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Impact of Ancient Chinese Painting on Contemporary Art

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Impact of Ancient Chinese Painting on Contemporary Art

**Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College**

by

Yi Cheng

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern era Chinese artists are quite prolific and work in many different styles. Mostly these are based on western art, following the great accomplishments of the renaissance painters, and modern masters such as Picasso and Andy Warhol. This pervasive influence derives from a basic component of the educational system in China. Artists focused on learning the representational skills of the West since the beginning of the twentieth century. During the 1950s, in fact, it was the socialist style of Russia that provided the distinctive western style models of propaganda art. However, during the Cultural Revolution of China, a lot of artworks were destroyed because it was considered inappropriate for the communist agenda, which resulted in a vast destruction. Today some artists are aware of the gap in styles between the west and traditional Chinese art, and they have sought to restore the native manner of painting by studying examples of the past, which have survived the ravages of Chinese history. Most of these examples are in Western museums, not surprisingly.

This senior project will focus on such the artists and photographers of contemporary China and look at how they were inspired by art of the past. For the most part these are figure painters, and naturally they look back to the Tang dynasty when figure painting reached its greatest development. They admire and copy not only the themes but also painting techniques, treatment of space, and the use of Chinese materials. However artists are not limited to the Tang, it seems to have drawn the most attention. There are also references to Sung dynasty art as well. As for the photographers, they also look to the past for themes and styles of art. Their reconstructed photos are based on famous works of art, and they

highlight many contemporary problems which are seen in the stark juxtaposition of art of the past the technique of modern photography. First I will investigate some of the key works that have survived from the Tang dynasty. Next I will discuss a group of modern painters and compare their work with the art of past and analyze how the culture and art of the past has inspired them. Chapter 3 examines several prominent photographers and the art themes and styles that they used in their work. It is important to state that each of these artists uses the art of the past in his own unique way, but in the conclusion we will see what characteristics they share.

Chapter 1 Representative Art and Artists of Figure Painting in the Tang Dynasty

Chinese painting has a rich history as an enduring art form and is well known throughout the world. Traditionally, Chinese painting is done on rice paper or thin silk, using a variety of brushes, Chinese ink and dye. During the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-AD 907), Chinese painting developed dramatically, both in subject matter and technique. Figure painting, in particular, developed greatly in this period, with number of famous painters and works. Extant historical records and art histories written at court present biographies of the various artists and the works for which they were known. The most representative painters were Yan Liben (act. 600-673), Wu Daozi (act. 680-759), Zhang Xuan (act. 713-755) and Zhou Fang (act. 730-800). Tang figure painting is characterized by large size figures drawn in a skillful way that is naturalistic and detailed, and conveys the personality or mood of the character. The figures are often placed against a blank background. The colors are rich, the patterns detailed. In the following discussion I will show the contributions of such great masters and how Chinese figure painting entered its golden age.

Yan Liben

Yan Liben (AD600-673) was one of the most prominent painters of portraits and figures in the Tang Dynasty. He was not only a famous painter who created many characters from history books but also a royal architect and engineer. His duties included painting historical scrolls, notable events past and present, and portraits, including those of foreigners and strange creatures brought to court as tribute, to

the delight of his patron, Emperor Taizong. Yan Liben painted in a conservative style with a delicate, scarcely modulated line.¹ Among his most important paintings are the *Thirteen Emperors Scroll*, which has been in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston since the 1930s, and *Portraits at Lingyan Pavilion*, life-sized portraits of 25 government officials commemorated for their meritorious service and contributions to the establishment of the Tang Dynasty. Other notable works of Yan Liben include *Tribute Bearers*, *Emperor Taizong Giving Audience to a Tibetan Ambassador*, and the portraits of *Eighteen Scholars of the Qin palace* who served under Tang emperor Taizong before he ascended the throne, when he had the title of Prince of Qin.² His portraits became the standard style of official court portraiture and the epitome of the Confucian ideal, representing virtuous and accomplished ministers at court.

Among the extant works attributed to him, the most important is the *Thirteen Emperors Scroll* (Figure 1.1-1.13), in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, depicting a series of emperors selected from Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D.220) up to the Sui Dynasty (581-581). This painting is the portraits of thirteen emperors from the Han to Sui Dynasties. All the empire founders look solemn, benevolent and incomparable graceful while all the empire losers look dejected and apathetic.³ The portraits capture not only the emperors' physical appearances but also their distinctive spirit and personalities. These paintings reflect the traditions and essence of portraiture of the Han Dynasty. Yan Liben shows a

¹ Kathleen Kuiper, *The Culture of China*, 2011 by Britannica Educational Publishing, P191

² David Wu, *Yan Liben: Artist who transformed the ordinary into the divine*, Essence of China, May 22-28,2014, P11

³ Ming Deng, *The Art Book of Chinese Paintings*, San Francisco: Long River Press, 2006. P. 30

different character and temperament through the characters posture, attendants, facial expressions, eyes, forehead and lips using a brush ink and various hues of the color red, to express his evaluation of the emperors. For example, Emperor Wen of Wei (Fig. 1.1), a worthy ruler is shown standing, two servants stand beside him. The Emperor Wen of Wei has a well-built and imperial face. His eyes are very serious and severe and his eyebrows are upturned. His clothes are very formal and well-dressed. In contrast Emperor Fei of Chen (Fig. 1.2) was known to not have paid sufficient attention to court matters, so Yan shows him seated and two servants are standing beside him. The emperor Fei of Chen has a pair of soft eyes and curved eyebrows. He has a thin build and friendly face. His clothes are very casual and suave.



Figure 1.1 Emperor Wen of Wei, 魏文帝曹丕



Figure 1.2 Emperor Fei of Chen, 陈废帝陈伯



Figure 1.3 Emperor Houzhu of Chen, 北周武帝宇文邕



Figure 1.4 Emperor Wen of Chen, 陈文帝陈蒨



Figure 1.5 Emperor Xuan of Chen, 陈宣帝陈顼



Figure 1.6 Emperor Wu of Jin, 晋武帝司马



Figure 1.7 Emperor Da of Eastern Wu, 吴大帝孙



Figure 1.8 Emperor Wen of Sui, 隋文帝杨坚



Figure 1.9 Emperor Yang of Sui, 隋炀帝杨广



Figure 1.10 Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou, 北周武帝宇文邕



Figure 1.11 Emperor Zhaolie of Shu, 蜀昭烈帝刘备



Figure 1.12 Emperor Guangwu of Han, 汉光武帝刘秀



Figure 1.13 Emperor Zhao of Han, 前汉昭帝刘弗陵

Another important work by Yan Liben is *Bunian Tu* (also called *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*)(Figure 2). It is one of the top ten traditional Tang dynasty Chinese paintings. It features elegant and bright colors, smooth and vigorous lines. The painting is a representative piece of paintings from the Tang dynasty, and possesses both historical and artistic value. *Bunian Tu* records the grand occasion of envoys from Tufan (in the present-day Tibet) coming to Chan'an (present-day Xi'an), the Tang Capital to ask for the permission to marry princess Wencheng in 490AD. On the right side of the painting, the Emperor is sitting on the royal sedan by six women. Two more women carry huge fans and another holds a red parasol. Standing at attention are a Chinese protocol officer in red, the Tibetan envoy Lu Dongzan in brocade, and a court attendant in white. The Taizong emperor is the focus of the painting. He looks solemn with a perfect composure and graceful with a deep forward sight, full of majesty of an emperor in the reign of great prosperity.⁴ On the left, the first person is the official in the royal court, the one in the middle is the envoy and the last one is an interpreter. The painter

⁴ Ming Deng, *The Art Book of Chinese Paintings*, San Francisco: Long River Press, 2006. P.31

demonstrated his skills in the painting. The ink outlines of garments are both smooth and vigorous. The figures are shown in various postures against a blank background common to the so-called Monumental figure painting style of the Tang. Done with fine lines the different facial features expressions of the main characters are vivid. Shading is used in some parts of the painting, such as the wrinkles of boots, which gives the painting a strong three-dimensional effect. The painting's color scheme is bright, generous and splendid, featuring large area of red for the costumes and green for the imperial fans, which presents a sense of rhythm and impressive visual effects.⁵



Figure 2, *Emperor Taizong Receiving the Tibetan Envoy*, by Yan Liben, Handscroll, ink and colors on silk, h: 38.5 cm, w: 129 cm

Another of Yan Liben's famous figure paintings includes the *Tribute Bearers* (Figure 3). It depicts an animated scene of a procession of foreign dignitaries and attendants from various countries adorned in their ethnic attire as they pay tribute and bring offerings from their faraway lands to Emperor Taizong at the Tang imperial court. The painting also records in vivid detail the busy and prosperous capital of Chang'an and the exotic treasures being presented to the emperor. In the procession of tribute payers, there's a man holding a shallow pot that contains a beautifully arranged landscape. It's pretty much

⁵ Confucius Institute Online, Yan Liben's *Bunian Tu*.

similar to modern-day landscape bonsai. And there are other people in the procession carrying or shouldering exotically shaped mountain rocks.⁶ The tribute bearers are each portrayed with different postures and expressions, while the solemn and mighty air of Emperor Taizong provides an appropriate contrast.



Figure 3, *Tribute Bearers*, by Yan Liben, handscroll, ink, pigment on silk, 61.5 cm x 191.5 cm, in the palace museum, Beijing

The vividness and liveliness of Yan Liben's paintings impressed renowned Tang poet Du Fu (712-770), one of the most celebrated masters of classical Chinese poetry. Du Fu's poems about paintings are some of the most influential poems on the nature of this craft and the aesthetic experience of looking at a painting. In one of his poems, Du Fu described the distinctive character of Yan's "Portraits at Lingyan Pavillion" as follows:

“Good ministers wearing the jinxian guan on their heads; brave generals carrying long arrows at their waists; the hair of Lord Bao and Lord Er seems as if it is fluttering; with their valiant and spirited bearing, they appear as if engaged in fierce battle.”⁷

⁶ Culture China Online, *The Painting Tribute Bearers* by Yan Liben

⁷ David Wu, Yan Liben: Artist who transformed the ordinary into the divine, *Essence of China*, (May

(The “jinxian guan,” or “cap that represents the worthy,” was a special cap worn by civil officials at court during that period, and was also worn by intellectuals and gentlemen. Lords Bao and Er were two of the meritorious officials in the “Portraits at Lingyan Pavilion.”)

Yan’s portraits faithfully represented the standard for fine arts during the Tang Dynasty, which required that artworks be naturalistic, educational and uplifting. Yan’s work, which prominently featured vivid portraiture, accurately depicted historical events and figures and helped bring Chinese painting into its golden era.

Wu Daozi

The greatest brush master of Tang painting was the 8th-century artist Wu Daoxuan, also called Wu Daozi (act.710-796). His portrait painting reached a very high level, according to Tang records, he painted over 300 murals and more than 100 scrolls. Many of them were on Buddhist and Taoist topics but also drew mountains and rivers and flowers and birds. His brushwork, in contrast to that of Yan Liben, was full of such sweeping power that crowds would gather to watch him as he worked. He painted chiefly in ink, leaving the coloring to his assistants, and he was famous for the three-dimensional, sculptural effect he achieved with the ink line alone.⁸ Wu Daozi had a great enthusiasm and pursued vigorously in the world of arts, very much like Michelangelo during the Renaissance. When he doing figures, however large, he could start with either hands and arms or legs

22-28,2014). P11

⁸ Kathleen Kuiper, *The Culture of China*, New York, (Britannica Educational Publishing, 2011) P. 191

and foots, still being able to balance and control the overall composition. With the combination of the meticulousness of calligraphy and a great creative imagination, he painted many vivid pictures beyond comparison in their, full rhythms and colorful magic.⁹ Wu Daozi had a profound influence, particularly on figure painting, in the Tang and Song dynasties.

Wu Daozi drew many art works in his life. *The Portrait of Confucius*, (Figure 4), Wu Daozi made for the Qufu Confucius Temple in Shandong, an image of Confucius holding jade tablets, which were used to designate feudal rank; it became quite famous.¹⁰ A rubbing of an image attributed to this artist shows the sage as an old bearded man; he turns to the right and slightly inclines his body. Wearing a long, formal court robe with an ornate border and a small cap on his bald head, he clasps his hands together.¹¹



Figure 4. *The Portrait of Confucius*, rubbing of an engraving after Wu Daozu, eighth century, Qufu, Shandong Province. (After *Native Place of Confucius*, Kong Yanglin, ed. [Zhejiang peoples Press, 2000]:98)

⁹ Culture Chian Online, Wu Daozi's Paintings.

¹⁰ Julia K. Murray, "Idols in the Temples," *Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no.2 (May 2009): 371-413

¹¹ Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, *Chinese Religious Art* (Maryland Lexington Books 2014); 108

Also in the style of Wu Daozi is the *Scroll of Eighty-Seven Immortals* (Figure 5), measuring 30 centimeters vertically and 292 centimeters horizontally, is currently on display at the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing. The painting was a handscroll, painted with ink on silk. The painting depicts 87 Taoist immortals paying homage to the supreme deity. The portrayed images come alive with vivid facial expressions and their dresses and ornaments add a vibrant touch to the painting's artistic appeal. This painting is notable for the painters' imagination and expressiveness with the brush, and is considered one of China's best achievements in line drawing techniques of classical portraits. This is a good example of a composition of outlined figures with black lines. Only black ink and freely painted brushstrokes are used. The lines are vividly expressive and alternately thick and thin, with inner tensions. This painting was in distinct contrast to the other paintings of this era where artists used brilliant color and precise borders used by Wu Daozi's contemporary artists.¹²



Figure 5. *Scroll of Eighty-Seven Immortals*, by Wu Daozi, handscroll, ink on silk, 30 x 292 cm, Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing

Without a doubt, Wu Daozi's most famous work was *The Presentation of Buddha* (Figure 6). It depicts the Buddhist story of how Shakyamuni's father, holding his son to his chest, thanked the Buddhist

¹² <http://asianartwork.weebly.com/examples-of-asian-art.html>

Gods after the baby's birth. This painting is a religious story, and the looks and postures of characters are vivid as ordinary people and replete with a human touch. Zhang Yanyuan recorded in the second volume of *Famous Paintings of Past Dynasties* the words of Wu Daozi:

“Everyone is cautious about the likeness of appearance while I diverge from the beaten track.”¹³

This illustrates that his painting not only focused on likeness in appearance but also paid great attention to the representation of people's mental state.



Figure 6, *The Presentation of Buddha*, by Wu Daozi, ink on paper, and 35.7cm x 338 cm. in the collection of Osaka Museum, Japan.

Wu Daozi may well be known as the Sage of painting. His spirit borrowed from the creative powers of heaven, and so his noble genius was inexhaustible. While all others took pains to join the ends (of strokes), he for his part broke up and left spaces between his dots and strokes. While all the rest paid careful attention to verisimilitude, he rid himself of such vulgarities. His curved bows, straight blades, vertical pillars, and horizontal beams, did not require the use of marking lines or rulers.¹⁴ Wu's strokes

¹³ Qizhi Zhang, *An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing, 2015, P.339

¹⁴ Susan Bush, Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Hong Kong University Press, Nov 1, 2012, P.61

were full of changes and vigor, expressing the internal world of the characters. Wu used simple colors or none at all. He was always in great ferment when he was painting, and his works exhibit an expressionist style.

Zhang Xuan and Zhou Fang

In the figure and portrait painting of the Tang Dynasty after Wu Daozi, the painters devoted most of their time to producing works depicting the growing extravagance of the imperial court and aristocrats.¹⁵ They appreciated the beauty of rich and luxurious living and admired full and plump bodies of court ladies. The many sculptures and paintings survived from that period provide a glimpse into this aesthetic standard. In this period painting has the representative characteristics of this aesthetic standard, with a full and plump body, chubby cheek, curved eyebrows, thin eyes, relaxed postures, and fulfilled and happy facial expressions.¹⁶ At that time, the most famous painters are Zhang Xuan (act. 713-755) and Zhou Fang (act. 730-800).

Zhang Xuan had served as a royal painter and he was famous for his skill on figure paintings. His paintings are associated with many social activities such as spring out, snow day sightseeing, dressing up, hiding and seeking, and music instrument playing. He focused on the belle, children and horses and liked to apply rouge to the earlobes of aristocratic ladies he painted to accentuate healthy good looks. His famous paintings are *Lady Guoguo on a Spring Outing* and *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven*

¹⁵ Li Li, *China's Cultural Relics*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, P. 114

¹⁶ Ming Deng, *The Art Book of Chinese Paintings*, San Francisco: Long River Press, 2006. P. 33

Silk. He is the forerunner of Zhou Fang's painting and direct impact on the painting style of late Tang, Five Dynasties and contemporary eras.

Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing (Figure 7), depicts the sister of the emperor's favorite concubine Yang Yuhuan, Lady Guoguo (虢国夫人), on a spring outing. Nine persons and eight horses make up a triangular formation, with the lady and the young princess on the same horse bringing up the rear. The three riders are Lady of Qin and the Lady of Guo. Four of the figures are wearing red dresses and brocade scarves, while the other five figures are wearing gentleman's round-collar robes. The lady of Guo, on the left center of the painting, is wearing a light greenish-blue narrow sleeved upper garment, with a brocade scarf around her shoulders and a red skirt decorated with painted golden flowers. The Lady of Qin is located on the right upper section of the painting turning sidewise to talk with the Lady of Guo.¹⁷ The dress accessories and the saddlery afford a glimpse into the real life of twelve hundred years ago.

The painting is focused to depict the figure portrayed, using strong but slim lines. The colors, elegant and rich, are painted with a vivid and lucid style. The composition of the picture has a natural density. The suggested movement of the people and horses is comfortable and relaxed, fitting the theme of a spring outing. The people in the painting, though finely outlined, are full figured. It is a copy made by

¹⁷ Confucius Institute Online, *Portrait of Lady of Guo Going Sightseeing in Spring* by Zhang Xuan

artists during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). The original painting cannot be found. This painting is a good example for self-confidence and optimism typical of the flourishing Tang Dynasty (618-907).



Figure 7, *Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing*, by Zhang Xuan, 51.8 cm high, 148 cm wide, ink and pigment on silk, currently located at the Liaoning Provincial Museum.

In comparison to *Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing*, *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk* (Figure 7) depicts a more ordinary life but all court ladies in the painting are still full of the rich and plump postures. It has been in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts since 1912. It derives from an original composition by Zhang Xuan and now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The painting depicts luxuriously adorned ladies demonstrating three steps in making clothes: pounding silk with poles, sewing, and ironing. Scholars have proposed that it represents a rite known as “palace sericulture.” The painter clearly draws upon the imagery of erotic poetry, presenting beautiful women. The ladies dress in sumptuously colored, empire-waisted garments of silk patterned with abstract designs, floral motifs,

or paired birds. Their hair is piled atop their heads with the aid of spotted bamboo combs and hairpins. They are full-figured, a detail likely taken from Zhang Xuan's original painting, as it suggests the eighth-century fashion for plumpness.¹⁸



Figure 7, Attributed to Emperor Huizong (1082-1135, r.1100-1125), after Zhang Xuan (fl. 713-742). *Court Ladies preparing Newly Woven Silk*, Northern Song dynasty, early 12th century; handscroll, ink, color, and gold on silk, 37.0 x 145.3 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Zhou Fang was a prominent court painter who was famous for painting female subjects. The court ladies portrayed by Zhou Fang are more luxurious, dispirited and plump. He was born in an aristocratic family and well acquainted with fashionable women and high society. He studied under Zhang Xuan, a master of the genre, but excelled him in psychological treatment: his portrait of the Tang-dynasty general Guo Ziyi's son-in-law Zhao Zong is said to have caught his character as well as his smile, which argues accuracy of observation and expression on both levels.¹⁹ The famous works by Zhou Fang include *Ladies with Head-pinned Flowers* and *Court Ladies Playing Double Sixes*.

¹⁸ Lara C.W. Blanchard, *Huizong's New Clothes*, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution and Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan. 2009, P. 112

¹⁹

<http://202.194.48.102/englishonline/culture/ChineseCulture/Chineseliterature/zhoufangandwomenwearingflowers.htm>

Ladies with Head-pinned Flowers (Figure 9 and Figure 10 detail), in the Liaoning Provincial Museum, painted by Zhou Fang depicts the unhurried life of court ladies in the Tang Dynasty—the five ladies wearing magnificent clothes, stroll in the flower garden. This painting depicts five court ladies, one is teasing a sportive dog with a duster; one is holding her collar; another is too engrossed in a red flower in her hand to notice a passing white crane. Behind this lady on the right is a maidservant holding a long-stemmed fan. In contrast with the delight of the others, her eyelids are going down, and her face is set, vividly evoking palace hierarchy. By the rockery on the left stands a lady before a blooming magnolia. She has just caught a butterfly and is looking over her shoulder at a delightful dog. It is an authentic depiction of leisurely, lonely and peaceful life in court. The background is very simple as the artistic conception of the painting is mostly reflected through the expressions of the female figures.

Women in Zhou Fang's work exemplify the fashion of the high Tang Dynasty. Emperors preferred plump and full-faced beauties with soaring hairstyles and broad eyebrows, and women rushed to follow the fashion. Zhou Fang first applies a layer of white for a tender skin texture, and then modestly adds red. He gives his women almond eyes and lightly painted broad eyebrows with a golden spot between them. Their red lips are small and their hair decked with jewelry or flowers, they are dazzlingly graceful.²⁰

²⁰<http://202.194.48.102/englishonline/ChineseCulture/zhoufangandwomenwearingflowers.htm>



Figure 9. *Ladies with Head-pinned Flowers*, 46 cm x 180 cm, in the Liaoning Provincial Museum



Figure 10 detail of *Ladies with Head-pinned Flowers*, 46 cm x 180 cm, in the Liaoning Provincial Museum

Court Ladies Playing Double Sixes, (Figure 11) painted by Zhou Fang currently held at Taipei Palace Museum. Double-sixes is a lost chess game that first appeared in China during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280) and became popular in the Sui (581-618), Tang, Song (960-1279), and Yuan (1279-13689) dynasties.²¹ In this painting a beautifully dressed woman sits on a stool, looking down at the game board smiling, as the woman opposite her takes her turn. The dignity and elegance are all showed in the cheerful countenances of the ladies and their magnificent clothes. On the contrary, maids look humble with hardly countenance in the court atmosphere. Under the brush of Zhou Fang, the scene of leisure and aristocratic playing seems complex with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow.²²

²¹ Fengwen Liu, *Balle Painting of Ancient China*, Wuzhouchuanbo Publish in China, 2007, P. 18

²² http://www1.chinaculture.org/classics/2008-11/13/content_317019.htm



Figure 11. Zhou Fang. Court Ladies Playing Double-sixes. Freer Gallery of Art. Ink and color on silk, H: 30.5 W: 47.6 cm.

In summary figure painting boomed in the Tang Dynasty with an obvious tendency towards depicting real life. Through the use of composition, a variety of lines, like thick thin, short, long curving strokes and some color, mostly red, they described the individuals in their different postures, physical features and facial expression. True to the time, the figures are set against a blank background. In these works, the artists render the figures to illustrate important lessons of history as a model for proper behavior. Many paintings are especially interesting to historians because they help us understand what life looked like in the earlier periods of the imperial palace. Different types of people, different walks of life, different personality, indicate social status.

Chapter 2 The Influences of Chinese Ancient Painting Technique on Chinese Contemporary Art

Chinese figure painting placed a great emphasis on depicting the inner spirit of its characters. Many artists of Tang dynasty (AD 618 – AD 907) show the vivid figure painting through proficient brush technique. The best example of this technical advance was *gong bi* (fine brush) style. Gong bi strove for extremely meticulous realism achieved by painstakingly slow work of fine brush strokes and shading in ink and color. This style tended to be visually complex and descriptive rather than interpretive of the subject matter. Gong bi paintings were often highly ornamental and refined, and had an aristocratic and haughty aura. It became particularly popular in figure-painting genre but was also seen flower-and-bird genre.²³

In Tang dynasty many artists used gong bi technique and further developed it. For example, in the early Tang dynasty, Yan Liben (AD 600- 673) was good at drawing the inner spirit of figure's characters. His brush technique was strong and proficient. In his work, *Thirteen Emperors Scroll*, we can see every emperor has a different character accomplished with very beautiful brush line and colors. In the mid-Tang dynasty the great master Wu Daozi (act. 710-796) was exceptionally good at depicting the features of human beings and created his own techniques in painting fabrics and creases of clothes. It was said the ribbons painted by Wu were so light and flowing. His technique was called "Wu's Breeze."²⁴ He paid most attention to the variations and dynamics of brushwork. He excelled at a

²³ Sharron Gu, *A Cultural History of the Chinese Language*, McFarland, Dec 13, 2011, P. 99

²⁴ Zhou Jin, *Traditional Chinese Art*, 2002, Guangxi art press, P. 9. translated from Chinese to English.

technique that combined speed, pressure and rhythm in his strokes to depict his subject. The work that is particularly representative of Wu Daozi's style is the painting *The Presentation of Buddha*. In this painting Wu Daozi uses a broad range of lines but no colors to depict human figures. He showed the very vividly the figure's clothes through the Gong bi brush technique, and the viewer almost feels the breeze. In the later of the Tang dynasty, Zhang Xuan (act.713-755) and Zhou Fang (AD 766-804) were both expert in depicting realistic themes, which was the aristocratic female lifestyle. In the mid Tang dynasty people liked the "fat" ladies, we can clearly see it in the Zhang Xuan and Zhou Fang's works. Zhang Xuan's work, "*Lady Guoguo on a Spring Outing*", is a very important work in Gong bi technique. This painting has elegant and rich color and vivid brush style. In the Tang dynasty the Gong bi style developed very quickly.

In contemporary art there are a lot of artists who employ the Gong bi style. The Gong bi technique uses highly detailed brushstrokes that renders details precisely and without independent or expressive variation. It is often highly colored and usually depicts figural or narrative subjects. But contemporary artists' works are generous with other meanings, from Mao's utopia and China's unrelenting economic growth and development, to reflections of the classic Gong bi style and subject matter.²⁵ By the 20th century, painters had combined Western-style realism with traditional Gong bi brushwork, producing paintings showcasing Gong bi techniques while illustrating the basics of Western linear perspective

²⁵ Kealey Boyd, *Contemporary Takes on China's Oldest Painting Technique*, October 15,2015, Hyperallergic

and chiaroscuro modeling.²⁶ In Chinese contemporary art, the most representative Gong bi style painters were Zhu Wei, Peng Xiancheng, Peng Wei and Yang Jinsong. I will analyze where the inspirations come from and how they adapted Tang dynasty painting technique.

Zhu Wei

Zhu Wei is the world's most renowned contemporary Chinese ink painter. He was born in Beijing in 1966 and first studied in the Liberation Army's Art Institute, then in the Beijing Film Academy and the Chinese Art Research Institute. He is one of the few artists to use traditional ink painting to reflect Chinese social realities.²⁷ His ink, colors and wash works have been collected by more than 30 domestic and foreign museums. While Zhu Wei's works primarily consist of ink paintings, he has also created many sculptures and engravings. The dramatic contrast between traditional art language and contemporary political social motifs makes his art irresistibly appealing. His motifs differentiate his art from those traditional meticulous ink paintings, however, in the techniques Zhu employed, such as coloring, outlining, blending and more, but he still retained the fundamental characteristics of traditional art. His ink paintings have an intensely individualistic quality: his techniques, including the traditional fine brushwork and heavy use of coloring, as well as the exquisite patient style, perhaps originated from the strict training he received in the Liberation Army's Art Institute.²⁸

²⁶ Exhibitions: *A New Fine Line: Contemporary Ink Painting From China*, August 7- October 24,2015, He explored the possibility at the Center for Visual Art at Metropolitan State University of Denver.

²⁷ Exhibition Preface, Today Art Museum, Beijing, Nov.2013.

²⁸ Gao Shiming, *Executive Dean of the School of Intermedia Art*, China Academy of Art Translated by Donald Maruyuma, Williams College Class of 2012

For Zhu Wei, his paintings are a medium through which he narrates his fables and stories, especially in his serial works. In terms of depicting the human form, he has chosen the early Renaissance style with a slight absence of three-dimensional shapes, which particularly suits traditional Chinese drawing habits. Through the use of painstaking rendering and mottled skin texture, the artist represents the human form in a lightly three dimensional style. The self-deprecating inquiry and the familiar scent of the homely, the absurd, and the numbness – these are all central aspects of the mood of Zhu Wei’s works.²⁹

Zhu Wei’s *Sweet Life No.21* (1998, lot 41)(Figure 1) is a later series of portraits that depict a “fat-headed” figure that bears a striking resemblance to the artist himself. Growing up, Zhu Wei was often teased by classmates and reminded by his grandmother that his head was too big, so it is possible the series presents a form of self-portraiture.³⁰ As its title implies, this painting is indeed a sweet image. There is a bald “fat head” boy wearing a lilac-colored jacket, standing a middle of watery background replete with small fish, two of which appear to gaze comically at the human figure as though he has invaded their aquarium. With pronounced traditional ink and wash painting, we can clearly see the waves of the water. *Sweet Life* is an exemplary expression of the light-hearted joy that often appears in the artist’s work.

²⁹ Gao Shiming, *Executive Dean of the School of Intermedia Art*, China Academy of Art Translated by Donald Maruyuma, Williams College Class of 2012

³⁰ Stephen Mcguiness ed., *Zhu Wei Diary*, Hong Kong, 2000, p.129, illustrated in color

Zhu Wei investigates the anxieties of modern China's growth, the rapid degradation of the environment and the utopia the revolution sought to establish. His *Ink and Wash Research Lecture Series (unfinished)* (2015)(Figure 2) depicts an older Chinese man wearing a gray colored surgical mask. He is baldheaded with big nose, glassy eyes, and wears a Chinese traditional shirt with charcoal-colored in a portrait-like fashion. The background is only a red curtain with some black lines. The melancholy figure's face is the only place where the gongbi technique can be discerned.³¹ He explored the possibility of reflecting contemporary Chinese political and social life with traditional gongbi (meticulous) ink.



Figure 1, Zhu Wei, "Sweet Life No.21, 1998" ink and color on paper, laid on silk and canvas, 70.3 x 67.5 in.



Figure 2, Zhu Wei, "Ink and Wash Research Lecture Series (unfinished)" (2015), ink and color pigment on paper. *A New Fine Line* at the Metropolitan State University of Denver's Center for Visual Art.

³¹ Kealey Boyd, *Contemporary Takes on China's Oldest Painting Technique*, October 15, 2015

The Political and Cynical Realism movements within Chinese art in the 1990s, following the Tiananmen incident, are characterized by raucous, aggressive mockery and ridicule of societal atrocities and absurdities. Zhu Wei paints various satires layered with symbols, metaphors, and both personal and social narratives. He is the one of China's internationally recognized contemporary artists. In contrast to his contemporaries in the Chinese contemporary art scene who regard oil painting as more conducive to explicit, subversive expression. Zhu Wei stayed constant to the traditional technique and ink painting. His choice of the classical Chinese brush and rigorous gongbi (meticulous brushwork) style provides a stark juxtaposition between traditional techniques and contemporary political motifs.³²

Zhu Wei paints with penetrating clarity and vision, including the complexities and ironies of social and political life with sharp wit and gentle humor. His insightful figure painting displays not just a critical the social situation but also deep empathy for the powerless classes of society. Furthermore, his persona experience in the People's Liberation Army lends his military characters an ironic dignity.

Pictures of the Strikingly Bizarre –hand—washing Ritual (Fig. 3) is emblematic of Zhu Wei's layered, metaphor-laden works. The top inscription means new creating of the strikingly bizarre-hand-washing ritual. In this painting right corner, the Chinese characters writing by Zhu Wei means:

An anxious, restless mood pervades society as we approach the end of a century. Some unfortunate things are caused by man, some by fate (I don't know). All we can do is go along with it – it's the only solution because there is no solution.³³

³² Zhu Wei, *ZHU WEI Diary*, Plum Blossoms (International) Ltd., Hong Kong, 2000, p. 232

³³ Zhu Wei, 2000, p. 232

It was drawn in 1994, a year during which the artist pursued multiple creative paths simultaneously. His *Strikingly Bizarre series* references the famous vernacular short stories *nihuaben* (“imitation story scripts”) from the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Appropriating the title of these renowned folk tales, Zhu Wei tells contemporary stories through his paintings, suggesting that what is happening today resembles what once happened in history. In this diptych, everyone has a red circle on big head, which is characteristic of Zhu Wei’s painting. Their faces look like they are waiting for something. Their dress is different, some wear Chinese traditional cloths, and some wear military uniforms.³⁴

In addition to the *ni huaben* reference, *Hand-Washing Ritual* pays specific tribute to two well-known historical paintings: the Tang dynasty (618-907) magnum opus *Banquet and Concert* (anonymous) (Figure 4) and the early 12th century painting *Literary Gathering* inscribed by Emperor Song Huizong (Figure 5). In contrast to the solemnity of these ancient masterpieces, which depict aristocratic exclusive activities; Zhu Wei’s playful diptych is more interesting. Portraying a fictitious gathering of characters from various social strata that could never happen in real life, he alludes to the joint ritual of washing hands before a meal, combining imagination with irony to express his displeasure about social segregation. Only rarely does Zhu Wei include inscriptions in his paintings—in this exceptional piece, however, the top inscription declares the work to be possibly the last in the *Strikingly Bizarre series*.

³⁴ Zhu Wei, 2000, p 232



Figure 3, Zhu Wei, Pictures of the Strikingly Bizarre-Hand-Washing Ritual, ink and color on paper, mounted on silk and panel, diptych, framed.

Left: 134 by 67 cm., 52 3/4 by 26 3/8 in. Right: 134 by 64 cm., 52 3/4 by 25 1/4 in. executed in 1994



Figure 4, Emperor Song Huizong (1082-1135), *Literary Gathering*, ink and colour on silk Collection of National Palace Museum.



Figure 5, Anonymous, Banquet and Concert, Tang dynasty (618-907), ink and colour on silk Collection of National Palace Museum.

Zhu Wei has made other paintings relate to Tang Dynasty, like *Comrades* (Fig.6) which is based on Zhang Xuan's *Ladies Making Silk* (Fig.7). Zhang Xuan's *Ladies Making Silk* is a very elegant portrait of women making silk. The background is very simple and solely used to generate atmosphere, the entire focus is on the figures and their activity. There are only a few colors used, but the painting is very light and vibrant. The complicated design and pattern appeared on the dresses and the detailed headpieces again show the aristocratic identity of these figures. The figures are mostly portrayed in a naturalistic manner, and their gestures are very elegant that satisfies aesthetics of both noble women and painting. The two girls in the picture, on the other hand, add a little bit of playfulness, which in a sense make the entire setting more peaceful.

Comrades uses the same subject and composition, but tells a totally different story. Instead of a portrait of daily activity, the flag those women are holding shows that the subject matter is about politics. This also implies that the figures may be used to represent other issues, such as political themes. This work differs from Zhang Xuan's work, this painting looks very full: there are multiply layers of patterns in the background, including words and lines. The red pattern may be windows or other room structure; human figures are very exaggerated and big in size occupying the entire frame. Both human figures and the setting resemble none of the elegance of *Ladies Making Silk*, instead, it has a very strong emotion as well as strong visual impact to the viewer.



Figure 6, Zhu Wei, b 1966 *Comrades*, ink and color on paper, 1995



Figure 7, Zhang Xuan, *Ladies Making Silk*, Tang dynasty eighth century, (later copy), ink and colors on silk, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Zhu Wei uses a muted palette, except for the vibrant red, that contributes to a nostalgic atmosphere, while his mastery of ink washes creates unique pictorial transparency and radiant surfaces reminiscent of aged silk. Mounting the panels on vermilion colored silk, Zhu Wei integrates the glaringly brilliant red border into the organic color composition of the painting. Such an inventive and daring use of color, emblematic of Zhu Wei's highly successful works, demonstrates his acute sensitivity to both aesthetics and political symbolism.

Amongst the abundant superior group of contemporary Chinese artists, Zhu Wei is one of the artists who chooses to use traditional ink painting techniques to depict the social scene in modern day China.

His paintings make up for an area that has often been overlooked in contemporary Chinese art. He allows the world to see paintings with authentic Eastern origins, and read its contemporary values and power.

Peng Xiancheng and Peng Wei

Peng Xiancheng, born in 1941, is one of China's most distinguished modern ink painters. He is specialized in "boneless" brushwork and portraits. He skillfully emphasizes the contingent relationship of water and ink, integrates the Han and Tang Dynasty styles into his own works. His works show elegance, austerity and spirituality, exhibiting a combination of the ancient and modern touches mark his style.³⁵ His daughter, Peng Wei, focused much of her work on contemporary art. But her work combines classical Chinese painting and subjects with altered traditional and contemporary materials, such as garments and embroidered shoes. Drawing upon her father's legacy and distinctive style, Peng Wei expresses a similar passion for her art and transforms her paintings into contemporary style.³⁶

Peng Xiancheng's Chinese ink paintings began as a teenager and developed into a career spanning over forty years. He is celebrated for his unique style and mastery of the "boneless" technique (painting without outlines). He has a collection of famous paintings and was deeply affected by Tang dynasty paintings. This is seen in Peng Xiancheng's *Beauties* (Fig. 9) and *Coquetry* (Fig.10). We can easily

³⁵ <http://arts.cultural-china.com/en/77Arts5431.html> Retrieved 28 Feb. 2016

³⁶ <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2015/two-generations-ink-art-by-peng-xiancheng-peng-wei-hk0616.html>
Retrieved 28 Feb. 2016

associate the painting *Beauties*, with the *Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing* (Fig.8) by Zhang Xuan. The *Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing* has a very simple and empty background, and there is only one object shown, which depict a very vividly portrait on a spring outing. The color choice of this painting is very warm and simple. The background of rich warm yellow creates a very luxurious feeling. Theirs clothing are done in great details. The red and green is a primary color on the women's clothing and all character and horses on the left side, riding to the right. The color of horses only uses yellow and black. But the details of horses are drawn very vividly and elegant, and there are three horses tie a red ball in their necks. The hairstyles of all the figures are very tall. The clothing and hairstyles of all the figures strongly resembles the style of Tang Dynasty. The graceful design on the dresses and the detailed hairstyles show the identity of these figures. In contrast, Peng Xiancheng changes some details in his painting *Beauties*, but we can clearly see a similar subject in the character of this painting. He chooses misty lines and multiple colors with executed in a vivid and lively style. All of the figures have a very tall hairstyles and a beautiful clothing as same as the portrait of the painting "*Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing*". Differs from Zhang Xuan's work, Peng Xiancheng drew a red flower on the top of every female hair, which strongly highlight the character of female and a rich nobleman group. The background looks very simple and empty, however differs from Zhang Xuan's painting, there are still some words in the top of this painting. These two paintings were very similar, both drawing on the Chinese old paper and both having a same subject. In these two paintings the dress accessories and the saddlery afford a glimpse into the real life of Tang Dynasty.



Figure 8, *Lady Guoguo on A Spring Outing*, by Zhang Xuan, 51.8 cm high, 148 cm wide, ink and pigment on silk, currently located at the Liaoning Provincial Museum.



Figure 9, Peng Xiancheng, *Beauties*, 2011 Ink and color on paper, 70.2 x 137.7 cm

The other painting *Coquetry*, an over one-meter-tall painting depicting two women dressed in elegant robes frolicking amid blossoming magnolia trees against a bright blue sky and bursts of vibrant color, punctuated by gold-leaf ornamentation that, dazzle the eye. Similarly recall the Tang artist Zhang Xuan's work, *Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flower* (Fig.11 detail). Feminine beauty in the Tang dynasty consists in plumpness, painting eyebrows into butterfly wings, adorning one's high-pile hairdo with peony or lotus flowers. The clothing of all females is very elegant with good details, mainly in red, ocher or white, in a reflection of the esthetic taste.³⁷ In Peng Xiancheng's painting ladies

³⁷ Ming Deng, *The Art Book of Chinese Paintings*, Shanghai Press and Publishing Development Company, 2006, P.19

in shallow space, close up to viewer, emphasis on delicate drawing of their magnificent gowns and the floral motifs of the garden in which they stand. In contrast to the dull representation of women in the cultural revolutionary posters, this is a return to old ideas of glamour. While many contemporary artists like to use oil painting on canvas, Peng Xiancheng was exploring delicate wash and traditional painting techniques and material.



Figure 10, Peng Xiancheng, *Coquetry*, 1995 Ink, color and gold leaf on paper, 138.5 x 69 cm



Figure 11, Zhou Fang, *Court Ladies Adorning their Hair with Flowers*, Ink and color on silk 46 x 180cm, Liaoning Provincial Museum



Figure 12, Peng Wei and his father Peng Xiancheng

Peng Wei is one of the few female artists in China working in traditional technique. She is best known for her delicate ink color paintings on traditional *xuan* paper and using traditional painting techniques to explore the language of contemporary art. She learned these techniques and materials at an early age studying with her father and won praise as a child as a traditional artist. (Fig.12 Peng Wei and his father Peng Xiancheng) She draws inspiration from the aesthetics of traditional Chinese painting, including its motifs, forms and patterns, which she freely appropriates and reinterprets in her work.³⁸ Though executed in the traditional medium of ink and colors on paper and employing native imagery, her presentation of the material is strikingly modern. With delicately colored washes she renders the fabric of kimonos, recreating the beauty and complexity of their textile patterns.³⁹

³⁸ <http://inkremix.com.au/artists/peng-wei/> Retrieved 29 Feb. 2016

³⁹ Patricia Karetzky, *Femininity in Asian Women, Artists' work from China, Korea and USA: if the shoe fits*. KT press, 2012

Her works include illustrations of embroidered shoes and traditional robes, painting installations, painted paper-cast sculptures. She likes to combine traditional ink painting with the features and expressive methods of contemporary life. For example, she used traditional Chinese textile patterns as a background for landscape scenes. She also constructed women's evening gowns and covered sculptures of female torsos with her elegant renderings of beautiful natural scenes and architectural blueprints.⁴⁰

In her Chinese Robe series, there is a representative work, which is the *Chinese Robe* (2004) Chinese ink on rice grass paper 155 x 85 cm (Fig. 10). This one is a very traditional Chinese Robe style with red color. The only one color of the Chinese robe is like the Tang Dynasty's painting which has a very simple background. As the one color the entire of this Chinese Robe focus is on the figures and their activity. All the figures are done in great details replicating an old Tang figure painting. There is a lot of people stand up and their head looking up. They seem to be looking the person sitting in the garret. The clothing of all the figures strongly resembles the clothing style of Tang Dynasty. Peng Wei uses her very proficient *gongbi* techniques of classical Chinese ink painting to render the images within the new context of the robe that provides a contemporary image with rhythm and logic.

⁴⁰<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/beijing-modern-contemporary-chinese-art-cn0020/lot.20.html> Retrieved 29 Feb. 2016



Figure 10, Peng Wei *Chinese Robe* (2004) Chinese ink on rice grass paper 155 x 85 cm

In her recent works, Peng Wei has created delicate slippers out of pure white silk and using pastel colors and ink painted the inner linings with Chinese erotic scenes.⁴¹ She still uses the *gongbi* brush techniques. And she chooses the most feminine of shoes as a creative medium and an ancient erotic theme. Putting the ancient erotic painting in the shoes sole is the great-implied meaning. Peng has said:

In ancient China, women's feet were always considered as one of the most private parts of the body, it was forbidden to show them. Men considered women's feet to be very alluring and erotic. So shoes have always had a connection with sex. However, when I began painting shoes, I don't think of sex. I think it is very natural for a girl like me to want to paint shoes. And I don't consider my artworks to be fashion designs. What I paint are items from the past—lost and beautiful things. My method of painting is also a traditional Chinese way. Since old, classical things have never been painted in this way before, the artworks may look a bit like fashion.⁴²

One of the series, *Take off the Shell-winter*, (Fig. 11) is a good example to analyze. The background is pure white with the green trees, which depict the very nature world. As the background is solely

⁴¹ Patricia Karetzky, *Femininity in Asian Women, Artists' work from China, Korea and USA: if the shoe fits*. KT press, 2012

⁴² http://cnews.chinadaily.com.cn/shys/2015-04/01/content_19971804.htm Retrieved 29 Feb. 2016 Translate from Chinese to English

used to generate atmosphere, the entire focus is on the figures and their activity. There is a partial landscape with a mid-section view of two leafy trees and a pair of lovers wraps their arms around the tree trunk. Partially seen from the rear, the male longingly looks at the young woman. One woman wears a red dress and hides her body in the back of the tree. The man wears a blue robe and shows his body to the women. The right sole has an interior view of a room in which a naked woman holds a Chinese pan, or small vertical wind pipes to her lips, another sexual allusion. It is warm and the open door allows a view to a garden with a lotus-filled pool that represents the fecundity of nature.⁴³



Figure.10, Peng Wei, *Take off the Shell, the Winter Solstice*

Other pairs of shoes in the series (Fig.11) show the left shoe bearing an outdoor garden view and the right shoe displaying two lovers in the room. For example, the left shoe in the series has two lovers hug each other under the big tree and their clothes are scattered. They look like engaged in sexual play in

⁴³ Patricia Karetzky, *Femininity in Asian Women, Artists' work from China, Korea and USA: if the shoe Fits*. KT press, 2012

the outdoors. The right shoe depicts a couple playing in the room. The woman covers the man's eyes using her hands and the man holds the woman's arm. The viewer can imagine seduction on the right shoe and resultant climax on the left shoe. Here however, rather than Tang paintings, Peng recalls the erotic colored paintings of the Ming dynasty. Peng Wei uses work to explore traditional concepts and subvert classical motifs introducing elements of the contemporary. Fusing antiquity with modern themes allows the artist and viewer to continually produce thought-provoking pieces.



Figure. 11 Peng Wei, *Good Things Come in Pairs – no. 20*, 2011-13, silk shoes with painted insoles, 24 x 17.5 x 4.5 cm.

In another work she copies the famous painting, *Auspicious Cranes*, (Figure 12) by the Emperor Song Huizong. This painting depicts cranes flying over the roofs. It is a masterful combination of elegant composition and realistic observation. There are two cranes have alighted and the other white cranes soar in a turquoise sky with fluid and perfect formation. The painter carefully recorded the black and red feathers of the white cranes and depicted the birds from a variety of viewpoints to suggest that they were circling around the roof. Huizong was a Song dynasty emperor and a great calligrapher, painter, poet and musician. As Huizong records on the scroll, the appearance of the birds was seen as an omen

of good luck: in China, cranes appear in art and architecture as auspicious emblems of good fortune.⁴⁴

Additionally it also means longevity, because of crane is called “*Xianqiu*”, which is immortal bird.

Peng Wei recreated this famous painting, putting the ancient theme in Chinese Robe. Ancient art is a constant inspiration for her.



Figure 12, Song Emperor Huizong, *Auspicious Cranes*, Hand scroll, ink and colors on silk, 51.0 x 138.2 cm. Liaoning Provincial Museum.



Figure 13, Peng Wei, *Chinese Robe* (2007), 155 x 85cm Chinese ink on rice grass paper

While Peng Wei has focused her work on garments and shoes, she has expanded by applying traditional painting techniques onto three-dimensional objects. Hers work *Body Series 2007-2011* are composed in plastic mannequins and Xuan paper, which are two easily accessible materials. It is clearly considered a sculptural work, however, the artist is still painting on Xuan paper. The plastic

⁴⁴ <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2013/11/21/masterpieces-of-chinese-painting-the-pursuit-of-happiness/>
Retrieved 29 March. 2016

mannequins were wrapped in Xuan paper. However, in the *Body Series* Peng Wei goes beyond traditional thinking and works within the three-dimensional space. One of the *Body Series*, *Autumn of the Tang Dynasty*,(Fig.12) is a beautiful work made from Xuan Paper molded around a mannequin torso on which a traditional scene has been painted. This painting depicts a Tang dynasty gentleman dressed in red clothes sitting on horseback and looking back and up to a big tree; his beautiful horse walks with its head down. The background is very simple, which is the natural color of Xuan paper. It is easily to feel lonely and sentimental. In this painting the man wears red, but the other objects are more subdued in color -- white, black and gray. It shows the human being is very small in this world. Peng Wei draws the painting in the back of female mannequin and fits it to the females' body curves.

Xuan paper became popular in Tang Dynasty. It is mainly used for practicing Chinese calligraphy and painting. It is also known by Westerners as rice paper. Xuan Paper was regarded as the king of paper and is supposed to last 1,000 years. It can well absorb the ink but it is not rough. In the ancient China many of the artists like to draw in the Xuan paper.⁴⁵ In contemporary art Peng Wei is good at combining classical Chinese painting and subjects with contemporary materials. Her work is vivacious, free and creative. Since the new century, much of contemporary art has sought direct, simple, and aesthetically pleasing effects. Peng Wei's *Embroidered Shoes* and *Brocade Robes* series have always had both the classical elegance of Chinese painting as well as the concise symbolism of post-modernism.

⁴⁵ http://www.chinatourguide.net/12_15.htm Retrieved 5 March. 2016



Figure12, Peng Wei, the *Body Series, Autumn of the Tang Dynasty*, 2007-2011

Looking at Peng Wei and her father's painting, it is undoubtable that the two Pengs both adopt traditional art styles, techniques and medium but have very individual, unique approaches to be art making. Peng Xiancheng's paintings are vibrant and carefree, showing a mastery of brave dry brushwork in balance with watery, dissolving ink. On the other hand, Peng Wei emphasizes on detailed brushwork, and explores with a wider range of medium, including sculpture.⁴⁶ Hers works always associated with notions of femininity and beauty and are symbolically stripped of their purpose or function and are refashioned into contemporary art objects. It is obvious that both have very strong roots in traditional Chinese ink painting.

⁴⁶ Eunice Tsang explores a rare duo exhibition of father and daughter, *Two Generations: Ink Art by Peng XianCheng and Peng Wei*

Yang Jingsong

Yang Jingsong was born in Chongqing, China, in 1971 during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. He trained in the oil department at the Sichuan Fine Arts Academy. After graduating he took up a lecturing position in the same department.⁴⁷ Yang Jingsong focus on objects of everyday life and still executed in a miniaturist manner with loving attention to the details. Trained in Western realistic style as well as Chinese brush painting techniques, Jingsong's skill in rendering representational images is evident in the details, but he obscures his skill in favor of a more direct childlike technique, though occasionally three-dimensional modeling with light and shade and drawing in perspective are apparent.⁴⁸

In his early works, Jingsong painted delicate representation of his daily life. He makes portrayals of the difficulties of life in urban China. He use traditional rice paper, ink painting, collage, drawing and ready-made material media and works the abstract painting make people thinking. Jingsong also likes using the pictorial tradition of the "Blue and Green" Tang palette in his works. In the ancient Chinese people were good at extracting colors from large amount of minerals and plants. Because of that, the colors in Chinese paintings became more systematic and abundant in their brightness and richness.

He likes to draw his home where he and his wife occupy a space filled with the consumer goods. He shows himself with his wife, often their two heads sharing a body. Their unity established among the

⁴⁷ Recent Painting- The Hughes Galery-2013-

⁴⁸ Patricia Karetzky, "New Works New Directions in the Art of Yang Jingsong" *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, vol. 7, no.1 (2008): 37-40

diversity of objects in their apartment. The consumer products are colorfully portrayed in minute detail.⁴⁹ In his piece, *Works with No Series* (Fig.13), shows the pix tradition “Blue and Green” Tang palette. He and his wife’s heads and upper bodies are inscribed within the lotus. We can see that the background uses the pix tradition blue with natural ripple. There are some small details in this painting and he concerns with the disparity in the size of the objects is surrealistic. For example, there is a tiny factory on the top of painting and a small desk lamp on the bottom right of painting. The lotus was drawn relatively large and using different types of green to depict the three-dimensional of painting. Although the portrait is drawn smaller than the other object, it cannot be ignored. This painting makes us think about our life and how when facing social issues we are small. His work always depicts unique paintings into the daily existence of the artist in the China today.



Figure13, Yang Jingsong, Series: *Works With No Series*

As we have seen, Yang Jingsong has drawn a lot of painting’s inspiration from ancient art. For example, compare his work *shanshui* (Fig. 14) and the traditional work from the Tang dynasty

⁴⁹ Patricia Karetzky, *Beijing Boogie-Woogie*, Chinese American Arts Council, 2007

Dunhuang Cave 103 (Fig. 15). In these two paintings, we can clearly see that Yang Jingsong painting's style was based on those at Dunhuang, one of the Silk Road's most important Buddhist caves sites. During the thousand years of artistic activity at Dunhuang, the style of the wall paintings and sculptures changed. During the tenth century, Dunhuang became more isolated and the organization of a local painting academy led to mass production of paintings with a unique style. *Duhunag Cave 103* painting depicts a flourishing key trading post of Silk Road. The color choice of this painting is carefully planned. Black line, light green and dark green show the hills, which can be clearly seen that the three-dimensional of painting. At the top of this painting there are three people, the first person looks like a guide, and two other people ride the horses forward to follow the guide. And all the figures are very small comparing with the hills. Because the important thing is not the figures, is depicting a story of the flourishing Silk Road. Yang Jingsong used this idea in his work. There is the pix tradition light green and dark green Tang palette to show the three-dimensional of hills, and at its crest is a miniscule portrait of Jingsong and his wife, which is his favorite element. The painting is filled with a lot of details: the grey background with ripple and shade of hills, the garbage at the foot of the hills, the factory at the top of hills, is home to an island. As we have seen, this painting tells a totally different story, which is polluting the environment, rampant consumerism and high-rise apartment buildings in our lives. In this evocation of the artist's life in Beijing, Yang Jingsong draws a portrait of the problems of our contemporary lives with a nostalgic reference to the unpolluted past.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Patricia Karetzky, "Portrait of a Beijing Artist: Yang Jingsong"
Eastern Art, 2005, Issue 49.1: 24-29



Figure 14, Yang Jingsong, *Shanshui*



Fig 15. Dunhuang Cave 103 Tang dynasty, Dunhuang Gansu

In the Yang Jingsong's others work, we can also find the inspiration of ancient art and the surrealistic size of the objects, but tells a totally different story. The kitchen sink (Fig.16), filled with water dripping from its faucet, is home to an island: at its crest is a miniscule portrait of the artist and his wife. Spent cigarettes and watermelon rinds float in the surrounding sea; an electric plug immersed in the water dangles off the side of the sink; and near the faucet, toothpaste oozes out of its tube. Yang Jingsong still likes using the pix tradition Blue and Green Tang palette to depict the hills. We can clearly see the three-dimensional of this painting. Another painting, *Red Cloud 2004.6* (Fig.17), is

similar with the Fig. 14 Yang Jingsong, *Shanshui*. We can see the though three-dimensional modeling with light green and dark green. The background is red cloud. There is a small airplane and the factory of polluting the air. These large paintings of oversized objects elicit Lilliputian images of a gargantuan race, or the worlds within worlds found under a microscopic lens.⁵¹ His paintings are unique in that they expose intimate and personal views of the world around him in a simple manner. They are not shocking or screaming in color, they are simple renditions of people and objects in his life.⁵²



Figure16, Yang Jingsong, *Sink* 2004.6 (oil on canvas 150cm x 190cm)



Figure17, Yang Jingsong, *Red Cloud* 2004.6 (oil on canvas 150 x 190 cm)

⁵¹ Patricia Karezky, *The Life of a Young Painter in Beijing*.

⁵² Sean Kissane. *Dreaming of the dragon's nation: contemporary art from China*. (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2004)

In sum, Yang Jingsong always looks back to ancient art and focuses on drawing the small details on his painting. He likes to draw the surrealistic painting with the disparity in the size of the objects and using three-dimensional modeling with Chinese the pix tradition blue and green tang palette. His paintings are unique in contemporary art and his work always makes viewer thinking a lot and feeling we are so small in the world.

In conclusion, looking at these four contemporary Chinese artists we can see clearly how the culture and art of the past has inspired them. Rejecting western painting techniques, themes and materials so prevalent among their contemporaries, they find the past more engaging. They try to bridge the gap between past and present and in the process often show how the present has become an ecological, social and political disaster. The poignancy is all the shaper for the contrast of older art styles of a simpler time.

Chapter 3 The Influences Chinese Ancient Paintings on Modern Photographic Art

Contemporary artists sometimes look to ancient art for inspiration and affirmation of cultural values in a hostile and westernized environment. It was called appropriation, which means to repossess, reuse, and recycle an existing image by alternating its form and/or bringing it into a new pictorial or interpretative context. The source image must be familiar enough so the viewer can readily identify it and bring his original associations with the image to the new necessarily. In contemporary Chinese art, appropriations became common from the early 1990s, as many works of Political Pop were based on popular paintings and photographs from the Mao era. It was in this context that some artists turned to traditional paintings and religious icons, transforming them into contemporary images with a heightened sense of irony.⁵³ Here I will discuss the role of ancient art on contemporary photographers. The contrast is the more startling since photography is a modern medium used to recreate ancient themes. I will make explore this aspect of the works of Wang Qingsong, Hong Lei, Liu Wei and Liu Zheng's photograph and how their works adopted the inspiration of ancient paintings to modern artworks.

Wang Qingsong

Wang Qingsong was born in the Heilongjiang Province of China. Studying in the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Qingsong graduated in 1991 and now lives and works in Beijing. He

⁵³ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A history 1970-2000s*, Printed and bound in Singapore by Tien Wah Press, 2014, p. 346

focused on the Chinese ancient art and contemporary art and interested in the contradictions of contemporary Chinese social reality generated by the country's rapid economic development and from western influence. Qingsong is well known for his contemporary art and photography. Wang Qingsong's photographs appropriate many classics, or rather classical images, or classic stories, as his photograph *Night Revels of Lao Li* and *New Women*.

In 2000, artist Wang Qingsong created *The Night Revels of Lao Li*, which is a contemporary version of Gu Hongzhong's episodic ink-and-color scroll *Night Revels of Han Xizai* (ca.770) (Figure 1.1-1.5). This painting was the best piece of Chinese traditional figure painting. Han, a minister of the Southern Tang emperor Li Yu, had a habit of missing the grueling dawn audiences with his sovereign, a consequence of long nights of drinking with friends and singing girls. In any case, Li Yu sent an artist to observe the nocturnal goings-on and record them afterward in pictures, with which the emperor then tried, without much success, to shame his minister into courtly compliance.⁵⁴ The *Night Revels of Han Xizai* depicted the then social life in the torrents of transformation, and depicted the life of a worried intellectual and high official in Post-Tang Dynasty, Han Xizai.⁵⁵ This narrative painting is split into five distinct sections: Han Xizai listens to the pipe, watches dancers, takes a rest, listens to the flute, and then sees guests off. The skillfully created painting employed screens and instruments to connect and separate

⁵⁴ Richard Vine, *New China New Art*, Prestel Munich London New York, revised and expanded edition, 2011 P. 158

⁵⁵ Wang Qingsong Studio online, http://www.wangqingsong.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58:night-revels-of-lao-li&catid=9:2000-photography&lang=en&Itemid=

different sections. In each of the five episodes, Han plays the main actor. The painting is approximately 333.5 centimeters long and 28.7 centimeters tall. The whole painting will be viewed right-to-left. There are 46 people and some of them were appeared very frequently. Using careful observation, all the figures are done vivid with great details and the clothing of all the figures strongly resembles the clothing style of Tang Dynasty. During the revel, Han Xizai always frowns and puts on or takes off his coat for several times. Behind this extravagant and buckish rebel, we could know the really complicated feeling of Han Xizai. He was powerless to fulfill his ideals of reconstructing the country and he chose to evade in the society. This painting has surprising ability to observe and understand of Han's destiny, which makes this painting outstanding and thought provoking.



Figure 1.1 The First Section: Han Xizai listens to the pipa. This section includes five women and seven men. The one in red is the Number One Scholar and the man sitting on the bed is Han Xizai.



Figure 1.2 The Second Section: Han Xizai and his guests watch dancers.



Figure 1.3 The Third Section: Han Xizai and his guests take a rest. Han puts his black coat on.



Figure 1.4 The Fourth Section: playing string instruments. Han unties his underclothes.



Figure 1.5 The Fifth Section: Han Xizai sees guests off. And, here, you could see Han put his yellow coat on.

After several centuries, even though the Chinese dynasties have changed frequently, the status of intellectuals in society has remained the same. With some thoughts on this question, Wang Qingsong created “*Night Revels of Lao Li*” (Figure 2.1-2.15).⁵⁶ Instead of a painting like the original, it is a photograph. Updating each scene of the original scroll, Wang Qingsong presents hedonism as both a form of protest and the best available consolation for the powerless.⁵⁷ For

⁵⁶ Wang Qingsong Studio online

⁵⁷ Richard Vine, *New China New Art*, Prestel Munich London New York, revised and expanded edition, 2011 P. 158

his women resemble prostitutes dressed in cheap and gaudy attire with heavy makeup. His friends are among the subjects of the photo as are itinerant laborers he hired. We can still clearly see that parallel between *Night Revels of Han Xizai* and *Night Revels of Lao Li*, like reading right-to-left, splitting into five distinct sections and all figures' position is same as *The Night Revels of Han Xizai*. In the *Night Revels of Lao Li* women are depicted wearing gaudy clothing and lingerie, with bright make-up and exaggeration hair styles. They are doing dances, playing music, fighting with each other, giving a backrub to one man and washing the feet of another. The men in the picture are relaxing, being pampered, listening to the music, observing what's going on, and seem to be enjoying themselves. The colors in the image are diverse and modernistic: yellows, pinks, blues, purples, and reds dominate the clothing of the women, while the men are mostly dressed in blacks and grays. The color of figures is multicolored; however, the background is very simple color. The floor is a white color, and the background is a charcoal grayish drape cloth.⁵⁸ Wang Qingsong's work depicts a portrait of contemporary Chinese reality in this new century, portraying the situation of contemporary Chinese people, and of intellectuals in particular. Indeed, much of the imagery is influenced by the western world and inspiration is from the ancient Chinese art, which is seen more and more throughout China.

⁵⁸ Collins, Matthew. "Matthew Collings visits Wang Qingsong's Studio in Beijing." Saatchi Online. 2/16/2008
http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/blogon/art_news/matthew_collings_visits_wang_qingsongs_studio_in_beijing/4240



Figure 2.1 Wang Qingsong, the first part of *Night revels of Lao Li*, 2000 Color photograph, 110 x 960 cm



Figure 2.2 Wang Qingsong, the second part of *Night revels of Lao Li*, 2000 Color photograph, 110 x 960 cm



Figure 2.3 Wang Qingsong, the third part of *Night revels of Lao Li*, 2000 Color photograph, 110 x 960 cm



Figure 2.4 Wang Qingsong, the fourth part of *Night revels of Lao Li*, 2000 Color photograph, 110 x 960 cm



Figure 2.5 Wang Qingsong, the second part of *Night revels of Lao Li*, 2000 Color photograph, 110 x 960 cm

Wang Qingsong also made *New Women* (Figure 3) after Zhou Fang's (c.730-800) *Court Ladies With Flowers* (Figure 4), which is a classical piece in Tang dynasty. This old piece described the decadent life in the imperial court. However, such desperate and dissolute lifestyle was not exciting, since it was separated from the then social realities. Such ecstasy was only playful fun scenarios designed by the noble rich people.⁵⁹ Wang Qingsong revisits this painting and refitting it for the contemporary era. He sees a lot of fake nouveau-riche who dress themselves with jewelries and western high fashion brands. They look fabulous, confident and happy. But inside their heart, they must feel very fearful that their hard-earned business and treasures shall end in bankruptcy.⁶⁰ So he made the *New Women* for us to provoke our thoughts. In this image women are depicted wearing gaudy clothing and lingerie, with bright make-up and exaggerated hair styles. It is same false recreation of the ancient art found in Wang Qingsong's the other works.

⁵⁹ Wang Qingsong online Studio <http://www.wangqingsong.com>. Retrieved 6 April. 2016

⁶⁰ Wang Qingsong online Studio <http://www.wangqingsong.com>. Retrieved 6 April. 2016



Figure 3 Zhou Fang, Zhou Fang's (c.730-800) *Court Ladies with flowers*, 46 cm x 180 cm, in the Liaoning Provincial Museum



Figure 4 Wang Qingsong *New Women*, 2000 color photograph, 120 x 220 cm

In sum, Wang Qingsong creates large-scale photographs that explore the rapid changes occurring in China. Inspired by material grounded in classical Chinese art as well as in Western art history, his photographs comment on such topics as rampant consumerism, migration, globalization, and the influence of the West on Chinese culture. Capturing the contradictions of contemporary Chinese life, Wang Qingsong's staged compositions offer a critical consideration of the gulf between the traditional and the modern in China.

Hong Lei

Among contemporary Chinese photographers, Hong Lei is especially committed to creating a conversation with tradition. If Wang Qingsong recycled old masterpieces to comment on today's commercial culture, Hong Lei appropriated traditional paintings for a variety of different

purposes. Hong Lei modeled on the imperial court paintings of the Song Dynasty by using real birds and flowers and arranging them in a composition of the court flower-and-bird painting (Figure 5 and 6) of Song Dynasty with an aristocratic taste. But since he depicted dead birds, the images look sad at the same time. To escalate the “morbid beauty” he found in the historical works, he placed dead birds entangled with bloodstained jade and turquoise necklaces in verandas in the Forbidden City.⁶¹ Employing a ground-level vantage point and a shallow depth of field, Hong has created the sense of infinitely receding space and time, as though the dead bird in the foreground.⁶² The dead bird, a common motif in Hong Lei’s work, suggests drama and death at the heart of China’s empire.



Figure 5. Hong Lei, *Autumn in the Forbidden City*, East Veranda, 1997 Color photograph, 104.1 x 127 cm

⁶¹ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A history 1970-2000s*, Printed and bound in Singapore by Tien Wah Press, 2014, P. 240

⁶² Richard Vine, *New China New Art*, Prestel Munich London New York, revised and expanded edition, 2011, P.128



Figure 6 Hong Lei, photo

In another photo he recreated the famous silk fan painting of the Southern Song with their largely empty spaces. Delicate and nostalgic of a lost past they create the sense of loss of the southerners who retreated from the onslaught of the nomadic invaders of the eleventh century. But here nestled in the corner is a small creature, perhaps road kill. The commentary of the loss of a better culture and the rape of the environment is evident. These contrasts are all the more potent because of the contrast of the art of the past and the problem of the present.

Liu Wei

The photographs of Liu Wei have been a reflection of the artist's inner state. He uses works from different periods as a model to reveal his different moods. Beginning in 1999, the artist frequently used natural landscapes as his subjects, but even then, the works have varied widely in style. This is all because Liu's works and his life are inextricably bound. Liu Wei's landscape photos to a large degree reveal the qualities of both the East and the West, possessing Western technique as well as elements of the Eastern humanistic spirit.

Liu Wei's work, *It Looks Like a Landscape*, (Figure 6) brings out the tension between “veiled” traditional landscape and the “naked” modern body. Unlike classical Western art, ancient Chinese painting offers no space for the nudes; unclothed figures appear only in crude, pornographic.⁶³ As we have seen, Liu Wei's work, *It looks like a Landscape*, is a bold attempt in Chinese art. This looks like a traditional Song dynasty monochrome ink landscape (Figure 7). In this photographic image, a traditional gray-toned landscape of jutting hills turns out, upon close inspection, to be composed of cropped nude human figures, bent over to reveal only a sea of backsides.⁶⁴



Figure 6 Liu Wei, *It Look Like a Landscape*, 2004, Black-and-white photograph

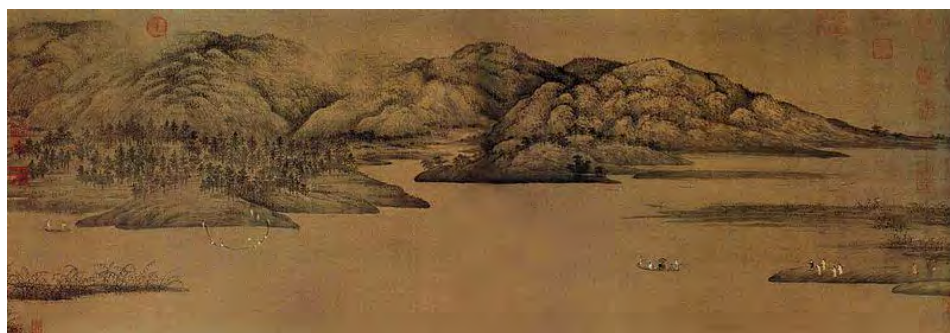


Figure 7 Dong Yuan *The Rivers Xiao and Xiang*, about 1200-1300 Toledo Museum of Art

⁶³ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970-2000s*, Printed and bound in Singapore by Tien Wah Press, 2014 P.348

⁶⁴ Richard Vine, *New China New Art*, Prestel Munich London New York, revised and expanded edition, 2011, P.232

Liu Zheng

Liu Zheng was born in Wuqiang County, Hubei Province, China in 1969 and graduated from the Beijing Technology Institute in 1991. As he traveled throughout China from 1994 to 2001 for his series *The Chinese*, Zheng documented a society struggling with the contradictions between traditional culture and modernization and presented a broad cross-section of society including the wealthy; the poor; transsexuals; coal miners; opera performers; and museum wax figures. In his photos he recreated old paintings and scenes from the Chinese opera. For example, Liu Zheng has created *Four Beauties*, dramatic photographs as grand oil paintings in classical tradition. The series *Peking Opera* of 1997 and *Four Beauties* (2004) portray, respectively, sexy versions of theater scenes drenched in historical and mythology reference, and episodes relating to the “four famous beauties” in early Chinese history (Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, Diao Chan, and Yang Yuhuan)---their stories rife with lust, political betrayal, and blood.⁶⁵ His work, *Four Beauties-Diao Chan*, (Figure 7) depicts the legendary life of Diao Chan. In fact, Records on Diao Chan are scarcely found historical sources and may possibly be a fictional character. Diao Chan’s role as a widely known character is attributed to the famous novel-Romance of the *Three Kingdoms*. According to the novel, Diao Chan is a singing girl in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. In order to alienate Dong Zhuo (a tyrannical warlord) from Lu Bu (Dong Zhuo’s adopted son), Diao Chan took upon herself to implement interlinked badger games, regardless of her own happiness. Under her effort, Dong Zhuo was killed by Lu Bu, thus contributing to the emerging

⁶⁵ Richard Vine, *New China New Art*, Prestel Munich London New York, revised and expanded edition, 2011, P.140

of the outstanding heroes: Cao Cao, Liu Bei and Sun Quan, etc. The story of Diao Chan's circumventing Dong Zhuo and Lu Bu is narrated in Phoenix Pavilion, a play of Peking Opera.

We can see here is a representation of the cruel misuse of women and violence of earlier times when human life had little value. In reflecting on the history and status of women, to fully realize that women not only need to share with men the burden. They need to preserve the autonomy of a female subjective conscious. In modern China, the liberation of women is in fact also a revolution in ideology culture—women need a process of self-recognition.⁶⁶



Figure 7 Liu Zheng, *Four Beauties—Diao Chan*, 2004



Figure 8 Liu Zheng *Peking Opera - The Web Cave*, 1997 Pékin Fine Arts

⁶⁶ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, The Museum of Modern Art Press, P. 197

Similarly in his photos of the Peking Opera Liu (Figure 8) dressed his models up in traditional costumes, but they are naked. Nudity is a taboo subject in Chinese art, even in the modern era. So these seem to be some sort of pornographic translation of the classic dramas that recall the cruelty and sexual abuse of the past and its continuation into the present. There is no contemporary imagery that could convey the perversity of human society as well as these.

In conclusion, we can see Chinese contemporary photographers, also draw a good deal of inspiration is from Chinese ancient paintings. Here the juxtaposition of the past and present is more acute, as the artists' strain to create techniques and stratagems to translate the art of the past into current art. In this way they are able to present the problems of modern society in a fresh way. But it is also subtle and jarring because the images are not abstracted but stark and real.

CONCLUSION

Observing on ancient Chinese art and contemporary art, we can clearly see contemporary artists achieve their purpose by using the style, imagery and techniques of Chinese ancient art. In the Tang dynasty, figure painting developed greatly with many famous painters and works. They had an obvious tendency towards depicting real life through proficient brush technique, a variety of lines and some color, mostly red. We also can clearly see all of the Chinese ancient figures painting is often placed against a blank background. Different from Chinese ancient painting, contemporary painters like to add to these prototypes more colors and to multiply layers of patterns in the background, and to include words and lines. The best example is Zhu Wei's work *Comrades*, ink and color on paper, 1995.

As we have seen, in contemporary art most of the inspirations came from the aesthetic of Chinese ancient art. And contemporary artists combined Western-style realism with traditional brush technique. Theirs painting shows a realistic view of life by using the basic tools of Western linear perspective and chiaroscuro modeling. Occasionally, three-dimensional modeling with light and shade and drawing in perspective are apparent. On these conditions, the contemporary artists' works tells us a totally different story than Chinese ancient paintings. But they also show modern life within the context of Chinese culture. For example, Yang Jingsong in his painting, *Shanshui*, uses the traditional light green and blue color style of the Tang dynasty, three-dimensional and surrealist size of the objects to show the problems of urban pollution and growing militarism.

Such Chinese contemporary artists have a unique style and frame their idea about the modern cultural and political background in a less direct and less offensive way, as it has the appearance of old art. In the same way artists appropriate photography to comment on the social issues and urban senses. Here too instance photography became an important modern medium used to recreate ancient themes. Ancient Chinese art could not show the nude classical Western art. But breaking this long-standing taboo, some contemporary artists try to bring the two opposing visual fields together, using naked human bodies as the subject to negotiate with classical imagery. For example, Liu Zheng's photography, *Four Beauties—Diao Chan, 2004*, which reflect a Chinese social issue of the cruel misuse of women and violence. We can clearly see this photo recreated old scenes from the Chinese opera. However, the figures of this photo are naked. Artist alludes to the tension between tradition and modernity, fiction and reality.

In conclusion, aesthetic standards of art in the modern era are uniquely different than those of Chinese ancient art. Modern living in a restrictive and rapidly urbanizing society has brought so much pressure. The artists considered in this project are trying to restore traditional Chinese art and preserve it for this generation to appreciate. They are enlivening it by altering the themes and techniques and media to reflect both the past and the present. Through their works, they want to remind us of changing times, and changing people's minds. The only thing that has not changed is that all artist desire to showing the real life of our world.

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