

5-2017

Nameless Art in the Mao Era

Tianchu Gao

College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [Asian Art and Architecture Commons](#), and the [Modern Art and Architecture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gao, Tianchu, "Nameless Art in the Mao Era" (2017). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 1091.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis/1091>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

Nameless Art in the Mao Era

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Department of Art and Art History from
The College of William and Mary

by

Tianchu (Jane) Gao 高天楚

Accepted for _____
(Honors, Non-Honors)

Xin Wu, Director

Sibel Zandi-Sayek

Charles Palermo

Michael Gibbs Hill

Williamsburg, VA
May 2, 2017

ABSTRACT

This research project focuses on the first generation of No Name (*wuming* 無名), an underground art group in the Cultural Revolution which secretly practiced art countering the official Socialist Realism because of its non-realist visual language and art-for-art's-sake philosophy. These artists took advantage of their worker status to learn and practice art legitimately in the Mass Art System of the time. They developed their particular style and vision of art from their amateur art training, forbidden visual and textual sources in the underground cultural sphere, and official theoretical debates on art. The history of No Name not only reveals the diversity of art under Mao, especially during the Cultural Revolution, but also suggests a new potential narrative of Chinese modernism that traces the inception of Chinese contemporary art to the Mao period.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Acknowledgement	3
List of Illustrations	5
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 Ambiguity within the Official Art Education System: <i>The Start of No Name's Art Development</i>	12
CHAPTER 2 The Secret Art Practices of No Name in the Cultural Revolution	28
CHAPTER 3 The Political Meanings of Visual Languages : <i>The Conundrum of Form, Content, and Artist's Expression</i>	45
CONCLUSION	66
Appendix	
I Chronology of First Generation No Name Artists	70
II List of Second Generation No Name Artists	75
III Major Public Art Exhibitions during the Cultural Revolution	76
Bibliography	77
Plates	81

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Upon the completion of this honor thesis, I would like to thank many individuals, who have encouraged and supported me throughout this research during my undergraduate years at the College of William and Mary.

First I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor Professor Xin Wu. She has mentored me into the field of Art History, cultivated my intellectual interests in modern Chinese art, and inspired me in my research of No Name since two earlier independent studies. She has tutored me on how to conduct scholarly research, tirelessly read every draft, and assisted me for improvements. This thesis would not have been possible without her guidance and encouragement. A part of the draft served as my successful graduate school applications to Chicago University and Ohio State University. The academic rigor professor Wu has fostered in me would be invaluable for my upcoming PhD study at Ohio State University. I would also like to thank Professor Susan Webster and Professor Sibel Zandi-Sayek for offering critical perspectives and suggestions for my research. Professor Sayek's course on modern Architecture initiated my interest and broadened my vision on modern art.

I am profoundly grateful to Carolyn Hsu-Balcer, an art collector and researcher in New York, who introduced the No Name artists to me, passionately supported my research, and provided invaluable guidance for my development in the field of Art History. I thank No Name artists for participating in my interviews, including Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, Shi Zhenyu, Ma Kelu, Zhang Wei, Zhen Ziyang, Li Shan, Wang Aihe, Liu Shi, Tian Shuying, and Du Xia.

Many thanks go to Dr. Michaela Pejcochova, curator of the Chinese Collection in the National Gallery in Prague, Czech Republic, for providing me an internship opportunity in Summer 2016, which exposed me to a holistic understanding of museum job from

research library to conservation lab.

Finally, I have benefited greatly from the liberal arts education at the College of William and Mary. The Roy R Charles Center for Academic Excellence, College of William and Mary generously supported my research through Summer Research Scholarship, which enabled me to travel to China for collecting primary resources and interviewing the artists. The university's Earl Gregg Swem Library supported my research with resources and interlibrary loan services.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES *following page 81*

1. Xu Beihong, *Tian Heng and his Five Hundred Followers*, 1928-30, oil on canvas, oil 197 × 349 cm, Xu Beihong Memorial Hall, Beijing.
2. Liu Haisu, *Express Train*, 1929, oil on canvas, 65 × 53 cm, *Liu Haisu youhua xuanji*, shanghai.
3. Li Hua, *Roar! China*, 1935, woodblock print, 20 × 15 cm, National Art Museum of China, Beijing.
4. Zhao Wenliang, *Red Moon*, 1964, oil on canvas, 20 × 25.3 cm, Artist's Collection.
5. Fujishima Takeji, *Perfume*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69.5 × 70 cm, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.
6. Zhao Wenliang, *August 18*, 1966, oil on canvas, 18.2 × 21.3 cm, artist's collection.
7. Zhao Wenliang, *Listening to Music in Secrete—Für Elise*, oil on canvas, 16.5 × 20 cm, artist's collection.
8. Zhao WenLiang, *Big Tree by Wheatfield*, 1955, oil on canvas, 43.1 × 55.8 cm, artist's collection.
9. Henri Harpignies, *Antibes*, 1883, oil on canvas, 35.5 × 43.5 cm, Arts de Bordeaux.
10. Minggang Zhu, *Talking about the Future*, 1955, copper etching, 27.7 × 18.5 cm, New China Art Documentation Museum, Beijing.
11. Zhao Wenling, *Street in Fushun with Autumn Atmosphere*, 1968, oil on canvas, 19.1 × 22.5 cm, artist's collection.
12. Claude Monet, *Exterior of the Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrival of a Train*, 1877, oil on canvas, 62 × 70 cm, private collection.

13. Baishi Qi, *Lotus Leaves and Little Fish*, 1930s, ink on paper, 109.3 × 33.4 cm, *Likeness and Unlikeness: Selected Painting of Qi Baishi*.
14. Wenliang Zhao, *Winter Dream*, 1976, oil on canvas, 18 × 19 cm, artist's collection.
15. Ma Kelu, *Riverside*, 1974, oil on paper, 19 × 26 cm, artist's collection.
16. Zhang Wei, *Loader*, 1976, oil on canvas, 100 × 130 cm, private collection.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the formation and development of the No Name painting group (*wuming*) during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1976) through the works of three artists, Zhao Wenliang (b. 1937), Yang Yushu (b. 1944), and Shi Zhenyu (b. 1946). The topic I chose, concerning the limited popularity and fleeting history of No Name, is specific to say the least. Yet it addresses the large question of how art of the Mao era paved the way for post-Mao emergence of Chinese contemporary art.

The three artists I shall be focused on are only part of the whole group. No Name was an underground painting group of thirteen artists formed during the Cultural Revolution and secretly practiced painting that countered the official artistic standards. As a group, No Name was active from 1961 to 1985. According to Gao Minglu's periodization of the history of No Name, I have divided the group into two generations.¹ The first generation started to paint together since 1961, and the second group joined their artistic activity around 1973. I have carried out archival research and conducted interviews with the whole group. Given the comprehensive nature of the materials, this thesis will limit its scope only to the works of the first generation artists. I am looking forward to complete a full scale research of the whole group and its contribution to the twentieth-century Chinese during my forthcoming PhD study at Ohio State University.

¹ Minglu Gao, *The No Name: A History of Self-exiled Avant Guard* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007), 31-71.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the state exerted strict control over art as a means for political propaganda. Socialist Realism, imported from the Soviet Union, became the official art style, while other controversial art forms—such as Chinese ink painting—underwent reforms in reference to the orthodox realist criteria on art. Such strict artistic policy reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution when any deviation from the official art standard could result in detention or even violent punishments for the artists. It was under such dangerous condition when the members of No Name secretly painted non-Socialist Realist art together. It was not until 1979 when No Name held their first public exhibition in Beijing Beihai Park under the looser artistic policy enforced by the new moderate government that rose in power after Mao's death in 1976. Since then numerous unofficial art groups of young artists emerged, and their art experimented with visual forms that were utterly modernist. The pluralist art scene reached its peak in the '85 New Wave in 1985, which paved the way for *China/Avant-Garde* in 1989 at National Art Museum of China, one of the most notable exhibitions in modern Chinese art history.

My thesis questions the established narrative about the birth of contemporary art in China, and reexamines the twentieth-century painting history from a broader perspective. As Stephen Bann pointed out, a clearer understanding of contemporary art does not rely on “standing on the upmost rung of the ladder” in order to “contribute to the development of the critical discourse of the present day”, rather one should “take a few steps back”

into the historical contexts and processes that had shaped the new art.² From this perspective, a more informed understanding of Chinese contemporary art requires the knowledge of art of the Mao period. Therefore, instead of simply seeing the development of contemporary art as the result of Mao's death and the dismantling of a totalitarian system of art, my thesis will take a long view into the obscure era under Mao—a period that remains challenging to penetrate. As a matter of fact, I use No Name as a case study to reveal the diversity of art under Mao, and investigate the narrative that traces the inception of Chinese contemporary art to the Mao era.

The discussion of modernism in China first emerged in the late nineteenth century when the Qing Empire had lost its past glory under the increasing threats from the west. The Opium War shocked the Qing court out of its complacency and forced China to open trade with the west after hundreds of years of seclusion. Chinese intellectuals actively promoted modernization, which was equivalent to westernization at the time, through various means including art. Chinese students began to learn Western art in Europe and Japan, believing that the modern art they learnt there could contribute to the modernization of the country and the education of the public. Consequently, it had become an urgent and inevitably question for the artists at the time that which school better represent modernity and educate the public. Artists practiced European art can be divided into two camps: European Academism and Modernism. Academists associated

² Stephen Bann, *Ways Around Modernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 38.

realistic representation and the painting techniques with science, thus it could convey the knowledge of modernity to the viewers (fig 1). In contrast, the artists of the other group favored modernist art, such as impressionism, expressionism, fauvism, and cubism (fig 2), as the provocative visual languages could “awaken the common folk from their day dreaming.”³ Confrontations continued to occur between the two camps throughout the twentieth century.

The balance between these two elitist interpretations of modern art was disturbed by a new branch of leftist art in China during the 1930s, marked by the Modern Woodcut Movement, emerged when foreign encroachment of China intensified since 1910s. The leftist artists viewed art as a means to propagate political teachings to the public and unite them together to defend the nation against foreign invasions. Therefore, Chinese leftist art in the early twentieth-century adopted a rather expressionist visual language, following the style of German and Belgian woodblock prints (fig 3), to convey revolutionary spirits and stir strong emotions. This style of leftist art underwent drastic reforms in Yan’an, a military base constructed by the Communists when they escaped from Republican’s suppression in the 1930s. In the *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art* in 1942, Mao asserted that it was the function of art to “serve the masses of the people,” including workers, peasants, and soldiers. The previous visual language was considered “bourgeois art” because the peasants found it hard to understand. The new policy required art to be

³ Xiaobing Tang, *Origin of Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2008), 4.

about the people's lives and the capacity to educate them.⁴ He even claimed that can “we tell the good [art] from the bad” based on both the “motive,” the artist's subjective intention, and the “effect,” the social impact on the audience.⁵ However, Mao gave little instructions on the appropriate form, or the visual language, through which the political message should be conveyed. Nonetheless, the *Yan'an Talk* exerted fundamental effects on art after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949—art creations in China shifted from an elitist, academic pursuit of modernism to a popular practice for political propaganda.

Because of the political and popular nature of official art under Mao, it has attracted little scholarly attention compared to post-Mao and contemporary Chinese art. Moreover, it was not until late 1970s when China started to establish diplomatic relations with western countries that researchers eventually had access to foreign art, artists, and archival documents in China on a large scale. Arnold Chang's *Paintings in the People's Republic of China: the Politics of Style* was among the first efforts to unravel the complex art scene under Mao's reign. Chang based his art historical narrative on two major concepts: “popularization (*pushi*)” and “elevation of artistic standards (*tigao*)”—the two guidelines that Mao proposed in the *Yan'an Talks*. The former refers to art meant to be available to and understandable by the people, while the latter means

⁴ Zedong Mao, “*Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*,” Mao Zedong, database of Marxism Documentations in Chinese, accessed March 12, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm

⁵ *Ibid.*

artistic value, achieved by skills and aesthetic perception. Throughout 1949 to 1979, either one or the other of the two guidelines dominated the art policies. The opposing pair of “popularization” and “elevation of artistic standard” is effective for understanding the development of art under Mao. His book for the first time gave coherence and meaning to the art under Mao, which covered a variety of styles (traditional Chinese, folk, Socialist Realism, and early modern European) and subject matters (landscapes, figures, floral, industrial, and agricultural), conveying political messages directly and symbolically. However, due to the lack of access to archival sources, Chang only consulted *Yan’an Talks*—which was repeatedly referred back to throughout the 1949 to 1979. Consequently, this book did not provide sufficient historical background to understand the artistic development.

This problem is addressed in later scholarly works. Julia Andrew’s *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, published in 1995. Andrew’s research is based on massive sources, including both primary textual records and artists’ interviews about their personal experience. It provides a very detailed and informative account about the administrative system of art, especially the stances of the cultural administrators and their influences on artistic production. Most importantly, she discussed the impetus behind the changes in art—how artistic techniques, visual style, and medium were given political meaning through theoretical debates and cultural policies. Thus the significance of her work is that she shifted attention from the political

role of art determined by the state to how such a role is achieved through the bureaucratic system's achievements.

In *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*, Ellen Johnston Laing explored the conflicts between the “Chinese-ethnic heritage [author's translation; also translated as ‘national heritage’]” and Socialist Realism, the official style chosen by the state to best convey political messages. Such conflicts between the two artistic discourses persisted since the early 1950s. The supporters of either side all took advantage of Mao's vague principles on art, re-interrelating, and sometimes even manipulating, the painting techniques and theories in ways that suited their own interests. It shows that the state had never had a coherent and unanimous control on art. Despite the seemingly orthodoxy of Socialist Realism style adopted for propaganda purposes, art under Mao potentially enjoyed greater diversity because of the contending voices within the administrative system.

This topic was further studied in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-century China* by Kuiyi Shen and Julia Andrews. Their analysis of art under Mao is based on the division of media, including *guohua* [“national painting,” basically refers to ink painting], oil painting, woodblock prints, graphic design, etc. Shen and Andrews investigated in depth the flexibility of the genre *guohua*; their analysis about the negotiations on art policies and the nuances in changing techniques reveals how artists at the time shifted the meaning of *guohua* through manipulation of the ink. It

further reveals the contenting voices on art within the government, adding complexity to the understanding of art in the Mao era.

The effort to resolve the disjunction between the Cultural Revolution and post-Mao era in Chinese art history increased in the past decade. More and more scholars looked into the Mao era when investigating contemporary Chinese art. For instance, Wu Hung included the history of No Name in his *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000*, published in 2014. Although he does not go into depth in analyzing the group, he suggests its potential connection to Chinese contemporary art.

Richard King's *Art in Turmoil: Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-76* aims to address the impacts of Cultural Revolution on contemporary Chinese art. In the introduction of the book, King states that "scholars of China's arts have tended to focus on...the post-Mao years in preference to the more strident images to the Cultural Revolution, [however] Cultural Revolution art demands attention with its return as nostalgia or kitsch in an age when the market, rather than the Communist Party, is the arbiter of popular taste."⁶ This book enriches the current understanding of art of the Cultural Revolution because it reveals the complexity of artistic productions at the time from the perspective of the controlled, from well-educated professional artists to amateur artists of rusticated urban youth, rather the controller. It illustrates a sociocultural reality at the time that the entire society was mobilized to participate in creating inspiring images

⁶ Richard King, ed., *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-1976* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

of the utopian fantasy. The reception of art policies and the effects of the art administrative system by the public contributed to the cultural environment among the public that nurtured the post-Mao art. Therefore, the study of the alternative art world beyond the state's control is constructive for understand both the complexity of the Cultural Revolution and its transition into the contemporary stage.

No Name stands as a representative of the underground alternative art during the Cultural Revolution. It was an oil-painting art group founded in the early 1970s and dissolved in the early 1980s. No Name had never had a clear list of members, as the artists were also engaged with other culturally dissonant individuals in the underground cultural sphere. Even the name of the group "No Name" itself was proposed for their first public exhibition in 1979. Nonetheless, it provides insights into the alternative cultural sphere that paved the way for contemporary Chinese art.

The No Name artists can be divided into two generations. As stated earlier, the first generation includes Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, and Shi Zhenyu, who started their amateur art education prior to the Cultural Revolution in the early 1960s. The second generation included Du Xia, Li Shan, Liu Shi, Ma Kelu, Tian Shuying, Wang Aihe, Wei Hai, Shi Xixi, Zhang Wei, Zheng Zigang, and Zheng Ziyang, whom were only in their teens at the time. Because of their shared devotion to painting, they formed a small circle of amateur artists and participated in underground salons where they circulated and discussed forbidden books, music, and artworks. They enjoyed access to such forbidden

cultural products because some of them were children of high officials, who were under detention in May 7th School during the Cultural Revolution. In 1974, the second generation painter Zhang Wei met the first generation when they were painting in the Beijing city-skirt, marking the conjunction of the two generations. All members of the second generation had received directions from the first generation, especially Zhao Wenliang, during the Cultural Revolution period. However, different from the first generation, they showed greater interests in contemporary American art and European modernism. Thus after China opened up to the west, they soon embarked on a totally different journey whereas the older generation maintained their No-Name artistic principles.

My research of No Name intends to investigate the formation and development of the group since early 1960s to 1976 through their artworks. No Name's history in the Cultural Revolution enables re-evaluation of many taken-for-granted concepts about modern and contemporary Chinese art, especially the relationships between the Mao era and the post-Mao era. Due to limited length of this paper, it concerns only the first generation. I want to investigate several rarely studied, yet crucial, aspects during the Cultural Revolution that paved the way for the development of new art: the theoretical debates about modern art (especially after the Sino-Soviet split), the Mass Art system (including training and exhibition), and underground art salons and networks. These

aspects also marked a continuation of the artistic discourses on modernism in the early twentieth century in the Mao period.

The first chapter explores the artistic education that the first generation had accessed before the Cultural Revolution, with an emphasis on the artists' flexible reception of the orthodoxy teachings of Socialist Modernism. It also reveals how the mass art system, originally intended to expand control over art, enabled the amateur artists to learn and practice painting under lesser monitoring. The second chapter focuses on the secretive practice of art by the No Name artists during the Cultural Revolution, including their sources of painting material, social system that enabled their artistic activities, and organization of underground salons. The third chapter investigates the impacts of the theoretical debates on various visual languages on its impact on No Name's artistic development. Before the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1967, Chinese art world enjoyed a relatively liberal period from mid 1950s to early 1960s. At this period, scholars and artists who sympathized with non-Socialist Realism styles justified them by re-interpreting their visual languages in ways that matches the political ideology. These theoretical debates shaped the first generation's understanding of art. The particular context of the Mao era incubated the style of No Name. Thus the study of the formation of No Name contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of art under Mao, especially during the Cultural Revolution, which resolves the lacunae and distortion in the narrative of Chinese modernity.

CHAPTER 1 Ambiguity within the Official Art Education System:
The Start of No Name's Art Development

56 年报考中央美术学院，第二榜口试时，问：对当前油画的想法，答：“千篇一律”，不中！决心不再考美院。这就是我学油画的开始。
— 赵文量

In 1956, I applied to the Central Academy of Fine Art. During the second round interview, [I was] asked “what is your opinion about the present Chinese painting [oil paintings] and I replied: “it is stereotyped all following a similar pattern.” I was rejected. After that, I decided never again to apply to the Academy. This is the start of my learning oil painting.
— Zhao Wenliang

In 1956, Zhao Wenliang, the oldest and also the most prestigious artist in No Name group, applied for the department of oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing. Zhao was only nineteen years old, and the group members had not met each other yet. At the second round interview, he was asked about his view on mainstream painting in China of the time, and replied “it is stereotyped, all following the similar pattern.”⁷ Unsurprisingly, he got rejected despite his talents in art. This incident left a profound impact on him and largely contributed to his contempt against the art established by the state. As a teenager, his negative remark on painting in China of the time is not just an expression of his criticism against the art system of the time. More importantly, it was a reflection of the contradicting forces within the administrative head in the government.

⁷ Wenliang Zhao, “Self-statement,” in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 11*, ed. Wang Aihe (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 15.

The contending voices within government infiltrated into the particular education system of art, which enabled the No Name amateur artists to learn and practice art as workers. It was through their personal reception of the art teachings from the education system that the first generation of No Name developed their own style and artistic beliefs.

When Zhao was applying to the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the art system in China was undergoing a reform period, creating a relatively liberal art environment in the early 1950s. It was probably because of the first Five-year Economic Development Plan (1953-1957) that focused on technologies and expertise, art shifted from a subject of popular culture to a specialized, professional undertaking. Therefore, the dominating guideline shifted from “popularization” to “elevation of artistic standard”. The criticisms against the earlier formulaic and repetitive art creations started to emerge, and the authors urged artists to improve visual expressions.⁸ Greater attention was placed on painting techniques. More and more academic articles and art critiques started to discuss Socialist Realism and traditional ink painting from a positive angle. These became the important channels through which Zhao was exposed to the new criticisms against previous official artistic guideline that focused on popularization. Therefore, it was unsurprising for Zhao to comment the contemporary Chinese art as stereotyped and patterned. Indeed, the liberal art discourses served as an enlightening education in Zhao’s early art career, and it

⁸ Ye Jin, “*tan chuangzuo jiaoxue zhongde jige wenti—zhongyang meishu xueyuan huadong fenyuanchuangzuo jiaoxue jinyan* 談創作教學中的幾個問題——中央美術學院華東分院創作教學經驗 [On the Problems of artistic creation—Experience of the East China Campus of Central Academy of Fine Arts]. *meishu* 美術[Fine Art], no. 10 (1950): 15-8.

contributed to his creation of a personal art style that countered the official art.

Zhao started his art education mimicking Socialist Realist oil painting seen in Soviet magazines. Although the Chinese government set Socialist Realism as the official style of the Chinese art, artists did not massively practice it until the 1952 when artistic value of art production was given greater emphasis. From the 1949 to 1952, popularization dominated the art world. The leading administrators in art had all participated in Yan'an Woodcuts Movement, thus they inherited the ideology of art of the Yan'an period. The main mediums were woodcuts, New Year paintings, and cartoons because they originated from Chinese folk art, thus appeared most familiar and appealed to the masses. Oil paintings and ink paintings (*guohua*) were not in favor because people found the light-and-shadow in oil paintings and the abstract formal language in *guohua* hard to interpret.⁹ After 1953, art policies shifted to elevation of artistic standards, and the significance of oil painting and *guohua* increased. The Soviet style Socialist Realism replaced the Yan'an teaching method and became the orthodoxy style for Chinese oil paintings. The Central Academy of Fine Arts not only adopted the curriculum from Soviet Union, but also invited the Soviet artist Konstantin M. Maksimov in 1955 to teach at the school. Because Socialist Realism put emphasis on three-dimensionality and optical objectivity in depicting an object, it was seen as scientific and systematical,

⁹ Feng Jiang, “*huiyi yanan muke yundong* 回忆延安木刻运动 [Reminiscence on Yan'an Woodcut Movement],” *meishu yanjiu* 美术研究 [Fine Art Research], no. 2 (1969): 1. The peasants in Yan'an found the light-and-shadow effects in figural oil paintings to resemble “yin-yang face,” an idiom in Chinese to describe a person with two contrasting qualities such as yin and yang. Therefore, it carries the negative connotation for deceitfulness and cunning.

perfectly matching the criteria of “elevation of artistic standard.” The constant swaying between “popularization” and “elevation of artistic standards” in the Chinese art policies challenges the holistic view that art in People’s Republic of China is merely political propaganda, since artists could access art forms and techniques that were previously forbidden, such as early modern European art or traditional Chinese art, in the liberal period. Even during the time when the government emphasized popularization, amateur artists like No Name enjoyed privilege to participate in art productions because of their worker status through the particular art education system.

The new education system in China was established in 1950 based on the previous art academies founded by the Nationalist government (1925-1948). When the Communist party successfully took over northern China and was about to win the civil war, the transformation of art academies began under the direction of the military in early 1949. This particular feature persisted into the Mao’s era as art productions continued to be closely associated with the Chinese army. The military affairs committee combined National Beiping Arts College with the art department of North China United University, and transferred it to the Central Academy of Fine Arts—the nation’s most prestigious art academy. Principal Xu Beihong, who had learnt and strongly supported European Academic oil painting in late nineteenth-century France remained the director of the school, but no longer had the leading administrative power. After the official establishment of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, a new Communist

party structure was launched in the Central Academy of Fine Arts to replace the military administration as the highest leader.¹⁰ The core of this Communist party structure was a five-man small group consisted of artist-veterans of the Yan'an military base. As a result, the small group strongly supported the “popularization” guideline because of their experience in the Yan'an art sphere and loyalty to communist ideology.

Besides the art academies, the state also founded other institutions to monitor and organize art productions in China. Artists in the Mao era bore the title of “art workers,” since their primary social role was to provide artworks that satisfy people’s need for cultural entertainment. From this perspective, art-making was assimilated to a skill mastered by artistic technicians. Based on such ideology, the government established Fine Arts School Affiliated with the Central Academy of Fine Arts—a middle school whose curriculum emphasizes art—to train future art workers earlier and more specialized.¹¹ Normal middle schools and primary schools also have art courses, following the concept of “aesthetic education (*meiyu*)” proposed by educationist Cai Yuanpei in the Republican period.¹² Cai’s belief in the association between aesthetic

¹⁰ Gong Wang, Xi Zhao, and Youci Zhao, “*fulu zhongyan meishu xueyuan jianshi* 附录中央美术学院简史 [Appendix: Brief History of the Central Academy of Fine Arts],” *meishu yanjiu* 美术研究 [Art Research], no. 4 (1988), 93-104.

¹¹ “School Overview,” About, Fine Arts School Affiliated to China Central Academy of Fine Arts, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.faschool.net/xuexiaogaikuang.html>.

¹² Yuanpei Cai, “*meiyu dai zongjiao shuo* 美育代宗教说 [Replacing Religion with Aesthetics Education],” in *ershi shiji zhongguo meishu wenxuan* 二十世纪中国美术文选 [Selected Writings on Twentieth-Century Chinese Arts], ed. Shaojun Lang and Zhongtian Shui (Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing house, 1999), 15-20. Cai Yuanpei was one of the earliest educationist in modern China and the first president of Beijing University. His most famous theory was “replacing religion with aesthetic education.” According to Cai, religion no longer fulfill modern people’s need because it countered science and was aggressively exclusive. In contrast, aesthetics was neutral and disinterested, thus it better served to cultivate the Chinese people, reshaping their morality and world view, in the modern society. Cai’s education reform was actually a progressive political force. When he was the president in Beijing University, he actively encouraged students to participate in extracurricular activities that were highly political in nature,

perception and morality, or spirituality, continued into the Mao era. Yet in the latter case, aesthetic education became a crucial means to teaching political ideologies rather than morality.

The art curriculum taught at official academies and their affiliated middle schools in the 1950s adopted many aspects of the Soviet administrative system, and Soviet painting and sculpture were then viewed as models for the new socialist art. Thus students learnt the techniques and the revolutionary ideals of the Soviet style of Socialist Realism. Since the roots of Socialist Realism lies in French and German nineteenth-century academic art, Socialist Realist paintings presented narrative or anecdote contents through realistic visual language—as they were intended to be easily interpreted by the audience. Thus academies at the time only valued figure paintings as serious artistic creations while took landscape paintings as elementary lessons of perspectives. Moreover, art academies in China required its faculties and students to labor among the peasants in order to better grasp and present the revolutionary ideals of Socialist Realism.¹³ By familiarizing with and learning from the peasants, artists were believed to be able to capture the essence of the new socialist regime, and it usually turned out to be paintings that promoting the achievements of the government. Therefore, besides painting skills and techniques, political study also played a significant role in the curriculum of official art academies.

under the cover of “intellectual freedom.” Largely impacted by Cai’s theory, the students in Beijing University initiated the May Fourth Movement, which harshly criticized traditional Chinese values and shook the reign of Beiyang government. From then on, education in China continues to connote political messages.

¹³ Ye Jin, “On Several Problems of Teaching Artistic Creations,” 15-18.

These official art teachings went beyond art academies and reached the public through the Mass Art System—a system of supplementary organizations that aimed to broaden China’s cultural activities—during the Mao period under his cultural guideline of popularization. For instance, Children’s Palace (*shaonian gong*) and Workers’ Cultural Palace (*gongren wenhua gong*), run by municipality, provided students and workers the access to artworks and skills of art-making. Art lovers trained in these organizations could take on simple tasks such as painting propaganda blackboards (from schools to factories, all work units had blackboards for propaganda purposes), posters, or decorate public facilities.¹⁴ Another means for amateurs to learn art was publications. The publishing houses in China were all founded by the Ministry of Culture, and contents of the publications, mostly catalogs of artworks, were to be approved by the Art Workers Association, a part of the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party. One of the most important art publications was *Fine Arts*, a monthly magazine run by China Artists Association. *Fine Arts* not only introduced knowledge of art—such as introducing artworks and artists of China and other nations, on-going theoretical debates, new art policies—but also taught painting techniques for self-learners. These were the major means for amateur artists like No Name artists to learn painting in Mao’s China. In another word, the Mass Art System enabled the No Name members to learn and practice art as workers.

¹⁴ “*gedi xiangji juban gongren yeyu meishu xuexiban* 各地相继举办工人业余美术学习班 [Several Municipals held Amateur Art Classes for Workers];” *meishu* 美术 [*Fine Arts*], no. 5 (1955): 52.

However, although the art teachings provided by the Mass Art System followed the state's official stance on art, it differed from art academies in that the amateur artists enjoyed greater liberty in their reception of the teachings. These relatively peripheral art educations through supplementary organizations and publications, in comparison to the major art academies, had greater tolerance for art practices that deviated from the official guideline. The state monitored carefully on the artistic creations of the faculties and students in academies, but it was impossible to exert the same level of supervision on amateurs' art. More importantly, the amateur artists, mostly peasants and soldiers, enjoyed favorable political status, thus in the Mao period they were believed to have correct political vision. From this perspective, their art could capture the revolutionary ideal of communist ideology and the essence of socialist society.¹⁵ In contrast, professional artists appeared suspicious to the government because of their intellectual, elitist status, which made them more prone to the lapse of "bourgeois art." Therefore, artists in the Mass Art System enjoyed greater freedom than those in academies because it was their personal receptions of the art educations that shaped their artistic beliefs and practices.

Zhao's self-studying of Socialist Realism enabled him to develop a personal reception of the style, independent of its original intention. Although he failed to enter art academies, Zhao learnt Socialist Realism from the illustrations of the Soviet magazine

¹⁵ Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1988), 31-2.

Ogoniok. Because Zhao's father worked as a Russian translator for the Ministry of Petroleum, Zhao from an early age enjoyed access to reproductions of Soviet oil paintings. Besides visual references, he could learn the theories and techniques from the self-learning guides for amateurs from publications. Study guides for amateur to learn art making prevailed in the early 1950s.¹⁶ From 1954 to 1955, *Fine Arts* published a series of nine articles that summarized the Soviet book *Study Guide of Sketching and Painting for Amateur Artists*, originally produced by H. Krupskaya Soviet People's Studio. The purpose of these articles was to help amateurs to "grasp the basic principles of Socialist Realism."¹⁷ This self-study guide published on *Fine Arts* served as a reference to the government's interpretation and rendering of Socialist Realism to the public. The Chinese version of *Study Guide of Sketching and Painting for Amateur Artists on Fine Arts* included a series of intro-level studies of the basic elements of oil paintings, such as perspective, composition, color, and depiction of figures. Each study had detailed instructions for amateur-learners on the purpose of the study, the materials needed, and things to notice particularly when painting. The Socialist Realist characteristics of this study guide were reflected through its descriptions about the appropriate subjects and the ultimate purpose of painting. A serious oil painting should depict the life of the mass,

¹⁶ Fuming Zeng, "yansu bianzhuang zhidao xunzhong xuexi huihua de jifa shuji 严肃编撰指导群众学习绘画的技法书籍 [Serious Effort on Editing Books Teaching Painting Techniques to the Masses]," *meishu 美术 Fine Arts*, no. 2 (1954): 38-39.

¹⁷ Soviet H Krupskaya People's Creation Office, "Yeyu huajia sumiao yu huihua jiaocai 业余画家素描与绘画教材 Sketching and Painting Study guidelines for Amateur Artists," *meishu 美术 [Fine Arts]*, no. 9 (1954): 48.

thereby fulfilling its function of serving the people. Still life and landscape paintings thus were no more than practice that prepare the artists to better grasp the techniques.

However, the No Name artists did not pay much attention to this particular set of instructions in the study guide. Instead, they were interested in the teachings about colors, which was a major section in the Chinese version of the book. It assigned seven classes on the study of color and natural light.¹⁸ These classes also covered advanced topics like the influence of surroundings on the perception of the color of the main object, the changes that natural light causes for the perception of color, and the reflection of light. The emphasis on colors, especially under natural light, aimed to create optically realistic, thus scientific and modern, paintings. Thus amateur students were encouraged to create still life and landscape paintings from life to better grasp the use of color. These works, however, were seen as shallow and formalistic because they did not qualify realism, which can only be conveyed through the depiction of the masses in the new, promising socialist society. Nevertheless, the No Name artists painted very few figural paintings, and most of them are in simple, static poses. It was probably because the teachings of figure paintings were short and general in these self-study guides. Close studies of anatomy and plaster sculpture were only accessible in professional art schools. Interested more in the visual effects rather than the political connotation of Socialist Realism, the first generation of No Name started their art career painting landscapes from life.

¹⁸ Ibid., 48-52.

Although the artists started them out as practices initially, their sole accessibility to landscapes—especially during the Cultural Revolution—contributed to the formation of the particular No Name style.

Besides the self-study guides of Socialist Realism, another major source of artistic education for the older generation of No Name was Xihua Art School (*xihua meishu buxi xuexiao*), a private art school in Beijing. Because of their unfavorable family backgrounds, the artists of the early generation all had been rejected by art academies or their affiliated middle schools. Consequently, these artists looked for amateur training art schools, and the training they received there could also qualify them to become lower-level art workers. This was the only means for them to continue their art career legitimately in Mao's China.¹⁹ Therefore, they went to Xihua instead and met each other there. Xihua was originally Beijing Women's School for Western Painting (*Beijing nizi xiyanghua xuexiao*), an institution founded by Tang Shouyi, that played a significant role in the early era of art education in China. Tang and her husband studied in Japan in the 1910s, thus she was mostly exposed to Japanese interpretation of European modernism. When Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu were studying at Xihua, the major teachers of the school were the two daughters of Tang—Xiong Xianpeng and Xiong Xianling. Consequently, they were also influenced by the Japanese version of modern art, especially Impressionism and Fauvism. Xihua was running on a small scale during the

¹⁹ Wenliang Zhao, "Self-statement," in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalogue Vol 11*, 11. They were painting Zhao's niece in the shiyoubu dayuan but got dispelled. Only art workers could paint legitimately without inspection.

Mao period, and it opened to anyone who wanted to study there. The tuition was quite expensive at the time— 39 *yuan* per semester, roughly half a year. The school has day curriculum and night curriculum, which aimed at serious learners and hobbyists respectively. The day curriculum comprised an advanced class that focused on still life oil painting, while the other low-level class only taught sketching. The first generation of No Name studied in Xihua until 1960 when the management of the school was taken over by the education bureau of Dongcheng District, Beijing Municipality and administered by the Beijing City Fine Arts Company.²⁰

The two teachers in Xihua carefully taught courses that matched the artistic standard of Socialist Realism under the state censorship. Yet their preference for modernist visual languages, especially Impressionism, was revealed through their emphasis on the color scheme of blue, purple, and grey.²¹ Impressionist style was dominant in Japan in the early twentieth century when Chinese students, including Tang Shouyi, studied oil painting there. The Impressionist School in Japan, since White Horse Society, ceased to be simply a matter of outward technique and began to acquire a meaning as an expression of the inner spirit.”²² The artists moved beyond optical experience and strived to present

²⁰ Minglu Gao, *The No Name: A History of Self-exiled Avant Guard*, 102-3.

²¹ “*xihua meishu xuexiao: minjian xifang yishu chuandengzhe* 熙化美术学校：民间西方艺术传灯者 [Xihua Art School: the Inheritor of Western Art in China],” *zhongguo xinwen zhouban* 中国新闻周刊 China News Weekly, accessed March 10, 2017.

²² Michiaki Kawakita, *Modern Currents in Japanese Arts* (New York; Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1974), 40. White Horse Society was founded by artist Kuroda Seiki. He went to France and study under Raphael Collin. White Horse Society was known as the new school because it rivaled the dominating academy on western art, Meiji Art School. Meiji Art School showed greater academic concern on form and light, whereas the new school concerned more about artist’s personal expression. In the late Meiji period, Kuroda’s art rose as the dominant trend and set the horizon for later art.

their feelings inspired by the subjects. As a result, they adopted a much freer use of colors regardless of the rules concerning light and dark. Sometimes they painted shadows with purple and blue, thereby nicknamed as “Purple School.”²³ It is unclear whether the No Name artists learned the theories of Impressionism, since the introduction to western art was only a “word here and a word there due of the Xiong sisters’ fear of governmental suppression.”²⁴ Yet it was certain that the first generation artists were exposed to the Impressionism and other modernist paintings since the two teachers of Xihua showed them catalogs of modernist paintings featuring Cezanne, Picasso, and the works of other artists. These visual references contributed to their free hand in applying the techniques of color and space.

Taking Zhao’s *Red Moon* (fig 4) as an example, one could see the artist’s free treatments of space and color. He did not apply perspective or light-and-shadow at all to convey depth or volume; instead Zhao used only shades of colors to instigate a vague sense of three-dimensionality from the viewers. His use of the bold colors, mainly purple and pink, also deviated far from optical experience. These visual qualities all contributed to the artist’s expression of his sentimentality—a particular feature of early modernist paintings in Japan. For instance, in the Japanese painting *Perfume* (fig 5), Fujishima Takeji presented a beautiful lady sitting by a round table, absorbed into her thoughts. There is nothing particular about this female figure—indeed Fujishima did not portray

²³ Ibid., 58.

²⁴ Minglu Gao, *The No Name: A History of Self-exiled Avant Guard*, 102.

her realistically—yet the painting conveys a lingering sense of seduction. The general tone of pinkish purple and the title “perfume” arouse an intuitive psychological response that completes the presentation of this attractive, and somewhat alluring, female figure. The background is flattened out to highlight the woman, so it encourages the audience to adopt the artist’ gaze directed to the figure. Thus in this case, this painting is the artist’s expression of his personal perception about the model. Zhao played the same game in *Red Moon* too. The painting only presents a few trees by a small hillside at night, but it serves to express the artist’s intricate emotions. The dark tone in general creates a dull and suppressive atmosphere, but the moon in brilliant pink contrasts sharply with the dark background and arouses strong uneasiness. Moreover, although Zhao presented the colors in almost perfect flatness with little change in tones, he conveys dynamism through chaotic brush strokes. These pairs of oppositions serve to express his repressed anxiety, peaceful on the surface but violent underneath. Zhao created this painting in 1964, when he started to sense accumulating political tension in Beijing. Indeed, the notorious Cultural Revolution was about to break out in just two years. Because Zhao was constantly subjected to inspection when he painted in the city, he began to paint landscape from life in remote countryside. Therefore, the *Red Moon* was the artist’s expression of his emotion and mental state that he was experiencing at the time.

The Cultural Revolution eventually broke out in August 1966. From 1966 to 1968, the whole art system, including academies, artists’ association, and other administrative

organization were all disrupted by the Red Guards. The Central Academy of Fine Arts was occupied by politically zealous middle school students for three days. Violence and chaos erupted across the nation, and all Chinese intellectuals more or less felt threatened. The chaotic period eventually passed over in 1971 when General Lin Biao died in an air crash, and then art production continued under the administration of the Gang of Four until 1976. From 1971 to 1976, China experienced the strictest censorship on art under the administration of the Gang of Four. Despite the restricted art environment, No Name artists still received systematical art education, especially the younger generation who were still in their teens. Thanks to the art system of popularization in the Cultural Revolution, the No Name members were legitimate to paint because of their worker status.

In conclusion, despite the original aim of the Mass Art System to disseminate propagandist information, the amateur artists enjoyed greater freedom in interpreting and applying the art teachings. Their peripheral status in the art world enabled them to escape from state's monitoring to a limited extent. As a result, these artists learnt the basic realist painting techniques of Socialist Realism while disregarded its underlying political message. They then liberated their application of these painting techniques with the inspirations from Modernist visual references, which they accessed in Xihua Art School. Therefore, the Mass Art System not only educated the No Name artists and assisted their creation of a particular art style that countered the official art. Moreover, it served as a

crucial means for the amateur artists to gather together and encouraged them to secretly practice art that countered the national orthodox as a group—which I explore in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 The Secret Art Practices of No Name during the Cultural Revolution

我的绘画过程，不是在学院里科班的教育，受所谓的基本功的训练，而是一种完全的投身自然当中。自然就是老师，自然就是课堂
— 杨雨澍

My process of painting, is not out of the formal teaching of an art academy, [where students are] trained in the so-called professional skills. I never had formal academic or even elementary art education. My process was to completely immerse myself in nature. Nature was my teacher, my classmates, my studio.
— Yang Yushu

The art education that the older generation of No Name received in the 1950s only provided them the most basic knowledge of art creation, mostly painting techniques. It was rather their personal experiences in the Cultural Revolution that enabled them to develop their own interpretation of art and artistic expression. Although the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, the political environment became unstable in the early 1960s, and the members of the first generation of No Name actually suffered the political struggle early on. Prior to this period, the No Name artists saw their artworks of still lifes and landscape as mere practices, impacted by the art theories of Socialist Realism. However, things started to change when political tension accumulated in the early Cultural Revolution. Because of the increasing social surveillance, artists had to flee to remote countryside and paint landscapes. From then on, they started to see life drawings and landscape paintings as serious art creations and forms of artists' expressions. Such

change indicates that No Name developed their own art philosophies and theories based on their own life experience, integrating it with the visual language of Socialist Realism and early European modernism. Yet before the discussion on “special style” of No Name, I am going to present the secret practice of the group during the Cultural Revolution, when censorship in China reached its peak in the Mao era. No Name’s secret art practice countered the official art standard, proving the existence of alternative space within the Cultural Revolution context. It will also set the foundation for interpreting the art theories created by No Name, which I will explore in depth in the following chapter.

The seed of the Cultural Revolution was planted during the Socialist Education Movement in 1962 initiated by Mao Zedong. Claiming that governing implies a responsibility to disseminate a socialist education, Mao tried to remove the so-called "reactionary" elements, mostly intellectuals who criticized his administration, within the bureaucracy of the Communist Party of China.²⁵ Mao was under stress in the early 1960s because of the failure of the Great Leap Forward from 1958 to 1960—a campaign aimed at rapid rural industrialization and agricultural collectivization. Unfortunately, because of Mao’s disregard for the intellectuals and experts, the series of agricultural and industrial reforms in the Great Leap Forward followed impractical and unscientific procedures,

²⁵ “*guanyu muqian nongcun gongzuo zhong ruogan wenti de jieju (caoan)* 关于目前农村工作中若干问题的决定（草案） [On the Solutions to the Current Problems in the Work of Rural Areas (Draft Proposal)], *jinguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian di shiliu ce* 建国以来重要文献选编第十六册 [Selected Important Documents After the Establishment of the People’s Republic of China], *zhongguo gongchandang xinwen · wenxian ziliao* 中国共产党新闻·文献资料 *Chinese Communist Party News · Documentation*, accessed March 12, 2017. cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66671/4493612.html.

which unfortunately resulted in a tremendous famine. Some intellectuals, including high officials in the party, initiated indirect criticisms against the current policies and even Mao himself through essays and dramas.²⁶ Consequently, the moderate branch of the party took over Mao's role as the leading authority. Mao's disadvantageous position in the party pushed him to lean on the radical leftists, who assisted Mao in launching the Socialist Education Movement. The goal was to further class struggle, as Mao implied that the bourgeois members of the party were trying to overthrow the socialist regime.²⁷ Therefore, Mao fabricated an illusionist image of the national enemy, and this discourse turned out to be the major tool that Mao used to eliminate his political rivals during the Cultural Revolution.

In 1966, the leftist branch of the party launched critiques against the drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, written by historian Wu Han, marking the start of the Cultural Revolution. They claimed that the cultural administration in China had been dominated by the reactionary bourgeois like Wu Han, thus a revolution in the cultural field was urgent to restore proletarian art. In fact, the Cultural Revolution not only aimed at restoring Mao's ideologies but also at purging his political rivals. Thus in the first stage of the revolution from 1966 to 1971, massive violence broke out under the name of "Destructing the Four Olds" and "Down with Ox Demons and Snake Spirits." The state used the

²⁶ Nancun Ma, *yanshan yehua* 燕山夜话 *Night Talk at Yanshan* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1979).

²⁷ Peng L ü, *A History of Art in Twentieth Century China* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007), 431. No. 10 Conference of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in September 24, 1964, proposed the call for "Never Forgetting Class Struggle (*buyao wangji jieji dongzheng* 不要忘记阶级斗争)".

nickname “Ox Demons and Snake Spirits” to defame the so-called reactionaries, mostly intellectuals, who were found guilty of promoting Capitalism. The “Four Olds” refers to the traditional Chinese cultural products, and they were often associated with the elite class. Thus they also became the target of the Cultural Revolution; the state wanted to destruct all traditions in order to restore proletarian art. To carry out these movements, Mao mobilized a large group of zealous high-school and college students, known as the Red Guards, to lead the revolution in fierce manner.²⁸ Massive violence broke out in 1966. The Red Guards smashed old architecture, destroyed antiques, burnt down traditional paintings and calligraphies, including both public and private collections. The so-called reactionaries were beaten in public, sometimes to death, and their relatives must repudiate any connection with them to be exempt from punishments. The movement eventually turned out to be an uncontrollable riot, so the government suppressed it with military forces in 1968.

The violent movements from 1966 to 1968 impacted the three members of the first generation because their shared unfavorable family backgrounds that made them the targets of the Cultural Revolution. They not only witnessed the violence against their teachers, neighbors, or colleagues, they themselves were also subjected to the threat of being isolated and beaten. For instance, Zhao’s parents were driven out from their dormitory in Beijing, thus they had no choice but to rely on their relatives in Harbin,

²⁸ “*hengsao yiqie niuguisheshen* 横扫一切牛鬼蛇神 Eliminating All Ox Demons and Snake Spirits,” *renmin ribao* 人民日报 *People’s Daily*, June 1, 1966.

Northern China. Thus the homeless Zhao could only live in the factory that he worked for.²⁹ Yang's experience was even worse. He and his mother were almost beaten to death by the Red Guards. Fortunately, under the protection of his superior in his work unit, Yang kept his job and was exempt from violent punishments.³⁰ Moreover, the Red Guards destroyed their own artworks and collections of painting prints, in forms of catalogs and poster cards. It included works mostly by Soviet artists such as Konstantin Korovin, Igor Emmanuilovich Grabar, and Sergey Gerasimov. The No Name artists favored these Soviet artists probably because their artworks leaned toward modernism.³¹ The No Name artists also collected prints of European modernist paintings including those by Monet, Cezanne, and Degas.³² They tried to secretly hide their collections at night, either by burying them in the courtyard or transporting them to the countryside. In spite of these efforts, a large part of their collections was destroyed. The No Name artists' traumatic experiences and their isolation from mainstream society nurtured their resistance to the political ideologies and the frenzy in the social environment. As a result, these artists escape to the countryside to seek comfort and paint freely without inspection.

The traumatic experiences transformed the first generation of No Name's view on landscape and landscape paintings. Before the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, the

²⁹ Wenliang Zhao, "Self-statement," 12.

³⁰ Yushu Yang, "Self-statement," in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 9*, ed. Wang Aihe (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 12.

³¹ Zhenyu Shi, "Reminiscence," in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 5*, ed. Wang Aihe (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 11.

³² Yushu Yang, "Self-statement," 12.

first generation of No Name had already started painting landscapes because of the tense political environment. When the three artists gathered at the courtyard of Zhao's dormitory and painted his niece's portrait in 1964, the police showed up and admonished them to stop painting. To avoid inspection, the artists decided to move to the countryside, which served as a haven for their artistic activities, and created landscape paintings as mere practices to better grasp painting techniques. In contrast, the landscape paintings they created after their traumatic experience in 1966 became forms of artists' self-expressions. This is because the "nature" in the countryside stood in opposition to the chaotic and evil human society. In Zhao's account of the time when he lived in the factory, he said that he sensed no fear although the factory was built on a graveyard; "the graveyard give me a sense of security, rather it is when I opened my eyes and saw the livings that I was really scared." Nature granted "solace and comfort" to the artists in their most terrified and disgraced days.³³ Their new readings of landscape paved the way for their interpretation of the spiritual essence of nature in the late Cultural Revolution, which eventually developed into the foundation of their art theories.

At this stage in 1966, the artists began to express their emotions and political attitudes through landscape paintings. On August 18th in 1966, Zhao Wenliang, along with Yang Yushu and Shi Zhenyu, went out to the outskirts of Beijing and stayed there all day long. *August 18th* (fig 5) was one of the paintings he created on that day. The title refers to

³³ Ibid.

the political event that occurred on that day when Mao gave a talk to the Red Guards gathered at the Tiananmen Square, almost a million of them coming from all across China. It marked Mao's official recognition of the Red Guards, and their revolutionary activities reached its climax in the following month. Although the artists had escaped to the countryside, Zhao used his painting *August 18th* (fig 6) as a reference to the political event. At the back of the painting, he wrote: "made in August 18th"; followed by the horrible 'Red August [name for the violent activities done by Red Guards in August]'; stopped painting since then for forty-five days."³⁴ It shows that this painting served as an active reminder of the political environment rather than a sign of passive retreat. The visual language of the painting echoes Zhao's uneasiness and bewilderment. He used predominantly short and cursive strokes, which affords the painting a strong dynamism. The paints are thick, and brush strokes traces are clearly marked. Such painting techniques help to generate great energy. Also, the clash between red and green, the major two colors of the painting, further strengthen the dynamic quality of the work. Therefore, viewers could perceive the painter's emotional unease through the visual language of this landscape painting. In sum, the No Name artists started to feel strong association with landscapes, paving the way for their later spiritual reading of nature.

Before violence occurred in 1966, the artists usually attended landscape scenery closer to the urban area, such as Yu Yuantan Park. After censorship intensified, they

³⁴ Minglu Gao, *No Name: A History of a Self-exiled Avant-garde*, 17.

travelled further away to highly remote areas including the Thirteen Tombs of the Ming Dynasty, the Great Wall, Badaling, and Fragrance Hills. According to their memory, every time they went out to paint, they had to wait for the bus at the city center Deshengmen at five o'clock in the morning. When they came back, it was often eight or nine o'clock, or even later when they missed the returning bus.³⁵ Only during the most chaotic period in the August of 1966 did No Name stop painting, but they soon restored their activity after October 2nd, the day after Mao's second talk to the Red Guards at the Tiananmen Square. Since these artists all worked fulltime in factories, they went out together to paint on every Sunday, the only day off every week. Sometimes the artists actively create sick leaves by either hurting themselves or painting fake wounds on their bodies. Shi had once used oil paints to create serious bruises on his ankle and successfully got three days off. These sick leaves also became an important source for their painting activities.

The artists got their painting materials from art-supply stores, and sometimes they create those materials by themselves from industrial materials. China enforced planned economy at the time, thus the state only produced a limited quantity of art supplies each year, and they were only sold in a few designated art stores. In Beijing, the No Name artists often went to Crafts and Arts Supplies Store in Wangfujin, the only shopping street in Beijing at the time. When the artists could not afford the costs of buying painting

³⁵ Zhenyu Shi, "Rminiscence," 13.

materials, they took advantage of their worker status to create art supplies themselves. Shi Zhenyu learnt carpentry when he worked for Beijing No. 2 Light Industry Machinery Factory. Thus he was in charge of making wood painter boxes for the artists of the group.³⁶ These painter boxes were deliberately made to be small, thereby suiting the special needs of No Name because they can easily hide the boxes in their bags to avoid suspicion. As a result, No Name's paintings in this period were all of small sizes. When oil paints were short in supply, the artists would make paints based on the instructions set out by Soviet painting art books. To make white paint for instance, they bought linseed oil, washed it, and hung it in a bottle until it turned white. Then they added turpentine as stearic acid into the wax he got from his factory, and mixed it with lithopone. Finally, they jammed their homemade white paint into used tin-tubes. Besides paints, the artists also often ran short of canvases. Thus most of their oil paintings were actually drawn on all kinds of papers, from sketch paper to packaging paper. They brushed boiled bone glue or gesso paste on it to prepare the surface. Since all work units needed to do propaganda work, the artists sometimes smuggled real canvas that were meant to be used for Mao's portraits.

Besides these secret art practices, the Mass Art System, which was restored after the chaos in 1966 to 1967, in the Cultural Revolution provided the artists a chance to paint legitimately. The riot caused by the Red Guards assuaged in 1968 as Mao launched the

³⁶ Ibid., 12.

Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement to send the Red Guards and other urban youth to rural areas from the cities. The death of General Lin Biao in 1971 marked the end of the first stage of the Cultural Revolution, and the Gang of Four became the new government authority appointed by Mao from 1972 to 1976. Social order was completely restored as schools, factories, and other institutions returned to work, and the youth dispelled into the rural areas also gradually returned to their cities since 1972.

The cultural policies under the Gang of Four followed Mao's revolutionary line in literature and art, which highly valued popularization of art and the role the proletariat in art productions. To further enforce proletarian art, the Gang of Four enhanced the significance of the proletarian cultural organizations such as Children's Palace and Workers' Cultural Palace. These institutions were highly active at the time and trained numerous amateur artists of proletarian status. To encourage the masses to participate in artistic creations, the new administration allowed the best amateur students in the training institutions to submit their works to the National Exhibition, the largest national exhibition held during the Cultural Revolution since 1972 annually. Although professional workers were allowed to participate, "the Cultural Revolution's emphasis on proletarian art by workers, peasants, and soldiers ensured that most of the successful submissions were by amateurs."³⁷

³⁷ Julia Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1995), 139.

The institutions for training amateur artists not only enabled the members of No Name to practice art, it also served as a crucial means for them to meet each other. After the exiled youth came back to Beijing and returned to work, those who were interested in art could receive training and produce propaganda art for their work units. Consequently, the second generation of No Name excitedly found each other and became friends when they were training in Workers' Cultural Palace, creating propaganda posters, or decorating the public areas for festival celebrations. These young people of the second generation not only loved oil painting, their shared unfavorable family backgrounds made them resistant to political teachings and official art standards in the Cultural Revolution. Isolated from the mainstream society, they actively looked for people of their own kind to seek comfort and security. This is also why when the second generation of No Name saw the older generations painting from life in the outskirts of Beijing, they became interested in joining their collective painting activities. These people continued to introduce their own friends into the group, including non-No Name member, and created an expansive network that constructed an alternative cultural space in the Cultural Revolution. The alternative cultural sphere mainly took the form of private salons held at their homes. Not only the artists of No Name, individual artists, poets and other cultural dissidents all attended the these salons, where they exchanged ideas, circulated forbidden books, and listened to western music secretly. Zhao recorded this moment in his painting *Listening to Music in Secrete—Für Elise* (fig 7).

Some of second generation of No Name enjoyed access to forbidden cultural products since their parents were exiled high officials in the Cultural Ministry. During the Cultural Revolution, the previous high officials in the Cultural Ministry were replaced by young officials, and they were exiled, if not imprisoned, in the so-called May 7th Schools. Their children, mostly teenagers at the time, lived in the dormitory for the Cultural Ministry personnel. The dormitory stored forbidden books, covering literature, philosophies, painting catalogs from Europe and North America.³⁸ The courageous ones occasionally stole some books and catalogs from the storage room at night, and distributed them within the group.³⁹

These books and catalogs provided the No Name artists valuable visual references that broadened their knowledge of art and inevitably impacted their practice. One major source of visual references was catalogs of European Modernist paintings. According to Wang Aihe, a member of the second generation, they had imitated works of “Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Cezanne, and Picasso” from the catalogues stored in the dormitory storage, and they also studied from styles like “fauvism and expressionism.”⁴⁰ These catalogs only provided the No Name artists with visual references of European Modernism, and they were unaware of the intellectual context and the artists’ intention underlying the

³⁸ Ziyang Zheng, “*wo suo zhidao de wuming huajia* 我所知道的无名画会艺术家 [The No Name Artists that I know],” *huajia zheng ziyang* 画家郑子燕 [Artists Zheng Ziyang](blog), Sina Weibo, September 3, 2013. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_da3bc1190101r9mm.html.

³⁹ Aihe Wang, interview with author in the artist’s office at Hong Kong University, June 22, 2016.

⁴⁰ Aihe Wang, “Self-statement,” in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 9* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 5-6.

visual languages. As a result, they interpreted these modernist visual languages “from nature,” meaning that they made sense of these distorted depiction as if they were the artists optical experience of the real world under certain environmental condition, or with a particular emotion.⁴¹ Thus they would be able to *see* what the European Modernist painters had seen when created those paintings.

A more significant visual reference to the older generation of No Name in the Cultural Revolution was the collections of ancient Chinese ink paintings in the Palace Museum. The Palace Museum in Beijing used to be the imperial palace of Ming and Qing Dynasty, and People’s Republic of China turned it into a public museum in 1949. The Palace Museum luckily escaped from the destruction of traditional cultural products during the early Cultural Revolution period under the protection of Premier Zhou Enlai.⁴² When General Lin’s death assuaged the political tension in 1971, the Palace Museum reopened to the public on July 5th for diplomatic purposes.⁴³ The museum held the exhibition *China Ancient Masterpiece (Zhongguo lishi minghua zhan)*, in 1971 and restored its permanent exhibition in the Painting Hall in 1972.⁴⁴ Zhao recounted his visit

⁴¹ Zhenyu Shi, interview with author in the artist’s office at Hong Kong University, June 4, 2016.

⁴² Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, *zhongwenlai Nianpu (1949—1976)* 周恩来年谱 (1949—1976) [*Chronicles of Zhou Enlai*] (Beijing: Party Documents Publishing House, 1997), 50. On 1966 August 18th when Mao gave the first talk to the Red Guards on Tiananmen Square, Zhou was informed that a group of Red Guards planned to attack the Palace Museum. Then he immediately gave the order to shut down the museum and sent a battalion from Beijing Weishu Military District on the following day.

⁴³ Weijie Shi, “gugong jianyuan 90 zhounian: wenge qijian gugong jianzheng le wenwu waijiao 故宫建院 90 周年: 文革期间故宫见证了文物外交 [90th Anniversary of the Palace Museum],” *pengpai xinwen* 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News], accessed March 10, 2017. http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1375926_1

⁴⁴ “1971nian zhongyaode zhanlan yu chenlie 1971 年重要的展览与陈列故宫博物院官网 [Significant Exhibitions and Displays in 1971], *lishi zhongyao zhanlan yu chenlie* 历史重要展览与 [Significant Historical Exhibitions and Displays], The Palace Museum, accessed March 10, 2017. <http://www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/115/@/9036.html#26>.

to the Palace Museum: the simplicity of the visual language and the art theories of traditional Chinese painters like Zhu Da, Jin Nong, and Qi Baishi deeply touched him.⁴⁵

From then on, the older generation started to integrate Chinese ink painting techniques and aesthetics into their oil paintings, and this idea also impacted the younger artists of the group.

Different from the European Modernist paintings, the traditional Chinese ink painting served not only as visual references for the No Name artists, it also contributed to their artistic vision and philosophy. No Name's emphasis on nature and its capacity for self-cultivation was probably inspired by conception of landscape (*shanshui*) in traditional Chinese ink painting. Landscape painting thus served as a substitute for the real landscapes; by appreciating the painting, the viewers could achieve self-cultivation. This idea that nature can cultivate people was absorbed by No Name as they claimed that they learnt painting from nature. By painting natural landscapes, artists believed that they developed better, and more profound, understanding of various styles such as Impressionism and ink painting. The No Name artists saw nature as capable of cultivating people because it stood as an opposition to the frenzy, evil human society. From this perspective, the wild nature represented virtues as it is uncontaminated by human.

Another key feature of No Name that was also inspired by traditional ink paintings was the association between personal integrity and artistic quality. Zhao and Yang

⁴⁵ Wenliang Zhao, interview with author at the artist's home, July 12, 2016.

concluded their art as “inspiration,” “purity,” and “uprightness,” referring to artistic sensitivity, resistance to monetary desires, and the morality of insisting on the righteous and rejecting opportunism respectively. They believed that these three concepts should be the core of art.⁴⁶ Interestingly, purity and uprightness have no direct connection to art but rather to artists’ integrity. The association between art and artist’s qualities also derived from the artistic theory of traditional Chinese landscape painting, a genre of traditional Chinese ink practiced by Chinese literati class. Traditional Chinese landscape painting is an expression of the artists’ minds and personality, and it relies on the artists’ knowledge of the painted subjects. Thus the quality of painting is principally determined by the “personal qualities of the man who creates it.” Because of the particular historical condition of the Cultural Revolution, such theory appeared favorable to the members of No Name because it supported their political attitudes and justified their non-mainstream artistic creations. Appreciating the literati’s philosophy and identity, the older generation, especially Zhao and Yang, rejected to engage with the Chinese contemporary art world, in which artists strived to catch up with the western, mainly American, contemporary art trends. The first generation strongly identified with traditional Chinese painting theory that art should stem from spontaneous heartfelt expression. Thus rigidly following the visual languages of any style would block the artists’ spontaneous strokes and lose themselves in the painting. In contrast, the younger generation valued traditional ink

⁴⁶ Yushu Yang, “*lingqi qingqi zhengqi* 灵气清气正气 [Inspiration, Purity, and Uprightness]” (Personal essay, Beijing, 2009), 1-2.

paintings only as visual references. The diverging view on late modernism and contemporary art eventually contributed to the disbanding of the group in 1985.

The Cultural Revolution ended in the 1976 after the death of Mao, but shifts in political ideologies did not occur until 1979 when the moderate sect eventually launched their attack against the orthodoxy Maoists. With the support from government officials, No Name held their first public exhibition in Beihai Park in July 1979. Yet the rapid changes in China—including the opening up to China to foreign information, the economy growth, and construction of new social order—seriously deepened the gap among the No Name members. The post-Mao government redressed the officials punished in the Cultural Revolution, thus their children immediately enjoyed higher social status than the other members of the group. As the market economy expanded, some artists started other careers, practicing painting only as a leisure hobby. Some of the younger generation went to the United States and actively engaged with contemporary art as Diaspora artists. These artists moved beyond their engagement in No Name and started anew an artist career in the new China. Only Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu maintained the stance on art they had reached during the Cultural Revolution.

In conclusion, the traumatic experiences that the first generation artists experienced in the Cultural Revolution pushed them a step forward to the formation of No Name's art. These artists were isolated from the mainstream society, thus they sought comfort and security from nature, and developed a philosophical reading of landscapes inspired by

traditional ink paintings. Such development of No Name's was largely attributed to their access to various visual references, through both forbidden books and public exhibitions.

In the next chapter, I go beyond visual references and explore the influences of theoretical debates on No Name's interpretation and practice of art.

CHAPTER 3 The Political Meanings of Visual Languages:
the Conundrum of Form, Content, and Artist's Expression

我觉得绘画没有抽象不抽象，或者说没有各种表现形式。我觉得只要能把画家的感情表达出来，它就叫现实主义。
—石振宇

I think painting cannot be categorized [simply] into abstract or non-abstract [realistic]. Or such categorization based on style is meaningless. To my opinion, as long as a work can express the artist's feeling, it is realism.
—Shi Zhenyu

This paragraph was from my interview with one of the oldest members of the No Name Group Shi Zhenyu. To an art history student born after Mao Zedong's death, these words seem to betray a fair amount of irony and confusion about the definition of key concepts such as style, form, content, and artist's expression. Yet, when taking a step back into the thicket of the art-historical context of Mao's China, these words mirrored precisely the struggle and conundrum a whole generation of artists had confronted.

These artists gained inspiration from traditional Chinese art and modern European art throughout the period from 1956 to 1965. The decade witnessed the most liberal cultural environment throughout the Mao period.⁴⁷ The No Name artists accessed alternative art styles beyond Socialist Realism mostly thanks to art theoretical debates of art published on

⁴⁷ Ellen Johnston Laing, *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 23-57. The liberal artistic environment was initiated by the Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956. It was shortly disrupted by the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957, but it soon got rectified when the moderate sect rose in power after Mao's resignation in 1958.

official art magazines, mainly *Fine Art* and *Fine Art Research*. With this limited and somewhat twisted information—as scholars and critics at the time have to twist these art theories to match the popular political discourses—the artists of the first generation learnt about Socialist Realism, Impressionism, and traditional Chinese ink paintings. Based on these sources, they incorporated the Chinese traditional conceptual construction of reality into the particular visual language of oil paintings, creating their own style of realism.

When the first generation of No Name started learning to paint in their teens in the mid 1950s, they were mostly exposed to Socialist Realism, which was set as the orthodox for all art at the time—including not only oil painting, but also ink painting, New Year's print, and comics. Yet their works in this stage shows strong Barbizonic qualities, although they were unlikely to know Barbizon school due to restricted information. For instance, *Big Tree by a Wheatfield* (plate 8)—the first oil painting painted from life based on the artist's studies of the illustrations in the Soviet magazine *Ogoniok*—presents a rustic but beautiful scene of contemporary Chinese farming field. Compared to *Antibes* (plate 9) by the Barbizon school artist Henri Harpignies, the focus of both paintings are natural landscape. Harpignies captured the natural form of the landscape by honestly presenting the two nearly bare trees in non-romanticized and even somewhat haphazard composition. Similarly, *Big Tree by a Wheatfield*, despite the well-organized wheat field in the foreground, conveys a sense of wilderness through the slightly deformed tree in the center, with its branches stretching out orderlessly covered by small patches of leaves. Although

both paintings do not idealize their subjects, the artists still tried to capture the natural beauty of realistic landscapes. Harpignies, inspired by Dutch paintings, set a low horizon and left large spaces for the sky. Similar composition is also shown in *Big Tree by a Wheatfield*, creating a free and open atmosphere. Moreover, both works employ uniformly broad, rough, and painterly strokes, especially in the treatment of tree leaves. This technique helps to engender a sense of movement which captures the shaking tree leaves in the wind. Both artists adopted mainly earth tones and greens, and applied small amount of light yellow on the tree leaves to indicate the sunlight. Such palette greatly contributes to the naturalistic qualities of the painted subjects.

Although the visual effects of *Big Tree by a Wheatfield* and *Antibes* are similar, the motivations for their choices of style were much different. In fact, the reason why the No Name artists managed to extract aspects of Barbizon art out of Socialist Realism oil paintings because they concentrated solely on the visual effect of Socialist Realism, disregarding its artistic philosophy of presenting the “reality.” Barbizon school, as it emerged in nineteenth-century France, rejected the conventional idealized lyrical landscapes for down-to-earth, unvarnished images of natural scenes in opposition to the Romantic Orthodoxy that dominated academies and salons at the time. Barbizon-school painters went outdoors to paint from life because they believed that landscape paintings are

artists' expressions of their state of mind in response to the scene.⁴⁸ Therefore, Barbizon school believed in a unity of the subject-matter, the mode of presentation, and artist's expression. To the No Name artists, such presentation of nature matches the Socialist Realist philosophy that conventional romanticized landscapes, mostly used in mythological and religious paintings, disguise the peasants' travail associate with the land. Therefore, only the depictions of realistic and contemporary landscapes were appropriate contents for landscape paintings, as they could capture the "reality" of peasants' lives. However, the No Name artists disregarded the underlying social commentary in Socialist Realism works, and they were only interested in the visual effects and painting techniques: *Big Tree by a Wheatfield* solely focuses on presenting the rustic beauty of country landscapes.

No Name's absorption of Barbizonic visual language as it shone through Socialist Realist painting demonstrates the inherent paradox in form, content, and artist's expression—which means the visual language, the objects or figures depicted in the painting, and the messages conveyed to the audience respectively—in Socialist Realism. This particular artistic style originated from a cultural purge initiated by the Soviet government to exert absolute control over art. The Soviet government wanted to use paintings to serve propaganda and educate the mass about the advantages of the Communist regime. According to Stalin, artists were to be "engineers of the human soul"

⁴⁸ Jean Bouret, *The Barbizon School and 19th Century French Landscape Paintings* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1973), 9-24.

by “[depicting] reality in its revolutionary development,” yet no further guidelines on form or content were laid down.⁴⁹ Thus Socialist Realism concerned more about the message conveyed through the paintings, or artists’ expression, than its content and form. Therefore, as long as a painting clearly conveyed the appropriate message, it fulfilled the ultimate pursuit of Socialist Realism. As a result, narrative paintings dominated the style of Socialist Realism. This is because, compared to landscape paintings, narrative contents help to express unequivocal messages to the audience, such as the social ills in Capitalist countries or the happy lives enjoyed by workers and peasants in the Soviet Union. Similarly, the form of Socialist Realism, serving the same goal of assisting artist’s expression, basically followed the realist visual language of nineteenth-century European academic art for its capacity to avoid ambiguity, especially in contrast to modernism. Although both the form and content meant to enhance artist’s expression, the emphasis on the message conveyed allowed greater spaces for alternative subject-matters and visual languages, revealing the disunity among form, content, and artist’s expression in Socialist Realism.

The message that was to be conveyed through Socialist Realist art centered on the particular vision of “reality” constructed in Marxist philosophy. In this vision of reality, the development of history and civilization is driven by several fundamental objective laws—unequal property distribution divides people into social classes, and the conflicts

⁴⁹ Oxford Art Online, s.v. “Socialist Realism.”

between the ruling class and the working class, known as class struggle, drive historical progress. According to Marxism, these laws are the intrinsic and objective “essence” of the reality disguised under the “appearance” of daily trivia. The antithetical pair of “essence” and “appearance” was a crucial concept in the Chinese version of realism. Since the mid 1950s, artists were encouraged to meet the masses in factories and farms and observe their lives because it was viewed as the only process through which artists could understand and capture the reality. Yet not all scenes of peasants’ and workers’ lives qualified as embodiment of the concept of reality; paintings of daily trivia fall into the fallacy of Naturalism, which “only records superficial phenomenon while disregards its intrinsic essence.”⁵⁰ Consequently, it was the artists’ responsibility to extract the essence of reality from the superficial appearances through their own interpretation and analysis of everyday life. Yet on the other hand, the essence of reality should still be objective and intrinsic in nature, since the artist’s expression was not about personal intentions but rather the outcome of a requirement to abide by the official ideology. Nonetheless, such intriguing balance between artists’ personal expression and the objectivity of the painted contents impacted No Name’s concepts of reality and realism profoundly.

Moving beyond the interest in visual effect, the first generation of No Name started to look for their own “reality” in art based on the inspirations they drew from Impressionism,

⁵⁰ Zhi Guang, “*rushi de miaoxie bu dengyu xianshi zhuyi* 如实的描写不等于现实主义 [Realistic Depiction does not Equal Realism],” *meishu* 美术 [Art], no 5 (1956): 7-8.

which they accessed in the 1950s. Yet they did not start to appreciate the theories of Impressionism until 1968, when their traumatic experience in the Red Guard Movement enabled them to develop a philosophical interpretation of Impressionism. Since then, their paintings of landscapes were no longer practices but rather self-conscious and expressive art creations. The first generation of No Name witnessed and suffered in varying degrees from the violent Red Guard Movement, lasted from 1966 to 1968. The red guards, fanatic students mobilized by Mao to overpower his political rivals, were commanded to identify and punish the so-called Five Black Categories—individuals believed to be opponents to the Communist ideology. The No Name artists, and also their families, were mistreated in the political unrest because of their unfavorable backgrounds.⁵¹ Since then, these artists developed a critical view about the seemingly plausible “reality” in Socialist Realism; instead, they developed the vision that the reality of art lies in artists’ personal subjective sensual experience and expression of the world, inspired by works of Impressionists.

Impressionism was legitimized in the late 1950s in the names of mass education since it was assumed that aesthetic value could move the audience to better integrate the message conveyed through the artworks, thus serving the purpose of art to educate the mass. Under the official system of art in the Mao period, the value of a piece of art depended on the audience’s reception of the work, while artists had little agency in determining the meaning of narrative presented in paintings. The lasting debate around the

⁵¹ Aihe Wang and Thomas Greg, ed., *Wuming (No Name): Painting Catalog* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 3-9.

controversial copper etching *Talking about the Future* (plate 10) is a case to the point. The artist claimed that his intention was to present the children's wish "to grow up sooner in order to farm with machines," implying the prosperous lives of peasants and the bright future of the nation. However it was harshly criticized for the ambiguity of the narrative, triggered by the "gloomy and troubled" look of the children and their weak association with the farming machine in the background.⁵² Therefore, the audience's reception was valued at the expense of the artist's intention. Moreover, despite the appropriate realist visual language and the content of peasant life, *Talking about the Future* still did not fulfill the criteria of Socialist Realism because it failed to convey the message clearly to the audience.

Playing the same game, artists and critics took advantage of the priority placed on the audience's reception in judging the value of a piece of art to argue for greater tolerance to different art forms within the official art system. Since 1957, there were increasing voices against the straightforward didactic themes in paintings because the most effective means through which art impact people was "emotional appealing [动情]."⁵³ Thus aesthetic value was given greater significance because beauty can move the audience to better integrate the

⁵² Renbao Zhen, "tan shangliang jianglai de shiqing jiqi pingjia 谈'商量将来的事情'及其评价 [On "Talking about the Future" and the Comments about It]," *meishu* 美术 [Art], no 6 (1956): 14.

⁵³ Huixiang Ma, "meishu de 'dongqing' 'shuoli' ji qita 美术的'动情''说理'及其他 [The 'Emotional Appealing' 'Logic Persuasion' and Others on Art]," *meishu* 美术 [Art], no 11 (1956): 20-1.

message conveyed through the artworks.⁵⁴ Such interpretation of the role of form in the reception of art shed a positive light on Impressionism. Since “viewers can appreciate beauty through Impressionist paintings,” they fulfilled the function of “serving the people.”⁵⁵ As a result, alternative forms other than Socialist Realism became legitimate and compatible with the appropriate political message—as in Mao’s words, “the union of content and form cannot be taken too rigidly.”⁵⁶

Under such relatively liberal atmosphere in the late 1950s to early 1960s, the first generation of artists learnt techniques of Impressionism in Xihua Art School. It was run by two artists who studied oil painting in Japan in the early twentieth century, thus the No Name artists had chances to see catalogs of Impressionist paintings collected by the two artists. When the No Name artists first saw Impressionist paintings, they were attracted to the light palette and atmospheric presentations that drew sharp contrast to the dark and heavy visual language of Socialist Realism.⁵⁷ Another major source of information accessible to No Name was a series of academic discussions on Impressionism organized by the Central Academy of Fine Art, lasted from 1956 to 1957. These theoretical discussions were disseminated to the public through the journals of *Fine Art* and *Fine Art*

⁵⁴ Shaotang Pan, “dui sanpian piping ziran zhuyi wenzhang de yijian 对三篇批评自然主义文章的意见 [Comments on Three Articles Criticizing Naturalism],” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 11 (1956): 22-3; Weiyin Ren, “yixie butong de yijian 一些不同的意见 Some Different Opinions,” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 11 (1956): 23-4.

⁵⁵ “guanyu yinxiang zhuyi de tanlun 关于印象主义的讨论 [Discussions on Impressionism],” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 2 (1957): 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁷ Linghe Guo, “xihua meishu xuexiao: minjian xifang yishu chuandengzhe 熙化美术学校：民间西方艺术传灯者 [Xihua Art School: the Inheritor of Western Art in Folk China],” *China News Weekly*, no 11 (2012): 87.

Research, two popular official art magazines at the time. These scholars justified Impressionism to a limited extent. Besides its high aesthetic value which could move the viewers to better integrate the message of a painting, Impressionism, according to these scholars, employed a visual language that is “objective” and “scientific.” This is because the form of Impressionism, which tries to capture light in optical experience, is based on the scientific truth that colors are resulted from the reflections of light. This technique was believed to be conducive to presenting reality in paintings. Under these assumptions, Impressionism was into a progressive style which was worthy studying by Chinese artists.

Influenced by the theoretical discussions of Impressionism, the No Name artists saw optical experiences of the real world as the “reality” in art. However, they did not take it as objective presentation of the real world but rather as expressions of artists’ personal perceptions. According to the No Name artists, the optical experiences are the artists’ visual perception of the world, thus their paintings serve as expressions of their personal sensual experiences of the painted subjects. Such interpretation of the optical experience was likely to be motivated by their traumatic experiences when political environment intensified since the early 1960s. Since they were violently disapproved and isolated from the mainstream society, these artists started to value individuality.⁵⁸ At this stage, the No Name artists’ conceived reality in paintings as artists’ subjective perception of the world.

⁵⁸ Zhenyu Shi, Interview with author in the artist’s studio, June 4, 2016.

Take No Name's *Street in Fushun with Autumn Atmosphere* (plate 11) as an example.

The artist expressed his sensual perception of the street scene with the form of Impressionism. Impressionist painters focus on the effects of light and the atmospheric quality of the painted scene, so they usually employ rough and painterly strokes that overlap each other instead of smooth gradation of colors. For instance, in Claude Monet's *Exterior of the Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrival of a Train* (plate 12), he applied an extremely thin layer of paint with broad brush strokes in the treatment of the smoke. The thin paint captures the transparent quality of the smoke, and the rough strokes convey a sense of movement vividly. This technique tends to dissolve the volume of the objects, such as the coming train and pedestrians by the rails. Such treatment reinforces the audience's perception that the train is moving in fast speed and the pedestrians are walking in haste. Similar visual effects are also seen in *Street in Fushun with Autumn Atmosphere*. The bare tree branches are done in bold and vigorous strokes, and the traces of the brush stroke suggests the drastic movement of branches under the sweeping wind. The shapes of the buildings are softened and blurred into the tree leaves, conveying a fluid sense of volume. Besides the quality of brush strokes, Impressionism is also well-known for its relatively free choice of pigments, sometimes even disregarding the intrinsic colors of the objects. In the painting of Gare Saint-Lazare, the buildings in the background look bleached, as Monet mainly used white and brownish-grey paints. It draws a strong contrast to the foreground scene done with the dramatic combination of orange and green. Similarly, the No Name

painting employs obvious tints of the seemingly disharmony of purple colors. Yet the painting turns out to be very natural and vividly conveys the chilling and oppressive autumn environment.

The expressive visual language of impressionism enabled the No Name artists to express their perception of city street scenes. The visual language in Monet's painting helps to express his perception of train. The illusionistic presentation of the rail station in Monet's painting reflects the sense of disorientation shared by many at the time caused by the unprecedented fast speed of this new means of transportation, which disrupted people's previous perception of time and space.⁵⁹ The smoke dominating the painting surface helps to enhance this sense of disorientation because it blurs and sometimes blocks viewers' vision of the street. Behind the disguise of the smoke, the black locomotive looks almost like a monster marching to the viewers because of its deformed shape and the sharp contrast to the general pale palette. The sense of movement of the train and the pedestrians conveyed through the rough brushes addresses the rising pace of life in the new industrial era. In the case of No Name's painting, the visual language enhances the sensual perception of the street scene. In fact, this painting was created when the artist's family was driven out of Beijing and stayed at his sister's home in Fushun in 1968.⁶⁰ As a result, he sensed solemnity and oppression when he saw the empty street in Fushun in a chilling

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 33-45.

⁶⁰ Wang and Greg, *Wuming (No Name): Painting Catalog*, 12.

autumn day. The drastic wind implied by the shaking tree branches, conveyed through bold brush strokes and the grayish palette, contribute to the strong emotional appeal of the work. In sum, the first generation of No Name artists employed the expressive visual languages to convey their personal perceptions of the painted subjects. In other word, their paintings at this stage unified form and artist's expression, since the painterly visual language of Impressionism helped to express the artist's sensual perception of the view.

Besides the positive remarks made by the scholars in the academic debate, their criticisms against Impressionism inevitably also influenced No Name's interpretation of this style. The artists seemed to acquiesce with the scholars' view that Impressionist painting concerned solely momentary perceptions, while it disregarded the inherent essence of objects⁶¹ According to the debates, the optical experience presented through Impressionism was essentially superficial because it focused only on appearance while lacking "intellectual depth [思想性]"—an inner core of spiritual qualities.⁶² From this perspective, the scenes depicted in previous paintings by No Name were just media through which their feelings were conveyed, empty of any intrinsic meanings. Impacted by such interpretation of the limitations of Impressionism, No Name artists soon moved beyond and turned to the philosophy of traditional Chinese ink paintings.

⁶¹ Feng Jiang, "yinxiang zhuyi bushi xianshi zhuyi 印象主义不是现实主义 [Impressionism is not Realism]," *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 2 (1957): 2-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

As the most chaotic stage of the Cultural Revolution passed after 1968, the No Name artists secretly gathered together again to paint. Yet they could only paint remote outskirts in order to escape control. As a result, they gradually developed a spiritual reading of nature, as an antithesis to human societies. Inspired by the concept of *shanshui*, or mountain-and-water, in traditional ink paintings, No Name artists began to deem nature as their ultimate source for artistic inspirations and personal cultivations.

The official discussions on resuming traditional ink paintings actually started as early as 1950. Ink painting is viewed as an important cultural heritage that served as a crucial component of national identity. However, the early discourses on ink paintings focused mostly on reforming its visual languages to match the criteria of realism. Ink painting artists at the time struggled to present the sense of volume and space through techniques like perspective and light-shadow effect. However, inheriting Chinese traditions rose as an urgent problem after 1956, during the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the worsening relationship with the Soviet Union. Since then, critics and ink painting practitioners were encouraged to advocate the legitimacy of ink paintings. They started to publish articles discussing the artistic theories and techniques of ink painting from a positive angle. Previous reviews of ink painting categorized it as Formalism because Chinese painting, especially literati painting, concerns more about the expressiveness of ink strokes than depicting the physical appearance of objects in real space. Literati paintings, primarily about landscapes, developed a critical view against the physical appearance of nature. The

well known theoretician Su Shi, for instance, commented: “to discuss paintings in terms of form-likeness is to show the understanding of a child.” And this famous quotation about literati painting became a damning evidence for the ink painting sin of anti-realism in the early Mao period.

Literati painting’s preference for the “spirit” over formal-likeness of the painted subjects was legitimized in a series of theoretical debates in *Art* in 1961. Supporters of traditional ink painting applied the discourses of realism to describe the theories of *shanshui* paintings. In their articles, the relatively abstract form of literati painting was as “a visual strategy of exaggeration” used by artists to summarize and extract the “essence” of the painted subjects from their “superficial appearance”.⁶³ From this perspective, the spirituality of landscape is not anti-realism but rather the essence of nature. For instance, Sun Qifeng interpreted Su Shi’s comment—“to discuss paintings in terms of form-likeness is to show the understanding of a child”—as challenging artists to “captures the true spirit of the painted subjects” which can be achieved through “reaching into the mass,” and “capturing the essence through careful observation and artistic processes.”⁶⁴ These concepts were originally proposed in the early 1950s to standardize Socialist Realism and restrain the artistic practices of painters. By applying the theoretical discourses of realism to literati paintings, Sun transformed the “spirit resonance” in literati painting into the

⁶³ Keran Li, “mantan shanshuihua 漫谈山水画 [Discussions on Shanshui Paintings],” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 5 (1959): 15-6.

⁶⁴ Qifeng Sun, “shilun su dongpo he ni yunling jianlun wenrenhua 试论苏东坡和倪雲林兼论文人画 [Discussions on Su Dongpo, Ni Yunlin, and Literati Paintings],” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 4 (1959): 42.

“essence of reality.” From this perspective, the previously “formalist” visual language of literati paintings was no longer mere ink play but critical visual strategy employed by the artists to express the essence in a more vivid and appealing manner. Since the essence of reality in paintings resulted from artists’ “summarizing and processing” of what they saw in real lives, they enjoyed greater freedom in choosing the content and form for their works.⁶⁵ Therefore, the disconnection between the political message with form and content in official art had become even more prominent in the early 1960s.

Although the government did not exert strict censorship on art at the time, literati painting remained sensitive throughout the 1960s because of its association with the literati class, whom was believed to be antithetical to the proletariat, in Chinese feudal society. Thus writers were particularly careful about their selection of literati texts analyzed in their articles. They tended to choose painters who had more favorable personal backgrounds based on the political framework of the day. As a result, the information of traditional Chinese paintings that reached the No Name artists was highly filtered. The theories that they were most familiar with were mostly created by Qi Baishi. Qi was arguably the most esteemed traditional ink painter in the Mao period because of his peasant background and his preference for humble subjects—mostly fruits and animals—over lofty literati themes.⁶⁶ As a result, although Qi was hardly a theorist, his artistic beliefs were the most

⁶⁵ Guang, “Realistic Depiction does not Equal Realism,” 7-8.

⁶⁶ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996), 9.

accessible to the public. His motto that “the marvel of a good painting lies between likeness and unlikeness” left a profound and long-lasting impact on No Name artists’ vision of reality.⁶⁷ The play between likeness and unlikeness touches on the question of reality; likeness addresses the phenomenon of sight whereas unlikeness is the result of subjective renderings of the object based on personal interpretations. Chinese ink painting has little concern for resemblance because, under the profound impact of the concept of *shanshui*, everything in nature is “unobjectifiable par excellence.”⁶⁸ Following this idea, Qi adopted a highly reductive formal language and disregarded all details when painting animals and plants, instead, he captured the principle of internal “coherence” of the painted subjects.⁶⁹ Under the influence of Qi Baishi’s theory of likeness and unlikeness, the first generation of No Name artists in this stage transformed their concept of reality from sensual perception of the object to mental interpretation of it. In this sense, the painted subjects have their own intrinsic spirits, and their paintings were no longer subjective and momentary.

The spontaneous and reductive formal characteristics of Qi’s art were adopted by the No Name artists as techniques for presenting the reality. For instance, Qi’s painting *Lotus Leaves and Little Fish* (plate 13) is highly simplistic. Large area of the painting surface is left blank since it follows the conventional layout of ink painting guided by

⁶⁷ Zhenyu Shi, Interview with author in the artist’s studio, June 4, 2016.

⁶⁸ Francois Jullien, *The Great Image has No Form: On the Nonobject Through Painting* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 123.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

tension. Similarly, No Name's work *Winter Dream* (plate 14) also adopts a reductive composition. The only two objects that stand out on the painting surface are the tree branches and the standing figure, while the bluish background is a void like the blank area in ink paintings. The light and dark of ink corresponds to the varying degrees of blue in No Name's work. Since the reality of the painted subject lies in their inner spirits, artists no longer rely on optical experiences to present their subject. Thus the details of the body of the fish are all omitted, leaving only one brush strokes to highlight the sense of movement. In *Winter Dream*, the artist rejects any specific presentations of winter scenes, and only leaves the colors in the background to convey to chilliness of the season. Yet different from the chilliness in *Street in Fushun with Autumn Atmosphere*, *Winter Dream* conveys the pure of ethereal quality of winter, reflecting a philosophy of nature as ideal source for personal cultivation. The effect of the feeling generated by the bluish background resembles the blank spaces in Qi's painting, a technique of traditional ink paintings. At this stage, No Name's art focused solely on their vision of the world—which they believed to be the “reality”—and the expression of it. Since their “reality” did not lie in formal likeness of the real object, they were no longer concerned about what to be presented or through which visual language, giving up their previous specific rules on content and form.

The particular style of No Name established by the artists of the first generation challenges the common view that art under Mao was exclusively Socialist Realism. In

fact, the style of Socialist Realism in China was rather ambiguous because of the loose association between its form, content, and artist's expression. Scholars, critics, and artists in the Mao era took advantage of the fluidity of the term to advocate the legitimacy of different styles, through theoretical debates on art magazines. Inspired by these discussions, the No Name artists experimented with Impressionism and traditional ink paintings, and developed their own vision of the reality which largely derived from the philosophical construction of Chinese *shanshui*. Therefore, their works broke free from the conventional constraints of oil paintings and created images that are not limited by the individual character of form. This problem of formal-likeness has increasingly haunted modern paintings, since Cezanne to Cubism and early abstract paintings, and the abandoning of formal-likeness even constituted their modernity to a certain extent. From this perspective, No Name artists created their own approach to modernism using the philosophy of Chinese ink paintings. Indeed, they were the precursors in the experimentations of incorporating Chinese *shanshui* philosophy into oil painting, a popular theme in contemporary Chinese art. In other words, surging from the conundrum of form, content, and artist's expression in art under Mao, No Name developed its own approach to bridge Chinese artistic tradition with modernism, paving the way for the development of contemporary art after the Cultural Revolution.

Besides its critical role in continuing the Chinese modernism of the early twentieth century into the communist period, No Name's significance also lies in its connection to Chinese contemporary art. As I mentioned before, No Name was a loose artist group during the Cultural Revolution, and its members were also associated with the larger underground cultural sphere in Beijing at the time. Although such underground cultural sphere did not last long, it has great significance in understanding the transition from Cultural Revolution art to post-Mao art. Right after the moderate sect of the party took power and liberated artistic creation from political propaganda in 1979, numerous art groups of amateurs practicing modernist art emerged in public attention. Academy students soon joined this current and started experimenting with contemporary art, including not only painting, but also installation and performance. These students, active in the contemporary art world currently, grew up in the Cultural Revolution and received professional artistic training in the academies. Many of them were aware of and attended the unofficial exhibitions of the amateur art groups, and these two groups of young artists, professional and amateur, coexisted. As artist Xu Bing recounted, his visit, as an academy student, to the activities organized by amateurs was not expected, but acquiesced.⁷⁰ Although not all of them found the amateur art to be inspiring, there was a substantial sympathy among the academy students toward the amateurs. The complex relation between amateurs and professionals, and their drawing inspirations from each other,

⁷⁰ Bing Xu, "yumei 愚昧 [Ignorance]," in *qishi niandai* 七十年代 [The 1970s], ed. Li Tuo (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2009).

contributed to the contemporary Chinese art scene. The activities of No Name, as an amateur art group in the post-Mao period, shed new light on the origination of contemporary Chinese art in relation to the transition from Mao to post-Mao era.

CONCLUSION

The art of No Name proved that the discussion of modernism in the early twentieth century was not disrupted after the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949. Although the new government promoted popular forms of "people's art"—mostly through woodcuts, cartoons, New Year Paintings, and posters in a realist visual language—to convey political teachings to the public, efforts to protect alternative art forms and styles, especially traditional Chinese ink painting, persisted throughout the Mao era. Attributed to the contending voices of "Popularization (*pushi*)" and "Elevation of Aesthetic Standards (*tigao*)," the first generation of No Name artists had access to Socialist Realism and other European modernist styles, and their amateur status enabled them to avoid the state's monitoring of art to a limited extent and to interpret the art theories and practice with greater flexibility. Their amateur status also granted them critical advantage during the Cultural Revolution when the state's strict censorship on art reached its peak. The government at the time favored young artists, mostly in their twenties, because of their political loyalty to the new regime, while the well-established professional artists could only take minor jobs, such as painting the background of large paintings, or even rejected for any art-related positions. No Name's pursuit of modernism during the Cultural Revolution has critical significance in modern Chinese art history because it proves the artistic diversity during the Cultural Revolution period when strict

censorship was imposed on artistic production. The government's emphasis on popular art enabled the No Name artists to practice art and to maintain an underground artistic circle during the Cultural Revolution from 1972 to 1976. Thus the group continued the pursuit of modernism in modern Chinese art history.

After the Cultural Revolution ended and artistic creation was liberated in the 1980s, No Name experienced a split between the artists of the first and the second generation under the changing social and political environment. The split between the two generations is indicative of the transition of the Mao to the post-Mao era. According to Shen and Andrews, No Name can be seen as the inheritor of the modernization reformists in the early twentieth century because they both tended to see “modernization and Westernization to be the two sides of the same coin.”⁷¹ Indeed, No Name, just like the reformists in the 1920s, favored Western cultural forms,” including not only art but also music, literature, and film. However, the first generation identified more strongly with Chinese artistic tradition, especially the literati painting theory of the association between one's personality and his artworks. Their interests in traditional Chinese painting inevitably influenced the second generation of artists. Yet different from Zhao and Yang's adherence to these traditional Chinese painting theories, the second generation tended to see traditional ink paintings as visual references only. For instance, Ma Kelu's *Riverside* (plate 15) adopted its aesthetics of simplicity, incompleteness, and abstract formal

⁷¹ Kuiyi Shen and Julia Andrews, *Light before Dawn: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985* (Hong Kong: Asia Society Hong Kong Center, 2013) 28.

language, inspired by traditional Chinese ink painting aesthetics. The second generation showed greater interests in western cultures than the first generation. Even before the Cultural Revolution ended, the second generation highly admired European modernist painting and imitated their visual languages through the limited information available. In Zhang Wei's *Loader* (plate 16) painted in 1976, the mono-chrome effects through the various tones of grey, the melan cholic atmosphere, and the relatively smooth brush strokes differed from his previous energetic, vivid visual language but rather resembled Picasso's Blue Period. This incident partly contributed to the later split between the two since Zhao and Yang felt disappointed at the young artists' imitation of western painting. To the first generation's view, good painting does not depend on techniques or style but rather the free expression of the artists' heart, thus each individual artist should strive to discover his own style based his particular personality rather than rigidly following others. In contrast, the second generation viewed European modernism as the supreme art creations and studied them with greater enthusiasm. This is also why the second generation actively engaged with the contemporary art scene, both in China and the west, and participated in the dialogue of art development with their works.

With hindsight, we may both lament and celebrate the dismantling of No Name group at the eve of the surge of contemporary Chinese art. Between the first and second generation of artists, they succeeded in passing the baton from Chinese modernism to the contemporary, thus linking these two crucial chapters in twentieth-century Chinese art

history. But this would be another story to be told in the future.

APPENDIX I Chronology of First Generation No Name Artists

Zhao Wenliang 赵文量:

- 1937 born in Harbin Province
- 1952 started imitating illustrations from the Soviet magazine *Ogoniok*
- 1953 applied Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, rejected
- 1954 moved to Beijing
- 1955 first life drawing at the Great Wall (incompleted)
- 1956 painted *Big Tree by the Wheat Field* from life
applied Central Academy of Fine Arts, rejected
- 1957 enrolled in Xihua Art School
visited the exhibition of Soviet oil paintings at Beijing Exhibition Center
- 1958 Zhao's father became unemployed; started part-time work
started painting landscapes from life in Diaoyutai, Yuyuantan Park
- 1963 visited northwest of urban Beijing for life drawing for 18 days, with Yang Yushu, Shi Zhenyu, and other classmates
- 1964 painted the portrait of his niece from life with Yang and Shi, caveated by the police
frequently went to Beijing city-skirts to paint from life since then, including Ming tombs, Fragrance Hill, Summer Palace, and Badaling.
- 1965 visited Soviet oil painting exhibition and developed a critical view on it
- 1966 assigned a job at a neighborhood factory
went to Ming Tombs to paint when Chairman Mao received the Red Guards at the Tiananmen Square
rescued paintings and catalogs in the movement of destroying the "Four Olds"

- 1967 painted with Yang and Shi during weekends
occasionally organized salons at home
- 1968 more people started learning painting from him
lost his job thus lived at his sister's home in Fushun
- 1969 moved back to Beijing and received a job
continued painting at Beijing city-skirts and taught students
- 1972 saw traditional Chinese ink painting at Palace Museum, deeply touched by
its techniques and artistic philosophy
- 1974 met the artists of the second generation and started painting together
- 1975 attended the private exhibition at Zhang Wei's home
visited Beidaihe, a coastal resort town on northeast China's Bohai Sea, for
painting with Shi Zhenyu, Zhen Ziyan, Zhang Wei, and Zhen Zegang
visited Beidaihe again with other ten members of No Name
- 1976 Bao Lean wrote to Zhao and Yang, saying that some of them were impacted
by European Modernism painting
rented a camera and recorded the protest at Tiananmen Square triggered by
the death of Premier Zhou Enlai
- 1977 through Bao Lean's connection with Beijing Library, viewed the 24
volumes of global art history
- 1978 Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, and Liushi met Liu Haisu during his speech at
Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (now Academy of Arts & Design,
Tsinghua University); Liu viewed their works and highly praised them
- 1979 The Star invited No Name to join their exhibition at the Temple of Earth,
rejected
No Name visited exhibition of the April Photography Group (combining
photographs with poems) at Zhongshan Park
organized the first public exhibition of No Name at Beihai Park
- 1980 The Star invited No Name to organize a joint exhibition but under the

name of the Star, rejected

1982 the second public exhibition of No Name

Yang Yushu 杨雨澍

1944 born in Beijing

1959 applied Fine Arts School Affiliated to Central Academy of Fine Arts,
rejected
Enrolled in Xihua Art School, met Zhao

1963 visited northwest of urban Beijing for life drawing for 18 days, with Zhao
Wenliang, Shi Zhenyu, and other classmates

1964 frequently went to Beijing city-skirts to paint from life
since then, including Ming tombs, Fragrance Hill, Summer Palace, and
Badaling.

1965 visited Soviet oil painting exhibition and developed a critical view on it

1966 assigned a job at a neighborhood factory
went to Ming Tombs to paint when Chairman Mao received the Red Guards
at the Tiananmen Square
rescued paintings and catalogs in the movement of destroying the “Four
Olds”

1974 met the artists of the second generation and started painting together

1975 attended the private exhibition at Zhang Wei’s home

1976 Bao Lean wrote to Zhao and Yang, saying that some of them were impacted
by European Modernism painting
witnessed the protest at Tiananmen Square triggered by the death of
Premier Zhou Enlai

1977 through Bao Lean’s connection with Beijing Library, viewed the 24
volumes of global art history

- 1978 Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, and Liushi met Liu Haisu during his speech at Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (now Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University); Liu viewed their works and highly praised them
- 1979 participated in the first public exhibition of No Name at Beihai Park

Shi Zhenyu 石振宇

- 1946 born in Inner Mongolia Province
- 1962 met Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu at Xihua Arts School
started practicing oil painting
- 1963 visited northwest of urban Beijing for life drawing for 18 days, with Zhao Wenliang, Yang Yushu, and other classmates
- 1964 frequently went to Beijing city-skirts to paint from life
since then, including Ming tombs, Fragrance Hill, Summer Palace, and Badaling.
- 1965 visited Soviet oil painting exhibition and developed a critical view on it
- 1966 assigned a job at a neighborhood factory
went to Ming Tombs to paint when Chairman Mao received the Red Guards at the Tiananmen Square
rescued paintings and catalogs in the movement of destroying the “Four Olds”
- 1974 met the artists of the second generation and started painting together
- 1975 attended the private exhibition at Zhang Wei’s home
- 1976 witnessed the protest at Tiananmen Square triggered by the death of Premier Zhou Enlai
- 1977 through Bao Lean’s connection with Beijing Library, viewed the 24 volumes of global art history
- 1979 participated in the first public exhibition of No Name at Beihai Park

- 1982 participated in the second public exhibition of No Name
- 1983 became administrator of Beijing Academy of Arts and Crafts
- 1986 teaching industrial designing at Central Academy of Arts and Crafts (now Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University)

APPENDIX II List of Second Generation No Name Artists

Du Xia	Li Shan
Liu Shi	Ma Kelu
Shi Zhenyu	Tian Shuying
Wang Aihe	Wei Hai
Zhang Wei	Zheng Ziyang
Zheng Zigan	

APPENDIX III Major Public Art Exhibitions during the Cultural Revolution

- 1971 *China Ancient Masterpiece (Zhongguo lishi minghua zhan)*, Palace Museum
- 1972 The Palace Museum (Beijing) regularly exhibited more ink paintings in traditional style by both ancient and contemporary painters
- 1973 *Black Painting Exhibition (Heihua zhan)*, National Art Museum of China (all ink paintings in traditional style)
- 1975 *Canadian Landscape Painting Exhibition (Jianada fengjing zhan)*, National Art Museum of China
- Australian Landscape Painting Exhibition (Aodaliya fengjing zhan)*, Cultural Palace of Nationalities in Beijing

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andrews, Julia. *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1995.
- Andrews, Julia and Kuiyi Shen. *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998.
- Bann, Stephen. *Ways Around Modernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2007.
- Bouret, Jean. *The Barbizon School and 19th Century French Landscape Paintings*. Greenwich: New York Graphic Society Ltd, 1973.
- Cai, Yuanpei. “*meiyu dai zongjiao shuo* 美育代宗教说 [Replacing Religion with Aesthetics Education].” In *ershi shiji zhongguo meishu wenxuan* 二十世纪中国美术文选 [Selected Writings on Twentieth-Century Chinese Arts], edited by Shaojun Lang and Zhongtian Shui. Shanghai: Shanghai Calligraphy and Painting Publishing house, 1999. 15-20.
- Gao, Minglu. *The No Name: A History of A Self-Exiled Avant-Garde*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007.
- “*gedi xiangji juban gongren yeyu meishu xuexiban* 各地相继举办工人业余美术学习班 [Several Municipals held Amateur Art Classes for Workers].” *meishu* 美术 [Fine Arts], no. 5 (1955): 52.
- “*guanyu muqian nongcun gongzuo zhong ruogan wenti de jie jue (caoan)* 关于目前农村工作中若干问题的决定（草案） [On the Solutions to the Current Problems in the Work of Rural Areas (Draft Proposal)]. *jinguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian di shiliu ce* 建国以来重要文献选编第十六册 [Selected Important Documents After the Establishment of the People's Republic of China]. *zhongguo gongchandang xinwen · wenxian ziliao* 中国共产党新闻·文献资料 [Chinese Communist Party News · Documentation]. Accessed March 12, 2017. cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66671/4493612.html.
- Guang, Zhi. “*rushi de miaoxie bu dengyu xianshi zhuyi* 如实的描写不等于现实主义 [Realistic Depiction does not Equal Realism].” *meishu* 美术 [Art], no 5 (1956): 7-8.
- “*guanyu yinxiang zhuyi de tanlun* 关于印象主义的讨论 [Discussions on Impressionism].” *meishu* 美术 [Art], no 2 (1957): 24-30.

- Guo, Linghe. “*xihua meishu xuexiao: minjian xifang yishu chuandengzhe* 熙化美术学校：民间西方艺术传灯者 [Xihua Art School: the Inheritor of Western Art in Folk China].” *China News Weekly*, no 11 (2012): 86-8.
- “*hengsao yiqie niuguisheshen* 横扫一切牛鬼蛇神 [Eliminating All Ox Demons and Snake Spirits].” *renmin ribao* 人民日报 [*People’s Daily*], June 1, 1966.
- Jiang, Feng. “*huiyi yanan muke yundong* 回忆延安木刻运动 [Reminiscence on Yan’an Woodcut Movement].” *meishu yanjiu* 美术研究 [*Fine Art Research*], no. 2 (1979): 1-3.
- Jiang, Feng. “*yinxiang zhuyi bushi xianshi zhuyi* 印象主义不是现实主义 [Impressionism is not Realism].” *meishu* 美术 [*Art*], no 2 (1957): 1-11.
- Jin, Ye. “*tan chuanguozuo jiaoxue zhong de jige wenti—zhongyang meishu xueyuan huatong fenyuan chuanguozuojiaoxue jingyan* 談創作教學中的幾個問題—中央美術學院華東分院創作教學經驗 [On Several Problems of Teaching Artistic Creations—Experiences of East China Campus of Central Academy of Fine Arts].” *meishu* 美术 [*Fine Arts*], no. 10 (1950): 15-18.
- Jullien, Francois, *The Great Image has No Form: On the Nonobject Through Painting*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- King, Richard, ed. *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-1976*. Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2010.
- Laing, Ellen Johnston. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Li, Keran. “*mantan shanshuihua* 漫谈山水画 [Discussions on Shanshui Paintings].” *meishu* 美术 [*Art*], no 5 (1959): 15-8.
- Lü, Peng. *A History of Art in Twentieth Century China*. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007.
- Ma, Nancun. *yanshan yehua* 燕山夜话 [*Night Talk at Yanshan*]. Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 1979.
- Ma, Huixiang. “*meishu de ‘dongqing’ ‘shuoli’ ji qita* 美术的“动情”“说理”及其他 [The ‘Emotional Appealing’ ‘Logic Persuasion’ and Others on Art].” *meishu* 美术 [*Art*], no 11 (1956): 20-1.
- Mao, Zedong. “*Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art*.” Mao Zedong. Database of Marxism Documentations in Chinese. Accessed March 12, 2017,

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm

- Pan, Shaotang. “*dui sanpian piping ziran zhuyi wenzhang de yijian* 对三篇批评自然主义文章的意见 [Comments on Three Articles Criticizing Naturalism].” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 11 (1956): 22-3.
- Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, *zhongwenlai Nianpu (1949—1976)* 周恩来年谱 (1949—1976) [*Chronicles of Zhou Enlai*]. (Beijing: Party Documents Publishing House, 1997.
- Qifeng Sun. “*shilun su dongpo he ni yunling jianlun wenrenhua* 试论苏东坡和倪云林兼论文人画 [Discussions on Su Dongpo, Ni Yunlin, and Literati Paintings].” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 4 (1959): 42-3.
- Ren, Weiyin. “*yixie butong de yijian* 一些不同的意见 [Some Different Opinions].” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 11 (1956): 23-4.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- “School Overview.” About. Fine Arts School Affiliated to China Central Academy of Fine Arts. Accessed March 10, 2017. <http://www.faschool.net/xuexiaogaikuang.html>.
- Shen, Kuiyi and Julia Andrews. *Light before Dawn: Unofficial Chinese Art 1974-1985*. Hong Kong: Asia Society Hong Kong Center, 2013.
- Shi, Weijie. “*gugong jianyuan 90 zhounian: wenge qijian gugong jianzheng le wenwu waijiao* 故宫建院 90 周年: 文革期间故宫见证了文物外交 [90th Anniversary of the Palace Museum].” *pengpai xinwen 澎湃新闻 [Pengpai News]*. Accessed on March 10, 2017. http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1375926_1
- Shi, Zhenyu, “Reminiscence,” in *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 5*. Edited by Wang Aihe. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
- Soviet H Krupskaya People’s Creation Office. “*Yeyu huajia sumiao yu huihua jiaocai* 余画家素描与绘画教材 Sketching and Painting Study guidelines for Amateur Artists,” *meishu 美术 [Fine Arts]*. no. 9 (1954): 48-52; no. 10 (1954): 53-4; no. 11 (1954): 54; no. 12 (1954): 51-54; no. 3 (1955): 45; no. 5 (1955): 52; no. 10 (1955): 54; no. 11 (1955):28-31; no. 12 (1955): 19-14.
- Sullivan, Michael. *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1996.

- Tang, Xiaobing. *Origin of Chinese Avant-garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Xu, Bing. “yumei 愚昧 [Ignorance].” In *qishi niandai 七十年代 [The 1970s]*. Edited by Li Tuo. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2009.
- Wang, Aihe. “Self-statement.” In *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 9*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
- Wang, Gong, Xi Zhao, and Youci Zhao. “fulu zhongyan meishu xueyuan jianshi 附录中央美术学院简史 [Appendix: Brief History of the Central Academy of Fine Arts].” *meishu yanjiu 美术研究 [Art Research]*, no. 4 (1988), 93-104.
- Wu, Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History 1970s-2000s*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.
- Yang, Yushu. “Self-statement.” In *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 9*. Edited by Wang Aihe. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
- Yang, Yushu “lingqi qingqi zhengqi 灵气清气正气 [Inspiration, Purity, and Uprightness].” Unpublished essay. Beijing, 2009.
- Zeng, Fuming. “yansu bianzhuan zhidao xunzhong xuexi huihua de jifa shuji 严肃编撰指导群众学习绘画的技法书籍 [Serious Effort on Editing Books Teaching Painting Techniques to the Masses],” *meishu 美术 Fine Arts*, no. 2 (1954): 38-39.
- Zhao, Wenliang. “Self-statement.” In *Wuming (No Name) Painting Catalog Volume 11*, edited by Wang Aihe, 15-18. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009.
- Zhen, Renbao. “tan shangliang jianglai de shiqing jiqi pingjia 谈‘商量将来的事情’及其评价 [On “Talking about the Future” and the Comments about It].” *meishu 美术 [Art]*, no 6 (1956): 13-14.
- Zheng, Ziyang. “wo suo zhidao de wuming huajia 我所知道的无名画会艺术家 [The No Name Artists that I know].” *huajia zheng ziyang 画家郑子燕 [Artists Zheng Ziyang]*(blog). Sina Weibo. September 3, 2013. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_da3bc1190101r9mm.html.
- “1971nian zhongyaode zhanlan yu chenlie 1971年重要的展览与陈列故宫博物院官网 [Significant Exhibitions and Displays in 1971]. *lishi zhongyao zhanlan yu chenlie 历史重要展览与 [Significant Historical Exhibitions and Displays]*. The Palace Museum. Accessed March 10, 2017. <http://www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/115/@/9036.html#26>.

Plates



Plate 1 Xu Beihong, *Tian Heng and his Five Hundred Followers*, 1928-30, oil on canvas, oil 197 × 349 cm, Xu Beihong Memorial Hall, Beijing.

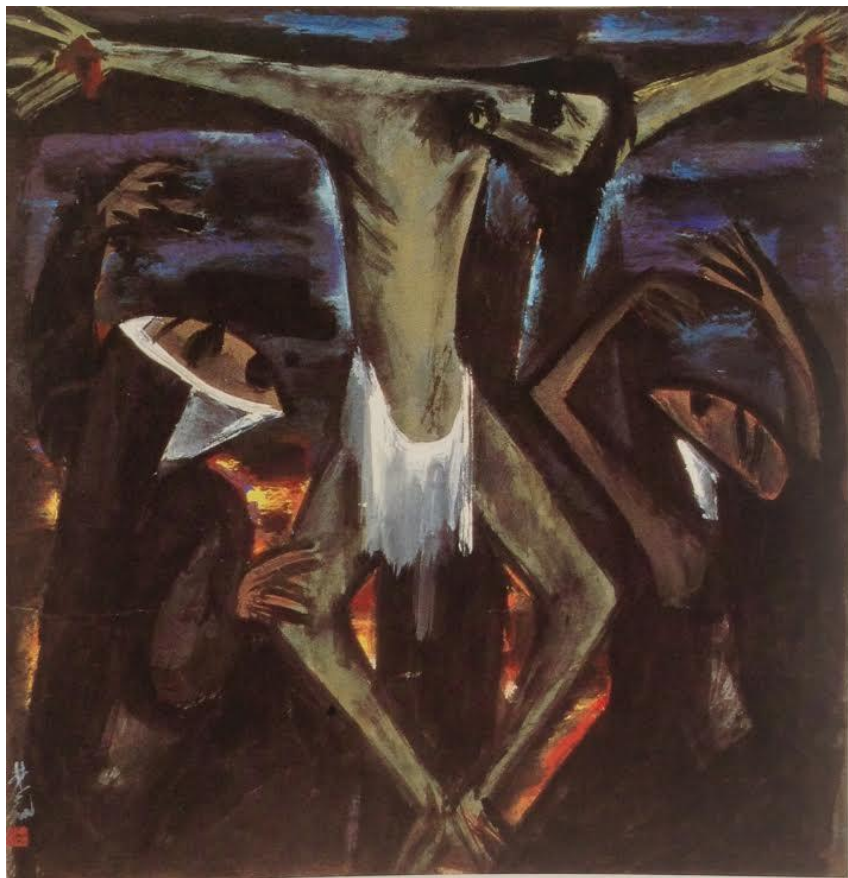


Plate 2 Liu Haisu, *Express Train*, 1929, oil on canvas, 65 × 53 cm, *Liu Haisu youhua xuanji*, shanghai.



Plate 3 Li Hua, *Roar! China*, 1935, woodblock print, 20 × 15 cm, National Art Museum of China, Beijing.



Plate 4 Zhao Wenliang, *Red Moon*, 1964, oil on canvas, 20 × 25.3 cm, Artist's Collection.



Plate 5 Fujishima Takeji, *Perfume*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69.5 × 70 cm, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.



Plate 6 Zhao Wenliang, *August 18*, 1966, oil on canvas, 18.2 × 21.3 cm, artist's collection.



Plate 7 Zhao Wenliang, *Listening to Music in Secrete—Für Elise*, oil on canvas, 16.5 × 20 cm, artist's collection.



Plate 8 Zhao WenLiang, *Big Tree by Wheatfield*, 1955, oil on canvas, 43.1 × 55.8 cm, artist's collection.

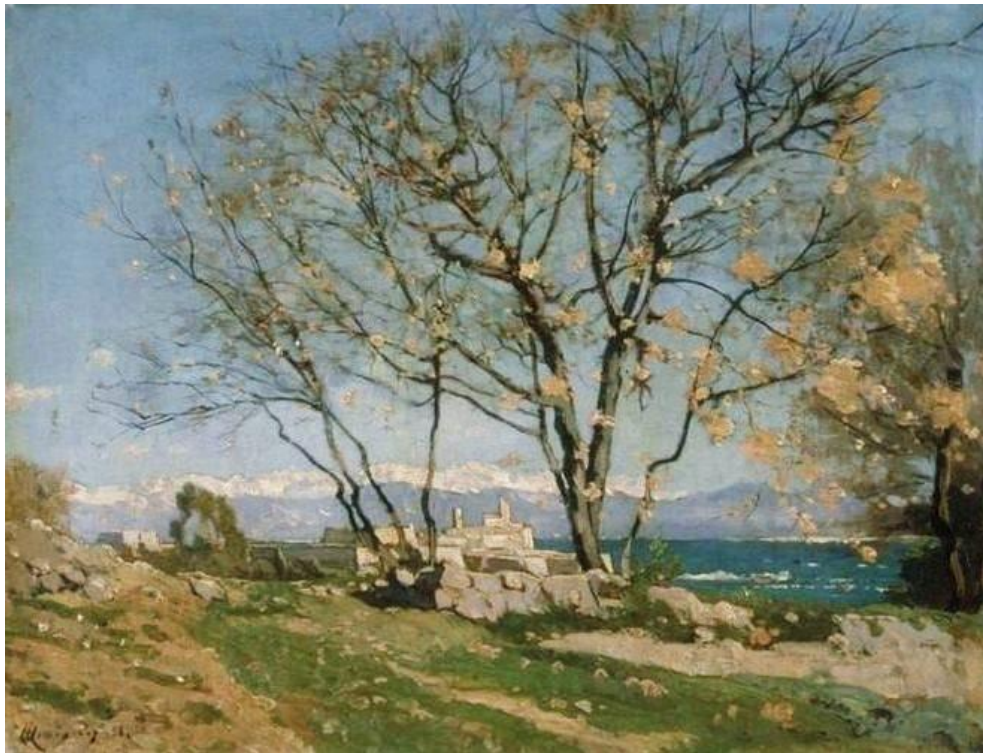


Plate 9 Henri Harpignies, *Antibes*, 1883, oil on canvas, 35.5 × 43.5 cm, Arts de Bordeaux.



Plate 10 Minggang Zhu, *Talking about the Future*, 1955, copper etching, 27.7 × 18.5 cm, New China Art Documentation Museum.



Plate 11 Zhao Wenling, *Street in Fushun with Autumn Atmosphere*, 1968, oil on canvas, 19.1 × 22.5 cm, artist's collection.



Plate 12 Claude Monet, *Exterior of the Gare Saint-Lazare, Arrival of a Train*, 1877, oil on canvas, 62 × 70 cm, private collection.

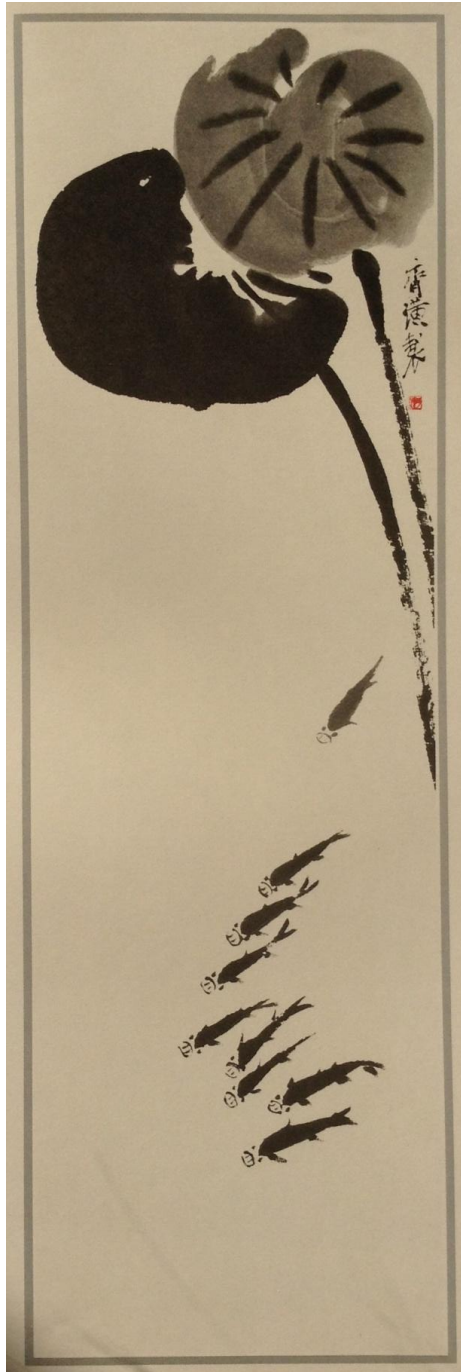


Plate 13 Baishi Qi, *Lotus Leaves and Little Fish*, 1930s, ink on paper, 109.3 × 33.4 cm, *Likeness and Unlikeness: Selected Painting of Qi Baishi*.

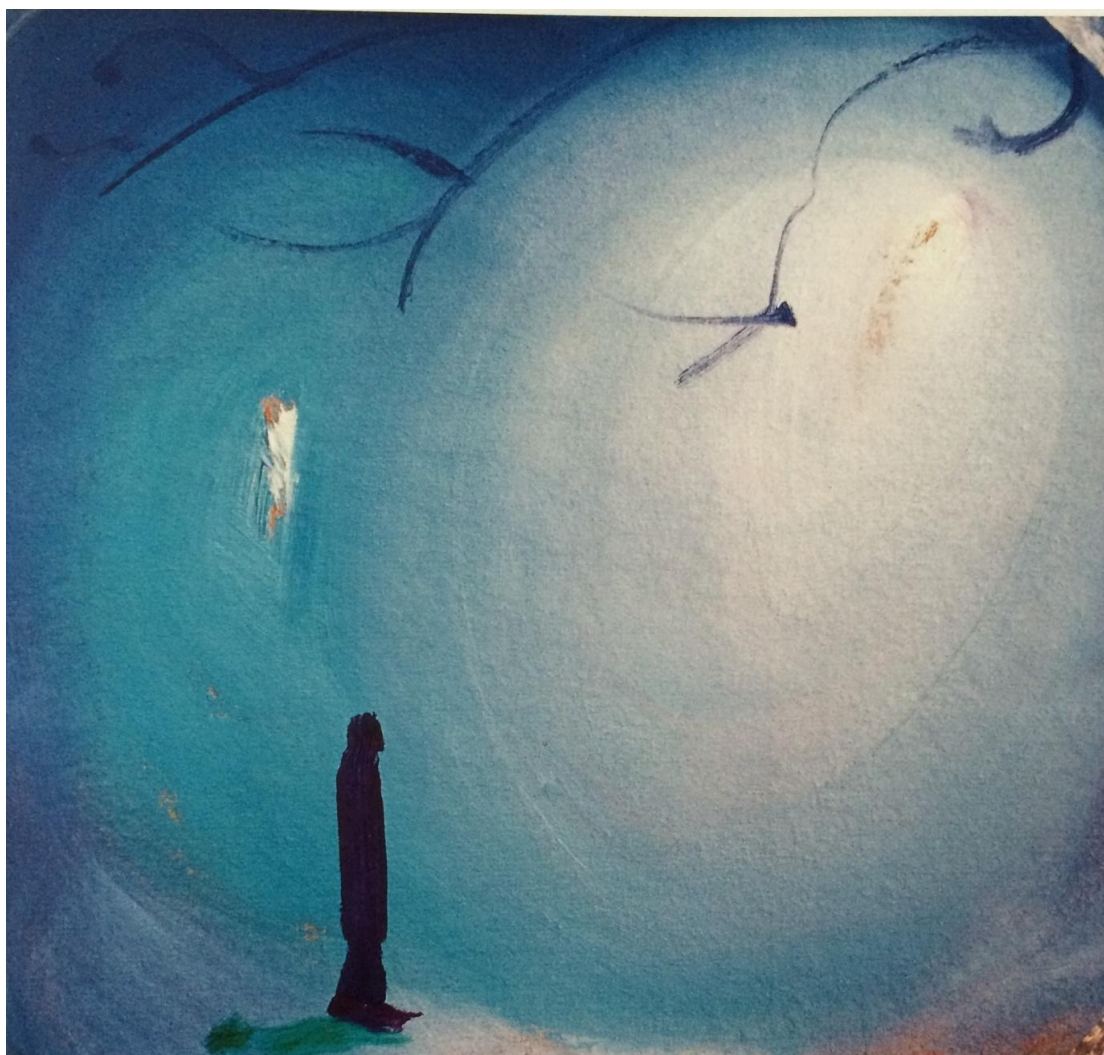


Plate 14 Wenliang Zhao, *Winter Dream*, 1976, oil on canvas, 18 × 19 cm, artist's collection.



Plate 15 Ma Kelu, *Riverside*, 1974, oil on paper, 19 × 26 cm, artist's collection.



Plate 16 Zhang Wei, *Loader*, 1976, oil on canvas, 100 × 130 cm, private collection.