

# Canonization in early twentieth-century Chinese art history

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Since the 1980s, the discussion of canons has been a dominant theme in the discipline of Western art history. Various concerns have emerged regarding 'questions of artistic judgment', 'the history genesis of masterpieces', 'variations in taste', 'the social instruments of canonicity', and 'how canons disappear'.<sup>1</sup> Western art historians have considered how the canon's appearance in Western visual art embodies aesthetic, ideological, cultural, social, and symbolic values.<sup>2</sup> In Chinese art history, the idea of a canon including masterpieces, important artists, and forms of art, dates back to the mid ninth century when Zhang Yanyuan (active 9<sup>th</sup> century) wrote his painting history *Lidai minghua ji* [Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties]. Not only does the title of the book suggest Zhang's canonical attitude towards Chinese painting history, but, as a companion work to Zhang's writing on calligraphy *Fashu yaolu* [Essential Record of Calligraphy Exemplars], his text on painting history promotes the theory that painting is comparable to the long privileged tradition of calligraphy. Since then, the process of canon construction in Chinese calligraphy and painting through collection, theorization, and publication has continued in China.

Faced with quite different political, economic, and social conditions amid the instability of the early twentieth century, Chinese scholars attempted to discover new canons for cultural orthodoxy and authority. Modern means for canonization, such as museums and exhibition displays, cultural and academic institutions, and massive art publications with image reproduction in good quality, brought the process up to an unprecedented speed. It is true that most of these means have comparable counterparts in pre-modern times. However, their enormous scope and overwhelming influence are far beyond the reach of their imperial counterparts. Through an inter-textual reading of the publications on Chinese art history in early twentieth-century China, this paper explores the transformation of canons in order to

<sup>1</sup> Marc Gotlieb, 'How Canons Disappear: The Case of Henri Regnault,' in Elizabeth Mansfield (ed.), *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, London & New York: Routledge, 2002, 163.

<sup>2</sup> See Emma Barker, 'Academic into Modern: Turner and Leighton,' in Gill Perry and Colin Cunningham (eds.), *Academies, Museums and Canons of Art*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1999, 167-187. See also, Anna Brzyski, 'Introduction: Canons and Art History,' in Anna Brzyski (ed.), *Partisan Canons*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, 3-4.

shed light on why and how canonical formation happened during the Republican period of China. Despite the diverse styles and strategies which Chinese writers used in their narratives, Chinese art historical writings produced during the Republican period canonized and de-canonized artworks.

### **Hierarchy of categories in Chinese art**

Before the twentieth century, neither discourse on the fine arts, nor theories of the fine arts had featured prevalently in China.<sup>3</sup> In classical Chinese no single word conformed to the twentieth-century Western concept of the fine arts. While many biographical and theoretical writings on calligraphy and painting survive from the fourth to nineteenth centuries, relatively few historical monographs exist to say much about other forms of art production. In the pre-modern history of China, bronze, architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts were treated and understood differently from calligraphy and painting. Calligraphy and painting were deemed unique, since their practice by Chinese literati demonstrated these scholars' high social status and personal cultivation. By contrast, pre-modern Chinese scholars seldom chose to practise other forms of the fine arts. They could appreciate and collect the productions of these art forms, like bronze and ceramics, but the actual production and reproduction of such objects were not their concern. From the late nineteenth century, a new notion of Chinese art, embracing different categories of art, emerged in relation to the Western conception of the fine arts.

In 1907, a scholar Liu Shipei (1884-1919) published the first two parts of his article 'Zhongguo meishuxue bianqian lun [On the Development of Chinese Art Studies]' in *Guocui xuebao* [The Journal of National Essence].<sup>4</sup> Liu briefly summarized the different characteristics of Chinese art in various periods from ancient times to the Song dynasty. For example, Liu suggested that categories of art, such as dancing, singing, drawing, writing, and clothing in prehistoric times were limited by their practical uses; in the Western Zhou, art, if represented by bronzes, jades, music, pictures, and textiles, was closely associated with rites; in the Qin and Han dynasties, only epigraphy was worth discussing as art; in the Tang dynasty, because of religious and imperial influences, sculpture, architecture, calligraphy, and painting of Chinese art made great progress. Liu Shipei's scope of Chinese art broadly encompassed any Chinese creation connected with such moral ideas as Liu termed 'zhen [truth]', 'shan [goodness], and 'mei [beauty]'.<sup>5</sup>

Also in 1907, the scholar Wang Guowei (1877-1927), in his article 'Guya zhi zai meixue shang zhi diwei [The Position of Classical Elegance in Aesthetics]', suggested an aesthetic concept of 'guya [classical elegance]' which differed from the

<sup>3</sup> See Craig Clunas, 'What about Chinese Art?', in Catherine Kind (ed.), *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> The remainder of this treatise cannot be found nowadays. So Liu's opinion about the later dynasties is unknown.

<sup>5</sup> Shipei Liu, 'Zhongguo meishuxue bianqian lun [On the Development of Chinese Art Studies]', *Guocui xuebao* [The Journal of national Essence], No. 30-31, 1907.

philosopher Immanuel Kant's idea of 'the beautiful and sublime'. Wang enumerated distinct Chinese artistic forms from the West — 'calligraphy, bronzes of the three pre-imperial dynasties, rubbings of Qin and Han, stone inscriptions from the Han to Song dynasties, and books in Song and Yuan times' — as art featuring 'classical elegance'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1912, 'Zhongguo meishuzhi [Records on Chinese Art]', an article serially published in *Zhenxiang huabao* [True Record], a pictorial newspaper organized by founders of the Lingnan School in Shanghai, provided other evidence for the creation of the notion of Chinese art. It gathered short anecdotes about different forms of Chinese art other than calligraphy and painting. Most of these stories were about artworks which had rarely been recorded in Chinese formal historical documents of art, such as paper cutting and woodcarving.

The publication of these texts is the manifestation of a structural transition from calligraphy and painting to the modern concept of Chinese art. Chinese scholars tried not to neglect any possible form of Chinese art from landscape paintings drawn by the literati to drinking vessels made by unidentified artisans. The effort to enlarge the scope of historical studies concerning Chinese art beyond its erstwhile limitation to calligraphy and painting continued through the 1910s and up to the 1930s. The emphasis of Chinese scholars aimed to match the well-developed branches of the fine arts (architecture, sculpture, and painting) in the West. Art historical texts applied the Western notions of art to discussions of Chinese art.

The new canonization of Chinese art affected new categories, such as architecture and sculpture. Scholars in late Qing and Republican China introduced the Western concepts of architecture and sculpture to re-categorize different forms of Chinese art. In 1920, the modern artist and art educator Yu Jifan (1891-1968) proposed a serious study of sculpture in China.<sup>7</sup> He argued that sculpture held a crucial position in art, and he deplored the lack of research on this art form in China. Yu saw sculpture as no less important than painting. He hoped that academic research on Chinese sculpture could be launched immediately. Teng Baiye (1900-1980), the modern sculptor and painter who studied art in both France and America, expressed a similar idea concerning architecture in his article 'Zhongguo de meishu [Art in China]' (1934). Teng pointed out that the Western notion of art covered a wide range of activities, some of which had not attracted enough attention in Chinese history. In this article, he chose only to include architecture, bronzes, lacquer, ceramics, and other applied arts, such as glasswork, cloisonné, silk, and embroidery. Painting was not included in his inquiry because the same issue of the journal published an essay specifically addressing painting entitled 'Zhongguo de huihua [Painting in China]' by the painter Zheng Wuchang (1894-1952). Teng Baiye, in particular, noted the different status of architecture in Western art and Chinese art. His explanation was that Chinese architecture before the Ming dynasty seldom

<sup>6</sup> Guowei Wang, 'Guya zhi zai meixue shang zhi diwei [The Position of Classic Elegance in Aesthetics],' *Jiaoyu shijie* [Education World], No. 144, 1907.

<sup>7</sup> Jifan Yu, 'Kuaixie yanjiu diaosu [Hasten the Studies of Sculpture],' *Meishu* [Fine Arts], Vol. 2, No. 3, 1920, 109.

possessed visible characteristics, except in some temples and tombs. In his view, architectural materials in China were easily destroyed, and could seldom last for a long time. Another problem was the replacement by one dynasty with another, an event which hardly ever preserved the palaces of the previous government. The usual actions after occupying a capital city were to destroy the old palaces and to found a new capital elsewhere. Teng believed that research on the history of Chinese architecture had not been developed, due to a lack of abundant working data. His suggestion for architectural studies was to use the existing buildings mostly dating to the Ming and Qing dynasties and to progress this research further on the basis of written documents.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the difficulties raised by Teng Baiye, most art historical publications standardized a concept of fine arts in which architecture, sculpture, and painting were three major elements. The art historian Teng Gu's (1901-1941) *Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi* [A Brief History of Chinese Art] (1926) and the art educator Li Puyuan's (1901-1956) *Zhongguo yishushi gailun* [Outline of Chinese Art History] (1931) only analyzed these major elements with small adaptations. Teng Gu used a paragraph shorter than seven lines to describe the existence of stoneware, earthenware, carpentry, and other wares made of shell, carapace, bone, and horn in prehistoric China. None of these wares was mentioned again elsewhere in his book. Li Puyuan's strategy was quite simple. He envisaged epigraphy, bronze, jade, seals, and ceramics as subcategories of sculpture.

Beyond these three main elements, some histories embraced calligraphy, decorative arts, and crafts. *Meishushi* [History of Fine Arts] (1917) by the art educator Jiang Danshu (1885-1962) included a fourth chapter on applied arts involving ceramics, foundry productions, dyeing, weaving, embroidery, lacquer, metalwork, and jades. The researcher Zhu Jieqin (1913-1990) in *Qin Han meishushi* [Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties] (1936) added calligraphy to his narrative and regarded epigraphy and sculpture as one category. In addition, he analysed the special Chinese stationery of brush, ink, paper, and inkstone because of their key roles in Chinese art. Zheng Wuchang's *Zhongguo meishushi* [A History of Chinese Art] (1935) contained a chapter on calligraphy and separated the account of ceramics from sculpture to form an extra chapter. The researcher Shi Yan (1904-1994) discussed painting, sculpture, and architecture in his book *Dongyang meishushi* [Eastern Art History] (1936), and only touched upon calligraphy and decorative arts.

These choices are instructive. During the last two thousand years, the art of calligraphy has enjoyed the greatest prestige among the different forms of art, and painting has taken second place. Aesthetic theories on calligraphy even extended into the field of painting and influenced its development. On the other hand, prior to the twentieth century, little historical information about architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts had been available, in contrast to large quantities of treatises on calligraphy and painting. However, Jiang Danshu, Teng Gu, and Li Puyuan followed the priorities of Western analysis by deciding to make architecture the supreme topic

<sup>8</sup> Baiye Teng, 'Zhongguo de meishu [Art in China],' *Wenhua jianshe yuekan* [Cultural Construction Monthly], Vol. 1, No. 1, 109-123.

of their discussions, to demote painting to secondary importance, and to omit any mention of calligraphy. Jiang's explanation was that architecture had led the development of the fine arts. Sculpture and painting were initially subordinate to architecture, and then became independent forms of the fine arts. The approaches of Zhu Jieqin and Shi Yan were less radical, in that both of them included calligraphy in their histories. Zhu put calligraphy between sculpture and painting. In the case of Shi Yan's book, the order of various artistic expressions was not absolutely fixed in the narrative of different periods. Nevertheless, painting and calligraphy constituted one larger group and always appeared before the other group of sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts<sup>9</sup>. His chapter on art in the Qin dynasty was an exception. His running order here was architecture, sculpture, calligraphy, and painting. The reason for this hierarchy can probably be explained by the fact that many more concrete records of architecture and sculpture in the Qin dynasty were available than those of calligraphy and painting. Zheng Wuchang adopted a new order: sculpture (including epigraphy, bronze, and jade), architecture, painting, calligraphy, and ceramics. These authors' choices demonstrate their efforts to show the significance of Chinese art according to Western artistic values. They tried to position Chinese art in parallel with Western art, and to elucidate the comparability of Chinese art to Western art.

Imitating the research scope of Western art history, art historical studies on architecture and sculpture occupied an important position in Chinese scholarship concerning art. This new inclusion of architecture and sculpture, artefacts that were made by unnamed artisans, stimulated Chinese scholars to shift at least part of their attention away from paintings by famous scholar artists. Moreover, Western studies on Chinese art had, since the mid-nineteenth century, devoted most attention to ceramics, bronze, lacquer, and other decorative arts. Influenced by a Western focus, Chinese scholars also dedicated their energies to research on such art forms.

Images included in some of these Chinese publications also reveal a dramatic shift in emphasis. Illustrations produced by new printing techniques commanded respect in late Qing and Republican China. Even though no image was included in his *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* due to the expense of picture printing, Zhu Jieqin had planned to print images. He asserted that art historical books should have illustrations for reference and confirmation. Jiang Danshu succeeded in providing images for his readers. Jiang chose twenty-two pictures for his *History of Fine Arts*: four for architecture, three for sculpture, twelve for painting, and three for decorative arts. In the twelve illustrations of painting, three images from the Han dynasty were anonymous works and the other nine pictures were paintings by famous painters of all periods of Chinese history. Transparently, painting of the literati was still the major object of Jiang Danshu's attention. Li Puyuan went one step further. In his *Outline of Chinese Art History*, Li used sixteen pictures. Five of them are about architecture, including a miniature building discovered from a grave. Another five illustrations about sculpture comprise a vessel, a clay oxcart and ox for the dead,

<sup>9</sup> Within the two groups the orders of these categories were different.

a figure of Buddha, and a stone statue from a mausoleum. The last six images of paintings contain three portraits. Among all these sixteen pictures, only five paintings are attributed to well-known artists. The remainder are all works by unknown artists. The researcher Wang Junchu's (1904-1986) selection of pictures in *Zhongguo meishu de yanbian* [The Development of Chinese Art] (1934) was an even more extreme case. His eleven illustrations were either pictographs or patterns from the relics of prehistoric China. The choice of images in their works demonstrates the growing interest in artworks executed by unknown creators, and it implies that paintings by famous scholar artists were no longer the core of art history in China.

### **Canonization in the temporal structures of Chinese art history**

The shape of time is crucial in art history. Writing a history of art in China during the early decades of the twentieth century was closely associated with a new consciousness of time, which in turn affected the process to define a new canon for the national culture. The emergence of temporal frameworks in this period provided new structure and logic for canons in Chinese art.

While some authors still used the dating system according to the succession of imperial reigns, they also gave the dates in the Western calendar. The painter Fu Baoshi (1904-1965), in his *Zhongguo meishu nianbiao* [Chronological Table of Chinese Art] (1937), puts both the Chinese and Western calendars in his table to indicate Chinese and Common Era dates. This dual temporal arrangement inscribes a modern organizational time scheme onto a traditional one. It indicates a new linear consciousness of time, which was a founding construction of Chinese modernity, a point that Leo Ou-fan Lee emphasizes in his study *Shanghai Modern*.<sup>10</sup> Both Zhu Jieqin in his *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* and Shi Yan in his *Eastern Art History* place the corresponding Western dates in brackets following the Chinese dates. Other authors, such as Li Puyuan, even chose to only provide Western dates. Rather than transcribing the dates according to different emperors' successions, these texts adopted a unified and homogenous calendrical dating from beginning to end. This adoption suggests a new coherence in the history of Chinese art, for the relations between different dates are clearly shown without the cultural shading that dynastic nomenclature inevitably promotes.

Meanwhile, a strong tendency of new periodizations was what Chinese scholars of the 1920s and the 1930s needed for a coherent narrative of Chinese art history. Through different ways of dividing the history of Chinese art, these writers on art illustrated their understandings of the inner logic of Chinese art development according to new standards.

In the initial stage of creating novel narratives of art history, a new consciousness of time was not evident. The division which Jiang Danshu adopted in his *History of Fine Arts* was based on different forms of art in China rather than historical episodes. Quite different from Jiang, Teng Gu demonstrated his philosophy of time in Chinese art history when he consciously chose an innovative

<sup>10</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999, 79-80.

standard of periodization. Teng Gu's first sentence in the preface to *A Brief History of Chinese Art* claimed that, under the instruction of the influential scholar Liang Qichao, Teng decided to study the history of Chinese art. Probably a partial influence from Liang Qichao was Teng Gu's appropriation of a linear and progressive notion of time, particularly visible in his periodization of Chinese art. Teng divided the history of Chinese art into four periods: growth (*shengzhang shidai*, from the emergence of art to Han), cross-fertilization (*hunjiao shidai*, Wei, Jin, and the Six Dynasties), the flourishing period (*changsheng shidai*, from Sui to Song), and stagnation (*chenzhi shidai*, Yuan, Ming, and Qing). The boundaries between different eras, for him, were not clear-cut. For example, the influence of foreign culture had already existed during the rule of Emperor Mingdi of the Han dynasty (28-75 CE) when Buddhism started to spread in China. Cultural exchange started in his 'growth' phase and it became more obvious in the later period of 'cross-fertilization'. Teng also stressed the last historical stage as 'stagnation' rather than decline. His idea coincided with Liang Qichao's major concept of '*jinhua* [growth]'. Although *jinhua* is often translated into English as evolution, Liang Qichao used it without a connotation of progress. For Liang, *jinhua* was a constant directional process towards the future. Similarly, Teng Gu compared the history of art to water running in a river: 'Sometimes it became a rushing current and sometimes, unsurprisingly, it slowed down; but it never stopped'. In his opinion, it was wrong to deny any accomplishment in Yuan, Ming, and Qing times, for unique artworks and artists did appear in these periods.<sup>11</sup> Still, art in these dynasties lacked a major break-through, and Teng was not satisfied with the constant recourse to the training technique of copying which had in his view hampered the initiative of creative minds.<sup>12</sup> Teng Gu canonized his cross-fertilization and flourishing periods on account of what he judged to be their tremendous innovations in art.

Likewise, Zheng Wuchang claimed in his introduction to *A History of Chinese Art* that Chinese art could be separated into four eras, exactly as Teng Gu had suggested. Zheng even drew a parallel between Italian art immediately after the High Renaissance, which he considered as '*yiluo qianzhang* [a disastrous decline]', and Chinese art from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries. He identified the reason for the stagnation of Chinese art in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties with the cause of what he perceived as the decay of Italian art in the sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Although Zheng's understanding of Italian art is problematic, the point he attempted to stress is the nature of history to alternate the flourishing period with stagnation. He believed that it was an opportunity for contemporary Chinese art to turn the stagnation of the previous centuries into the starting point of a revival.

<sup>11</sup> Gu Teng, *Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi* [A Brief History of Chinese Art], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1926, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Gu Teng, *Zhongguo meishu xiaoshi* [A Brief History of Chinese Art], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1926, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Wuchang Zheng, *Zhongguo meishushi* [A History of Chinese Art], Shanghai: Zhonghua Books, 1935, 9-10.

The descriptive terminology for division invented by Teng Gu and shared by other Chinese scholars demonstrates their biological view of the past. Different from the European art historians, who by the end of the nineteenth century had already turned away from biological metaphors for the maturity of art history as an academic field<sup>14</sup>, Chinese scholars in pursuit of a scientific discipline of Chinese art history utilized the well-founded and defined terms from natural science for their periodization of Chinese art history. Accordingly, such terms of periodization as 'growth', 'cross-fertilization', and 'decay' appeared in Chinese histories of art.

Chinese historians also suggested other sets of terminology to unify the artistic changes of China's past. Zheng Wuchang's version of Chinese painting history in *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* [A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies] (1929) possessed a new theoretical framework in periodization which contemporary Chinese scholars considered highly original. The most impressive point Zheng made is his structural diagram of four large periods in his book: from the functional period (*shiyong shiqi*, prehistory before Xia times), the ritual period (*lijiao shiqi*, from Xia to Han), the religious period (*zongjiaohua shiqi*, from the Six Dynasties through Tang times), to the literary period (*wenxuehua shiqi*, from the Song dynasty onwards). Zheng's proposition argued against the usual concept of artistic decline during the later dynasties. Instead, he saw a shift of Chinese artists' attention from creating artworks with its practical uses in religious rituals to expressing their emotions in their art production. As Julia Andrews and Shen Kuiyi have suggested, Zheng's interpretation of Chinese painting history provided confidence and hope in Chinese art's potential. It opened up the possibility for Chinese painting to develop continuously along its age-old route in modern times.<sup>15</sup>

Zhu Jieqin's *Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties* mentioned four epochs in his preface: the practical epoch (*shiyong shiqi*), the ritual and ethical epoch (*lizhi/jiaohua shiqi*), the Buddhist and Zen epoch (*fofa/chan shiqi*), and the literati epoch (*wenren shiqi*). Zhu's division was analogous to Zheng Wuchang's idea, and in the same preface Zhu Jieqin acknowledged the influence of Zheng's work. Zhu accepted Zheng's periodization of Chinese painting and expanded its scope to the whole history of Chinese art.<sup>16</sup>

Shi Yan's *Eastern Art History* dealt with a time span from prehistoric China to the end of the Five Dynasties (960 CE). As mentioned in Chapter One, Shi Yan divided this duration into two large periods of "Remote Antiquity" (prehistory to the third century BCE) and "Middle Antiquity" (the third century BCE onwards). It is possible to infer a third period as "Recent Antiquity". This division was familiar to

<sup>14</sup> Lothar Ledderose, 'Aesthetic Appropriation of Ancient Calligraphy in Modern China,' in Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith (eds.), *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions*, New York: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001, 231.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, 'The Japanese Impact on the Republican Art World: The Construction of Chinese Art History as a Modern Field,' *Twentieth Century Chinese Canon*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 25-30.

<sup>16</sup> Jieqin Zhu, *Qin Han meishushi* [Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1936, 1-2.

the popular tripartite periodization in most narratives of general Chinese histories in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>17</sup> Within every large period, Shi Yan separated the narrative into dynasties. He explained that he had to employ the dynastic division because his intention was to write a history of Eastern Art, which included China, India, and Japan. Restrained by the complicated historical data of art in “diverse nations, times, regions, and styles”, Shi Yan preferred a simple technique of dynastic division which was easy for him to handle. However, Shi considered this dynastic division to be extremely limiting. He maintained in the first chapter of his introduction that division in writing art history should be based upon the changes of thoughts and styles in art instead of following the periodization of political history.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, his book did not achieve this aim.

The problem of periodization is also manifest in the way Chinese art historians disassociated the narrative of Chinese art from the classic cycle of dynastic history. Unlike history, as Siegfried Kracauer has suggested, art history challenges the power of one unified chronological time.<sup>19</sup> Art objects have their own peculiar sequence of time in terms of each other rather than the political chronological time according to dynasties. Kracauer’s point, which was not intended in the context of Chinese history, is a valuable one, since Chinese intellectuals writing on art endeavoured to break the dynastic concept in periodization. They attempted to define the history of Chinese art according to its own artistic time scheme.

In the introductory part of his book *Tang Song huihuashi* [A History of Painting from Tang to Song Times] (1933), Teng Gu regarded Ise Senichirō’s method of periodizing the history of Chinese painting as the only truly viable one. According to Teng, Ise Senichirō in his *Shina no kaiga* [Chinese Painting] (1922), divided the periods of Chinese painting into the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods.<sup>20</sup> Ise’s terminology for his periods was not innovative. What Teng Gu admired was that Ise disregarded any political name for Chinese dynasties. Using solely the Western calendrical system, Ise proposed that the ancient period of Chinese painting was from prehistory until 712 CE; the medieval period from 713 to 1320; the early modern period from 1321 to the present. The period around 712 CE is the beginning of Tang Emperor Xuanzong’s reign (712-756), but also the beginning of the Nara period (710-794) in Japan. This periodization allows for a degree of synchronous development across both China and Japan. In Teng’s view, breaking down the dynastic system, Ise’s periodization showed the development of Chinese painting in its own schedule. Teng admitted the political influence on Chinese art, but it was not the only force for him to stimulate the development of Chinese painting. Teng

<sup>17</sup> Tze-ki Hon, ‘Cultural Identity and Local Self-Government: A Study of Liu Yizheng’s History of Chinese Culture,’ *Modern China*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 506-542.

<sup>18</sup> Yan Shi, *Dongyang meishushi* [Eastern Art History], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1936, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, 143-145.

<sup>20</sup> Gu Teng, *Tang Song huihuashi* [A History of Painting from Tang to Song Times], Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguangshe, 1933, 2-4.

believed that this periodization identified different phases of Chinese painting related to his proposition of style transformation.

Li Puyuan created a much more sophisticated system in *Outline of Chinese Art History*, because he took the political, economic, and social conditions into consideration. Disregarding all the dynasties, Li treated the development of economics and changes in social structure as the standards for his division. Li also used the terms which indicated the political and social conditions to name his different periods. He discussed Chinese art in ten different epochs as Table 1 shows.

Table 1

Epoch	Time Span
Primitive Society ( <i>yuanshi shehui</i> )	late 27th century to middle 24th century BCE
Early patriarchal-clan society ( <i>chuqi zongfa shehui</i> )	middle 24th century to late 23rd century BCE
Late patriarchal-clan society ( <i>houqi zongfa shehui</i> )	late 23rd century to late 12th century BCE
Early feudal society ( <i>chuqi fengjian shehui</i> )	late 12th century to early 8th century BCE
Late feudal society ( <i>houqi fengjian shehui</i> )	early 8th century to middle 3rd century BCE
First transitional society ( <i>diyi guoduqi shehui</i> )	middle 3rd century to late 3rd century BCE
Early composite society ( <i>chuqi hunhe shehui</i> )	late 3rd century BCE to middle 12th century CE
Late composite society ( <i>houqi hunhe shehui</i> )	middle 12th century to middle 19th century CE
Second transitional society ( <i>di'er guoduqi shehui</i> )	1839 to 1918 CE
“Socialist” society ( <i>shehui zhuyi shehui</i> )	1919 to 1930 CE

This division is unique. In his preface to this book, Li explained that he had two theories to account for this division. One was termed ‘materialistic dialectics (*weiwu bianzheng fa*)’ and the other ‘the theory of culture diffusion (*wenhua chuanbo lun*)’. He considered them equally important.<sup>21</sup> In Li Puyuan’s opinion, the same social and cultural background gestated the same style of art. Within a relatively constant society, the style of art should remain the same. However, Li’s second theory pointed out that in a relatively constant society, the style of art would extend to confront the artistic styles of other contemporary societies. These styles definitely influenced and penetrated each other. As a result, the style of art in a society never stayed absolutely the same.

<sup>21</sup> Puyuan Li, *Zhongguo yishushi gailun* [Outline of Chinese Art History], Shanghai: Liangyou Publishing House, 1931, 6-9.

Li Puyuan tried to show dynamic trends by adding transitional epochs. Also, he illustrated that the later part of one period differed from its early part because of new, gradually accumulating, minor changes. However, the way he named these epochs—and his extremely uneven separation of them—buried any possible dynamics this division might have. The longest period Li chronicled was ‘the early composite society’ lasting fourteen centuries, and his shortest period was ‘the first transitional society’ lasting less than five decades. Fourteen centuries contained a tremendous amount of information to cover and Li Puyuan had no choice but to sub-divide his narratives of a lengthy epoch into dynasties. In contrast to the famous scholar and writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), who was drawn to the chaotic period of the Wei and Jin dynasties<sup>22</sup>, Li looked to the more socially stable periods in Chinese history for artistic achievements.

Nevertheless, Li Puyuan tried hard not only to provide a historical description of art in China, but also to answer why artistic changes in China occurred at certain periods and how these changes were disseminated and accepted by society. In the accounts of every period, Li first elucidated the meaning of the title chosen for each period, then described its material life and general culture—language, science, religion, philosophy, law, and morality—of the period, and finally analyzed its art. Li Puyuan’s dialectical rules of historical materialism in art history were revolutionary not only by Chinese standards at that time but by Western ones too. Lin Wenzheng (1903-1989), an art theorist trained in France, wrote a preface to this book, and he praised it as a milestone of art historical research in China.<sup>23</sup> Li’s book is probably the most radical one among modern Chinese art historical publications in the early decades of the twentieth century. Even the printing pattern of this book distinguished itself from traditional works. Its format was parallel to the Western standards. Instead of the normal vertical arrangement of characters from right to left, the text was in horizontal order reading from left to right.

*The Development of Chinese Art* by Wang Junchu was an exception in the case of periodization. Its narrative format was organized thematically. All twenty-one chapters in the main text of the book addressed different aspects of Chinese art ranging from patterns on vessels to the Southern and Northern Schools in landscape painting. There is no apparent connection between the chapters, each of which can be read as an individual essay. Arranging them in a vaguely temporal order, Wang Junchu attempted to offer some different insights into Chinese art throughout history.

Both Li Puyuan and Wang Junchu were quite eccentric, that their methods of periodization did not gain immediate success in Republican circles of Chinese art. Their ideas were too radical to be widely accepted at that time. In a bid to avoid being seen as eccentric, other Chinese art historians, such as Yu Jianhua (1895-1979), followed the longstanding dynastic periodization in their histories of Chinese art.

<sup>22</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 45-47.

<sup>23</sup> Wenzheng Lin, ‘Xu [Preface],’ in Puyuan Li, *Zhongguo yishushi gailun* [Outline of Chinese Art History], Shanghai: Liangyou Publishing House, 1931, 2.

The third group of scholars, including Teng Gu and Zheng Wuchang, was the most successful as their epics of Chinese art history were both novel and acceptable to contemporary scholars. Their publications during the early twentieth century discarded the rigid divisions of dynasties. Rather, they organized individual events in the history of Chinese art into a coherent flow. What had been the relative quiescence of the history of Chinese art changed into a temporal development, which moved more continuously and more vigorously.

### **The emerging canons of unknown artisans**

Out of the mass of artworks and artists that emerged in each period only a small proportion of any category became reified as the objects and members of a canon. These lucky few absorbed the most attention from scholars and the public, while the residual remainder was usually consigned to oblivion. Even so, the process of canon formation never ends. Old canons may be reinforced by subsequent judgement and retain their canonical status. Alternatively, challenged by new standards, they may be demoted and replaced by new canons. In late Qing and Republican China, ideological changes took place gradually in the narratives of Chinese art, but they eventually amounted to a shift that converted pre-modern canons from theoretical guidelines into research objects of the past, and replaced them with canons constructed from new content and new categorical logic.

The named artists were the axis of art historical treatises in pre-modern China. Traditional art historical accounts comprised textual descriptions, analysis of artworks, and biographies of their authors. Chinese scholars recorded extensively the names of canonical artists and their artworks. Admittedly, a few artworks whose creators were unknown were also mentioned in these texts. Zhang Yanyuan, for instance, noted mural paintings in the temples of Chang'an, the capital of the Tang dynasty. However, Chinese scholars prior to the twentieth century always considered these works of art to be secondary and relatively less important. A traditional belief in the close connection between the virtue of an artist and his creation was also a significant factor in why emphasis was given to named artists. From the Tang period, Chinese scholars had been guided by the principle that a great artist 'must be a man of superior character and attainments'<sup>24</sup>. They encountered difficulties making value judgements on artworks without knowing the identities of authors.

Chinese classical works on art created in the Ming and Qing dynasties attached unique prestige to literati art and exclusively provided accounts of scholarly artists. Distinct from these texts, new histories of Chinese art in the early twentieth century paid more attention to artisans without names and their collective production in seldom discussed categories, such as architecture, sculpture, and decorative arts. Chinese scholars now gave artworks by unknown artisans the same status as 'masterpieces' by famous artists in Chinese art history. A case in point is their discussions of art in the Han period. Han achievements in art became the

<sup>24</sup> Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds.), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1985, 194.

indices of a founding cultural moment that endured through subsequent ages, and functioned historically as a moral and aesthetic reserve against which later art in China—and abroad—could be measured. The modern development of ideas concerning art in China often promotes pictorial values of Han art in a national history of Chinese art. While earlier scholarship addressed only the importance of Han objects for textual studies, researchers from the late nineteenth century onwards promoted Han art's visual, aesthetic and cultural values.

The earliest record of Han art available today is not from a text on art but can be found in *Shuijing zhu* [Commentary on the Waterways Classic], an ancient geographical book describing rivers in China, compiled by the scholar Li Daoyuan (d. 527). In this treatise, Li described images on the stones of Han tombs.<sup>25</sup> Han artworks were first treated as art in Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties*. Zhang listed six painting events at the Han court, nine titles of Han painting, and twelve Han painters. He recorded the didactic significance of mural paintings of virtuous historical figures in imperial palaces.<sup>26</sup> His interpretation of these idealized portraits followed a Confucian idea. Zhang also provided as much information as he could for the nine titles of Han painting, such as the authors, the creation times, the contents, and the reasons for production. He stated that he had not actually viewed these paintings himself, but had gained the information from earlier documents. Furthermore, Zhang Yanyuan recorded twelve painters in the Han dynasty. Eight of them were court painters, and the other four were officials of the Han government. Zhang began by providing biographical information for these painters and then remarked on their painting skills.<sup>27</sup>

During the following eight hundred years, pre-modern Chinese scholars accepted Zhang Yanyuan's narrative concerning Han painting as the orthodox history. Subsequently, new developments emerged outside the orthodox histories of painting. Song scholars' interests in antiques and Qing epigraphic studies stimulated great attention for Han objects other than paintings. For example, the epigraphist Zhao Mingcheng's (1081-1129) *Jinshi lu* [Records of Bronzes and Stone Carvings] (completed in 1117) included Han stone rubbings. However, the major focus of Song literati was on the inscriptions that accompanied the portraits in Han rubbings rather than engraved images.<sup>28</sup> These scholars and antiquarians treated Han stones as rare ancient objects, and they paid relatively little attention to their pictorial values. Likewise, in the eighteenth century, Qing scholars were still concerned with ancient inscriptions, although Qing epigraphic studies on Han objects collected abundant materials of Han bronzes, stones, and bricks from excavations.

<sup>25</sup> Daoyuan Li, *Shuijing zhu* [Commentary on the Waterways Classic], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1984, 291.

<sup>26</sup> Yanyuan Zhang, *Lidai minghua ji* [Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Yanyuan Zhang, *Lidai minghua ji* [Record of Famous Painters of All the Dynasties], Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1963, 25-26, 54-56.

<sup>28</sup> Hung Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, 3-4, 38-42.

Taking the canonization of Han art one step further, researchers in late Qing and Republican China directly pointed out the significance of Han objects in the long history of Chinese painting. The Qing scholar Yang Han (1812-1882) held up stone engravings from the Han dynasty as vital evidence central to his argument that the history of Chinese painting did not begin with the emergence of scroll paintings in the Wei-Jin period. Instead, he suggested that images from Han objects should be viewed as an important foundation of Chinese painting history.<sup>29</sup>

Modern scholars, unlike their predecessors, consciously promoted Han art for its own artistic values and not solely for its historical significance to textual studies. Zheng Wuchang claimed in his *A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies* that it was a pity that no Han artisans had been recorded by texts of the past. They had disappeared from the canons established around scroll painting from Song to early Qing. The Han dynasty, in Zheng's view, was the starting point when elite artists occupied the whole scenery of Chinese painting.<sup>30</sup> Zheng Wuchang examined Han painting through images on stones and bronzes, and was amazed by the portraits in the Wuliang Shrine. He considered them to be successful and influential, and representative of the high artistic level of Han painting.<sup>31</sup> In his *Zhongguo huihua bianqian shigang* [Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting] (1931), Fu Baoshi attributed the root of beautiful lines in Chinese painting to the patterns on Han objects, to Han mural paintings, and to Han stone engravings.<sup>32</sup> He not only admired the simplicity in Han art, but also believed that Chinese painting established its tradition of lines in the Han period. Likewise, in 1936, the philosopher and aesthetician Zong Baihua (1897-1986) claimed that 'the Eastern Jin [painter] Gu Kaizhi's painting absolutely emerged from Han painting'<sup>33</sup>. Meanwhile, Zhu Jieqin devoted a whole monograph to Qin and Han art. Zhu emphasized the great accomplishments of the Han dynasty in architecture, sculpture as bronzes and steles, and calligraphy. In particular, he noted the great influence of Han calligraphy on subsequent generations.<sup>34</sup> (Zhu 1936). The scholar Feng Guanyi singled out stone engravings of the Han dynasty for one chapter of his book entitled *Zhongguo yishushi gelun* [Separate Comments on Chinese Art History] (1941). In Feng's opinion, the stone engravings showed the prosperousness of Han wall painting and stone carving. He even enjoyed the special artistic delight of the ink rubbings, which he believed to

<sup>29</sup> Han Yang, *Guishixuan huatan* [Discussion on Painting at the Guishi Studio], Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2000, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Wuchang Zheng, *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* [A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies], Shanghai: Zhonghua Books, 1929, 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> Wuchang Zheng, *Zhongguo huaxue quanshi* [A Complete History of Chinese Painting Studies], Shanghai: Zhonghua Books, 1929, 28-35.

<sup>32</sup> Baoshi Fu, *Zhongguo huihua bianqian shigang* [Historical Outline of the Development in Chinese Painting], Shanghai: Nanjing shudian, 1931, 41-42.

<sup>33</sup> Baihua Zong, 'Lun Zongxi huafa de yuanyuan yu jichu [On the Origins and Foundations of Chinese and Western Painting Skills],' *Zhongyang daxue wenyi congkan* [Central University's Literature and Arts], 1936, Vol. 1, No. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Jieqin Zhu, *Qin Han meishushi* [Art History of the Qin and Han Dynasties], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1936.

be far superior to those created by later generations.<sup>35</sup> Lu Xun was also interested in Han art, and collected stone engravings and rubbings of the Han Dynasty (now in the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing).

Most successfully, Teng Gu's research in the 1930s on Han engraved stones represents a modern trend in both Chinese and Western art historical scholarship on Han pictorial art. Applying formal analysis to his 1937 discussion of the engraved stones from a Han tomb in Nanyang, Henan, Teng established a Chinese artistic tradition in designing and carving pictorial scenes on stones. He concluded that two modes of Chinese stone engravings, which he labelled respectively as '*ni fudiao de* [bas-relief style]' and '*ni huihua de* [painting style]', coexisted in the Han period. Teng claimed that the Nanyang reliefs were the archetype for the bas-relief style, which should not be positioned in the category of painting. On the other hand, the painting style represented by the carvings in the Wuliang Shrine was much closer to painting. Teng Gu suggested that the second kind of carvings, radically different from the reliefs of Ancient Greece, Ancient Egypt, and Ancient Middle East, possessed an art historical value for research on Han painting. He also mentioned that brushwork in Han brick carvings was very similar to that of Han mural painting.<sup>36</sup> Teng Gu's analysis led to discussions on Han mural art by Western scholars, such as Wilma Fairbank, from the 1940s onwards. Fairbank developed the concept of two different artistic modes of Eastern Han stone carvings when she compared carvings from three Han sites in Shandong.<sup>37</sup> Her explanation for the emergence of two distinct Han engraving styles laid the foundation for Martin Powers' studies on the patronage of Han art which emphasizes the social and political influence on styles of artworks.<sup>38</sup>

Modern Chinese researchers provided detailed descriptions of artworks by unknown artisans. The Han objects mentioned above are part of these recovered canons. Similarly, scholars conducted academic research on other surviving works of art by unknown producers. Examples include the Buddhist caves of the Southern and Northern Dynasties, embroideries of the Tang dynasty, and ceramics from the Song and Yuan period. Their research was not concerned with the makers of these artworks. It was more important for them to analyze the style, form, and content of these objects in relation to other products in art history. Scholars in early twentieth-century China discovered unknown artists whom previous researchers

<sup>35</sup> Guanyi Feng, *Zhongguo yishushi gelun* [Separate Comments on Chinese Art History], Shanghai: Huizhong Publisher, 1941, 348-349.

<sup>36</sup> Gu Teng, 'Nanyang hanhuaxiang shike zhi lishi de ji fengge de kaocha [A Historical and Stylistic Examination of Han Dynasty Pictorial Stone Carvings from Nanyang],' in Shi He, Yuanpei Cai, and Yunwu Wang (eds.), *Zhang Jusheng xiansheng qishi shengri jinian lunwenji* [Studies Presented to Mr. Zhang Jusheng on His Seventieth Birthday], Shanghai: the Commercial Press, 1937.

<sup>37</sup> Hung Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991, 23-30.

had considered as unimportant artisans. Via various professional studies, they positioned these artworks as canons in Chinese art history.

Innovations in writing the art history of China represented efforts by Chinese scholars to adapt to changes in society and to conserve Chinese tradition. This development provided new ways for Chinese scholars to reconsider Chinese art, its theories, canons, and functions. The extension of Chinese art to various categories shows the enlarged scope of Chinese scholarship on art. The linear time scheme indicates Chinese scholars' efforts to forge a continuous national history of art. New canons represented by artworks of unknown artisans secure Chinese artists' confidence in the future of Chinese art.

Chinese art historical publications in the early decades of the twentieth century applied these new paradigms in historical narratives of art in China so as to ensure a new access to China's art historical past. They disseminated modern knowledge of Chinese art in China with the intention of enlightenment. Canonization in Chinese art at that time applied new paradigms to organize old and new information of Chinese art into usable knowledge. This process of writing new histories for Chinese art contributed to the formation of a modern Chinese art history field.

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