despaired. Now I have accepted that I cannot change society, I can only portray our situation... painting helps to relieve my own sense of helplessness and awkwardness."³ His words echo the accounts of the majority of young artists in the early 1990s.

Liu is classified as a Cynical Realist like Fang Lijun. The two above examples of Fang's works (Figures 15, 16) are representative of an earlier stage, and by the mid-1990s he produced works of a more mature, solid artist. While continuing with similar portraits, Fang's critical view is somewhat disturbing. While he mainly works in oil paintings, strongly representative of the cynical attitude felt by many young artists is his woodblock triptych, simply labeled *No. 16B* (Figure 21). The identity-less figure struggling, drowning in the deep, intensely blue water is representative of a feeling of helplessness and a loss in faith. As Liu Wei described his feelings after the Tiananmen Incident and the effect it had on his works, it was common to find many artists "abandon[ing] the concern for serious problems and turn[ing] their interest to a

³ Solomon 49.

'subjective/instinctive reality' with no rhetorical content."⁴ This ideological reality of life is found in both Liu and Fang's cynical works.

Possibly some of the most daring "happenings" were performed at the *China Avant-Garde* exhibition, due to its high profile setting. But the trend of performance art also continued into the 1990s. The theme of challenging set institutions once again was relevant. Zhang Peili (born 1957), who exhibited oil paintings in both the 1987 *Beyond the Open Door* exhibition in the U.S., and in the 1989 *Avant-Garde* show, returned to the more aggressive medium of performance/video art in the 1990s. In 1991 the government began a hygiene campaign, where all citizens were taught the importance of cleanliness.⁵ It was during this campaign that Zhang filmed his performance *Hygiene No. 3* (Figure 22), sometimes referred to as *The Correct Procedure for Washing a Chicken*. In a two and a half hour performance Zhang repeatedly washed a live chicken with soap and a bowl of water. While the chicken struggled and tried to escape at first, in the end it submitted to the procedure. The premise of this work is quite odd, and somewhat humorous, but the ideology of repetitiveness, resistance, and submission are all exposed in a visual metaphor for the reality of life in contemporary China. Commenting on the repressive environment of the situation of the arts in the early 90s Zhang said, "The extension of artistic language and expansion of media seem to offer numerous possibilities, but in actuality what we really can select and make use of for our own purposes is limited."⁶

⁴ Liuk'ung Chan, "Ten Years of the Chinese Avant-Garde: Waiting for the Curtain to Fall," *Flash Art* Jan.-Feb. 1992: 112.

⁵ Solomon 51.

⁶ Doran 145.

Performance artists continued to carry out avant-garde principles of creating statements around larger cultural and social issues.⁷ During the early 1990s artist Zhang Huan (born 1965) conceived of performances that were aggressive, uneasy, and masochistic. Such is the performance where he spread honey over his naked body and sat motionless for three hours on a hot summer day in the public toilet, allowing flies to tread along his body. In works such as this, the central concern is common people's living situations as juxtaposed with his individual experience. Zhang confronts the audience with his relationship to the immediate environment, yet forces the viewer to take a step back and reflect on the issues of psychological influences of living conditions and surroundings.⁸ By the later 1990s not only Zhang's performances exemplified a turning point to a more interactive approach working with issues of the environment, urbanization and overpopulation, but these became growing themes within contemporary Chinese art. In the 1997 performance *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* (Figure 23), Zhang hired 40 workers that had come to Beijing from the countryside in the hopes of earning more money in the modern city. Zhang's brilliant, aesthetically pleasing statement is on the modernization of cities in China, and how numerous workers flooding in to find jobs, overflow the population in such cities as Beijing. During the performance as the number of people in the pond increased, the water level went up, creating a visual metaphor for the problem Zhang finds in China's modern cities.

While the diversity of the genre of avant-garde "spin-offs" continued to expand into such media as sculpture, installation and video projects, above I highlighted a few of the most well known trends both in China and abroad. It is these styles of the so-called

⁷ Gao, "What is the Chinese Avant-Garde?" 5.

⁸ For illustrations of this performance and others by Zhang Huan see, Wu Hung, "Speaking the Unspeakable," *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the 20th Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999), 102-107.

avant-garde of the 1990s that have been most visible within the international art community. The intensification of economic development in the 90s has further increased the contacts with the outside world, and cultural exchanges are far too great for the government to curtail them all. This has strengthened the presence of Chinese contemporary art on an international level. There are numerous reasons why avant-garde participation on an international level may be something the government would not approve of, particularly with "dissident" themes in art; the Party also sees this exchange as a way to promote Chinese national identity abroad. But most likely the government's "support" of the exchanges can be viewed as another way to bring financial profit to into the country.⁹ While themes that appear to be dissident or controversial tend to have greater appeal to foreign buyers, the artists I will now introduce do not represent "trendy", commercialized art. Although four out of the five artists are represented by the oldest and one of the most successful contemporary art galleries in Beijing, catering mostly to foreign clients, they are not "avant-garde" and not "official" artists either. They are teachers and professional artists. While this notion of the art market will be an aspect in each of the artists' stories, it is not the dominant factor in their drive to succeed artistically. Each of these artists plays an important role in the ability to document the condition of contemporary art in China.

Su Xinqing and the Inner Self

The most widely known internationally among the five artists, Su Xinqing has probably remained the most reserved and private. Born in 1960 in Jinan, Inner

⁹ This was admitted by Wang Guangyi when questioned on why the government allows his "satirical" art. See Joan Lebold Cohen, "Chinese Art Today: No U-Turn," *ARTforum*, Feb. 1992, 107.

Mongolia, he received his first degree in 1983 from the Tianjin Institute of Fine Arts. In 1989 Su received his Master's degree in Printmaking from CAFA, and began teaching in that same department that year. He has now been promoted to the Deputy Director and associate professor of that department. He currently resides in Beijing with his wife and daughter. His resume is impressive, including high profile group exhibitions in China, like the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, and abroad. He has exhibited his works in Japan, France, Italy, Taiwan, and recently in the 1998/99 retrospective show *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* sponsored in part by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His list of solo exhibitions is even more impressive baring truth to the fact that he does not need the support of a group show. Besides numerous exhibitions domestically in China and Hong Kong, Su Xiping has established himself as an important contemporary Chinese artist in Australia, England, and in the U.S. His works can be found in numerous private collections as well as art institutions all across the globe, too many to list. This international and domestic success has not cast a noticeable difference on his personality, which he describes as introverted, but the changes in China's realities, on a social and historical level, have played a substantial role in the evolution of his work. Su refuses to follow official or avant-garde trends, and instead creates works marked with a reserved introspection unique to the contemporary Chinese and international art scene.

Su Xiping is proficient and highly skilled in both media of lithography and oil painting. His earliest success came with the showing of his lithographs, but currently his oils have been shown internationally. In 1979 as an undergraduate, Su began studying lithography (*banhua*) and continued to pursue that medium as a graduate student. In 1986-87 while studying at CAFA he began to practice oil painting. Although he feels that his skills in oils are still emerging, in 1994 he began placing more energy and concentration on their development, therefore, he is positive that in the future his works in oil will prove to be more successful than his prints. To Su, the process of printmaking

can become very tiring, and due to the small size of their format he believes that he cannot express himself well. With the ability to create larger canvases with oil, he feels more free, expressive, and happy.¹⁰ Through the following examples, one can recognize the transforming social conditioning and situation in China occurring at the time he completed these works.¹¹

Su humbly admires his graduate works, not only in their superior technique, but in their ability to express a special feeling of a specific time. He explains that in the early 1980s his instructors began teaching him to be in touch with his life, dramatically different than what he had been taught as a young boy. Su observes at this time official art was still commissioned as commercial propaganda working to create specific feelings. He was aware that this was false and observed that the propaganda posters, especially pre-80s, were depicting scenes that were not true feelings of ordinary, common people. With the encouragement of his instructors, he ignored the government's desire for art as propaganda, and instead extracted themes directly from life, from his life. His earliest series was therefore inspired by his childhood in Mongolia. Representative is *Grasslands in Spring* (Figure 24). While the theme and content may not produce an immediate connection with viewers, reexamining the work one will notice the movement of the figures, dressed in Mongolian robes, blending smoothly with the simple landscape and its rolling hills. The figures' facial expressions, individually calm and quiet, are executed with a skill that increases the peacefulness of the truthful scene. There is no subjective meaning just the expression of a true moment.

¹⁰ This and the following statements, unless otherwise indicated, are from a personal interview with Su Xingping, 13 July 1998, Beijing, China.

¹¹ Xudong Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity" 353-383. The ideology of aesthetic observations producing a social context is elaborated on in this interview.

Also created in the late 1980s early 1990 was *Dialogue* (Figure 25), a theme Su repeats in 1998. In this version, once again set in a barren landscape, he has placed two figures facing one another in a mirrored exchange. Su comments that when he made this work it had to do with a specific moment in time. He felt that people were isolated from one another and could not communicate in a deep way, so the figure is seen communicating with himself. By opposing these figures, one negative and the other positive, he admits it is a sobering scene of one's meditation. He believes there is a sort of balance and harmony, a Daoist *yin/yang* complementary. If we contrast this to the 1998 print, also entitled *Dialogue* (Figure 26), the feeling is quite different. In the more recent work, Su has applied color to the originally black and white print. The sky is now a vibrant red, and the figures are smiling with rosy cheeks and red lips in a manner reminiscent of posters of peasants during the 1960s and 70s. The seriousness witnessed in the earlier work where the figure stares intently into his opposite's eyes has been replaced by a smile and closed eyes. The clothing has also changed from a Mongolian robe to the traditional, androgynous suit worn by China's past officials, and in present day can still be seen worn mostly by the older generation. The horizon has been reshaped and softened implying a less then serious manner, so that the entire work does not appear as spiritual as the original. While wanting to interpret the '98 work as an expression of cynicism toward a past era, Su Xiping admits that is true, but for the most part this work is an exploration of a new approach to lithography. What I find important here is that although he is still expressing the condition that one has to communicate by oneself, he has lifted some of the seriousness that marked his earlier works. By repeating the theme, but in a quite different manner, it is visibly apparent that Su is feeling more free and jovial, able to find humor in the past.

Following the Tiananmen Incident, Su Xiping created the *Silent Town Series* (Figure 27). In ten works, the depression he was experiencing is obvious. "After

Tiananmen I felt nothing could be or was permitted to be perfect. I felt depressed and that reality was too difficult and tough to escape from. For two years I was so depressed with reality that I could only escape to my own inner world."¹² In coming to terms with the social situation, Su returned to a nostalgic language, finding inspiration from his personal past, very much in opposition to the avant-garde whose kitsch and pop works are impersonal. Su explores his feelings and found an escape in the inner world of childhood memories, images of Mongolia. In the fourth print of this series, Su portrays the characteristic barren landscape of a Mongolian village. The setting appears quiet, the only form of movement is from the running horse, that appears to be passing through. The tone of this work reflects an inward expression not so apparent in his depictions of a more external environment in his graduate works. The presence once again of a specific moment is here, only this time the moment is still, quiet and almost deserted. The image of this town is skillfully executed with sharp contrasts between graying tones. The dark path leads to the bright open landscape supplying the only feeling of life in the print. Within that square is the running horse that if the viewer looks away, will be gone. The contrast of dark and light characteristic of printmaking is conditioned to bring that small section alive. The *Silent Town Series* is about Su Xiping himself, but the meaning implied is a reaction against the concurrent social system. In all of his works he continues to communicate on a personal level.

Artists recognized that the idealism, freedom and enthusiasm that had been building up in the 1980s was once again facing restrictions in the early 1990s. Su acknowledges that these feelings invaded his works. The spirituality of his works, clearly affected by the social conditions, present a man who is struggling with his identity in this inconstant environment. With Su Xiping, rather than creating something kitsch,

¹² Su Xiping, personal interview, 13 July 1998.

shocking, or commercial, he creates works that explore his personal, psychological reactions to China in direct relation to his surroundings.

The Rising Sun (Figure 28) was part of a new series created in 1991 symbolic of something more hopeful. Su admits that he "came out from under a dark shadow," which corresponds to China's national reemergence from the Tiananmen tragedy. "My work and the development of my artistic career are really connected with China's contemporary social issues. *Rising Sun* is the best example of this, as I, the artist, was predicting China still has hope."¹³ Su has remained with the nostalgic image of a Mongolian figure, but the warmth and optimism symbolized by the light of the sun hints at the change once again occurring within Su's personal emotions as well as the livelihood of the Chinese people.

At the same time that the cultural situation in China was relaxing, the international art world began to take more notice of China's contemporary art scene, and Su Xiping deservedly, became one of the lucky. Between 1991 and 1993 he held solo exhibitions or was part of international biennials in Japan, France, Italy, the U.S. and Australia. The international acclaim that has increased the role of commercialization on many contemporary Chinese artists, for Su worked as inspiration. In 1994 he began focusing his efforts on oil painting. He graduated to new themes, not as easily expressed through lithography, relating to social issues and concerns. In one of his most dramatic series, *Sea of Desire*, Su alludes to the growing demands that capitalism places on individuals. In 1994 he was aware of the hectic emotions involved in the desire money can bring to people. On the whole, individual Chinese were becoming richer and material desire resulted. In this series of 20 works he has exaggerated the unsatisfied desire experienced by himself and others. The first works in the series portray the more

¹³ Su Xiping, personal interview, 13 July 1998.

hectic aspect of this condition, with images of people diving into and swimming in a sea of hands (Figure 29). Su also portrays the unsatisfied desire causing sorrow or pain. In a self portrait, his head in is his hands as he is surrounded by the sea of hands representing the unattainable desires of many (Figure 30). Su objectifies this feeling, as it was a universal phenomenon in China. This series supplies a progression of emotions toward the transformations during the 1990s. Su begins with a chaotic representation that gives way to a portrait of himself in a state of depression, and finally ends with figures running through the hands, that are fewer in number.

Today Su Xingping believes that a social reconfiguration has been completed and people are more happy and stable. He has and continues to eloquently provide visual portrayals of the macro level of social change occurring within the past two decades in China. Without reverting to the commercialized tactics of some avant-garde artists, his personal interpretation still begs the viewer to understand his individual suffering or joy of experiences in contemporary China. He is financially the most successful of the artists that follow, but has not allowed the material wealth to change his person. He has instead, used it to fertilize growth in his works.

Xie Dongming and Commercialization

Xie Dongming is also driven by a personal psychology within his art, and the desire to depict direct portrayals of his feelings. He is influenced on a more micro-level in depicting his own conditions rather than the broader issues affecting society. Xie was born in 1956 in Beijing. In 1972 as he graduated from middle school, he was "sent down" to the countryside for more than two years. When the confusion of the Cultural Revolution was over and he returned to the city, Xie was given a job at a small theater.

company working as a set designer. From 1976-1980, as he worked at the theater he was able to witness much of the new culture coming into China which increased his interest in studying painting formally. In 1980 he passed the entrance exam and entered the oil painting department of CAFA. He acknowledges that the four years of study were "intense and difficult, but taught him the self-discipline demanded of an artist. Upon graduating in 1984, he was appointed lecturer in the oil painting department, and in 1993 he was promoted as Deputy Director of the 3rd classroom in the same department. He and his family, a wife and daughter, live in Beijing where Xie's income is derived only from his work at the Academy and the occasional sale of a painting. He is not represented by a gallery, and has turned down different offers to be so.¹⁴ Although technically that renders Xie Dongming unsuccessful in commercial terms, he still considers himself a successful artist. He has been part of many group exhibitions domestically, particularly in Beijing, but has held solo exhibitions in both Hong Kong and the U.S. Xie provides a language inspired by what is in his heart and mind. He has been fortunate that China's cultural climate has allowed him to do so. Like Su Xinpeng, Xie does not imitate trends of the avant-garde or the official art circles in Beijing. He is satisfied and even enjoys his government-appointed job at the academy and does not complain about the small studio he shares with another artist. Possibly because he does not exhibit in the "blockbuster" international shows or biennials, he might be the most comfortable discussing the commercialization duly apparent in the realm of contemporary works, specifically the avant-garde. Xie enjoys the freedom to paint, and this is dramatically visible in his works.

In 1984 the cultural debates had just begun to increase their intensity. While avant-garde artists were still upset about the backward-looking official exhibitions and

¹⁴ The biographical information as well as the following material is drawn from a personal interview with Xie Dongming, 22 June 1998, Beijing, China.

the campaigns against self expression and Western trends, intellectuals of all philosophies involved themselves in the debates. Xie distanced himself from any group, nationalistic or avant-garde, and began the foundation for his individual style. Characteristic of his works from the mid-1980s was inspiration from travel, in particular to Tibet. After he graduated, Xie found that he was interested in a life style that was more simple and quiet; he liked the feeling in smaller cities, not large, chaotic cities like Beijing. He found direct inspiration in the lives and colors unique to Tibet.

Simplicity and bold use of color mark these works with a confidence that is not characteristic of much of the experimentation of the avant-garde groups during the mid-1980s. In *Tibetan Girl No. 2* (Figure 31), Xie uses vibrant primary colors to create a strong portrait. The girl's body is composed of curved forms, blending eloquently with the geometric shapes of her necklace and patterned skirt. The detail in her face and the small flower she holds supply her with individual character, and represents the peacefulness, beauty, and carefree spirit of the Tibetan culture. Xie's style of realism is nothing like the Soviet model of the past, instead the work appears to have been influenced by Henri Matisse or even Picasso. There is no shock value to this painting, but technique that Xie will admit is Western, is completed in a free expressive way.

Xie took advantage of the changing relationship of art and politics in 1991 and painted *Standing Nude Woman* (Figure 32). Hallmark to his works is the thick layering of paints producing a textured effect. He used this technique combined with realistic effects of light and shade to present a solidly defined work. This work still marks Xie's desire to express a scene with simple color and composition, but can clearly be an example of the freedom Chinese artists were once again experiencing by being allowed to paint and exhibit nude figures. While he has selected to modestly conceal the woman's face, he has executed her body and hair and in a fluid, controlled and confident style.

It was during 1988-89 that Xie noticed the gradual changes in China due to the development of the economy, particularly in the art world. Before this time, Xie said China did not have professional galleries allowing artists greater freedom to sell their paintings and earn a living. While he was in school, he did not know he could "use" his paintings to make money. This concept posed a moral dilemma for Xie. By selling his paintings commercially an artist could earn more money. For Xie there were more negative aspects to this situation that outweighed making a living as a professional artist. He began thinking about his works and whether or not people would like them enough to buy them. He discovered that he might have to change areas within his works in order to please patrons. He had always painted what was in his heart, and taught his students skilled technique and emotion that produced the best art. But the growing dealer interest, particularly from Hong Kong galleries, was beginning to prescribe styles for the international art market. Thus, simultaneous with the demonstrations in Tiananmen for more personal freedom and democracy, the commercialization of contemporary Chinese art began.¹⁵

Xie describes a similar story to that of Su Xinping, as the Chinese society changed following the Tiananmen Incident, his thoughts and psychology did too. By looking at his works of the early 1990s, one discovers that a changed spirit enters his works. "My confidence and faith in life did not resemble what it was before, it became more chaotic and changed my painting, my life changed."¹⁶ A new theme emerged in his works, a different kind of freedom than before. Two events impacted his context and philosophy. While traveling in China's southern province of Yunnan he came across a burial tradition. In this area, when a person dies the family members have a paper

¹⁵ For further comments see van Dijk, "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution" 38.

¹⁶ Xie Dongning, personal interview, 22 June 1998.

representation of the dead made. This paper figure, symbolizing the spirit, is placed at the head of the tomb and lit on fire during the funeral ceremony. In *Shouwanghe* (*In Expectation*) (Figure 33), Xie Dongming portrays one of these paper figures in an open landscape with a bright blue sky. The figure is animated and allowed to be mobile. Although the representation of the "spirit" is free, Xie's internal thoughts were still struggling with questions of life and death.

It was around this time that both of his parents fell ill and had to be moved into a hospital. He would visit them frequently, and as he did his thoughts became infused with life and death. "When people look at my work they may feel different," Xie said, "I think when we are living, the clouds, mountains, and sun all appear in a particular way. When we die they are different, and when painting them they may come out unsuitably. I found I was really questioning my faith in life."¹⁷ In 1995 when his wife was pregnant with their daughter his mother was still in the hospital. Xie came to the conclusion that a new life wanted to come into this world just as an old one wanted to leave. Between 1994-95 he completed his *Sob (Qi)* series (Figure 34), in which he depicts children of different ages crying. Whether depicting an infant or toddler, Xie's technical skill with oils and color combination, infuses these works with a powerful emotion. Owing to his training in Realist painting, the children's facial expressions range from sniffing to a full sobbing. The internal chaotic emotions are projected across the canvas, and the viewer indeed understands the struggle the artist must be feeling to paint such unhappy children.

Xie takes pleasure in the simplicity of children's thinking. He appreciates their innocence in a society that has more bad than good. He remembers the feelings of betrayal upon seeing pictures of Taiwan in the late 1970s. When he was a child, he would read stories in school about Taiwan and the Nationalist Party laden with

¹⁷ Xie Dongming, personal interview, 22 June 1998.

Communist propaganda against them. The films and stories always depicted Taiwan with a dark sky. In 1979 television programs showed present day Taiwan and a blue sky, he thought how strange, their sky is blue too?¹⁸

Xie holds a different view of today's China. Impressed with the availability of material items, the freedom to talk about and paint images is good, but the severe division in class differences is a difficult problem to accept. This is a predominant factor in contemporary Chinese art. The growing market for Chinese art has demanded a specific type of art, as Xie Dongming sees it, and is creating compromises on artists. As an instructor in oil painting at one of the most prestigious art academies in China, Xie works with undoubtedly some of the upcoming artists who wish to compete on an international level. When he started teaching in the mid-1980s the students were eager to learn and experiment with all different styles of painting, now, Xie says, the students do not listen to his instructions on technique and style. They are only interested in the trends of styles that art collectors and gallery owners want to buy. So, their in-class paintings may prove to be quite different from the styles they work on in their free time. The desire for success on an international level has led to many artists only working in media that sells. They are imitating styles and trends that are known to sell, and compromising the philosophy Xie is trying to teach. Today much of the art produced by young artists graduating from the academies is highly commercialized and mass produced.¹⁹

Xie related a story involving his contact with an art dealer. The dealer, a Chinese man who is now an American citizen, has rented space in a new office building in North East Beijing. He represents some of China's most popular "unofficial" contemporary

¹⁸ Garbido, 349. Garbido remarked that it was on New Year's Eve of 1978-79 that Chinese television first showed pictures of Taiwan.

¹⁹ van Dijk, "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution" 38.

artists, and is very well known among the Chinese art scene. Xie Dongming has met with this dealer both personally and professionally. The dealer, whose name I have selected to leave out, has told Xie that he can paint well, but his works will not sell; if Xie really wants to sell them on an international level, he needs to change the themes to something more politically controversial. Xie admits, "I told him that I could change my work, but now my family and I can eat well, wear nice clothing and are very comfortable, why should I change? If one day I cannot eat, I'll contact you."²⁰ In an act that renders Xie's art pure, he will not let the commodification of art enter his works. Other artists have not been as bold, and Xie understands this to be a big problem in China. Hou Hanru, an art critic now based in Paris, is also aware of this problem. Hou has gone as far as to name the trends of Political Pop and Cynical Realism as the art most accepted by the international market. He said:

[I]t has become a seductive model...instead of encouraging innovation, [it] has produced illusions of fame and cynical conservatism. How to resist such a seduction and refuse to become the prey of "international" ideologues' fantasies turns up therefore to be another emergent challenge lying in front of the Chinese artist.²¹

In a 1993 article, "Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China," Andrew Solomon raises conflicting observations on the state of contemporary avant-garde art. As one of the few English pieces that includes an interview with Li Xianting, one of the curators of the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition and supporter of the growth of individual art in China, Solomon labels him the "soul" and "leader" of the Chinese avant-garde.²² He portrays Li's role as, "to guide artists gently into their own powerful

²⁰ Xie Dongming, personal interview, 22 June 1998.

²¹ Hou Hanru, "Ambivalent Witnesses: Art's Evolution in China," *Flash Art*, Nov.-Dec. 1996: 61.

²² Solomon 44.

history.²³ Solomon explains that many artists from all over China send Li photographs of their works in the hope that he will respond with advice. Li is careful to document these samples in an effort to archive the development of art in China. While this sounds like a noble effort, Solomon also quotes one "follower" of Li: "The artists bring him their new paintings the way children bring homework to a teacher. He praises or criticizes it, and sends them to their next projects."²⁴ This is a very dangerous attribute, and I would argue one of the aspects of the commercialization of contemporary art. Many of the artists take Li's word as the final say in whether they will succeed or not. If he suggests that they change their personal style in order for their work to sell, many of them do. Whether it is a dealer or a critic defining the styles and trends artists should employ, I would argue that the freedom of personal expression these artists are supposedly fighting for is struck down another level.

Another young Chinese curator/critic agrees. Mr. Zhou, we will call him, has published articles in foreign journals, curated successful exhibitions of avant-garde, unofficial art both domestically and abroad, and edits an art journal in Beijing. In his curated shows, which include such media as video, performance and installations, he selects the works for their personal expression and artistic ideals. Mr. Zhou is interested in showing the connections of art and life, and he is well aware of the changes of contemporary Chinese artists and their art as influenced by society, or globalization, as he defines it. Artists, such as Wang Guangyi and the Political Pop generation, he will not work with. Mr. Zhou firmly stated:

Commercial artists have not changed their style or themes since the early 1990s because they know it sells, it is for export only. But there is so much more going on today within China's art world, the different media

²³ Solomon 44.

²⁴ Solomon 45.

and themes are just as characteristic to contemporary art. But some critics know these types of art [video, installation, performances] cannot be sold as easily as oil paintings, so they do not bother promoting it.²⁵

In November 1997, Sungari auction house held its second sale of contemporary works in Beijing. The majority of the works were by artists who have contracts with well known international galleries and were estimated to sell from anywhere between \$2,000 - 47,000 U.S. dollars. While the sale was not as successful as desired, the work by Fang Lijun sold for a reported \$48,000. This particular oil painting was quite large, 250 x 180 cm., and the private European collector did not feel the price was too high. In a documentary series and accompanying book, *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s*, the authors state, "The commercial or market value of a work, or type of work, is the price that someone will pay for it at that particular moment. The price will depend on the level of demand for the type of work and the available supply."²⁶ Therefore, the amount paid for a work of art, here Fang Lijun's, expresses the level of demand for the style and name of the artist. Speculation at this auction was spread that many of the sales were not official, and that artists' friends bid on the works and were then "refunded" by the artist. This was in order to enhance the artists' reputation at a somewhat high profile auction that was being held locally. In any case, the marketing of Chinese paintings has become a big business locally and internationally. Sotheby's, Christie's and another local auction house, China Guardian, have held numerous successful auctions, representing both official and unofficial art.

Xie Dongming did not participate in any of these auctions, yet I would argue that his works have a greater significance and meaning of contemporary China. He is not

²⁵ I have chosen to conceal his identity because his comments toward trends in avant-garde art are quite strong, and as he still works within the art circle in China and internationally, I do not want these ideas to cause professional problems.

²⁶ Sandy Nairne, Geoff Dunlop and John Wyver, *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987) 60.

searching for a cultural identification, but an individual identity. His work is influenced by his personal life and travels, not dictated by an institution, the government, or from the opinions of critics. His latest works portray a feeling of improved faith in life. In two untitled works (Figures 35, 36), he once again places figures in broad landscapes. The background consists of an immense bright blue sky. In both paintings, the child and the adult appear peaceful and in a relaxed state of thought, which is where we find Xie Dongming today. Fredric Jameson defines that in a postmodern society "a work of art is a registering apparatus" for new spaces and positions within cultural studies.²⁷ While Xie Dongming paints with his emotions, the outcome is producing a commentary on life in contemporary China.

Wang Lifeng - Tradition Versus Modern

In almost a direct contrast to Xie Dongming in both work and philosophy is Wang Lifeng.²⁸ On the outside, Wang appears the successful, professional artist. He and his family live in a gated condominium complex in North West Beijing. The commercial success has indeed transformed Wang on the outside, as he proudly drives a Jeep Cherokee, making it difficult to understand where the deeply traditional Chinese aspects of his work come from. But his artistic philosophy illustrates a man who is still interested in a traditional national culture, but comfortable with the financial benefits the contemporary situation has awarded him.

²⁷ Xudong Zhang 371.

²⁸ This section draws on Nicky Combs, "Reaching for Cultural Community," *Asian Art News* Sept.-Oct. 1998: 76-78.

Born in Inner Mongolia in 1962 Wang studied stage design at the Central Academy of Theater in Beijing and began his art career as a wood sculptor and oil painter. Since the mid-1980s he has focused on multi-media collage series. His exhibitions have remained local, but his works are part of many corporate and private collections across the globe. As recently as last year he had a significant work commissioned by an internationally run hotel in Shanghai. Graduating from school in 1986, Wang also emerged as the avant-garde movement was at its high point. He had always been interested in abstract mediums, but as he witnessed his friends moving on to installation and performance art, he resisted that move. Instead, the attraction of Chinese national themes and the style of abstraction continued to inspire him. His approach is an individually motivated transition of traditional themes and materials into vibrant contemporary works that identify historical and cultural aspects of China.

Wang formats his works in sets or series, and gives them titles on a universal scale, such as *Tomb*, *Purity*, *Dynasty* and *National Language*. He follows in the footsteps of Western abstract expressionism, and produces works that are strongly representative of his belief in Chinese traditional culture. Some of the most frequently used materials are embroidered silk, joss paper, calligraphy rubbings, and hand painted images in the form of seals or chops. Wang identifies the material used in a work as the most important feature.²⁹ He believes that too many cultural items are being ignored and "thrown out." Wang incorporates them into his works in order for them to be maintained today. In an interesting contrast to all the above mentioned artists, Wang wants to recognize the importance of Chinese cultural heritage in contemporary society. While this is difficult to believe after one realizes the financial advantages he has, Wang prides himself in preserving Chinese cultural history.

²⁹ This statement as well as the following information is drawn from two personal interviews with Wang Lifeng, 27 May 1998 and 8 June 1998, Beijing, China.

In his 1995-96 *Hui Series*, which refers to geometric shapes or symbols (Figure 37), one composition lends itself to the tradition of landscape painting and the balance in the practice of *feng shui*, simply put, meaning the placement of objects, patterns and designs in a specific manner to create a harmonious atmosphere. In this work, the structure and placement of material is as important as the meaning it conveys. The 15 red silk squares are symbolic not only of ancient society when silk was seen as an element of elite culture, but it also represents contemporary society, where it is a common textile people wear every day. Wang first began using his the remnants of silk from his wife's projects (she is a fashion designer) and today she selects the material for him. The calligraphy rubbings, one of his signature materials, are not to be read to find direct meaning. Instead Wang purposefully selects the reproductions of the Tang dynasty calligrapher Yan Zhenqing because of the continued popularity today of his philosophy. A viewer looking at this work today would get the feeling of continued cultural tradition reproduced in contemporary society.

In an earlier series, *Stele* (Figure 38), Wang emphasizes the ancient tradition of erecting stone monuments and incising them with commemorative inscriptions. The characteristic that highlights this series is the sense of motion and depth, which is evident due to the placement of the calligraphy rubbings and exaggerated sizes of chops. The material and painted symbols are layered in a technique that allows for the chop to appear as if floating. Wang gives new significance to the placement of the seal. Traditionally, a seal or chop represented the signature of the artist and the painting's owner. Placement of it was not casual. Wang has abstracted this idea in a modern manner by experimenting with balance, depth and movement.

Wang Lifeng's most recent series, *Brilliance* (Figure 39), marks an evolution into a more decorative approach. The theme and ideology is once again inspired by traditional culture, but the work is not as dependent on physical material as before. This

series is much more abstract. The symmetry from earlier works is absent, and in its place are splatters, randomly placed seals, and finger painted symbols leaving some of the works with an unfinished look. The arrangement of the materials, predominantly silk, and dramatic contrasts in the amount and shades of color used in each section throws off the balance in many of the works. The spontaneity and the feeling of freedom of the composition is a Western technique Wang likes. Replacing some of the darker backgrounds from past series, *Brilliance* employs vibrant gold, silver and bronze shades, as well as accents of a greenish-blue. Suggestive of his current interest in ceramics and bronzes are identifiable shapes and patterns that can be found on many ancient vessels now housed in museums, as well as the color of oxidizing bronze. Wang Lifeng believes this could be a new trend in his work, but he also cautions, it is difficult to give up a style once an artist has established himself in it.

The language Wang uses to represent himself is nationalistic in its adoption of tradition and culture. Wang acknowledges other contemporary artists using avant-garde or political motifs to create figurative works, but he believes that these trends are not strong enough to represent Chinese tradition, or himself. Wang poses an interesting dichotomy for the study of postmodern contemporary Chinese art. He uses material that in the past was reserved for the educated elite but perverts the class division by the combination and use of materials that have a popular use today. For a young artist, he has a philosophical foundation maintaining traditional aspects of cultural history as a requirement for art. While incorporating the Western style of abstraction, and visibly benefiting from the material rewards of an increasingly modern society, his material use remains based on tradition. Is he selling out his culture to foreigners who want to take "a little something of China" home with them, or is he speaking the truth? His works are strongly contemporary and abstract, yet have no political comments, but act as an extension of his firm belief and pride in Chinese cultural tradition. He is sincere in his

philosophy, and has not aggressively marketed himself to the international scene. The overall ambiance, feeling, and atmosphere produced by the work is cultural continuity, juxtaposing the positive aspects of traditional culture with a contemporary feel. Under the regime of a commercialized art market, Wang maintains his pride in Chinese traditional cultural, and is rewarded by financial success.

Liu Qinghe - Tradition Coexisting with Contemporary

Continuing with the theme of traditional content, yet reflective of the freedom of contemporary life is the artist Liu Qinghe.³⁰ Born in 1961 in the coastal city of Tianjin, he attended the Tianjin School of Arts and Crafts before moving to Beijing. He obtained his first degree from the Folk Art Department, and a Master's degree in 1989 from the Chinese Painting Department of CAFA. In 1992 as the "Artist in Resident" at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, Spain, he discovered the strong differences between Western and Chinese appreciation of artistic technique, representation and meaning. Presently he is an instructor in the Chinese Painting Department of CAFA, and he lives in Beijing with his wife, also an artist, and a daughter. Liu's exhibition record also remains fairly local, although while in Spain he held two solo shows, and in February 1999 he was part of a small group exhibition in the U.S.

The most unique aspect of Liu's works is the choice of medium, traditional Chinese ink and wash on paper. Embodying ancient Chinese painting technique, such as calligraphic brush work, he personally classifies his works as "modern."³¹ He feels he is

³⁰ This section draws on Nicky Combs, "Blending Tradition and Contemporary," *Asian Art News* July-Aug. 1998: 76-78.

³¹ Liu Qinghe, personal interviews, April 1998 and 7 May 1998.

not betraying tradition by combining Western elements, such as the use of brighter colors, but that he is painting to express his genuine observations toward contemporary society with a greater amount of freedom than allowed by tradition. His early studies of rural landscape painting proved not to be challenging enough. To accurately portray urban life through a traditional medium is a more challenging subject matter. His works exemplify contemporary feelings with a fresh and honest manner that is highly personalized in China's modern art world. It is easy to see that identity is a feature in his works, and some of the figures portrayed are indeed people from his personal life, but others exist as stereotypes of people in society.

For example, the character Mr. Wang appears in many of Liu's works. In the 1994 piece *Mr. Wang* (Figure 40), Liu depicts the Chinese "yuppie" (*xinguo*) relaxing, perhaps on an outdoor balcony. Mr. Wang is not a real person, but a parody, Liu's own creative impression of the newly emerging wealthy class that is benefiting from the increased amount of privatization of the economy. He wears a Western man's business suit as he sits on a wicker chair that is skillfully executed using various calligraphic lines. Looking closely at the chair, one notices the strokes identified in the tradition of painting bamboo, whether or not the intention was to create an image of a bamboo chair, the result is an increase in the display of Liu's skill in traditional Chinese painting brush work. Mr. Wang's glasses as well as his straggly goatee, again prove the mastering of different brush stroke styles under Liu's command. Also characteristic of his works is the contrast between straight lines, angles and detailed objects. Here the realistic chair is contrasted with a more wet, freer style of wash that makes up Mr. Wang's body, the umbrella and shadows. Thus, there is quite a stylistic freedom to these works.

In another work completed in 1994, Liu Qinghe creates a portrait of his parents on their wedding anniversary. In a large formatted work, *Golden Wedding* (Figure 41), Liu's parents are seated at a table, forever frozen in time smiling for the viewer, almost

as if seated for a photograph. There is no spontaneity in this piece, and indeed the work is skillfully executed. Liu uses the natural, pale hues found in all his works, and adds just a little bit of color in the flowers on the table. The technique and medium typically reserved for traditional landscape painting are applied in a dedicated manner and provides a view of a private/domestic scene. Behind his father is one of Liu's signature items, the floral patterned curtain. While there is no specific symbolism to the curtain, the theme of signature items in his later works comes to hold a deeper meaning. When portraying friends and family, Liu admits that the setting of the compositions many times come from a specific occurrence in his personal life, like the portrait of his parents. Other times, they are influenced by life in contemporary China creating a visual social commentary.

The work of Liu Qinghe has progressed over the years and matured into stronger, sometimes less optimistic, reflections on urban culture. *The Waltz* (Figure 42) painted in 1997, places a couple outdoors in a sort of embrace one might find on the dance floor. Surrounding the couple is a chain-link fence, serving as a symbol of enclosure. Liu's personal understanding of today's urban life is an aspect of enclosure that distances people from one another and other aspects of society. He gave a specific example of his job teaching at the Academy where the environment is more enclosed. There are specific rules and guidelines to the educational content the students are to receive, therefore limiting an artists' creative endeavors.³² Symbolic of these feelings in Liu's work is the fence, which in his most recent series has become a hallmark. He further creates the mood of distance through the characters' facial expressions. While the two figures are

³² Su Xingping certainly exemplifies this theme of the individual versus the institution as well. His position at the school is to teach lithography, but personally he is more focused on the development of his oil painting. Xie Dongming also reiterated this point when discussing attitudes of students toward working with more official styles of painting.

physically close, they carry a detached or disconnected expression. The woman is looking up at the man with a blank stare, and he looks off into a different direction, lost in his own thought. Liu's philosophy behind the facial expressions lead into another aspect symbolic of situations in contemporary society.

Evening Breeze (Figure 43) exemplifies the psychological states of Liu's figures most profoundly. This time the figures sit on the chain-link fence, each one staring off into different directions with a characteristic blank expression. They are stiff, quiet and appear lost in thought. Contemporary society places an unforeseen amount of pressure on people, and by giving his characters this blank, numb look, Liu's desire is to visibly express the physical reaction to the invisible pressure. Liu admits that the characters in his works represent a highly educated class, and it is his personal observation that this class is experiencing an overwhelming amount of pressure, particularly due to the changing economy. Therefore, in order to portray the perplexed feelings caused by this pressure, he purposefully paints the blank, stupefied look. His chosen medium is traditional Chinese painting which emphasizes a quiet reflection on the painted scene, but he adds the feel of today by the choice of setting and composition.

Many words can describe Liu Qinghe the person, but always mentioned is his sense of humor. While many of his works portray a pessimism toward a situation in urban life, his light-hearted attitude is also apparent. Many times Liu paints scenes of children. His own daughter is often visible, as her daily adventures inspire Liu. He works with direct quotes from his life, and visually expresses his feelings and emotions on the circumstances taking place around him.

The philosophy of traditional Chinese painting technique is the most important aspect of artistic creation for Liu, but reflecting the avant-garde petition in the 1980s, he is interested in a new way of creating art. Of course the attention to technique is important, but he believes that an artist must remember what he wants to represent.

added to the feelings and emotions of the subject. An artist must distance himself from the technique, and be free to incorporate an individual style. The most appropriate artistic language for him is Chinese painting, but it needs to include a feeling of today. To represent urban life with traditional technique is unique and challenging. To express one's own feelings is his goal, and the language to do that is a blending of tradition and vernacular, the postmodern dream, the synthesis of classical and popular art.

Zhang Yajie and "Gray Culture"

While the four above mentioned artists' personal styles make it difficult to classify them as belonging to a specific group, the final artist can be identified with the Cynical Realist Movement. While not as internationally known as Fang Lijun or Liu Wei, Zhang Yajie's work, and in particular his experimentation with many different media, places him as outstanding among the young contemporary artists who have remained working in one trend. While Liu Qinghe created scenes without a "big city spirit" or state of mind, Zhang Yajie's works skillfully portray this environment.

As the youngest artist in this group of five, Zhang was born in 1963 in Beijing. He also attended CAFA, and graduated in 1984 with a degree in printmaking. He was appointed to the Beijing Broadcasting Institute where he is an instructor of photography and art history. His academic training in the techniques of sketching and gouache gave him the fundamentals required to begin painting in oils. As many young artists did, in 1990 he started concentrating on the development of his oil painting. He echoes the statement made by Su Xinping, fellow printmaker, that it is easier to express his feelings

in oil painting.³³ Zhang has participated in a number of group exhibitions in China, the highest profile being the 1989 *China Avant-Garde* exhibition, as well as a few in Hong Kong and the United States. The early to mid-1990s mark an historical time in Beijing where society became commercialized and market oriented, admits Zhang, and this is the main inspiration behind his work.

The works of the early 1990s are colorful portrayals of Beijing's streets and alleyways which set him apart from the other Cynical Realists who stick to the theme of portraiture. While these cityscapes document the growing economic development, the figures carry worried expressions, and at times appear unfinished infusing the work with a hollow spirit. In *Street Scene* (Figure 44), Zhang accurately captures the pace of everyday life in Beijing as a mother shepherds her child along and others pass around them with vacant expressions. Realism and abstract technique are present in this work as Zhang applied bold brush strokes breaking up the defined shapes and even figures' faces. The incompleteness of the paintings also serves to heighten the instantaneous feel, that is characteristic of Beijing's rapid development. He depicts the many new skyscrapers, Beijing's store fronts with reflective windows, and hectic street scenes. In *Bus* (Figure 45), he portrays the common scene of people forced to stand on the overcrowded bus.

Between 1995-97 Zhang completed a series of portraits painted in varying shades of black, white and gray. Zhang uses the ideology of an ambiguous, undefined environment delineated by the "gray area" people find themselves in, to express a complex feeling associated with present day society. Color represents an expression of feeling, and when Zhang found he had no color to inspire him, he went to shades of gray.³⁴ He expresses that many people, including his friends who are depicted in this

³³ Zhang Yajie, personal interview, 13 July 1998.

³⁴ Zhang Yajie, personal interview, 13 July 1998.

series, feel a lack of spiritual gravity", as if they are floating about with no clear definitions. As expressed in his earlier works, the hectic pace of development in Beijing results in a loss of spirituality. In many of these works the faces of the figures are large, taking over the majority of the canvas. Zhang admits that he wants to portray the figures at a close range so it distorts their facial expressions. Indeed this distortion works to emphasize the figures' wry, mocking grins that are distant to Zhang's works. He confronts the feelings of malaise and ennui toward society producing authentic portrayals of a specific time in Beijing. In an untitled work (Figure 46), Zhang's painted the portrait

pretended emotion. The background is once again composed of abstract patterns, serving to give an undefined location. The figures' faces are painted white with uneven brush strokes as they are surrounded by shades of gray. In describing differences between high art and postmodern art, Fredric Jameson identifies postmodern to have a flatness, depthlessness, and superficiality.³⁵ But, rather than creating a flat work, Zhang gives his characters the flat, superficial expression as a personal observation of how people react to a postmodern, contemporary society.

Orville Schell writes about the emerging of a "gray culture" among the new generation in China, but rather than seeing it as a movement, he refers to it as a state of mind responding to changes in society. "The word 'gray' describes both the process by which Chinese culture was being bleached of its Communist redness in the early 1990s and the appearance of the new 'gray zones' of commercial and cultural activity that were arising outside of Party-state structures."³⁶ He elaborates on the blending of feelings of

³⁵ Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 60.

³⁶ Orville Schell, Mandate of Heaven: A New Generation of Entrepreneurs, Dissidents, Bohemians, and Technocrats Lay Claim to China's Future (New York: Simon, 1994) 321.

uncertainty and hopelessness with cynicism and sarcasm resulting in new forms of cultural expressions appearing in art, music and fashion.³⁷ This somewhat rebellious group has been labeled as *liumang* (hooligans) and has loosely been associated with the rock star Cui Jian, or the writer Wang Shou.³⁸ While to many the term is derogatory, others have associated it with positive aspects such as individualism and spirit of independence,³⁹ which are two approaches found within the works of Zhang Yajie.

Zhang's 1997 painting *One Day* (Figure 47) captures both his accomplished skill in the portrayal of the rapidly changing Beijing cityscape and portraiture. The figure, once again, grins at the viewer with a hint of a sneer, and the background behind him shows both the older, traditional courtyard housing, contrasted by the towering skyscraper-like apartments going up all over Beijing. The title signifies that this is an average day, a portrayal of the everyday life of one of Zhang's friends. While Zhang himself is aware that his works are a little depressing, he confesses that is because this is the way he thinks everyday life is. Zhang's bleak outlook on a nation whose economic development has played a role in the production of all the art throughout this paper, forces the viewer to bring into consideration individual accounts of contemporary China.

Zhang Yajie is currently working on developing different media: photography and relief sculpture. To him it is not the medium that is important, but that art as an abstract expression, conveys something specific about contemporary China. Two of his recent relief sculptures are called *Typical Types*, and are portraits of "model workers." One a male and the other a female, are imaginary people, but represent the type of person who is rewarded with "model worker" status by their dedicated work. As a child Zhang knew

³⁷ Schell 321-322

³⁸ For further talk of *liumang*, refer to Geremie Barbe and Linda Javin, *New Ghosts, Old Dreams* (New York: Times, 1992) 215-320

³⁹ Schell 322

of many model workers and looked upon them as heroes. In middle school he and his classmates wore red ties or armbands and were taught to learn from model workers' examples. The decades of the 1980s and 1990s this type of hero worship has changed, moving toward a direction of personal interest. Rather than looking up to officially recognized model workers, people are now interested in superstars, millionaires, thus the connection is much more personal, observes Zhang. The *Typical Types* are 20 x 30 cm. and are brightly colored, comic-like caricatures of the traditional type of model workers. For this series he used a form of industrial material, similar to plastic, that can be easily reproduced in factories. By making portrayals of model workers out of this material he is not only commenting on the commercialized aspect of China's economy, but also that these figures can be mass produced. He is looking at model workers with a new perspective, just as he has done with all of his works. His authentic portrayals enhance the awareness of the changes taking place in people's everyday lives, and exemplify an understanding that this "gray culture" is reality.

The one common denominator among these five artists, is that they are *not* interested in conscious efforts at political criticism. They are interested in art and the fulfillment of personal expression in contemporary society.

It is the commitment to art and the fulfillment of personal expression that has connected not only these five artists, but all the artists in this study. As Richard Kraus observes, "Many of China's most sophisticated artists have rejected politics by denying explicitly that their work is *about* anything. Such denials, however, are unlikely to prevent readers, viewers, and audiences from reaching their own conclusions, as ordinary citizens try to comprehend and reconstruct their roles amid the confusion of city life."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Richard Kraus, introduction, Davis 148

China's push for modernization has not only affected the economy, but also the cultural identity and art. The concerns facing artists today can not help but be influenced by this phenomenon. While many of the artists are producing social commentary with personal views on changes within society, their art encompasses the judgment and critique of an emerging global culture, in an intelligible way. The 1990s presented trends toward a clear language with artists focusing on involving social reality and everyday life in their art. These five artists have transformed their individual emotions, experiences, and events known from everyday life into a new vocabulary. Within the tradition of postmodernism, China, "a society in need of advanced technology and consumer goods, and a new place in the global economy, must perforce accept new modes of aesthetic activity."⁴¹ While the above artists' work may not appear all that similar to Andy Warhol or feminist artist Cindy Sherman's, they establish the same relationship of the commodification of art by the gallery and international art market. Modern art's ambition was to speak to the audience, forcing one to reconstruct the initial situation that the work emerged from. It is art produced in the postmodern era that needs to be addressed more critically in the same regard.⁴² The "historical conjuncture in which we find ourselves... is marked by dedifferentiation of fields, such that economics has come to overlap with culture: that everything, including commodity production and high and speculative finance, has become cultural, and culture has equally become profoundly economic or commodity oriented."⁴³ Therefore, as I have argued and exemplified through the studies of the five Beijing artists, it is within this defined postmodern condition that we are able to view their works as a discourse on contemporary Chinese

⁴¹ Norman Bryson, "The Post-Ideological Avant-Garde," Gao, *Inside Out* 52

⁴² Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 58-60

⁴³ Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 73

culture and society. It was through the "open door policies" beginning in the late 1970s that afforded the artists an approach to the transformations within a global context.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Today Chinese magazines and journals publish modern and postmodern works of non-Chinese artists, like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Georgia O'Keeffe, with critiques on their works by Chinese art critics. In 1993 the British artists Gilbert & George held an exhibition of their homoerotic art in the China National Art Gallery. While their works are considered controversial by Western standards, in China they were many times misinterpreted by the viewers.¹ In Part Two of the 1997 Sungan auction of contemporary Chinese art in Beijing, the auction house sold works, mostly sketches, by Picasso, Renoir and Georges Rouault. It is no doubt that these activities are influencing Chinese artists. Is that why we can claim that art produced today in China is globalized? Does the issue of globalization and the development of the Chinese economy impact Chinese art? Is it as Fredric Jameson said that "postmodernism" is the "global" term for the transformations in cultural production, and that including China's?

Nothing can be more unique to China than the changing relationship between art and politics, that for this study, resulted in new cultural production beginning in the late 1970s and continues today. Chinese artists in the 1980s began once again to use a form of Western language to negotiate cultural differences between the past and present. Iconoclastic themes reacted against the stale past viewed as constraints by many. As the 1980s progressed, the transition within the arts did as well. Artists began to not simply appropriate content, style and technique from the West, but instead advance them by incorporating narratives of personal cultural experiences. Many artists have participated

¹ Lynn Macrinche, "Precarious Paths on the Mainland," *Art In America*, March 1994: 51.

with reactions to new cultural production as a part of the global influence entering China. Rethinking art and traditional culture, national consciousness, and the relationship to their own society, China's artists are revealing a unique cultural identity that has transformed ideological notions of style, form and creativity.

Western postmodern artists have been described as, "hav[ing] nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture."² But, as I see it, some Chinese artists have not given up on the responsibility of working through the transformations to create art that is outstanding compared to non-Chinese contemporary artists. The global phenomenon of art commercialization has indeed place restrictions on art production in China, but holding onto a Modernist's spirit, the art scene in China is maturing with more individualism and vitality. Many artists are reworking Western "dead" styles and infusing them with Chinese cultural characteristics to create a new art form. I would argue that this production is just as Jameson claimed, a "home-grown" characteristic of Chinese postmodern art.

We are all aware of transformations on all aspects of society as nations become more and more affected by globalization. But how are Chinese contemporary artists negotiating and making a connection with globalization? Artists have rejected Chinese tradition, purposefully fused it with transnational culture, or subconsciously produced art that is relevant in both fields. What binds all of them together is that each represent the changes occurring within their culture. Jameson's model of art as a "registering apparatus" for societal transformations has proved successful in coming to terms with history through art. The transformations within Chinese art have had to take place in order to make the connection with an increasingly global culture.

² Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 63.

The art exemplified above at times portrayed identical characteristics to Western postmodern art in styles, themes and trends, but without relying too heavily on the Western model. Instead we can view contemporary Chinese art as providing a language to what individuals are experiencing in a global, postmodern era. These artists have and continue to produce a discourse that authentically portrays the transformations that China as a nation is experiencing. And, therefore, it is something that needs to be addressed with global terms.

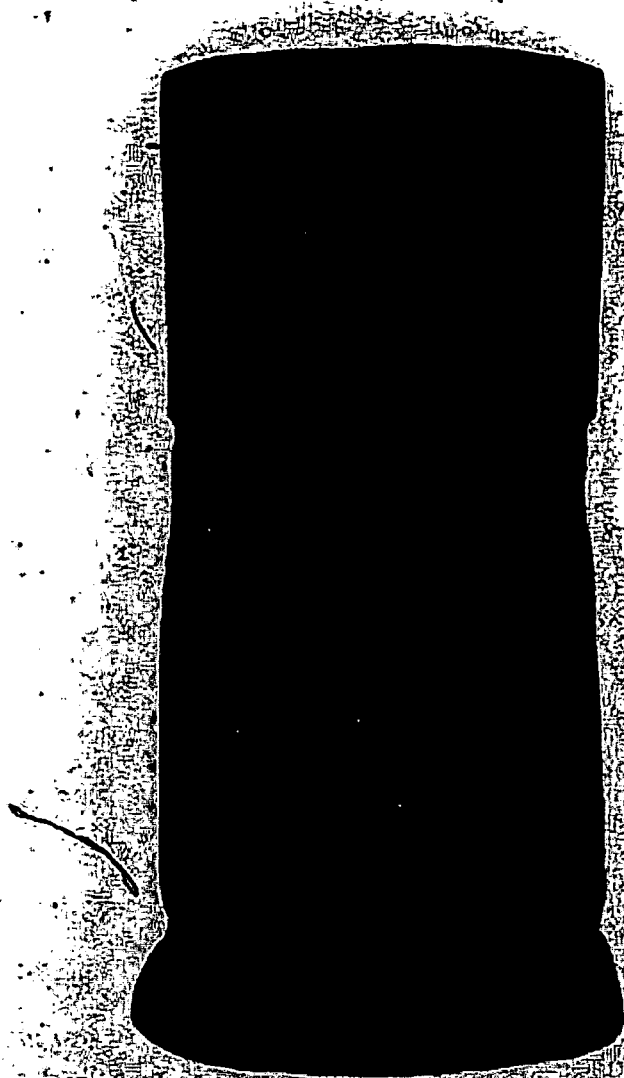


Figure 1. Wang Keping, *Idol*, 1979. Wooden sculpture, dimensions unavailable.
Source: Andrews, *Painters and Politics*, Figure 138.

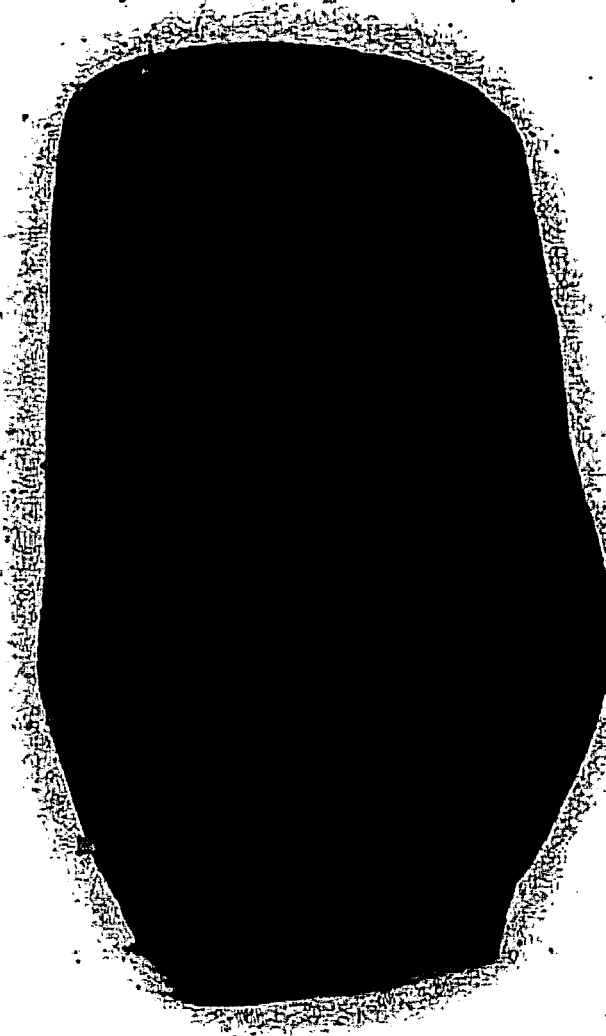


Figure 2. Wang Keping, *Blind and Silent*. 1979. Wooden sculpture, dimensions unavailable. Source: *North China Avant-Garde* 43.



Figure 3 Huang Yongning, *The Haystack*, 1983. Multi-media, dimensions unavailable. Source: Noth, *China Avant-Garde* 20.

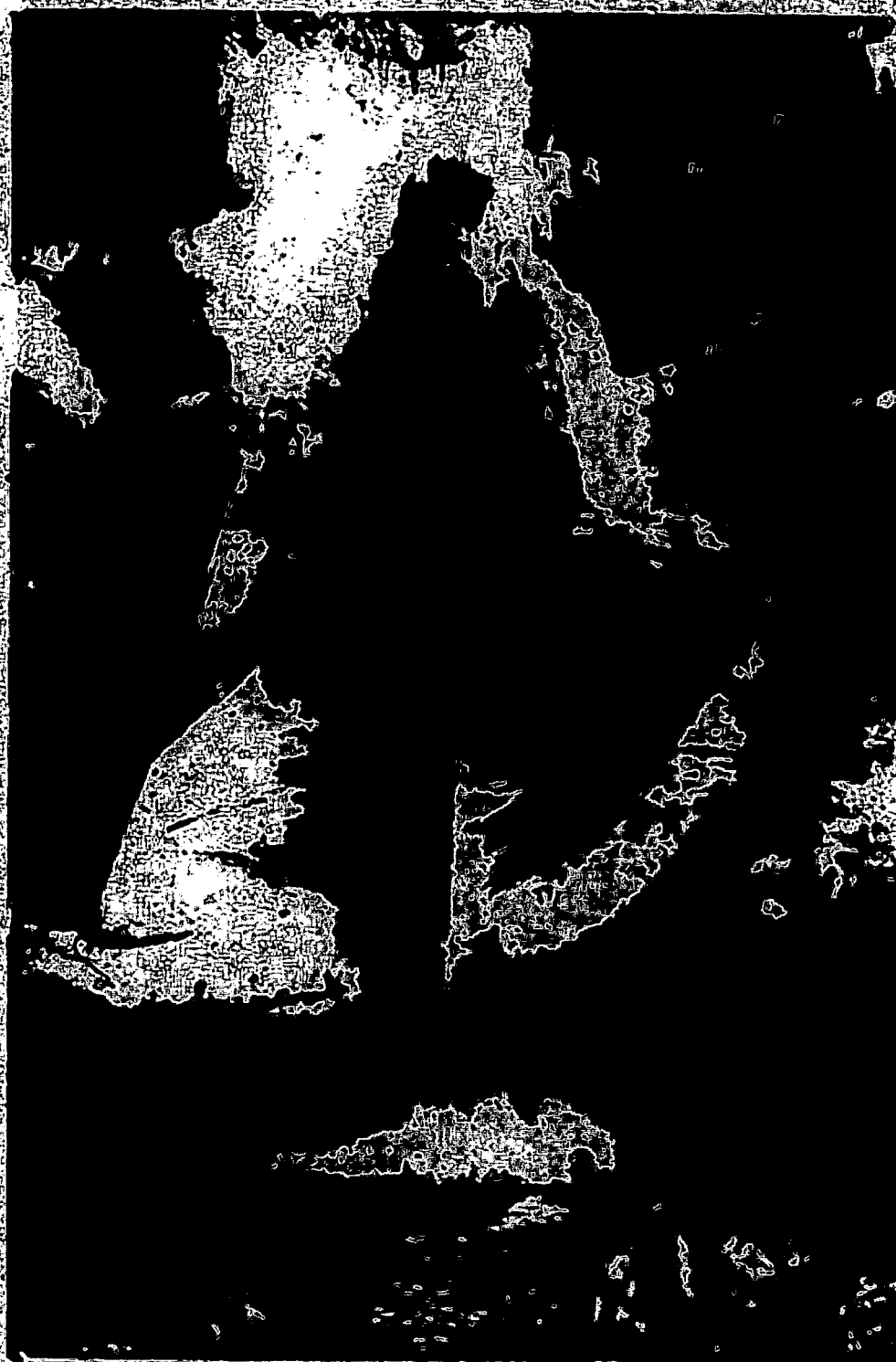


Figure 4. Gu Wenda, *Pseudo-Characters Series: Contemplation of the World*, 1984 (detail). Ink on paper, three hanging scrolls, each 247.3 x 182.9 cm. Source: Gao, *Inside Out*, Plate 3.



- Figure 5. Geng Jianyi, *The Second Situation*, Nos. 1-4, 1987 (detail). Oil on canvas, four canvases, each 170 x 132 cm. Source: Gao, *Inside Out*, Plate 22.



Figure 6. Xu Yihui and Cai Xiaogang, *Archaeological Excavations on a Waste Disposal Site*, 1986. Performance. Source: *North China Avant-Garde* 23.



Figure 7. 21st Century Group. *The Big Earthquake*. 1988. Performance.
Source: Noth, *China Avant-Garde* 35.

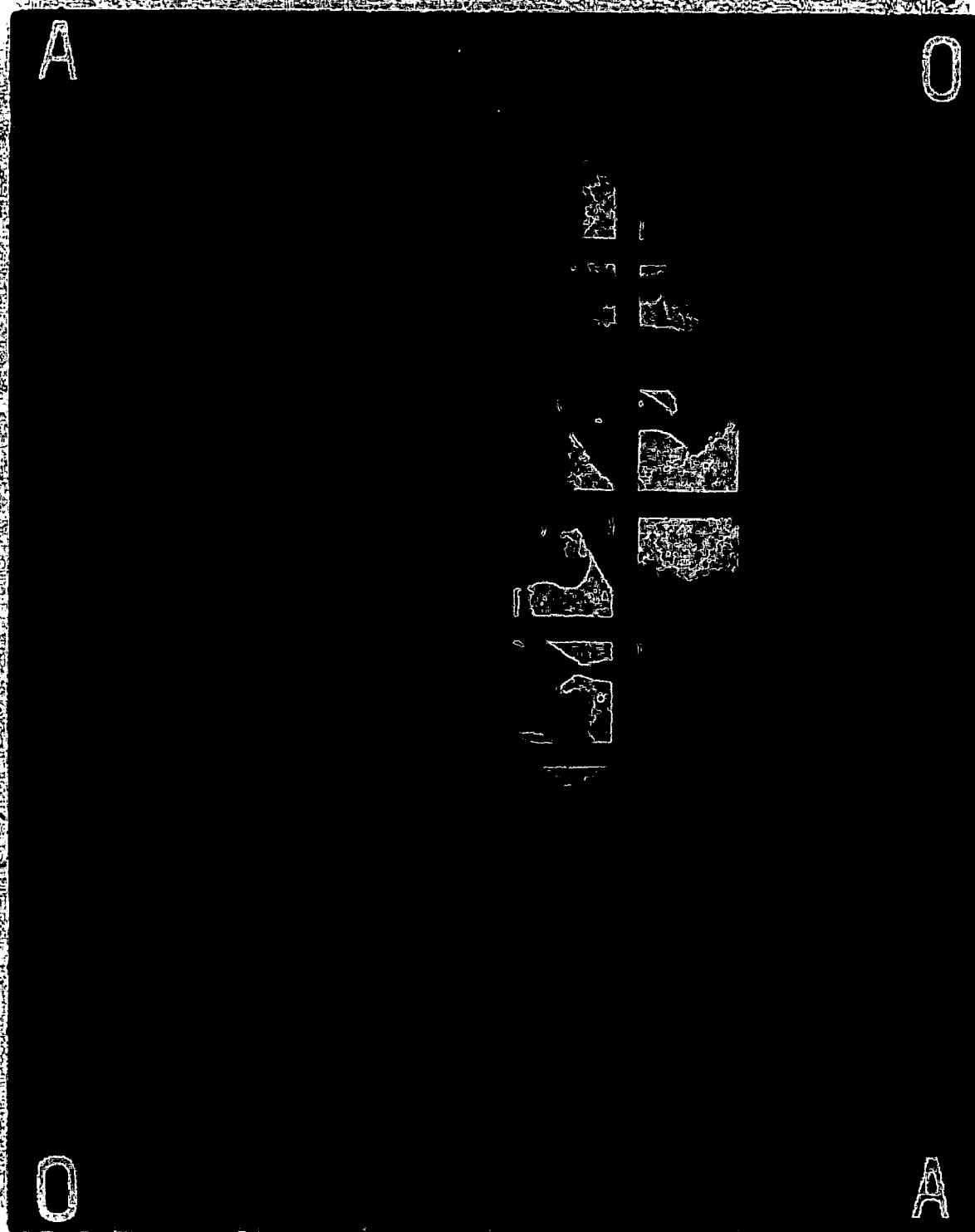


Figure 8. Wang Guangyi, *Mao Zedong No. 1*, 1988. Oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm.
Source: Gao, *Inside Out*, Plate 34. 6

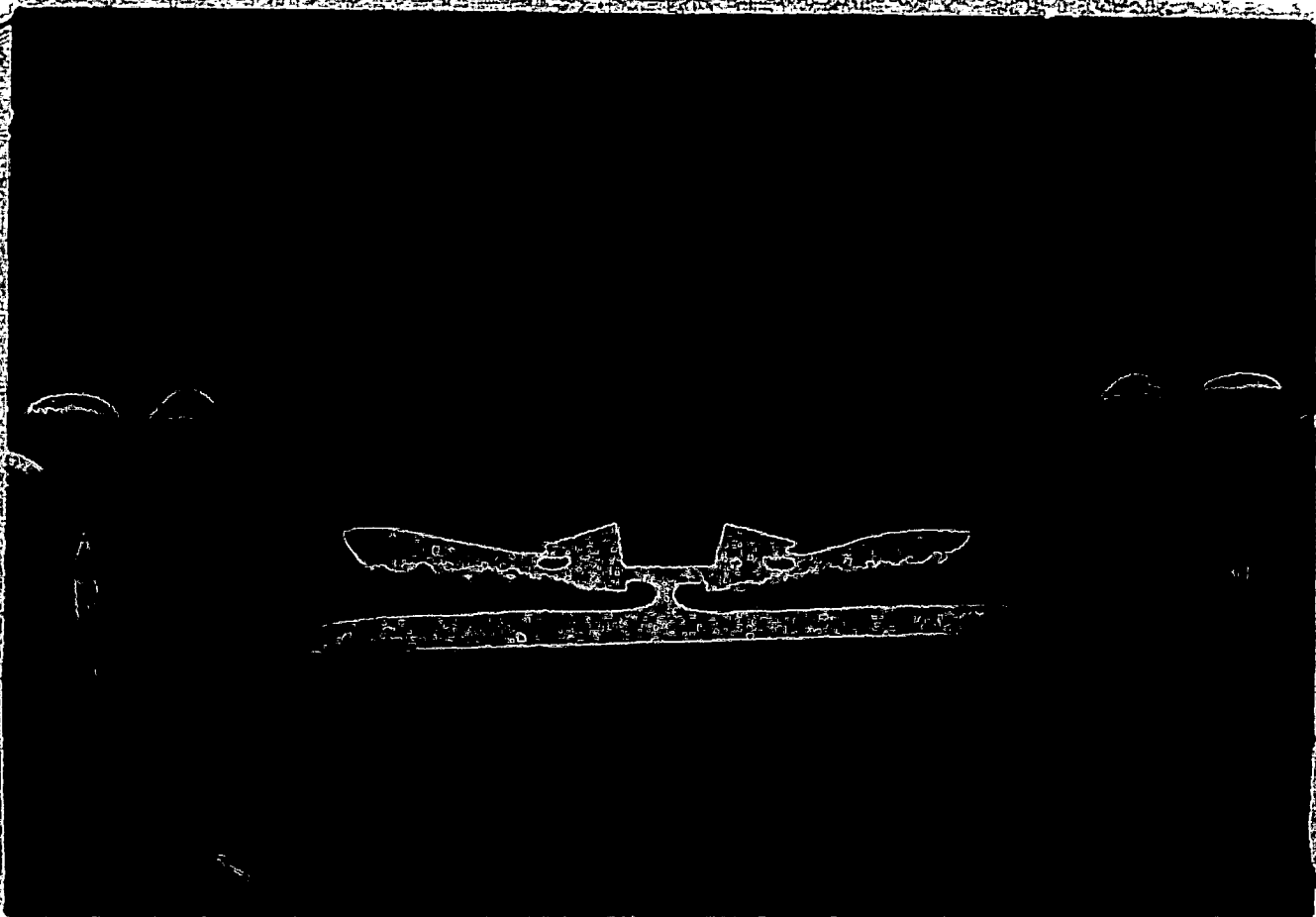


Figure 9.

Wang Guangyi, *Post Classical Series: Death of Marat*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. Source: Gao, *Inside Out* Plate 20.



Figure 10. Ren Mengzhang, *General Zhu De at the Art Show*. 1984. Oil on canvas. 158 x 178 cm. Source: *Contemporary Oil Paintings* 125.



Figure 11. Li Xiushi, *The Past, the Present, the Future*. 1981. Oil on canvas.
185 x 100 cm. Source: *Contemporary Oil Paintings*. 166.

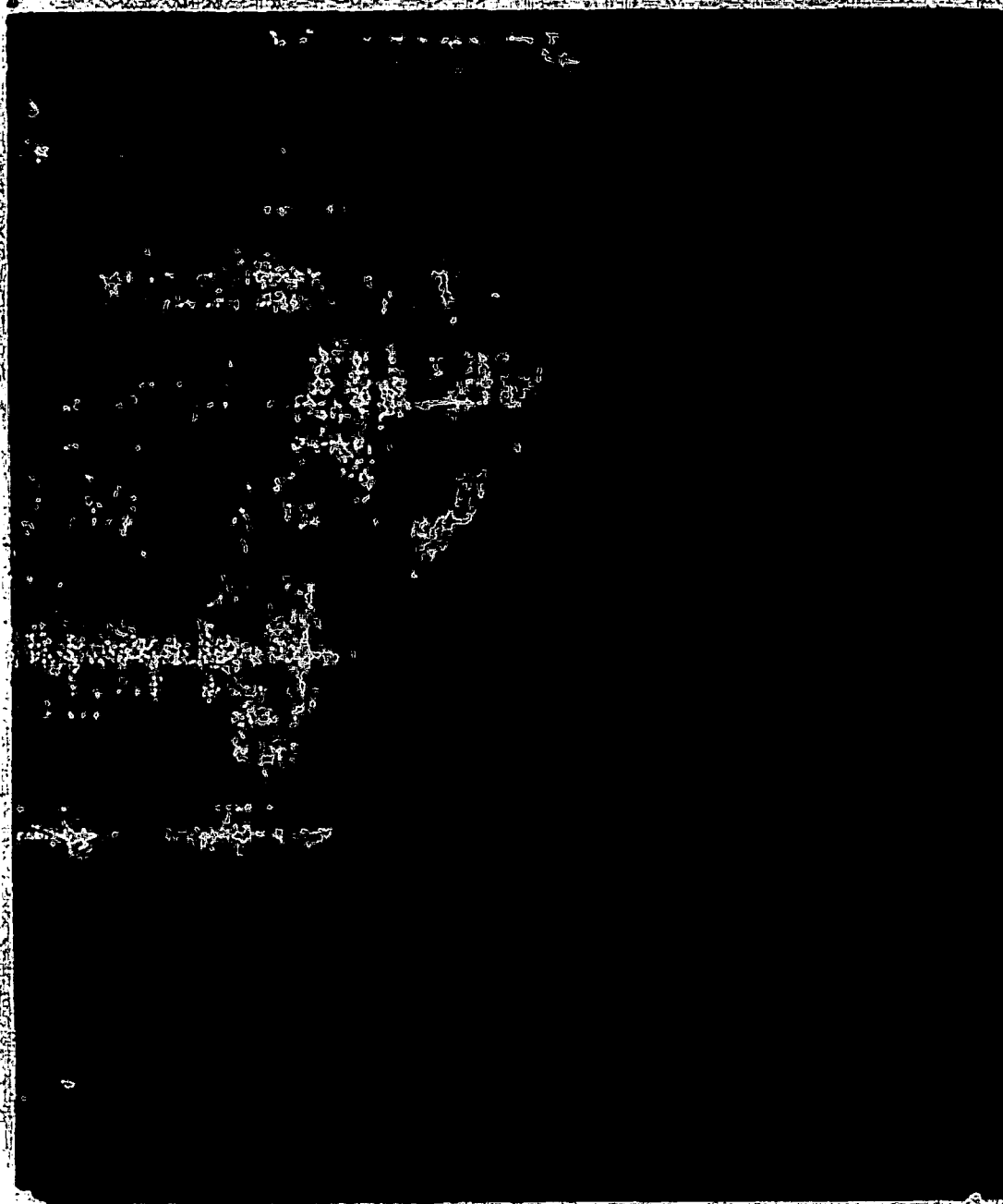


Figure 12. Qin Ming. *Portrait of the Artist*. No date. Oil on canvas, 70 x 60 cm.
Source: *Contemporary Oil Paintings* 139.



Figure 13

Chang Ming. *Black Hair, Black Eyes, and Yellow Skin*. No date. Oil on canvas. 150 x 194 cm. Source: *Beyond the Open Door* 65.



Figure 14. Xiao Lu and Tang Song, *Dialogue*. 1989. Installation. Source: Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art," Figure 9.24.



Figure 15. Fang Lijun, *Sketch No. 2*, 1989. Sketch on paper, dimensions unavailable. Source: Lu Peng and Yi Dan eds. *Zhongguo xiandai yishushi* [A History of Modern Chinese Art]. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe chubans, 1992. 334.



Figure 16. Fang Lijun, *Group I No. 5*. 1990. Oil on canvas, 80 x 100 cm.
Source: Noth, China Avant-Garde 112.



Figure 17. Gao Shen, Gao Qiang and Li Qun, *Inflatism*. 1989. Installation. Source: Andrews and Gao, "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art" Figure 9.22.



Figure 18. Wang Guangyi, *Great Criticism - Kodak*, 1990. Oil on canvas, 150 x 100 cm. Source: Noth, *China Avant-Garde*, 153.

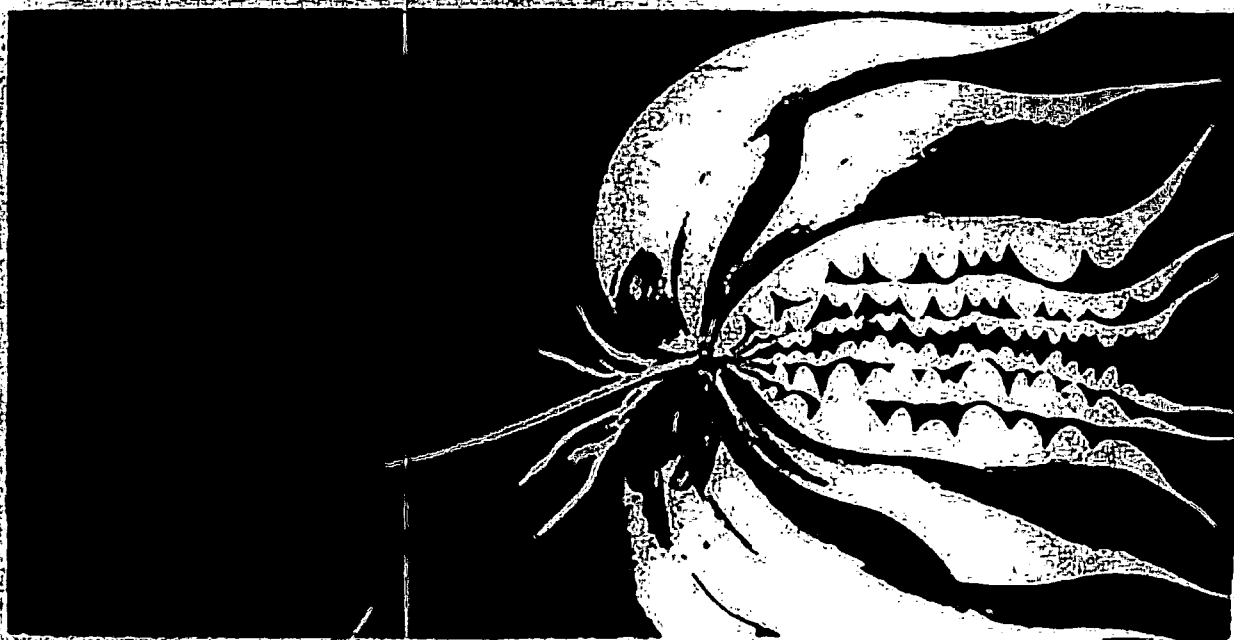


Figure 19. Li Shan, *The Rouge Series, No. 22*, 1992. Acrylic on canvas, 140 x 258 cm. Source: Doran, *China's New Art, Post 1989* 22.



Figure 20

Liu Wei, *New Generation*. 1991. Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm.
Source: Noth, *China Avant-Garde* 241.

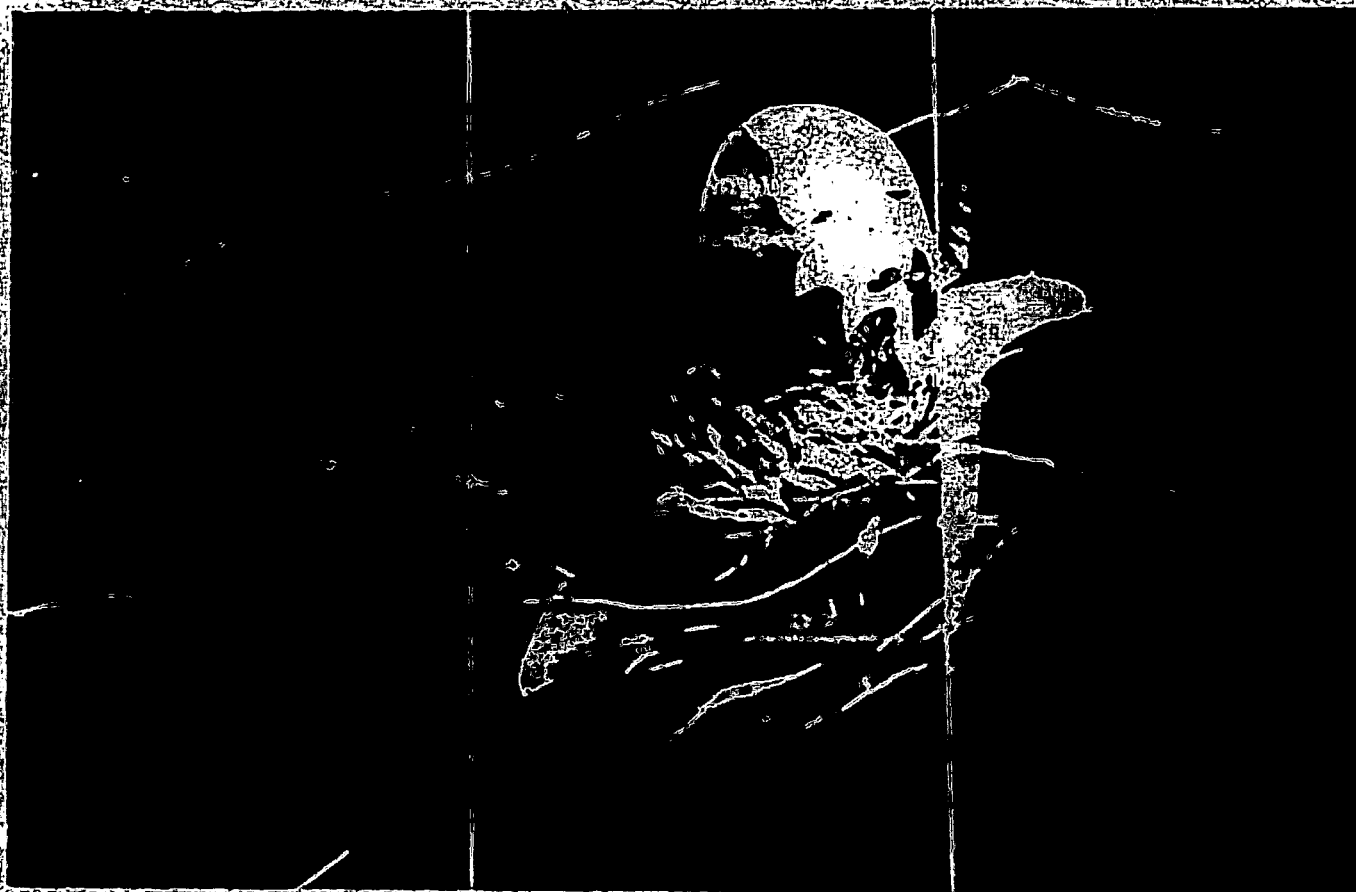


Figure 21. Fang Lijun, *No. 16B*, 1996. Woodblock print, 244 x 366 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 22. Zhang Peili, *Hygiene No. 3*, 1991. Installation. Video (detail).
Source: Doran, *China's New Art*, Post 1989 146.



Figure 23. Zhang Huan, *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond*. 1997
Performance. Source: Gao, *Inside Out* Cover illustration.



Figure 24. Su Xiping, *Grasslands in Spring*, 1989. Lithograph, 57 x 79 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 25. Su Xinping, *Dialogue*. 1990. Lithograph, 45 x 63 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.

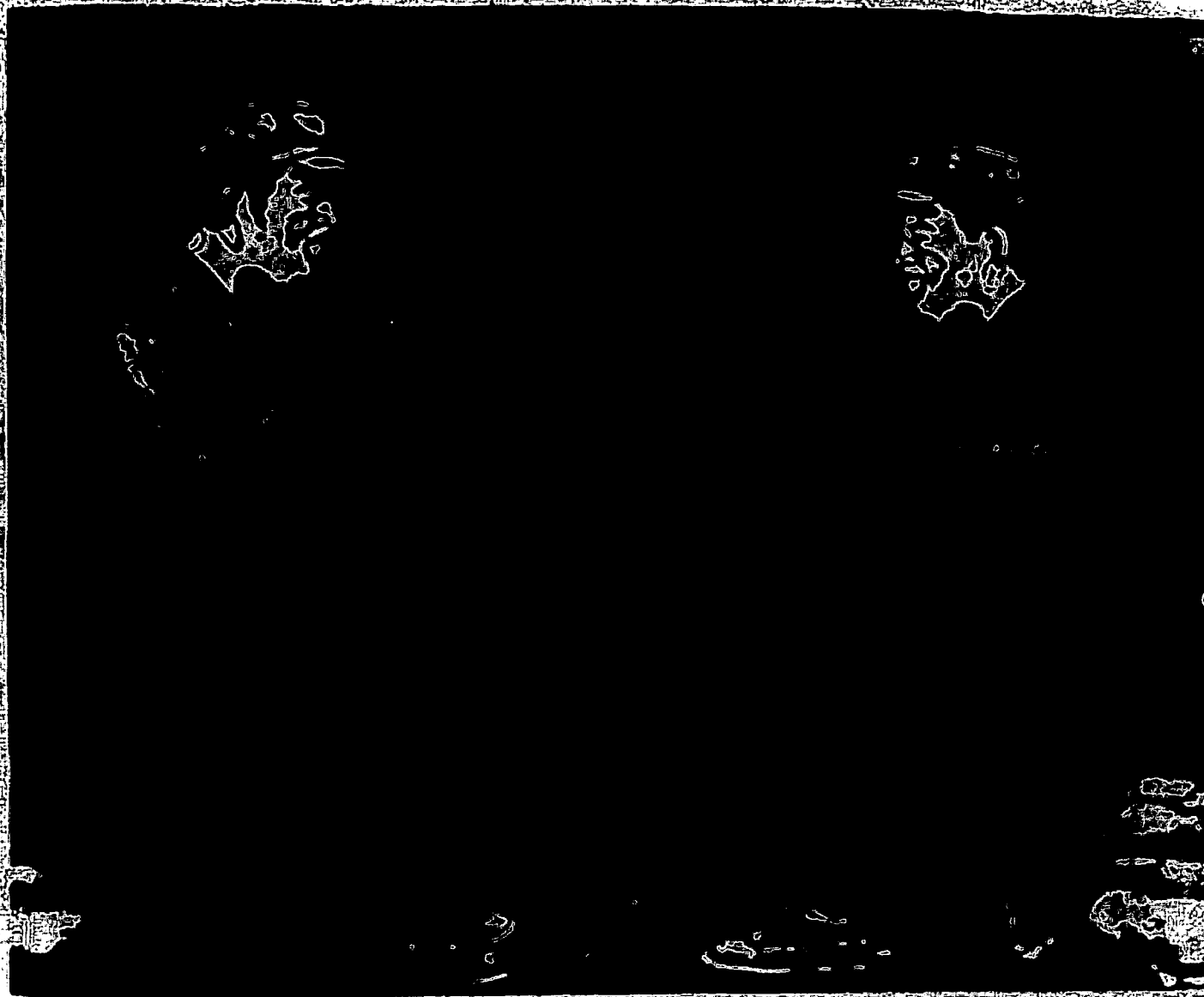


Figure 26: Su Xiping, *Dialogue*. 1998. Lithograph, 48 x 65 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.

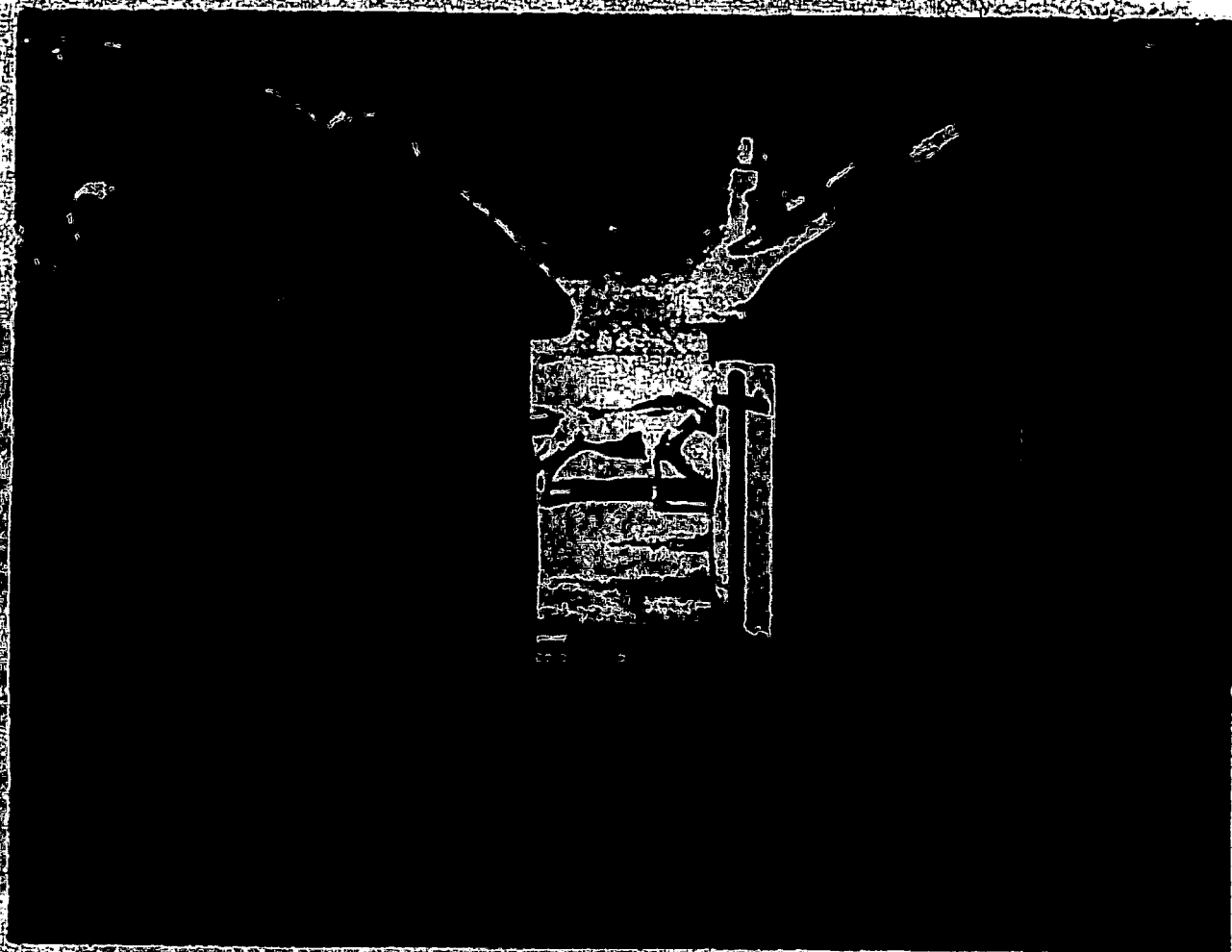


Figure 27. Su Xiping, *Silent Town Series, No. 4*. 1990. Lithograph. 57 x 78 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 28. Su Xiping. *The Rising Sun*. 1991. Lithograph, 57 x 79 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 29. Su Xiping, *Sea of Desire No. 6*. 1996. Oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 30. Su Xiping, *Sea of Desire No. 8*, 1996. Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.

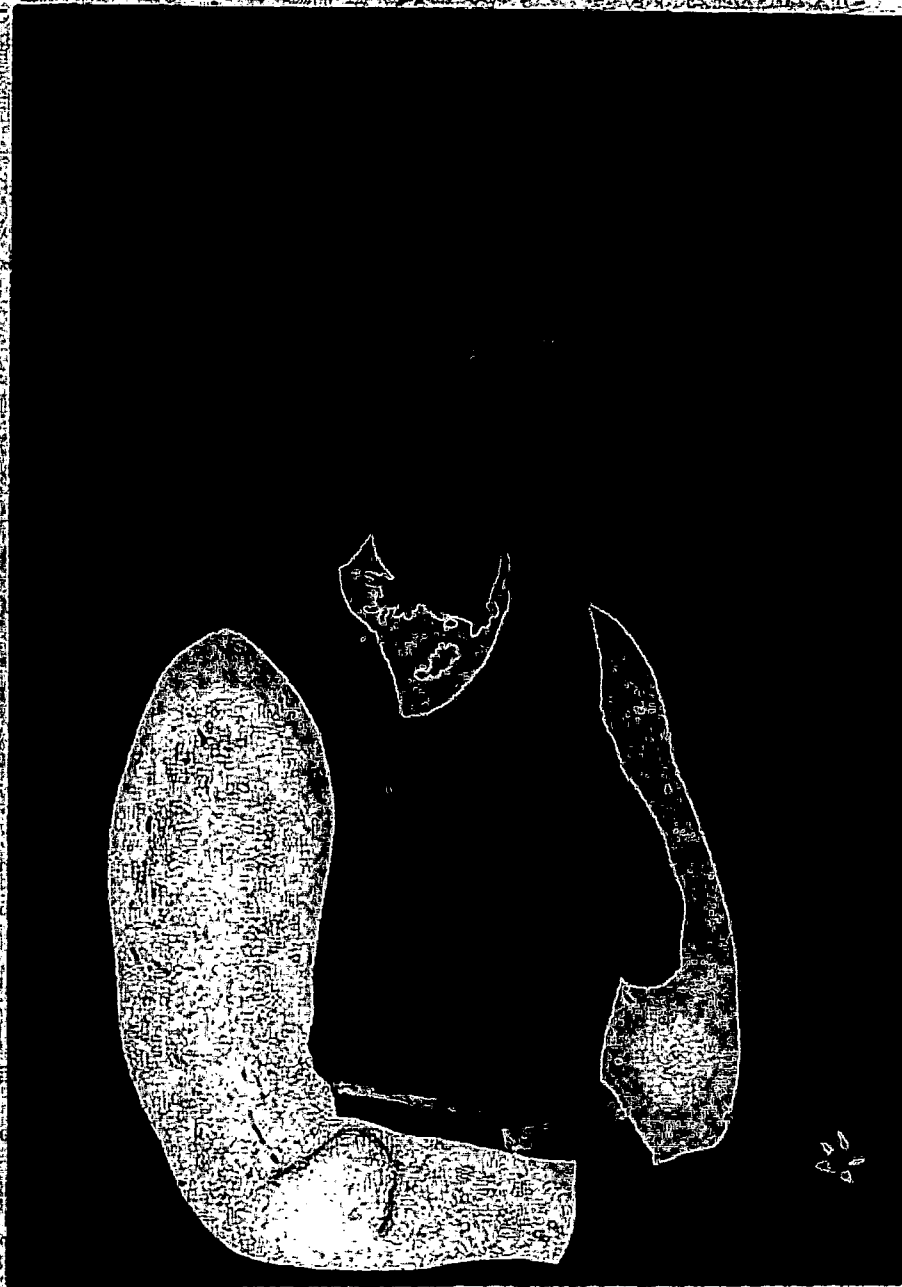


Figure 31. Xie Dongming, *Tibetan Girl No. 2*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 170 x 100 cm.
 Source: Shui Tianzhong, ed. *Xie Dongming: Zhongguo xiandai yishu zouping congshu* [Xie Dongming: Modern Chinese Art Series]. Guangxi: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 1995. 21.

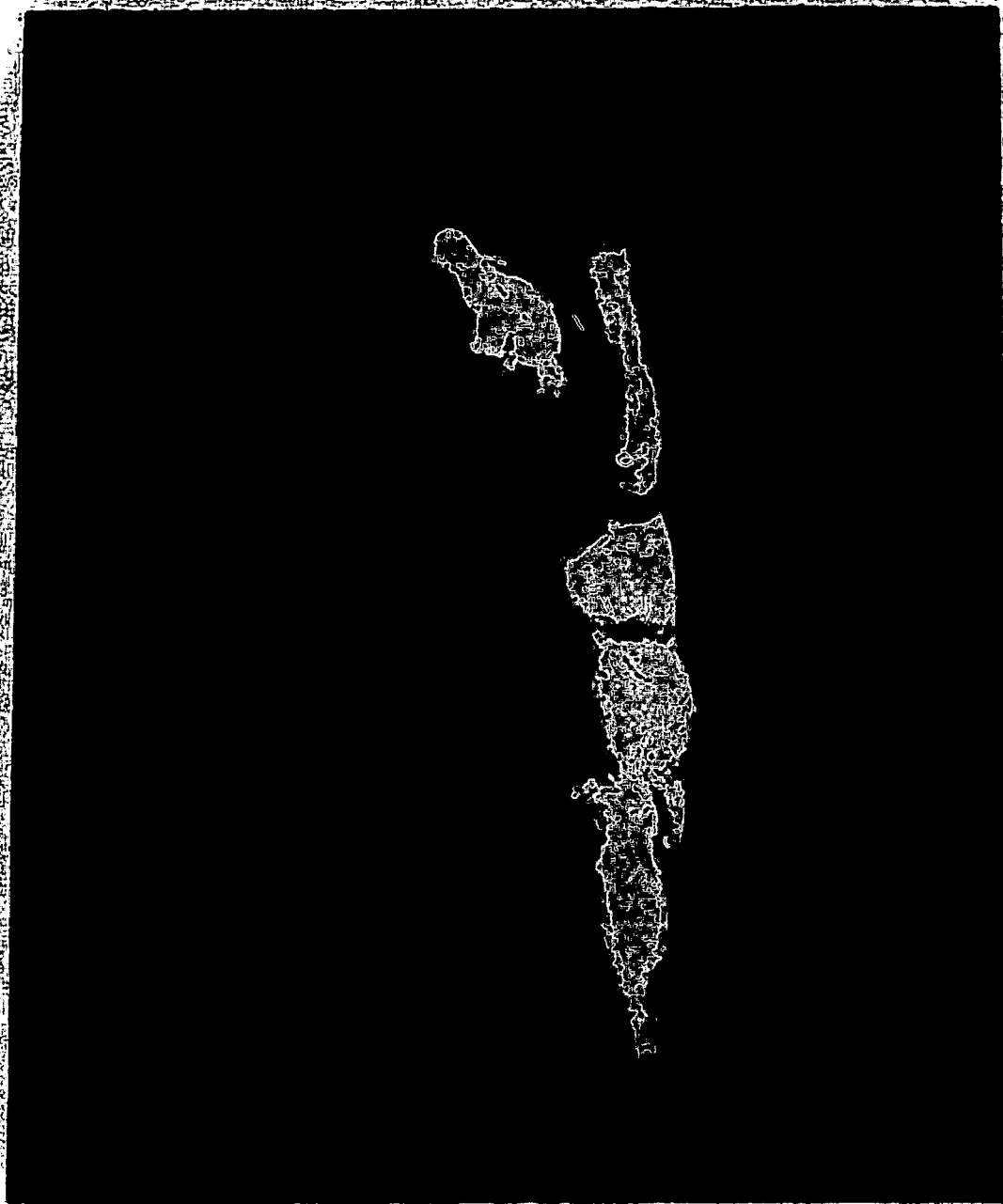


Figure 32. Xie Dongming, *Standing Nude Woman*. 1991. Oil on canvas. 140 x 120 cm. Source: Shui, *Xie Dongming* 31.

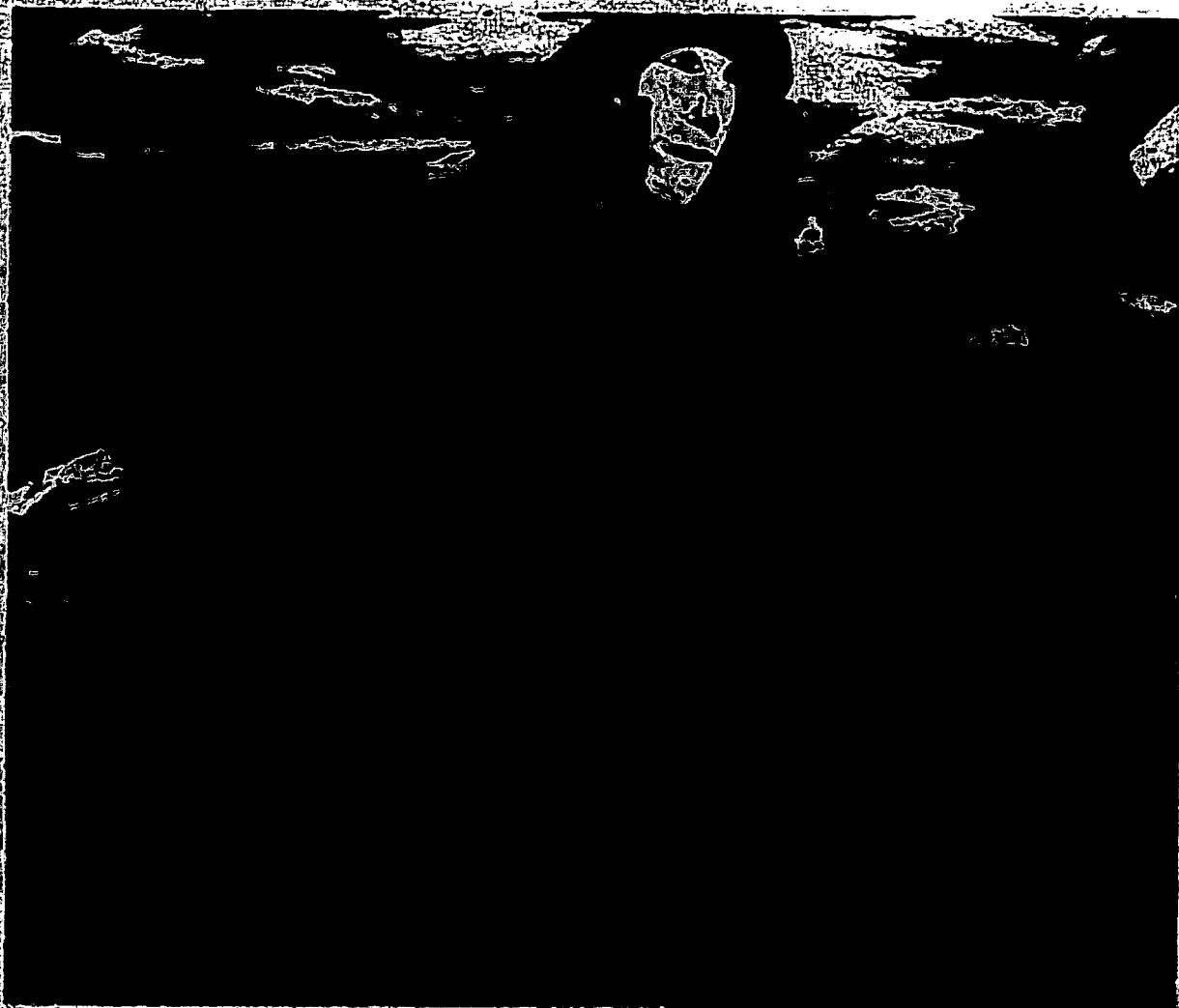


Figure 33. Xie Dongming, *Shouwanghe*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 120 x 140 cm.
Source: Shui, Xie Dongming 40.



Figure 34. Xie Dongming, *Sub No. 3*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 112 x 144 cm.
Source: Shui, *Xie Dongming* 53.



Figure 35. Xie Dongming, *Untitled*, 1997-98. Oil on canvas, dimensions unavailable. Source: Artist's collection.



Figure 36. Xie Dongming, *Untitled*, 1997-98. Oil on canvas, dimensions unavailable. Source: Artist's collection.

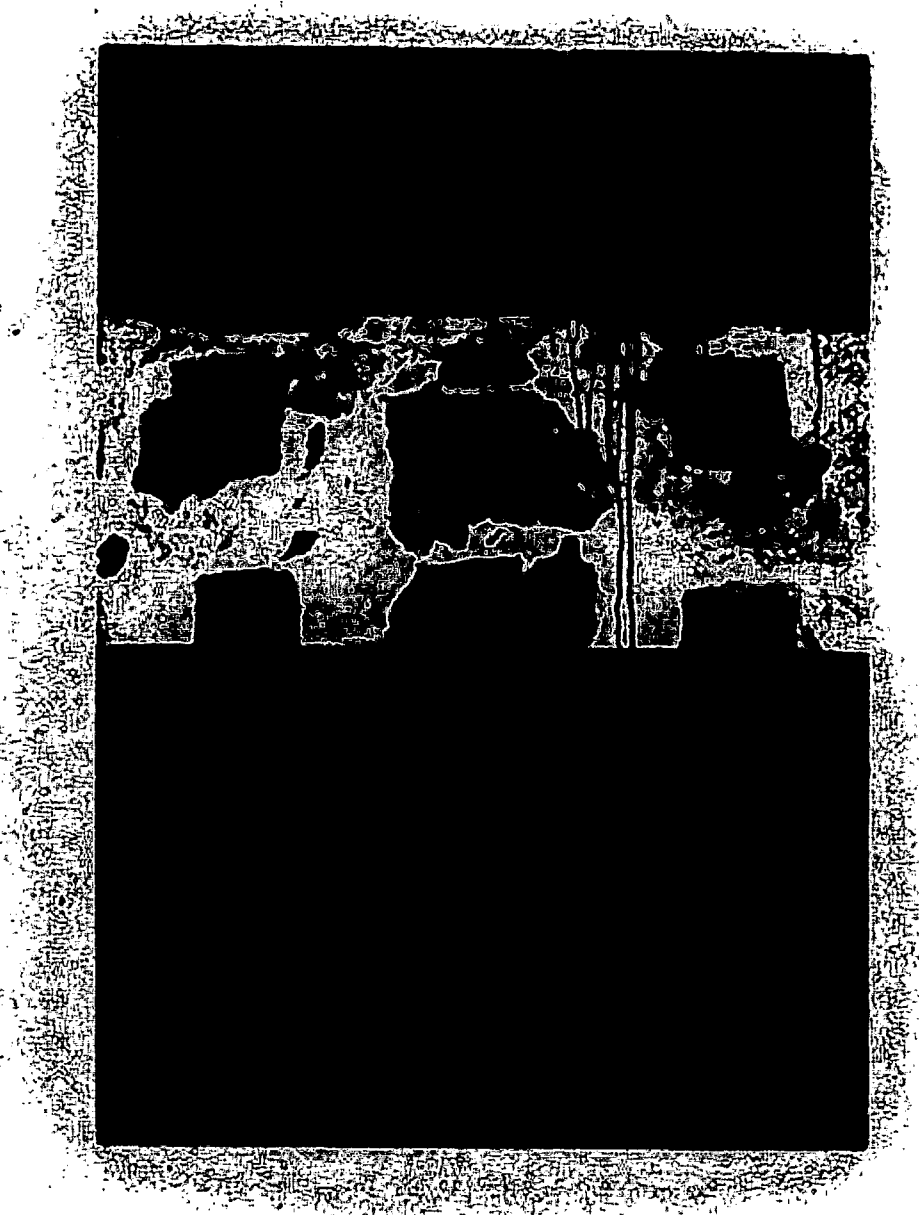


Figure 37. Wang Lifeng, *Hui Series*, 1995. Mixed media on canvas, 164 x 112 cm.
Source: Combs, "Reaching for Cultural Continuity" 76.



Figure.38. Wang Lifeng, *Sele Series*, 1990. Mixed media on canvas, 118 x 42 cm.
Source: Combs, "Reaching for Cultural Continuity" 77.



Figure 39. Wang Lifeng, *Brilliance Series*, 1998. Mixed media on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. Source: Combs, "Reaching for Cultural Continuity" 78.

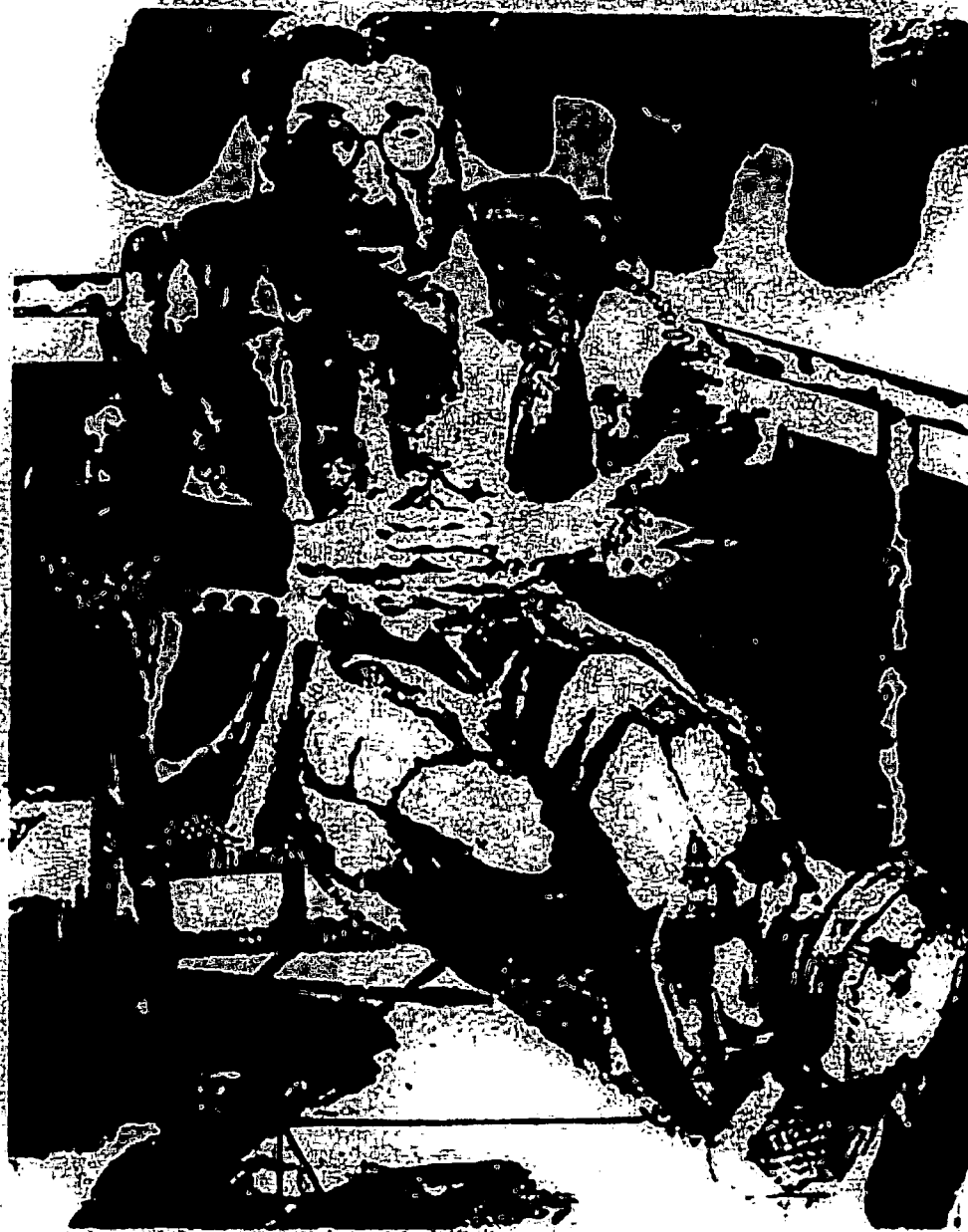


Figure 40. Liu Qinghe, *Mr. Wang*. 1994. Ink and wash on paper, 140 x 120 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing



Figure 41 Liu Qinghe, *Golden Wedding*, 1994. Ink and wash on paper, 140 x 120 cm. Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 42. Liu Qinghe, *The Waltz*, 1997. Ink and wash on paper, 120 x 90 cm.
Source: Combs, "Blending Tradition and Contemporary" 76.



Figure 43. Liu Qinghe, *Evening Breeze*. 1998. Ink and wash on paper, 120 x 90 cm.
Source: Combs, "Blending Tradition and Contemporary" 77.



Figure 44. Zhang Yajie, *Street Scene*. 1991-94. Oil on canvas, 176 x 126 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 45. Zhang Yajie, *Bus*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 46. Zhang Yajie, *Untitled*, 1995. Oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.



Figure 47. Zhang Yajie. *One Day*. 1997. Oil on canvas, 100 x 120 cm.
Source: Red Gate Gallery, Beijing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andrews, Julia F. "Fragmented Memory: An Introduction." Andrews and Gao, Fragmented Memory 6-13.
- , Painting and the Politics in the People's Republic of China. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.
- , and Gao Minglu. "The Avant-Garde's Challenge to Official Art." Davis 221-278.
- , curs. Fragmented Memory: The Chinese Avant-Garde in Exile. Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State U, 1993.
- Barme, Geremie. Shades of Mao: the Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1996.
- , and John Minford, eds. Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience. New York: Hill and Wang, 1988.
- , and Linda Jaivin, eds. New Ghosts, Old Dreams. New York: Times, 1992.
- "Beijing: Martial Art." ARTnews March 1990: 91.
- Bryson, Norman. "The Post-Ideological Avant-Garde." Gao, Inside Out 51-58.
- Capon, Edmund. "A Sense of Unreality: Painting in the People's Republic of China." Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting. Ed. Kao Mayching. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. 162-177.
- Chan, Lauk'ung. "Ten Years of the Chinese Avant-Garde: Waiting for the Curtain to Fall." Flash Art Jan.-Feb. 1992: 110-114.
- Clark, John. "Official Reactions to Modern Art in China Since the Beijing Massacre." Public Affairs 65.3 (1992): 334-352.
- Cohen, Joan Lebold. The New Chinese Painting 1949-1986. New York: Abrams, 1987.
- , "Chinese Art Today: No U Turn." ARTnews Feb. 1992: 104-107.
- Combs, Nicky. "Blending Tradition and Contemporary." Asian Art News July-Aug. 1998: 76-78.

—. "Reaching for Cultural Continuity." Asian Art News Sept.-Oct. 1998: 76-78.

Contemporary Oil Paintings From the People's Republic of China. Oklahoma City: Heifer Galleries, 1987.

Davis, Deborah S., et al., eds. Urban Spaces in Contemporary China. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Deming, Angus, Andrew Nagorski and Bernard Krushner. "Mao: A Misguided Mortal." Newsweek 15 Oct. 1979: 85-86.

Deng Xiaoping. Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982). Trans. The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of the Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin Under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Beijing: Foreign Languages P., 1983.

Dittmer, Lowell. China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981. Berkeley: U of California P., 1987.

Gao Minglu, ed. Inside Out: New Chinese Art. Berkeley: U of California P., 1998.

—. "Toward a Transitional Modernity: An Overview of *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*." Gao, Inside Out 15-40.

—. "From Elite to Small Man: The Many Faces of a Transnational Avant-Garde in Mainland China." Gao, Inside Out 149-166.

—. "Chronology: Mainland China." Gao, Inside Out 197-202.

—. "What is the Chinese Avant-Garde?" Andrews and Gao, Fragmented Memory 4-5.

—. "Chronology of Chinese Avant-Garde Art, 1979-1993." Andrews and Gao, Fragmented Memory 14-19.

Garrels, Gary and Colin Mackenzie. Introduction. Gao, Inside Out 11-14.

Garside, Roger. Coming Alive: China After Mao. New York: McGraw, 1981.

Goodman, David S.G. Beijing Street Voices: The Poetry and Politics of China's Democracy Movement. Boston: Marion Boyars, 1981.

Gu Wenda. Artist Presentation. Panel Discussion: The Future of Chinese Art. Traditionalism Vs. Modernism. Asian Art Museum. San Francisco, 26 Feb. 1999.

Han Minzhu, ed. Cries for Democracy. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.

Hou Hanru. "Ambivalent Witnesses: Art's Evolution in China." Flash Art
Nov.-Dec. 1996: 61-64.

Jameson, Fredric. Foreword. Politics, Ideology and Literary Discourse in Modern China.
Eds. Liu Kang and Xiao Bingtang. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. 1-7.

—. The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998. New York:
Verso, 1998.

—. "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review 146
(1984): 53-92.

Kissinger, Henry. Foreword. Beyond the Open Door: Contemporary Paintings From
the People's Republic of China. Pasadena: Pa.

Kraus, Richard. Introduction to Part II: Urban Culture and Identities. Davis: 143-148.

Liang, Ellen Johnston. "Is There a Post-Modern Art in the People's Republic of China?"
Modernity in Asian Art. Ed. John Clark. Sydney: Wild Peony, 1993. 207-221.

Li Chu-Tsing. Trends in Modern Chinese Painting. Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1979.

Li Tianxiang. "Oil Works at the Sixth National Fine Arts Exhibition." Chinese Literature
Autumn 1985: 84-86.

Li Xianting. "An Introduction to the History of Modern Chinese Art." Noth 40-45.

—. "Major Trends in the Development of Contemporary Chinese Art." China's New Art,
Post-1989. Ed. Valerie Doran. Hong Kong: Hanart TZ Gallery, 1993. X-XXII.

—. "Seven Chinese Artists and Contemporary Chinese Art After Political Pop."
4696/1998: Contemporary Art From China. Curs. Yvonne Force and Carmen Zita.
Vancouver: Art Beams, 1998. 9-18.

Lin Xiaoping. "Those Parodio Images: A Glimpse of Contemporary Chinese Art."
Leonardo 30 (1997): 113-122.

Liu Binyan. Tell the World What Happened in China and Why. Trans. Henry Epstein.
New York: Pantheon, 1989.

Liu Kang. "Is There an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate About Modernity in China." The Cultures of Globalization. Eds. Masao Miyoshi and Fredric Jameson. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 164-188.

Liu Qinghe. Personal interviews. April 1998 and 7 May 1998.

Lu Peng and Yi Dan eds. Zhongguo xiandai yishu [A History of Modern Chinese Art]. Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe chuban, 1992.

Macritchie, Lynn. "Precarious Paths on the Mainland." Art In America March 1994: 51-57.

Mao Zedong. "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art." Modern Chinese Literary Thought. Ed. Kirk A. Damon. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996. 458-484.

Meisner, Maurice. Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic. New York: Free P, 1986.

Nairne, Sandy, Geoff Dunlop and John Wyver. State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s. London: Chatto & Windus, 1987.

Nathan, Andrew J. Chinese Democracy. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.

Noth, Jochen, et al., eds. China Avant-Garde: Counter-Currents in Art and Culture. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

Riha, Thomas, ed. Readings in Russian Civilization. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965.

Schell, Orville. Mandate of Heaven: A New Generation of Entrepreneurs, Dissidents, Bohemians, and Technocrats Lay Claim to China's Future. New York: Simon, 1994.

Shen Kuiyi. "On the Reform of Chinese Painting in Early Republican China." 20. Shijie Zhongguohua "Chuantong de yanxiu yu yanjiang" Guoji xueshuyuan duihua lunwenji [Chinese Painting and the Twentieth Century: Creativity in the Aftermath of Tradition]. Eds. Cao Yiqiang and Fan Jingzhong. Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin yishu chubanshe, 1997. 602-622.

Shen Tong with Marianne Yen. Almost a Revolution. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Shui Tianzhong, ed. Xie Dongming: Zhongguo xiandai yishu zouping congshu [Xie Dongming: Modern Chinese Art Series]. Guangxi: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 1995.

Solomon, Andrew. "Their Irony, Humor (and Art) Can Save China." New York Times Magazine, 19 December 1993, sec. 6: 44+.

Spence, Jonathan D. The Search for Modern China. New York: Norton, 1990.

Su Xinping. Personal interview. 13 July 1998.

Sullivan, Michael. "Bliss Was it in That Dawn to be Alive!" The Stars 10 Years. Hong Kong: Harart TZ Gallery, 1989. 6-8.

Tsao Tsing-yuan. "The Birth of the Goddess of Democracy." Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China. Eds. Jeffery Wasserstrom and Elizabeth Perry. Boulder: West View P, 1994. 140-147.

van Dijk, Hans. "The Fine Arts After the Cultural Revolution: Stylistic Development and Theoretical Debate." Noth 14-39.

Wallis, Brian, ed. Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Wang Lifeng. Personal interviews. 27 May 1998 and 8 June 1998.

Wasserstrom, Jeffery. "Student Protests and the Chinese Tradition, 1919-1989." The Chinese Peoples' Movement: Perspectives of Spring 1989. Ed. Tony Saich. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990. 3-24.

Wu Hung. "Speaking the Unspeakable." Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the 20th Century. Chicago: The U of Chicago, 1999. 102-107.

Xie Dongning. Personal interview. 22 June 1998.

Zhang Xudong. "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson." New Literary History 29 (1998): 353-383.

Zhang Yajie. Personal interview. 13 July 1998.