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Cover illustration  Pan Tianshou 潘天寿, Sleeping Cat 睡猫图轴, ink and colour on paper (1954), 87 x 76.2 cm (collection of the China Art Gallery, Hangzhou)
TRADITION AND MODERNITY: THE LIFE AND ART OF PAN TIANSHOU (1897–1971)

Claire Roberts

If tradition cannot pave the way for future artistic possibilities, then it is a dead tradition.¹

Introduction

In this article I propose to explore aspects of the development of guohua or “national painting” in twentieth-century China through a case study of the artist Pan Tianshou. Pan Tianshou was a leading exponent of guohua. He specialised in bird-and-flower (huaniao hua) and landscape painting (shanshui hua) and was also an influential art educationalist. Within the context of Chinese art history his paintings are usually considered in relation to the wenren hua or “literati” art lineage and in particular to the work of the late-Ming early-Qing individualist artists Shitao (1642–c.1707) and Bada Shanren (1626–after 1705), Gao Qipei (1660–1734), the so-called Yangzhou Eccentrics (Yangzhou baguai) and artists of the later Shanghai School of Painting (Shanghaipai), notably Wu Changshi (1844–1927). But Pan Tianshou was very much a product of his time. Born in rural Zhejiang in the late Qing dynasty he developed a strong affinity with brush and ink painting from an early age. Unlike previous generations of brush and ink painters, however, he studied art, and later taught art, in educational institutions which were modelled on Japanese and European academies. Pan Tianshou is an interesting transitional figure. His life straddled a period of great cultural and political change during which major shifts occurred in the meaning of art and art making. His working life, spent mainly in Shanghai and Hangzhou, spans the Republican, warlord and Communist periods and

¹ Pan Tianshou, “Tingtiange huatan suibi” (Tingtian Pavilion essays on painting), in Pan Tianshou meishu wenji (Pan Tianshou’s collected writings on art) (Beijing: Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 1983), p.12.

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as such offers an interesting perspective on the evolution of brush-and-ink painting in the twentieth century.

But first it is necessary to articulate what is understood by the term *guohua* and look at the relationship between *guohua and wenren hua*. *Guohua*, an abbreviation of the term *Zhongguo hua* 中国画 or Chinese national painting, generally refers to artworks executed in the twentieth century with a brush (*maobu* 毛笔) and ink (*mo* 墨) on paper (*xuanzhi* 宣纸) or silk (*juan* 绢). These paintings are usually executed in a style that represents a continuation of the artistic ideal of scholar–amateur artists active in the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Traditionally the early training of a brush-and-ink painter involved the mastery of a complex language of codified brush-strokes, which had been developed by historical masters to depict a limited range of traditional subjects, significant for the larger moral and philosophical ideals to which they alluded. Artists were regarded as custodians of a tradition that had been perfected over centuries. In creating a painting an artist was giving expression to his moral and cultural refinement and a poetic sensibility which allied him to the cultural élite of China.

The term *guohua* came into use in the early twentieth century at a time when many Chinese intellectuals had lost faith in the traditional social, political and cultural systems and sought to embrace that which was foreign and therefore perceived as modern. Art was an important element of the cultural agenda and many felt that Western-inspired realism was better equipped than brush-and-ink painting to express the changes that were occurring in contemporary society. In searching for ways in which to invigorate artistic practice artists travelled abroad to learn new techniques and to actively participate in social and cultural change.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 Japan had achieved great success at industrialisation and modernisation. Japan was closer, and in many ways more accessible, than most Western countries, and was therefore a popular destination for large numbers of Chinese students. During the early 1900s many Japanese artists working in brush and ink (producing *Nibonga* 日本画: Japanese painting or Japanese-style painting) embraced concepts of Western realism. This new, modernised style of *Nibonga* painting was distinct from Western-style painting which was referred to as *yoga* 洋画.

The southern Chinese artists Gao Jianfu 高剑父 and Gao Qifeng 高其峰, both of whom had studied in Japan, were deeply influenced by the new *Nibonga* painting. In 1912 they established the *True Record Illustrated Magazine* (Zhenxiang huabao 真相画报) which was a vehicle for the promotion of what they termed New National Painting or *xinguohua* 新国画. For the Gaos, *xinguohua* was to offer a conceptual and ideological solution to the problem of reconciling an ancient art tradition with a modernising world which was more in need of a mass-orientated rather than an élite
artistic practice. The Gaos’ vision for art, expounded through their concept of xinguo, paralleled contemporary intellectual debates in China relating to nationhood and language reform. At around this time Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 and Hu Shi 胡适 advocated the vernacular as a national language, or guoyu 国语, to replace classical Chinese in literature, which would have the effect of making literacy and education more accessible to the majority of the population. Interestingly, by the early- to mid-1900s the terms guoyu and guohua, both of which derived from Japan, took on intense nationalistic and patriotic connotations. National language (guoyu) and national painting (guohua) offered a means by which Chinese nationals could define and defend themselves against the incursions of foreign powers, including Japan.

Pan Tianshou's life coincided with an epoch that presented the greatest challenge to traditional Chinese customs, institutions and practices. Whilst many of his artistic contemporaries experimented with new and foreign artistic media and alternative ways of conceiving the world, Pan Tianshou maintained a primary interest in the regenerative potential of Chinese culture and of guohua in particular. Throughout his lifetime Pan Tianshou promoted guohua with an unwavering belief. According to him, brush-and-ink painting did not have to be synonymous with archaism or a backward-looking attitude. The challenge for twentieth-century artists was how to make guohua relevant to changing social, cultural and political circumstances. Implicit in Pan Tianshou's understanding of guohua was a belief in its ability to transcend a particular period. The question was how to adapt traditional theory and practice to the modern Chinese world and produce art that gained strength from the past and provided a clear pathway to the future.

Pan Tianshou's commitment to guohua, however, must be understood within the context of his generation and early twentieth-century cultural politics. Despite promoting what is often interpreted by Chinese art historians as a conservative view of the future of Chinese art, Pan was not unfamiliar with Western art. As an undergraduate he had studied Western drawing under Li Shutong 李叔同 (1881–1942), one of the first Chinese artists to train in Japan, and after graduation he went on to teach guohua at some of the leading art institutions involved in the introduction of Western art to China. In his book A History of Chinese Painting (Zhongguo huihua shi 中国绘画史), published in 1926, Pan included an appendix on the impact of foreign art on China from the time of the Qin Shihuang Emperor 秦始皇帝 (third century BC) to the early twentieth century. He maintained that there were two distinct streams of art—Eastern and Western—which were fundamentally different. In conclusion he wrote:

If you only flaunt the assimilation of Eastern and Western art as new and modern, or if you believe that Western art with a touch of the East, or Eastern art with a touch of the West, is something to be proud of, then it should be noted that such tendencies are enough to damage the unique characteristics of both … ⁴
Pan Tianshou’s life: a brief history

Pan Tianshou was born in Ninghai 宁海 prefecture, Zhejiang province in 1897 into what was by rural standards a well-educated and cultured family. His father, Pan Bingzhang 潘秉璋, had attained the degree of xiucai 秀才 in the civil service examination and his mother’s father, that of juren 举人. Pan Bingzhang was one of the few educated people in the area and held the position of village elder for many years. He was skilled with the brush and is reputed to have been a fine calligrapher.

As a young boy Pan developed a keen interest in painting and calligraphy and learnt the fundamentals of painting by copying from the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (Jieziyuan huazhuan 芥子园画传). In 1915 he passed the competitive entrance examination to the Zhejiang First Normal College in Hangzhou (Zhejiang diyi shifan xuexiao 浙江第一师范学校), one of the strongest provincial arts institutions. The principal of the college was Jing Hengyi 金亨颐 (1877–1938), a graduate of Tokyo High Normal School (Tōkyō kōtō shihan gakko 東京高等師範学校). Jing Hengyi was an important art educationalist who had implemented many of the educational reforms advocated by the Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), who became a leading figure of the New Culture Movement of 1917 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Art education was a key platform of educational policy during the early Republican period and was understood to have the potential of enhancing moral and cognitive development and thereby promoting the advancement of students and ultimately the Chinese nation. In fulfillment of this policy it was compulsory for college students to pass drawing and painting (tuhua 图画), handicrafts and music in order to graduate. In addition to these courses Pan studied education as well as a broad range of humanities and science subjects. Pan was taught art and music by Li Shutong who had studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tōkyō Nihon geijutsu gakkō 東京日本美術学校) in Japan in the early 1900s. Influenced by his Japanese experience, Li Shutong was the first teacher to introduce life drawing and drawing from nature into the Chinese art curriculum.\(^6\)

In addition to being well versed in Western-style drawing, painting, graphic arts, music and theatre, Li Shutong was also a fine poet, seal carver and calligrapher. While teaching at the college he established a number of student societies including the Western Painting Society (Yanghua hui 洋画会), the Singing and Performance Group (Yanchang zu 演唱组), and the Delight in Stone [Seal-Carving] Society (Leshi she 乐石社) of which Pan was a member. Li was well grounded in both Chinese and Western art practices. In many ways his life symbolised the struggle that was taking place within society between those advocating the preservation of important traditions and those insisting upon change. In 1917 he resigned from the college and the following year became a Buddhist monk, adopting the name Hongyi 弘一.
As a teacher, Li Shutong seems to have had a profound affect on many of his students. Those who were influenced by his teachings include Lü Fengzi (1885-1959), Feng Zikai (1898-1975) and Pan Tianshou. On one particular occasion Pan Tianshou visited Li Shutong at Hu Pao Monastery on the outskirts of Hangzhou and discussed Buddhism and the idea of becoming a monk. Whilst Pan did not become a monk, a distinct interest in Buddhism is discernible in his art. From the 1920s until 1949 Buddhist-inspired subjects were common in his paintings; for example: *Bald-Headed Monk* (1922) (Figure 2), *Monk Reading the Scriptures* (1948) and a number of works depicting mendicants all entitled *Begging for Alms* (dating from 1924, 1929 and 1948). Buddhist subjects were also part of the traditional artistic repertoire of the scholar–amateur painter for whom the spontaneity of expression implicit in Chan Buddhism was held in high regard. In the period from the 1930s to the 1950s Pan used a variety of literary names or *hao*, many of which had Buddhist connotations, including "Abbot of Xin Ah Temple", "Bald-Headed Old Man", "Abbot of Xin Ah Temple", and "Lazy Venerable". References to Buddhism also appear in his seal carvings, for example "One-finger Chan", "Abbot of Xin Ah Temple," and "Finger of Chan" According to his son Pan Gongkai, Pan Tianshou considered becoming a monk at some time in his middle years, most probably during his thirties. Indicative, perhaps, of Pan’s sympathy with Buddhist doctrine is the couplet written by Li Shutong that still hangs in the artist’s studio (now part of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum):

Buddhist monastic discipline is the supreme fundamental of Bodhi. Buddhism is the beacon of all wisdom.

After graduation Pan returned to Ninghai and taught at the Zhengxue Primary School before being transferred to Xiaofeng (hometown of the Shanghai School artist Wu Changshi) in Anji prefecture.

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**Figure 2**

Pan Tianshou, *Bald-Headed Monk* (1922), ink and colour on shengxuan paper, 94.8 x 172 cm (collection of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum)
ure north-west of Hangzhou. In Xiaofeng he taught language, literature and art (tubua——drawing and painting). From a creative point of view these years were extremely productive. In 1922 Pan Tianshou and the calligrapher Shen Suizhen 沈遂贞 held an exhibition at the school. According to Li Dazhen 李大震, the majority of his works were large-scale finger paintings of pine trees, plum blossom, egrets, immortals, Buddha and mendicants—some on twelve-foot lengths of paper.8

The following year Pan moved to Shanghai and during the period 1923–28 taught at a succession of art schools that were at the forefront of artistic and educational practice. These included the Women’s Industrial Art School (Shanghai minguo nüzi gongyi xuexiao 上海民国女子工艺学校), the Shanghai College of Fine Arts (Shanghai meishu zhuanmen xuexiao 上海美术专门学效), a private art school operated by artist Liu Haisu 刘海栗, and the Xinhua Art College (Xinhua yishu zhanlan huaxue 教华艺术专科学校). Shanghai was the international financial and commercial capital of China and a centre of intellectual vigour and artistic experimentation. It was a leading centre for the teaching of modern Western art and it was here that the creative revival of Chinese brush-and-ink painting primarily took place.

During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century Shanghai artists had embraced the reform and modernisation of Chinese ink painting with significant creative results. Artists such as Ren Xiong 任熊 (1823–57), Ren Yi 任颐 (1840–95), Xu Gu 虚谷 (1823–96), Zhao Zhiqian 赵之谦 (1829–84) and Wu Changshı́ 胡丘山 in particular stretched the boundaries of brush-and-ink painting allowing influences from the international commercial capital to reform their artistic practice. Some of them explored technical aspects of Western art, while others explored an interest in calligraphy and epigraphy, everyday life, and vernacular or folk art. Responding perhaps to the more popular tastes of the mercantile capital, strong colour was re-introduced to painting which heightened both the realism and the decorative appeal of works. The results of their experiments differed markedly, but what is significant is the way in which their artistic practice was informed, sometimes in quite subtle ways, by the growing modern, urban metropolis of which they were a part.9

While in Shanghai Pan had close contact with artists who were actively involved in the creative development of brush-and-ink painting, including the renowned flower (huabai 花卉) painter Wu Changshı́. Pan was one of many artists who frequented Wu’s house to talk about painting and seek artistic guidance. A number of Pan’s works that date from the late 1920s display characteristics of Wu Changshı́’s style, notably rounded, calligraphic brushstrokes and compositions that combine a diagonal thrust with a long, vertical inscription. Unlike many of Wu Changshı́’s students, however, Pan did not forgo his own artistic conception. In Crimson Robe (1928) (Figure 3), a hanging rock protrudes from the top section of the painting and appears to be suspended between two spindly stands of crimson bamboo. Its fall into the viewer’s space appears imminent. The lower inscription reads:

8 Li Dazhen, “Pan Tianshou xiansheng zai Anji” [Pan Tianshou in Anji], Nanhu, 1981.3: 64–5. Pan Tianshou was introduced to finger painting as a young boy in Ninghai. Yan Yuanyuan was a local exponent of finger painting and appears to have been something of a mentor. See Xu Hong, Pan Tianshou zhuo, p.56.


10 “Shu quan fei ri” 蜀犬吠日—literally “Because it is such a rare sight in that misty region, Sichuan dogs bark at the sun.” This is an idiom that refers to an ignorant person making a fuss about something that he or she alone finds strange. Jonathan Hay has suggested that the dogs from Sichuan may be a reference to the artist Zhang Daqian and his brother.


14 On 23 March 1928, the occasion of the official opening of the National Art Academy there were approximately thirty teaching staff and approximately seventy students. During the early period of the academy the primary teaching staff were as follows: Lin Fengmian (director), Lin Wenzheng 薛,
I know nothing of painting
Hence I dare to paint as I please
One could say that this is a painting
Or that it is not.
I am not like the dogs from Sichuan
I do not make rash criticisms of others' work.
This is the version given by the Lazy Mendicant Monk.

Pan plays upon apparent awkwardness and a lack of technical accomplishment, a quality that was traditionally prized by scholar-amateur artists. Both the image and the colophon reinforce his intent to pursue an individual style.

Pan's artistic endeavours were further developed through the activities of the Baishe 白社, a painting society established in 1932 by Pan Tianshou and four artist friends Zhu Wenyun 朱文韵 (1894–1938), Wu Fuzhi 吴茀之 (1900–1977), Zhang Zhenduo 张振铎 (1906–93), and Zhang Shuqi 张书旗 (1899–1974). The society was formed to promote the development of brush-and-ink painting and continue the innovative artistic spirit of the Qing-dynasty individualist artists from Yangzhou. In a review of their exhibition published in 1933 the critic Li Binquan 李宾泉 said:

their works embody things that are of vital importance to the future of Chinese painting (Zhongguo hua). This is because their paintings are works of art and have not been painted with the sole purpose of being sold. Of greater significance however is their relationship to the future of Chinese painting. Quite apart from the view that there has to be a break (zheshuai 折衰) with tradition, here we see them posing the question as to whether Chinese painting can forge a new path for itself.

Between 1933 and 1936 Pan also participated in a number of large survey exhibitions. He contributed work to the 1933 Paris exhibition of Chinese art organised by Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (1895–1953) and to the Yifeng Society 艺风社 exhibitions held in Shanghai, Nanjing and Guangzhou in 1934, 1935 and 1936, respectively. Pan Tianshou was also one of the organisers of the National Art Exhibition held in Nanjing in 1937.

In parallel with these artistic activities, Pan Tianshou continued to develop his career as an art educationalist. In 1928, when the National Art Academy (Guoli yishu yuan 国立艺术院) was established in Hangzhou, Pan was appointed head of the Chinese painting department. This appointment marked the beginning of an association that was to last the rest of his life. The Hangzhou art school was modelled on a French academy and the noted artist Lin Fengmian 林风眠 (1900–91), who had studied art in France, was appointed Director. There were departments of Western painting, guohua, sculpture and design. The department of Western painting was by far the largest. Most of the staff had studied in either France or Japan and there were a number of overseas professors.

The main focus of the Academy was to promote art that took its impetus from the West. Chinese brush-and-ink painting was to be re-evaluated and exposed to change. Accordingly, in 1929, one year after the establishment of the Academy, the department of Chinese painting was amalgamated with the
department of Western painting to create a general department of painting (huibua xi 绘画系). This was in line with the Academy's aims, which were "... the introduction of Western art, the reorganisation of Chinese art, the synthesis of Chinese and Western art and the creation of an art for this epoch." It was felt that a common department would spawn a more socially relevant art. According to Director Lin Fengmian, the new art was to be individual, nationalistic and imbued with the spirit of the age. The departments did not separate again until 1939.

With the outbreak of war in 1937 and the Japanese bombing of the Hangzhou environs, the Ministry of Education ordered all schools to move inland. Staff and students of the Academy moved to Zhejiang province and from there to Guixi in southern Zhejiang province and further inland to Chongqing. Later that year the bombing of Changsha caused the school to move to north-western Hunan. In March 1938, as a result of wartime conditions, the Hangzhou and Peking art academies were amalgamated and renamed the National Art Training School (Guoli yishu zhananke xuexiao 国立艺术专科学校). Later that year Wuhan fell to the Japanese and the school was once again forced to move inland. The westward trek took staff and students through Guiyang and then on to Chongqing.

For Pan Tianshou the years 1937 to the early 1940s were spent on the move, travelling vast distances in order to meet the commitments and the needs of work and family respectively. In 1942 he moved to Jianyang 建阳 in Fujian to take up the position of Professor of Art at the Eastern China United University (Huadong lianhe daxue 华东联合大学) and Jinan University (Jinan daxue 济南大学). The following year the Eastern China United University (Huadong lianhe daxue 华东联合大学) amalgamated with the Yingshi University (Yingshi daxue 英士大学) and relocated to Yunhe 云和 in Zhejiang Province. Pan taught there for one year before being offered the directorship of the National Art Training School in Chongqing. After the defeat of Japan in 1945 Pan Tianshou returned to Hangzhou and made preparations for the reinstatement of staff and students. The directorship was a post that he occupied for a short time only; factional politics led to his resignation in 1947, when he decided to concentrate on teaching and painting.

At the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 Pan Tianshou was fifty-three. His artistic style was already mature. From a survey of the paintings that he created during the period 1948–66 it is possible to see him working in a number of different ways. For ease of discussion these works can be divided into two broad groupings: those that represent a continuation of his early artistic concerns which draw heavily on traditional artistic and philosophical principles, but which must also be considered against the backdrop of his own education and life experience, and those that reflect more directly a variety of responses to official Communist Party artistic policy and which can be viewed as a form of State art. Both types of painting were executed simultaneously, but for reasons of clarity they will be discussed separately and within appropriate contexts.
Pan Tianshou: art and tradition

In his writings on art Pan Tianshou, like so many brush-and-ink artists before him, refers to the formative role that the literati tradition exerted on his style, to the work of past masters, to traditional aesthetics and to Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist concepts. He emphasises the pre-eminence of the dicta of past masters and of nature, the virtue of passivity as a creative state and the determining influence of character on art. Pan Tianshou was inspired by the painting of Qing-dynasty individualist artists Bada Shanren, Shitao, the Yangzhou Eccentrics and Gao Qipei in particular. In inscriptions on paintings he often made reference to these masters, indicating a deferential reverence to them and a desire to be seen to be inheriting or continuing aspects of their art. By linking himself to the ancient and recent art-historical past he cast himself as being in the lineage of traditional Chinese art which connected the early twentieth century to antiquity.18

When studying the work of a particular artist Pan Tianshou advocated copying paintings in order to master the technique and enter into the artist’s mental world. But he also stressed how important it was to maintain a degree of dissimilarity and have the strength to take leave of the model so as to avoid being trapped in another artist’s shadow.19

Pan was influenced, for example, by the way in which Shitao often abandoned the traditional majestic view of nature, which incorporated near, middle and far distances, and focussed on a small detail of the landscape. The inscription on a landscape handroll by Shitao dated 1685 reads:

... When the mind breaks away completely from the restricting framework of established conventions and methods of painting, one’s painting will naturally be like an immortal gliding in the wind [i.e. imbued with a free, untrammelled spirit] ...20

Inspired by the paintings of Shitao, Pan collapsed the traditional genres of landscape (shan-shui hua) and bird-and-flower painting

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18 Pan Tianshou, Pan Tianshou meishu wenji, pp.4–9.
19 Su Dongtian, Pan Tianshou yishu daolu chutan [A preliminary examination of the artistic path of Pan Tianshou], unpublished manuscript, p.25. The source for the reference is cited as a conversation with the artist in Spring, 1964.
Shitao, Qingxiang Sketches, handscroll (detail), ink on paper

(buansiao hua) into one and in this way he instilled a sense of the majestic into bird-and-flower painting and imbued landscape painting with a sense of intimacy. A good example is Pan’s Night Mooring at Jiangzhou (the 1935 composition was reworked in 1953 and 1954) (Figures 4 and 5) which appears to have been inspired by a section of Shitao’s Qingxiang Sketches handscroll (Figure 6). In this work the viewer is denied the long, winding, zig-zag path into the distance, or along the horizontal plane, which is so typical of many earlier landscape paintings. Instead one is encouraged to explore the surface of the painting through the bold, close-up rendition of a landscape scene.

Pan Tianshou admired the “magnificence of danger” (xianjue 险绝), a quality that he found in Shitao’s painting but that was lacking in much contemporary Chinese art. In an inscription he wrote:

Calligraphers often feel that the magnificence of danger is strange or wonderous (qi 奇). Painters also think this way. Only Yan Lugong and Shitao have understood and attained this principle. Today most people are deceived by Zhao Wuxing and Wang Yushan and avoid that which is strange or wondrous.

Pan sought to revive the aesthetic of xianjue and curb what he perceived as the proliferation of imitative, orthodox brush techniques. The realisation of this aesthetic was a guiding force in his painting and is particularly evident in his structuring of pictorial space and his brushwork. A major compositional principle developed by Pan Tianshou that derived from this aesthetic has been described by Wu Fuzhi as “creating danger and annulling danger”.

Pan Tianshou, The Almighty Gaze (1), finger painting, ink and colour on shengxuan paper (not dated), 347.3 x 143 cm (collection of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum)
“Creating danger” referred to Pan Tianshou’s daring use of pictorial space and the creation of pictorial imbalance. “Annulling danger” was the process of modifying the original composition and restoring harmony. Whilst the final result was balanced and harmonious, it resonated with the initial daring conception (Figures 7 and 8).23

The dangerous and the fantastic are qualities that were also present in the paintings of Bada Shanren.24 Of particular interest to Pan were the bizarre rock motifs on which mynas, eagles, fish or cats perched (Figure 9). The positioning of the rock form within the pictorial field created a state of imbalance, and only after the strategic placement of additional elements was the composition re-aligned. Pan reworked his own version of Bada Shanren’s rock composition innumerable times throughout his artistic life. A large rock form appeared as early as 1932 in the landscape painting Fort at the Mouth of the River Yong (Figure 10) and was developed more fully in his bird-and-flower works of 1948. It remained a major pictorial concern throughout the 1950s and 1960s and took on many guises in the course of its evolution.

Pan Tianshou also admired Bada Shanren’s ability to convey a feeling of age, patina and resilience (guwei canggu 古味苍古) through his brushwork. This was not an archaistic tendency, rather an appreciation of that which was strong and enduring. It was an aesthetic that recognised beauty in things that had struggled to survive. It was beauty associated with age, experience, tradition, strength and an indomitable spirit. It was not new, pretty or crafted. An inscription on Landscape in Jet Ink (1953) (Figure 11) helps explain his affinity with Bada Shanren’s art:

In an inscription on a painting of pine trees and rocks executed in jet ink Bada Shanren wrote: “This is a painting of the sky clearing after snowfall.” By chance I paint a landscape today. Coldness and white punctuate the mountains and trees. It is as if it were an accumulation of ancient snow. I can use Bada’s inscription on this painting—but the vision and content are completely different. With painting one ought to seek...
similarly within difference, and variation and unity in the juxtaposition of black and white. Bada Shanren knew this long ago.\(^{25}\)

Encouraged by a local Ninghai exponent, Yan Yuanxuan 引远轩, Pan Tianshou practised finger painting from an early age.\(^{26}\) Finger painting may be viewed as a technical extension of the aesthetic of the fantastic, and for Pan Tianshou it constituted part of his search for an individual style. It embodied the natural as well as the fantastic. In finger painting the intermediary of the brush is discarded, ensuring a direct link between the artist and the process of creation. Unlike a brush, the finger is stiff and non-absorbent and the strokes it produces are short, jerky and relatively unpredictable. Through finger painting Pan Tianshou could express roughness, strength, and an uncouth or abrasive quality which were natural extensions of his aesthetic. 

Whilst finger painting was not a mainstream or conventional artistic practice, its status had been elevated by the Qing-dynasty individualist Gao Qipei, and it became the primary technique used by Pan Tianshou in his later years (Figures 12 and 13).

One of Pan Tianshou's seals is inscribed with the characters  

不雕—not carved—which speaks of an aesthetic found in his finger paintings.  

Bu diao is derived from Daoist thought—the uncarved block that has not been shaped by the hands of man. Its beauty lies in its simple and unrefined state; it is natural and therefore it is strong. The absence of brush marks lessened the artificiality of the creative process and enhanced the natural quality of painting. Pan believed that the ability to paint with the finger aided brush painting. His reason for practising both was

in order to learn the difference in method between the two techniques. The difference between brush and finger is mutually reinforcing. To use the brush is traditional and to use the finger is innovative. One seeks innovation within tradition in order to realise tradition and tradition in innovation in order to realise innovation.\(^{27}\)

Pan posited that finger painting was not possible without a strong grounding in brush technique and that the knowledge of the latter would strengthen the former.\(^{28}\) Tradition was thus viewed as an integral part of innovation and innovation derived sustenance from, but was not restricted by, tradition.

Like Chinese artists of earlier epochs, Pan Tianshou understood his works to be an expression of character. Strength was an important quality in his finger painting, brush-and-ink painting and in his choice of subject matter, and implicit in it was the concept of moral rectitude. Pan's son Pan Gongkai has borrowed the term feng gu 風骨, literally “wind and bone”—an allusion to the incorruptibility of an upright person, from traditional Chinese literary theory, to explain this quality. Applied to art, he explains feng gu as the exteriorisation of the artist's upright character and noble will. It can, he says, be likened to the union of Xie He’s 謝赫 (c.500) first and second canons of painting: qi yun sheng dong 氣韻生動 and gufa yong bi 骨法用筆—resonance and life movement, and bone manner, use of the brush.\(^{29}\) It is, he says, in essence a complex quality that emanates from the artist. Feng gu
connotes an interest in “bone vitality” or *gu qi* 骨气. It refers to strength conveyed through brushwork and implies the existence of a corresponding quality in the artist. The presence of “bone” or *gu* 骨 refers to the presence of strength. In his writings Pan Tianshou refers to brushstrokes as the framework or structure of Chinese painting. Pan maintained that bones must have bone vitality and that he who has bone vitality has strength of character. It was through bone vitality that the essential living quality of the motif was expressed. Two seals frequently used by Pan carry the words “Strengthen the Bone” (qiăng qi gu 強其骨). Pan Gongkai explains:

Bone means muscle and bone, bone strength, bone vitality. Father carved the characters “Strengthen the Bone” on a seal to indicate the Way of painting and the Way of conduct. This was a profound reflection of his character and his thought.  

In discussing his father’s paintings, Pan Gongkai talks of them as having been “constructed.” He chooses an architectural term because he feels it best describes Pan Tianshou’s approach to composition. “Construction” implies a physical interaction of parts which, when assembled, form a solid entity. The word highlights not only the relationship of parts to the whole, but also

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**Figure 12**

*Pan Tianshou, Vultures from the Distant Sea 穷海秃鹫图轴, finger painting, ink on paper (1932) (no longer extant)*

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**Figure 13**

*Pan Tianshou, Ink Chicken on a Large Rock 磐石墨鸡图轴, finger painting, ink and colour on doujiang paper 豆浆纸 (1948), 68 x 136.5 cm (collection of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum)*

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28 Ibid., p.39.
29 Pan Gongkai, “Gao feng jun gu jian jingshen—tantan wo fuqin Pan Tianshou yishu fenggede yige jiben tezheng” [Strength of character—a discussion of a fundamental characteristic of my father Pan Tianshou’s artistic style], Yingchunhua, 1981.4: 5.
30 Pan Tianshou, “Tingtiange huatan suibi,” p.18.
31 Zhu Jinlou, “Lun Pan Tianshoude yishu” [A discussion of Pan Tianshou’s Art], Xin Meishu, 1981.1: 19; Pan Gongkai, “Qiang qi gu—Cong fuqin Pan Tianshou yinzhang shuo chi” [Strengthen the bone—comments inspired by my father’s seals].
the physicality of the process. Elsewhere Pan Gongkai talks of a “welding of parts” that produces a feeling of stability and wholeness. Other writers such as Liu Jiang 刘江 liken “reading” one of Pan’s paintings to listening to an orchestra, while Wu Guanzhong 吴冠中 compares his paintings to defence strategies, noting that the crucial element in both is the deployment of forces within the field to achieve victory.

In his essays Pan Tianshou, like many other previous writers on art, often expressed his ideas in terms of dualisms—implying that the resolution of opposites creates a harmonious whole. For example, when talking about the solid he would note the importance of the void, and when referring to balance he stated that first one must strive for imbalance and only then for balance. Skilled brushwork, he said, was useless unless it was practiced with a skilled use of ink: a dry brush stroke must not be without the resonance of a wet stroke, nor a wet stroke without the vitality of a dry stroke. Thus by modifying an element within a painting through an awareness of its inverse, a sense of animated harmony could be achieved. This concept is well expressed by an analogy of Pan’s own:

Seal carvers call composition the articulation of areas of red and white. Crucial to the arrangement of characters on the face of a seal is the resolution of space. Painting is the same. Laozi’s 老子 saying “Be aware of the black and the white” is just this.

On a formal level Pan Tianshou viewed painting as the articulation of positive and negative space. Painting was as much about the articulation of the void as it was about the description of solid forms. It was an activity that involved the positioning of “live” parts that have no single or fixed position. The pictorial field had the potential to be in constant flux and when an equilibrium was reached the resultant painting was only one of countless possible permutations. Pan Tianshou’s paintings are structured entities. The relationship of parts to the whole and the interaction of elements to produce a harmonious configuration are central to his art.

In many of Pan Tianshou’s paintings the placement of pictorial elements is informed by the traditional compositional principle of kaihe 开合. Pan Tianshou explains that the principle of kaihe in painting is similar to the role of an introduction and conclusion in writing. Kaihe comprises four stages; the opening (kai 开), continuation (cheng 承), turning (zhuan 转) and conclusion (he 合). Kai is the opening of the flow of energy, cheng meets qi and continues its path, zhuan is the counter-thrust that follows cheng, and finally energy is drawn together and concluded with he.

In Sleeping Cat (1954) (Figure 14) a flower and a tuft

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Figure 14

Pan Tianshou, Sleeping Cat 睡猫图轴, ink and colour on paper (1954), 87 x 76.2 cm (collection of the China Art Gallery)
of grass lead the viewer’s eye into the painting and on a carefully chartered path. The placement of pictorial elements including the rock (dominant solid or *da sī* 大实), sleeping cat and colophon trace a circular flow of energy which creates a rhythm and coherence that may be attributed to the principle of *kaihe*. The brilliant white in the coat of the cat is the focus of the painting even though it has been pushed to the periphery. The flower and tuft of grass counter-balance the cat, and similarly the seal in the lower left corner acts as a foil to the inscription opposite. Diagonal tensions are set up between the various pictorial elements and cancel out any discord. Whilst the composition relates closely to the dimensions of the paper, Pan avoids any feeling of claus­phobia. The painting is self-refer­ential in its composition, yet at the same time Pan is conscious of establishing a relationship with that outside the painting. By cropping the right side of the rock and flower the viewer is made to feel as though the image extends beyond the limits of the paper. Pan used the same compositional structure to articulate the dominant void, *da xū* 大虚, in *Vermilion Lotus* (1963) where the lotus and its leaves serve to describe a large central space (Figure 15).

In formal terms Pan Tianshou was concerned with exploring particular configurations of solid and void capable of harnessing the flow of energy within a painting. Once he arrived at a particular compositional type he would use and re-use it. Solid areas may be transformed into voids, or sparse areas become dense, depending on the needs of the composition. Despite changes in pictorial vocabulary, the structural principle of the composition remained the same. The essence lay in the matrix. Thus the dominant form in *Sleeping Cat* may be equated with the dominant void in *Vermilion Lotus* and the suggested form in *The Happiness of Fish* (Figure 16). Each element had the potential to transpose into its polar opposite. Within each composition Pan emphasised the mutual dependence of opposite but complementary states.

Pan Tianshou’s approach to composition, as indicated by his writings on art, was informed by tradition. Before he began to paint he faced a live, unblemished pictorial field—a whole. As soon as a mark was made on the paper the whole gave way and a tension was established between the positive mark and negative space. The value of the space was altered and the original sense of balance disappeared. In painting Pan Tianshou strove to
Since its establishment the Academy has had a number of name changes: 1928 Guoli yishu yuan国立艺术院, 1930 Guoli Hangzhou yishu zhuankan xueyao 国立杭州艺术专科学校; 1950 Zhongyang meishu xueyuan huadong fenyuan, 1958 Zhejiang meishu xueyuan 浙江美术学院. It is now called Zhongguo meishu xueyuan 中国美术学院.


Yong, “Mao Zedong wenyisixiang zongjie chuangzuo jiaoxue—Zhejiang meishu xueyuan jianguo yilai changzuo jiaoxuede jiben zongjie” [A summary of the teaching of creative practice according to Mao Zedong’s thoughts on literature and art—a basic summary of the teaching of creative practice at the Zhejiang Academy of Art in the years following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China], Xin meishu, 1982.2: 4.


It would appear that for Pan Tianshou guohua remained an act of artistic creation that, through a desire to achieve harmony and balance, linked the artist to the creative energy at the heart of the cosmos. Whilst Pan’s approach to composition was informed by tradition, one cannot help but feel that the impact of his study of and exposure to Western art and contemporary intellectual debates in his early years in Shanghai and Hangzhou also exerted a strong influence on the development of his art. This is most apparent in his highly formal approach to painting and his strong sense of the graphic power of the image, which was at once traditional and modern.

\[Pan Tianshou: art and politics\]

Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 the National Art Training School in Hangzhou was placed under military control. Soon afterwards it was brought under the centralised administration of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美术学院) in Peking and was renamed the East China Campus of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Zhongyang meishu xueyuan huadong fenyuan 中央美术学院华东分院 ). The Academy, with its previous emphasis on Western-inspired Modernist art and guohua, was forced to reform and the curriculum was radically changed so as to comply with Communist Party guidelines. Jiang Feng 江丰, who had been active in the Communist art movement in Yan’an, was despatched from Peking to assume the role of Vice-Director and Secretary of the Communist Party Committee, which put him in effective control. Under his direction the Chinese painting department was once again disbanded and replaced by a department of painting (huihua xi 绘画系). Brush-and-ink painting and oil painting were largely replaced by popular propaganda art directed at a mass audience and realistic figure painting was given pre-eminence. The new administration promoted Marxism and Mao Zedong thought and concomitantly art that derived from popular tradition and Soviet Socialist Realism. It was clear that the government planned to cultivate a new breed of artist who conformed to their ideal. Older artists such as Pan
Tianshou who practised landscape and bird-and-flower painting, which did not have a place in the new curriculum, were no longer required to teach.

The new artistic policy encouraged all artists to draw creative inspiration from everyday life (tiyan shenghuo 体验生活) and paint contemporary figure works. Jiang Feng instructed staff and students at the Academy to participate in mass activities that would transform their artistic ideology and inculcate in them an understanding of the need for the popularisation of art.\(^{40}\)

In early 1950 elderly professors including Pan Tianshou and Lin Fengmian, together with final year students, travelled to Yiqiao village 义桥乡 in Sandun District 三墩区 on the outskirts of Hangzhou. The purpose of the trip was to encourage thought reform among them, to broaden their experience of life, and to gather material for their creative practice.\(^{41}\)

In the following year, in response to a directive issued by the Ministry of Culture for staff and students to participate in the Land Reform movement, Pan Tianshou, along with other members of staff and students at the Academy, spent time in Wanbei 宛北, an extremely poor area in northern Anhui province. Those who went to Wanbei participated in work teams, labouring during the day and attending meetings at night. Pan's task was to explain to locals the recently promulgated Marriage Law and assist with accounts and the overhauling and consolidation of some small enterprises.\(^{42}\)

During the period 1950–52 Pan attempted to renovate his already mature style of painting to accord with the changed artistic climate. He produced a series of figural works depicting rural activities in response to the promotion of figurative art, realism, and New Year paintings. These included *The Enthusiastic Turning-in of Grain for Collective Use* 踊跃争缴农业税图 (1950) and *Literary and Art Workers Visit the Country and Learn from Farm Labourers* 文艺工作者访问贫雇农图 (1950).\(^{43}\) In these works he abandoned his bold freely-brushed style of painting and adopted the more precise traditional outlining technique baimiao 白描. This traditional method of “drawing” with a brush was promoted as the most appropriate guohua 国画 technique in the early years of the People's Republic, owing to its ability to articulate forms clearly and therefore appeal to a mass audience. Pan Tianshou’s attempts to render realistic events resulted in works that were laboured and constrained. The ironic inscription on *Bumper Harvest* (1952)—“Shou learning to paint” (Shou xue hua 寿学画)—hints at the difficulty he experienced in creating such paintings (Figure 17).\(^{44}\)

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\(^{42}\) Long after 1950, *The Enthusiastic Turning In of Grain for Collective Use* was regarded as an important representative work (dai-biaozuo 代表作) of the “early post-Liberation period” and was included in many art reference books. It was later acquired by the China National Gallery. See Lu Xin, *Pan Tianshou*, pp.264–5.

\(^{43}\) See Su Dongtian, *Pan Tianshou yishu daolu chutan*, p.47; Shen Zu’an, “Pan Tianshou de huahua chengjiu” [The artistic achievements of Pan Tianshou], in *Duo Yun*, 1981.2: 113.

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*Figure 17*

Pan Tianshou, *Bumper Harvest* 收获图, *ink* and *colour on yuanshu paper* 元书纸 (1952), 49.5 x 37.2 cm (collection of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum)
From 1952 there was an official shift in Communist Party goals from the popularisation of cultural works to improving the quality of those works. This policy shift influenced the re-establishment of the department of colour and ink painting at the Academy in 1955. Between 1953 and 1957 research into national art was also encouraged through the establishment of the Painting Research Centre (Huihua yanjiusuo) attached to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Peking, which later became known as the National Art Research Centre (Minzu meishu yanjiusuo). Pan was invited to participate in its activities. At around this time a National Art Research Office (Minzu meishu yanjiushi) was established at the Academy in Hangzhou under Pan’s direction. He and a number of colleagues including Huang Binhong and Wu Fuzhi obtained funds for the office to buy old Chinese paintings from collectors in Zhejiang and Jiangsu which would form the basis of a research collection for the Academy. Following the 1949 revolution, these works were regarded as bourgeois and in political terms they were worthless. However, through these acquisitions Pan Tianshou created a valuable asset for the Academy and contributed to the preservation of what he feared was an endangered heritage. It was also during this period that he published a monograph on the Jin-dynasty artist Gu Kaizhi (346-407) and conducted research for his Basic Knowledge Pertaining to the Brush (Maobide changshi). A book which was published posthumously.

During the period 1954–57 artists were encouraged to paint from nature and derive inspiration from personal experience. Sunday excursions were arranged for the older professors at the Academy to climb the mountains around the West Lake in Hangzhou including Yuhuangshan, Baoshi Mountains, and Wu Mountains. During this time Pan Tianshou created a number of works which were inspired by the local environment, including Meinü Peak (1954) (Figure 18), A Section of the River (1954), Mount Long (1956), and A Corner of Lingyan Gully (1955) (Figure 19). In each case controlled brushwork reveals a keen awareness of specific forms. Whilst these works were inspired by real places, they were not executed en plein air. Pan continued to employ the artistic license of a traditional artist, making use of traditional aesthetic conceptions and type forms.

A Corner of Lingyan Gully was executed following a trip to Mount Yandang with staff and students from the Academy. It was shown at the Third
Exhibition of the Beijing Chinese Painting Research Association in 1956 and was well received by official art critics. The painting represented a known place, was attractive to look at and could be understood within the context of Mao Zedong’s directives to “weed through the old to bring forth the new” (tuichenchuxin 推陈出新) and “make the past serve the present” (guweijin yong 古为今用). Pan utilised a close-up view and an approach to surface structuring that was common to bird-and-flower painting. But by focussing on a detail of the landscape the viewer was encouraged to marvel at the richness, diversity and beauty of the natural world. In this work Pan Tianshou consciously addressed the problem of how to reconcile his own style with new artistic demands. The focussed view of a tiny corner of the landscape united traditional genres of landscape and bird-and-flower painting. Brightly coloured flowers enclosed by controlled ink lines combined with forcefully articulated rocks to create a tightly constructed, optimistic and decorative image.

During the 1950s, the use of strong colour was encouraged as a way of making ink painting more realistic and popular. Unlike many of his contemporaries Pan Tianshou was wary of showy, superficial colour effects. He mixed ink with colour to dull its brilliance and facilitate its integration into the whole. In discussing colour he stated: “It is easy to make colour spectacular, but it is not easy to make it elegant. It is easy for ink to be elegant, but it is not easy for it to be popular. By matching colour with ink the difficulty of using colour is alleviated.” In A Corner of Lingyan Gully Pan’s use of strong, optimistic colour was an important factor in the warm reception given to this painting. Colour forms part of the structural fabric of the painting but it remained subordinate to the ink lines.

Pan Tianshou returned to Yandang Mountain on many occasions. A Record of Yandang Mountain Flowers (Figure 20), which was exhibited in the Inaugural Guohua Exhibition of the Zhejiang Provincial Artists’ Association in 1957, was purchased by the Hangzhou Hotel 杭州饭店. Thereafter Pan Tianshou painted two similar compositions which were acquired by the China Art Gallery 中国美术馆 and the Yandang Guest House 雁荡招待所. This painting was well received in part because the flowers that Pan Tianshou depicted were wild mountain flowers that did not form part of the literati painting canon. They were a new subject and one that had been ignored by earlier artists.
In early 1956 Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇, Vice-Chairman of the People’s Republic of China, and Zhou Yang 周扬, the Minister of Culture, issued a directive which indicated their strong support for national heritage projects and for the development of new art forms based on the old. They were aware that distinguished, senior guohua artists were unhappy with the way in which brush-and-ink painting had been sidelined in the early years of the People’s Republic. This preceded Mao Zedong’s launch of the Hundred Flowers campaign on 2 May 1956 which led to an official revival of interest in and support for guohua. During the campaign a lively debate ensued about whether or not it was appropriate for students of guohua to receive instruction in Western-style drawing. In concord with the policy of “letting a hundred flowers bloom” (baihua qifang 百花齐放), Pan Tianshou advocated the coexistence of a wide variety of styles, so long as the unique qualities of Chinese brush-and-ink painting were not diluted or endangered. He believed that “Eastern” and “Western” art could benefit from a cross-fertilisation of ideas, but there needed to be a period of level-headed research and experimentation before any real assimilation could take place. What he feared most was the indiscriminate amalgamation with Western art that would result in a loss of national identity for Chinese brush-and-ink painting.

In April 1956 an inquiry carried out at the Hangzhou Academy found that many senior artists were highly critical of Jiang Feng and the art educational model that he had introduced to the Academy. Jiang Feng became a major target for criticism during the Hundred Flowers campaign and an outpouring of public criticism ensued. Among other things he was accused of violating the party policy of uniting Communist and non-Communist intellectuals. Many older-generation guohua artists, including Pan Tianshou, were not Communist Party members.

In late 1957 Pan Tianshou published a scathing attack accusing Jiang Feng of plotting to bring about the eradication of guohua in the years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. He argued that the Communist Party’s arts policy was to take the national traditions of literature and art as its foundation and that guohua therefore had an important role to play. Growing official support for guohua and Pan Tianshou’s position resulted in the reinstatement of the Chinese painting department (Zhongguohua xi 中国画系) at the Academy along with the teaching of landscape and bird-and-flower painting, calligraphy, Chinese art theory, the composition of poetic colophons and seal carving. During the Anti-Rightist campaign of
1957 Jiang Feng was labelled the “number one rightist in the art world” and expelled from the Communist Party. Pan Tianshou was spared from criticism and in 1959 was appointed director of the Hangzhou Academy.

During the late 1950s and 1960s Pan Tianshou cleverly accommodated the political campaigns of the day by incorporating appropriate political references in inscriptions on his paintings. Unlike many other artists he chose not to record these references in an overtly pictorial manner. In this way he retained the integrity of his own art and demonstrated an interest in finding a sophisticated artistic solution to social, cultural and political change. A good example of this approach can be found in *Transporting Iron Ore by Sailboat* (1958) (Figure 21), a large work mounted in two sections, which was painted during the period of the Great Leap Forward. The work was executed after Pan Tianshou visited the construction site of a hydroelectric power station in the upper reaches of the Xin'an River. This was the first large facility of this nature that had been designed and constructed in China and as such attracted huge media attention. Instead of painting the construction site Pan Tianshou chose to record the landscape of the neighbouring Tongguan mine. The colophon on his painting refers to the productivity of the local mine. Were it not for the identification in the inscription the painting could depict almost any locale.

*Transporting Iron Ore by Sailboat* was conceived as a series of layers with the mountain cliff as backdrop. There is no depth of pictorial space, which remains ambiguous, heightened by the over-large pine tree that thrusts out from behind the rock. The effect is fantastic and imbalance is balanced through a careful positioning of pictorial elements. The “clenched fist” (derived from Shitao) and “L”-shaped rock forms in the lower left corner of the painting are stylised elements of Pan Tianshou’s pictorial vocabulary that find frequent expression in his work. The emphatic use of horizontal, vertical and diagonal line reveals an almost rhetorical interest in form. The major lines describe and re-describe the two dimensional nature of the paper. As such the work is as much about the art of painting as it is about transporting iron ore by sailboat.

The publication of Mao Zedong’s first collection of poems in 1957 provided a safe body of source material from which artists could draw artistic inspiration. By including a line of verse from one of Mao’s poems, a
work could be legitimated. *Chairman Mao’s Poem* (1959) (Figure 22) and *This Land So Rich in Beauty* 江山如此多娇图轴 (1959) are two such works produced by Pan Tianshou.

**Yingchou 应酬—Artists “Serve the People”**

In the decade and a half following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Pan Tianshou, like many of his contemporaries, received a variety of prestigious appointments at both provincial and national level. In return for official recognition artists were expected to offer their services to the state. Between 1958 and 1964 Pan Tianshou painted a large number of works in response to requests made of him by government officials, private individuals and institutions. These may be termed ‘yingchou’ or ‘payback works’. It is said that *The Stare* 凝视图轴 was painted for Mao Zedong’s summer retreat in a secluded grove on the outskirts of Hangzhou. Smaller, less significant works were painted for lesser individuals. According to Lu Xin 卢炘, Pan Tianshou’s biographer, it was not unusual for Pan to be visited by the provincial Party Secretary who came with a list of the names of party officials requesting artworks, most of whom would be unknown to Pan Tianshou. No money passed hands. In the culture of the time this was common practice. It was understood that the artists were merely fulfilling Mao’s directive to “serve the people.” Zhu Qi 朱琦, Secretary-General of the Zhejiang branch of the Artists’ Association, recalls that over the years he alone requested a few hundred works from Pan Tianshou.

Public works were also part of an artist’s duties. In 1962 Pan Tianshou and Gu Kunbo 郭坤伯 were approached by the Hangzhou Parks and Cultural Relics Bureau of Management to produce paintings to embellish pavilions in local parks and gardens. Pan worked on this project for two years. According to Liu Huiyi 刘辉已, who worked for the Hangzhou Parks and Cultural Relics Bureau of Management, three of Pan Tianshou’s paintings were hung in the upper section of the Pavilion of the “Still Lake Reflecting...”

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58 His official positions included: 1953, participant in the Second National Literature and Art Workers’ Congress; 1957, Vice Director, East China Campus of the Central Art Academy; 1958, Representative, First National People’s Congress, Honorary Fellow of the Art and Science Institute of the USSR; Director, Zhejiang Artists’ Society Preparatory Committee; 1959, Representative, Second National People’s Congress, Director, Zhejiang Art Academy; 1960, Standing Directorate, Chinese Artists’ Association; Vice President, National Artists’ Society; 1961, President, Zhejiang Provincial Artists’ Society; 1964, Representative, Third National People’s Congress.


61 Conversation with Liu Huiyi, 14 September 1984. This painting was extant and *in situ* in that year.

62 See Pan Gongkai, *Pan Tianshou tan yi lu*, p. 7. Originally a scene of Mount Yandang c.1957 and a painting of peach blossom by Wu Fuzhi hung on the walls either side of the entrance hall of the Hangzhou Hotel, and a large painting of the same subject painted in 1958 hung behind the reception area in the foyer of the Hangzhou Overseas Chinese Hotel.
the Autumn Moon" (Pinghu qiuyue 平湖秋月) on West Lake, but none are extant. The sole remaining work that dates from this initiative is a large joint painting by Pan Tianshou, Wu Fuzhi, Zhu Lesan 诸乐三 and Lu Yifei 陆抑非. It hung in the Daming Hall 大明堂 at Mount Chao 超山 on the outskirts of Hangzhou and depicted plum blossom for which the area is renowned.61

During this period Pan Tianshou was also commissioned by publishing houses to paint works for publication in popular magazines to commemorate official events such as Labour Day—Pomegranate and Fragrant Plaintain Lilies 石榴簪图轴 (1956); National Day—The Longevity of the Country Knows No Boundary 国寿无疆 (1958); the founding of the People's Republic—Chrysanthemums and Wine 菊酒 (1959), and slogans such as Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom (1959) (Figure 23). He also produced a series of small paintings for the water-print factory which was established in 1958 to raise revenue for the art academy.

In the 1950s and 1960s it was also common for paintings to be commissioned for the entrance halls, reception rooms or restaurant interiors of hotels and other public buildings. For many of these works Pan employed the strong, decorative and colourful style of painting evident in A Corner of Lingyan Gully Pan Tianshou's earliest hotel commission was for the Peking Hotel 北京饭店. A Brief Rest 小憩图轴 (a version with seven egrets) and Red Lotus 红荷图 were selected for the interior decoration. It is said that Pan was given token amounts of 100 and 80 yuan respectively for these works. Thereafter he was approached by many hotels for artworks, and it was usual for a deal to be struck in which paintings were exchanged for accommodation.63

*The Brilliance of Dawn in China* (1964) (Figure 24) was painted to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Standing twelve feet high and twenty-eight feet long it is said to be the largest painting executed by Pan. It originally hung in the Xiling Hotel 西泠饭店 in Hangzhou. The *Brilliance of Dawn in China* combines

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**Figure 23**

*Pan Tianshou, Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom 百花齐放图轴, ink and colour on shengxuan paper, 1959. 78.4 x 52 cm (collection of the Guohua department, China Art Academy, Hangzhou)*

**Figure 24**

*Pan Tianshou, The Brilliance of Dawn in China 光华旦旦图, ink and colour on paper (1964), 26.5 x 68.5 cm (collection of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum)*

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63 Lu Xin, *Pan Tianshou*, p.275.
imagery that had become a hallmark of Pan’s mature style—eagles, pine tree, rock and the distinctive flora of his native locale. These motifs, combined with a line taken from “Qingyun ge” 卿云歌, a well-known national song, express warmth, hope and a wish for eternal life. One of the most famous guohua paintings of this period was This Land So Rich in Beauty 江山如此多娇 by Fu Baoshi 傅抱石 (1904–65) and Guan Shanyue 关山月 (b.1912). It illustrated a line from one of Mao Zedong’s poems and was commissioned to hang in the Great Hall of the People in Peking. It was one of the paintings commissioned for the Ten Great Buildings (Shi dajianzhu 十大建築) that included new museums and public edifices, the installation of which demonstrated that guohua, like oil paintings, could be painted on a large scale and have an impact in an important public space. In many ways the production of large-scale, state-sponsored guohua paintings represents a re-interpretation of the tradition of earlier court paintings (gongting hua 宫庭画).

The large-scale, brightly-coloured bird-and-flower paintings developed by Pan Tianshou in the 1950s and 1960s were particularly well suited to public display in a period when guohua was promoted as the pre-eminent national art form. They may be regarded as the epitome of an official artistic style that Pan developed to satisfy his own desire for the creative development of guohua and which at the same time presented a positive political image in accord with the political spirit of the times. Inspired by the monumental paintings of Shitao and Bada Shanren, Pan Tianshou had always worked on a large scale. It would also appear that his determination to create big paintings was motivated by a desire to disprove the statement by Jiang Feng that unlike oil painting guohua could not reflect the real world, lacked international character and could not be painted on a grand scale 64 (Figure 25). Whilst Pan Tianshou’s paintings employed traditional materials they were thoroughly contemporary in spirit.
Reassessment of Guohua in the Early 1960s

In a report to the Third Congress of Chinese Literary and Art Workers in 1960, Zhou Yang referred to a renewal of interest in traditional brush-and-ink painting. He acknowledged that in addition to figure painting, landscape and bird-and-flower painting had a role to play in society. The following year Pan Tianshou participated in the National Liberal Arts Teaching Materials conference in Peking and reiterated his support for specialised training in the traditional disciplines of landscape, bird-and-flower and figure painting in order to cultivate some students of merit. He also promoted the reintroduction of traditional brush-and-ink ‘drawing’ practices—baimiao or ‘outline drawing’ and shuanggou 双勾 or ‘enclosed drawing’—for those studying brush-and-ink painting, rather than Western-style academic drawing which was based on principles of realism and chiaroscuro.

In response to the renewed official recognition of huaniao hua a Bird-and-Flower Painting Studio (huaniao gongzuoshi 花鸟工作室) was established at the Hangzhou Academy. It was agreed that a young teacher would be assigned to each of the three professors of bird-and-flower painting—Pan Tianshou, Wu Fuzhi and Zhu Lesan—for instruction and cultivation. The aim of the studio was to ensure that the techniques and skills of elderly and established artists were handed down and perpetuated. Contrary to the wishes of Pan Tianshou, the professors were not allowed to select the individuals who would work with them. Instead, they were chosen by the Communist Party Committee of the Academy. In addition to learning painting techniques, the assigned teachers were also expected to undertake secretarial tasks to alleviate the professors’ administrative workloads. In the selection of young teachers, political credentials were valued more highly than artistic merit and in 1961 Ye Shangqing 叶尚青, who had studied revolutionary history and figure painting at the Academy from 1954 to 1959, was assigned to assist Pan Tianshou. This appointment was clearly political and it soon became obvious that the original aims of the studio program could not be realised. In a speech delivered in 1962 Pan Tianshou observed that the Academy had been in operation for over thirty years and had produced many good artists, but that he had taught for forty years and had not produced any talented brush-and-ink painters. It was implied that not enough attention had been paid to teaching guohua technique to students of calibre.

An indication of the improved status accorded to guohua during the early 1960s and the high official regard in which Pan Tianshou’s art was held was the offer of a large solo exhibition in 1962. The exhibition was initiated by Kang Sheng 康生 (1898–1975), a member of the Central Committee and alternate member of the Political Bureau, and sponsored by the Chinese Artists’ Association and the Zhejiang branch of that society. Although later politically notorious, Kang Sheng was also a cultivated man, a talented calligrapher and a competent painter and seal carver. He had a large collection of art works and antiques which he kept in his residence in the Diaoyutai 钓鱼台 and took...
great delight in. The exhibition of Pan Tianshou's paintings was held at the Shuaiduyuan Art Gallery attached to the Central Academy of Fine Art in Peking. Ninety-one works were displayed, many executed in the years immediately preceding the exhibition. Although Pan Tianshou did not travel to Peking the exhibition was enthusiastically received by art officials and the public. Kang Sheng composed an eight-character couplet in praise of Pan's achievement, published in the 7 October edition of the Guangming Daily, which read: "Master of the world of painting, Leader in the realm of art" (Figure 27).

Unfortunately the high profile accorded to Pan Tianshou and the official praise offered by Kang Sheng did not stand in Pan's favour during the Cultural Revolution. Few artists and art educationalists in positions of authority were spared from harsh criticism and cruel physical abuse during this chaotic period, and Pan was no exception.

The Cultural Revolution

On 3 June 1966, in direct response to events in Peking, large-character posters were pasted up around the Academy accusing Pan Tianshou, then aged seventy and director of the institution, of being a "reactionary academic authority" 反动学术权威. By September of that year the campaign to denounce him had intensified and he was paraded through the streets of Hangzhou with his head shaved, wearing a tall dunce's cap and a sign hanging around his neck advertising his so-called crimes. Like most other people under attack he was confined in a small area within the school grounds—a cow-shed (niupeng 牛棚), was forced into demeaning labour, and endured periodic criticism and abuse. In a move designed to highlight the fact that he no longer enjoyed a privileged status, eight families, all employees of the Academy, took up residence in his house. In 1970-71 a further eight families were accommodated in an apartment block built on what was formerly the front garden (Figure 28).

As part of the campaign to topple Pan Tianshou, a special investigation group was established to gather incriminating evidence—black materials (beicailiao 黑材料)—against Pan. Ye Shangqing, the young teacher whom Pan Tianshou had taken on in 1961 to train as a bird-and-flower painter and act as personal secretary, was a member of this group. Having had close personal contact with Pan Tianshou over a six-year period, Ye was well placed to inform on him.

In May 1968 at a meeting in Peking of Communist Party Central Committee figures and Zhang Yongsheng 张永生, representing the revolutionary faction of the Hangzhou Academy, information on Pan Tianshou was conveyed to Jiang Qing 江青 and Yao Wenyuan 姚文元. Jiang Qing is said to have denounced his paintings as bleak and ugly in the extreme, and Yao Wenyuan to have referred to his images of vultures as the incarnation of spies. Kang Sheng was asked about his support of Pan Tianshou and the couplet written

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70 "Pan Tianshou huazhan zai jing juxing" [An exhibition of paintings by Pan Tianshou opens in Peking], and Deng Bai, "Pan Tianshoude hua" [The paintings of Pan Tianshou], Guangming Daily, 10 July 1962, pp.2, 4.

71 Ibid.; Zhejiang meishu xueyuan da pipanzu, "Fangeming shidiande chedipochan—pipansirenbang yanzhong pohuai Zhejiang meishu xueyuan da zuixing" [The complete bankruptcy of the counter-revolutionary "test case"—a criticism of the grave destruction inflicted upon the Zhejiang Academy of Art by the "Gang of Four"], Meishu, 1978.1: 35; Lu Xin, Pan Tianshou, p.367.
in praise of him and published in the *Guangming Daily* in 1962. Kang Sheng denied supporting Pan Tianshou and stated that the inscription was merely tactical and intended to deflate the ego of another artist Chen Banding 陈半丁.73 With Kang Sheng’s endorsement impetus was added to the criticisms that were already underway. Following Pan Tianshou’s denunciation the student revolutionary organisation at the Academy mounted an exhibition of “black paintings” (bei hua ）that had been confiscated during a ransacking of the family home. The exhibition was closed after one day and many works were disfigured or stolen. On 17 September 1968 the *Zhejiang Daily* carried numerous articles criticising Pan Tianshou.

In March the following year Pan Tianshou endured the most severe form of punishment for a Chinese schooled in Confucian ethics when he was taken under guard to his native village Guanzhuang 冠庄 in Ninghai and paraded through the familiar streets. A huge placard hung around his neck advertised his criminal status to family and friends. The person who had organised this ordeal was a young student from Ninghai whom Pan Tianshou had helped in the past. Other students and young teachers who were closely associated with Pan Tianshou and whom he had assisted were also directly involved in this denunciation.74 On his return to Hangzhou Pan Tianshou wrote:

Complain not of the confining cage;  
My mind still roams free the universe.  
False charges so easily fabricated;  
Injustice is an ancient woe.75

Pan Tianshou died in hospital on 5 September 1971 aged seventy-five. There was no official announcement of his passing and no public funeral. At the end of his life, the achievements of his career had been officially repudiated. His spirit and resistance had weakened over a five-year period of physical and mental hardship. He felt that he had failed as a teacher and as an artist. He questioned whether the art Academy was the right way to cultivate artists. Should he live, he said, he would not teach any more—only paint, even though painting too was fraught with difficulties.76 In a letter to Su Weitang, a student from his home town, dated May 1970, he emphasised that in order to survive an artist must be aware of both tradition and politics. His words are those of a concerned teacher. Pan admitted that he had not been able to devise a style that could accord with the highly volatile artistic policies of the preceding twenty years:

To be an artist you need talent, skills and a good environment. You must constantly advance in order to reach the heights and achieve success. In this present revolutionary epoch, however, one

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74 Lu Xin, *Pan Tianshou*, p.376.  
76 Conversation with Pan Gongkai, 1984.
must also work in accordance with the requirements of the age. At present this is still of the utmost importance. The method of learning must differ from former literati principles, otherwise others will perceive that you are out of step with the age. How, but how can one be in keeping with the times? I still have not found the right way. It is a vexing problem …

Pan Tianshou was not politically rehabilitated until 1977, six years after his death. Following the official announcement of his reinstatement a memorial exhibition was held in Hangzhou, and in 1978 a commemorative service was held. These events signalled the beginning of an official move to re-establish Pan’s position in the Chinese art world.

In 1981, on the tenth anniversary of Pan Tianshou’s death, a memorial museum located in his former residence was opened to the public (Figure 29). The founding director was He Yin, Pan Tianshou’s wife, and his youngest son Pan Gongkai was appointed manager. Pan’s studio was restored to its former condition and favourite paintings, calligraphy and ornaments that had survived were restored to their original positions. The families who had moved into the house during the Cultural Revolution were relocated and the block of flats built in front of the house was pulled down to make it possible to recreate the garden.

Prior to her death in 1983, He Yin advised the Ministry of Culture that she would bequeath 120 of Pan Tianshou’s surviving works to the state. These works, she said, were to be housed in a memorial gallery for future generations to view and study. On 14 April 1984 the paintings were officially handed over to the State and a commendation ceremony, organised by the Ministry of Culture, was held in Peking in honour of the Pan family.

In 1985 the national Ministry of Culture agreed to fund the refurbishment of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum and construct a new gallery space. The government provided some 2.34 million yuan for this purpose. The generosity of the public purse was matched by the enterprising spirit of the deceased artist’s son Pan Gongkai, who directed the physical and financial development of the museum which opened to the public in 1991 (Figures 30 and 31).

Since Pan Tianshou’s political rehabilitation in 1977, an extraordinary effort has been made by family members to restore his name within the Chinese art world and to celebrate his achievements. Pan Gongkai is now Director of the Pan Tianshou Memorial Museum and the Pan Tianshou Foundation and President of the China National Academy of Fine Arts (a post previously occupied by his father). In recent years he has capitalised on official campaigns to
promote national culture (bonyang minzu wenhua 弘扬民族文化) to further elevate the position of his father and to defend brush-and-ink painting in the face of renewed claims from artists and critics that guohua is dead.

The evolution of guohua in the twentieth century is a fascinating and complex subject. At its core is the problem of reconciling an ancient tradition with a desire for change. For all artists the challenge remains how to make art that has a continuing relevance to both themselves and society. With the dramatic shift of world-view symbolised by the fall of the Manchu-Qing dynasty, the establishment of the Republic, then the People’s Republic of China and more recently the increasing globalisation of culture, the context and meaning of art making could not but change. Over the last one hundred years the fate of guohua has waxed and waned along with changing notions of what constitutes an artistic practice appropriate to the times. Seen in the context of Western art, brush-and-ink painting has come to represent a hallmark of Chineseness and at different times has been promoted as such by both the Nationalist and the Communist governments.

Guohua is still the most commonly practised and most popularly appreciated art form in China, yet in the late-twentieth century it does not have a high profile within the Western-dominated, international contemporary art world, nor is it respected or taken seriously by young Chinese art critics or exponents of international-style, avant-garde art.

For many people within China, and particularly the young, the ability to understand and appreciate guohua has been lost. Events of the twentieth century have seen its meaning and practice significantly changed through successive revolutions and modernisation attempts.
Most people in the late twentieth century continue to recognise brush-and-ink painting as “national painting” and respond to it in patriotic terms or as State-sponsored art. It has become a national symbol, but its artistic meaning beyond that is no longer clear.

Pan Tianshou is generally regarded as an innovative traditionalist, yet he may be more accurately regarded as a Chinese modernist—but one who pursued an indigenous form of modernism and achieved considerable creative results. Viewed within the context of his artistic contemporaries Pan Tianshou extended the boundaries of traditional artistic practice, carrying on from where the Shanghai School of artists left off. He created works that are striking for their power, strong graphic quality, and ability to communicate with the viewer. As one Western art historian has recently remarked, Pan Tianshou’s remarkable sense of form is “more acute, more Western than that of any other modern guohua artist.”

Plum Tree and Moon (1966) (Figure 32) was the last major finger painting that Pan Tianshou executed. The twisted, misshapen, almost grotesque form of the old plum tree seems to express the heaviness of despair that the artist felt as the nation was embroiled in the political mêlée of Maoism—yet a few blossoms still draw life from the age-old trunk. The tree issues from the lower edge of the painting and traces a troubled path. The plum is an emblem of winter and commonly regarded as a symbol of hope and steadfastness. Only a plant that is strong can withstand the cold and flower in winter. Here it gives powerful expression to concepts of strength, the natural, raw and awkward, bone vitality and an indomitable spirit—qualities that Pan Tianshou admired and cultivated. The concord between subject, composition, aesthetic and technique creates a disturbingly powerful work. The subject connects with the past, but the conviction with which it is expressed delivers an urgent, emotive and contemporary message. As Pan Tianshou’s last major work, Plum Tree and Moon is an example of how he believed guohua could pave the way for future artistic possibilities. The paintings of Pan Tianshou present a strong case for a re-examination of the concepts of tradition and modernity and an acknowledgement of the artist’s contribution to Chinese modernism—an indigenous modernism that has its roots in nineteenth-century Shanghai.