UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Mountains and Rivers Remain:
Abstract Painting in Postwar Taiwan, 1957–1968

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Mountains and Rivers Remain: Abstract Painting in Postwar Taiwan, 1957–1968

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

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Professor Kuiyi Shen, Chair

My dissertation investigates the foreign and domestic forces instrumental in the development of modernist abstract painting in postwar Taiwan between 1957 and 1968. My work contributes to the discourse of postwar abstract painting and modernism by providing a critical study of the relationship between calligraphy, ink painting, and abstraction. Mainland-born, Taiwan-educated artists continued the unfinished project of May Fourth by conducting the first thorough re-examination of Chinese art traditions and

interacting with European and American modern art currents. Against a backdrop of post-colonial cultural reorientation, post-civil war social reconstruction, martial law, and Cold War geopolitical realities, abstraction emerged as a style that upheld traditional Chinese aesthetic principles, that translated personal experiences of displacement, and that promised readability in the international arena. The first two chapters examine the emergence of abstraction from outward- and inward-looking angles, respectively. Chapter One examines the curatorial agenda and interests behind "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," the first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art, 1966–1968. Chapter Two considers the pivotal role of two literature and arts magazines, *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, as cultural producers and dialogue generators in the formation of Taiwan Modernism. It highlights the tight relationship between the artists and poets as they constructed a discourse for modernism. Chapter Three traces the evolution of the meaning of abstraction in postwar Taiwan, paying special attention to the "abstract landscape" by Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, the most prominent artists of the Fifth Moon Society. Chapters Four and Five look at the respective practices of Liu and Chuang and offer detailed formal analysis of their paintings, especially on their treatment of calligraphy and abstraction. In Chapter Four, I analyze the artistic trajectory of Liu and the development of his vernacular landscape paintings throughout the 1960s. In Chapter Five, I identify Chuang's use of brokenness as an aesthetic that confronts the predicament of displacement. In both chapters I examine the patronage and reception of their work outside of Taiwan to place them in the larger discourse of postwar abstraction and show the challenges in traversing cultural boundaries for transnational artists of their postwar generation.

INTRODUCTION

In the decades following Taiwan's return to Chinese rule in 1945—after fifty years of Japanese colonization and the Nationalist government's retreat to Taiwan after its defeat by the Chinese Communists in 1949—the social and cultural environment on the island was ripe with anxiety and unrest. The government under the Kuomintang (KMT) administration prioritized the eradication of colonial vestige, using tactics such as banning the Japanese language to re-sinicize the population and reinstate the centrality of Chinese culture on the island. The government launched anti-Communist propaganda and morale-boosting directives to fortify its power in both political and cultural spheres; it also silenced and persecuted dissidents who challenged authority, especially after the 228 Massacre in 1947. As martial law dictated civilian life, persistent military threats from the People's Republic of China continued to jolt the stability that the government was desperate to restore. The reassurance of the nation's legitimacy came partially from the physical presence of the treasures from Beijing's imperial collection, which the KMT government removed from the capital for safekeeping during the Japanese invasion and brought to Taiwan in 1948 and 1949. The nation's international recognition was also bolstered from its position as an American ally in the Pacific Rim, a relationship that was cemented after the United States' involvement in the Korean and Vietnam wars. The alliance between Taiwan and America against the spread of Communism opened the island to an influx of American cultural information (and economic aid), which further complicated the existing strands of cultural influences from China and Japan.

The project to modernize Chinese culture in postwar Taiwan unfolded against this complicated backdrop of post-colonial cultural reorientation, post-civil war social rehabilitation and reconstruction, and Cold War geopolitical realities. While this was not the first time Chinese culture had undergone tremendous crisis and reform in the twentieth century—the May Fourth cultural movement that began in 1919 was the first awakening of Chinese intellectuals under the crushing threat of a Western imperialist agenda—the modernization project in postwar Taiwan navigated in a much more complex web of external and internal forces at the onset of globalization. In many ways, the modernist movement in Taiwan resurrected and continued the unfinished project of May Fourth. In the field of visual art, as the arts establishment implemented a staunch conservatism with the aim of preserving traditional Chinese aesthetic values and art forms to satisfy a nationalist agenda, young mainland-born, Taiwan-educated artists formed independent societies—such as the Fifth Moon Society and the Ton Fan Society, both founded around 1957—to explore artistic freedom and seek camaraderie. The cross-cultural, interdisciplinary pollination surrounding them, as well as their personal experiences of war and displacement, presented new perspectives and possibilities, and the language of abstraction emerged as one that could both uphold traditional Chinese aesthetic principles and promise readability in the international arena. From the mid-1950s through the 1960s, abstraction became the dominant style as well as the main visual output of Taiwan Modernism.

My dissertation investigates the foreign and domestic forces instrumental in the formation of modernist abstract painting in postwar Taiwan between 1957 and 1968. My study contributes to the discourse of postwar abstract painting and modernism by

providing a critical study of the relationship between calligraphy, ink painting, and abstraction. It considers an important moment in the history of Chinese art when artists in postwar Taiwan defined a modern Chinese visuality specific to its local conditions and attuned to international sensibilities. The first two chapters examine the emergence of abstraction in postwar Taiwan from outward- and inward-looking angles, respectively. Chapter One examines the curatorial agenda and interests behind "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," the first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art in the postwar Western world. Organized by a U.S.-based historian of Chinese Art, Li Chu-tsing, and sponsored by the JDR 3rd Fund, the exhibition toured in America from 1966 to 1968. By examining the curatorial framework, the exhibition implementation, and its reception in America, my study demonstrates how this exhibition constructed a Chinese visuality via Taiwan and America and cast a lasting impact on the critical interpretations of the art in both Taiwan and the U.S. Chapter Two turns to the domestic environment and considers the pivotal role played by two independent literature and arts magazines, *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, in the formation of Taiwan Modernism. The first in the art-historical discourse to argue for *Wenxing* and *Bihui* as cultural producers and dialogue generators in the postwar visual culture of Taiwan, my study both demonstrates the instrumental relationship between modernist painters and poets in the construction of a discourse and highlights their utilization of the magazines to catapult their movement into mainstream consciousness.

Chapter Three traces the evolution of the meaning of abstraction in postwar Taiwan. It follows the methodological and theoretical formulations of artists from the Fifth Moon and Ton Fan Societies, as well as their supporters, in search for an optimal

artistic language that was both abstract and Chinese. I pay special attention to how Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, the most prominent artists of the Fifth Moon Society, arrived at the idea of "abstract landscape" in their paintings. Taiwanese artists used European and American abstract art as references for their experiments, and I compare their methodology and practice to those in the parallel art worlds of Europe and America. Ultimately, my investigation shows that abstraction in postwar Taiwanese art was not always defined in opposition to representation—as is typical in Western modern art—but rather by the knowledge system within Chinese art theory; and its practices were informed first by European modern art and then by American abstract art.

Chapters Four and Five look at the individual practices of Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che and offer detailed formal analysis of a selection of their paintings. The chapters show how the two friends and rivals—who have been estranged since 1966—differed greatly in how they incorporated calligraphy and Taoist philosophy in their paintings. In Chapter Four, I analyze Liu's artistic trajectory and the development of his vernacular landscape paintings throughout the 1960s. My study shows how he extracted ideas from calligraphy and classical Chinese painting theory to develop a new vocabulary for ink landscape painting that is accessible to both Chinese and foreign audiences. I give special attention to the reception of Liu's paintings within institutional-sponsored activities outside of Taiwan. In Chapter Five, I follow the artistic career of Chuang and identify his use of brokenness as an aesthetic for confronting the predicament of displacement. In his mixed-media collage paintings, Chuang updated the Chinese landscape tradition through a Western-inspired process and understanding of materials. Through examples of patronage and reception of Chuang's work in the U.S., I show the

advantages and challenges of traversing cultural boundaries for transnational artists of Chuang's generation. This dissertation places modernist abstract painting and artists in postwar Taiwan in the larger discourse of postwar abstraction and argues for a more nuanced reading of their work in the history of Chinese art and postwar modernisms globally.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS REMAIN: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CHINESE VISUALITY VIA TAIWAN AND AMERICA IN THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES

In 1966, when the Cultural Revolution began in full force in mainland China, an exhibition featuring artists residing in Taiwan and in America, "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," toured in the United States until 1968. Sponsored by the JDR 3rd Fund and managed by the American Federation of the Arts (AFA) in New York, "The New Chinese Landscape" was the first major exhibition of contemporary Chinese art in the postwar Western world. Organized by a Chinese-American art historian, Li Chu-tsing (Li Zhujin), with the assistance of Thomas Lawton, an American scholar of Chinese art and a Fulbright scholar in Taipei, the exhibition launched the international career of Liu Kuo-sung (Liu Guosong), Chuang Che (Zhuang Zhe), and Fong Chung-ray (Feng Zhongrui), three young painters of the Fifth Moon Society (*wuyue huahui*) in Taiwan. Even though this was not the artists' debut in America, it certainly was the most professionally organized, well-publicized, and thematic presentation of their work (Figure 1.1).[1]

[1] Selected exhibitions of artists from Taiwan in the U.S. prior to "The New Chinese Landscape" include: exhibitions of Ton Fan (Dong Fang) society artists at the Mi Chou Gallery, New York (January and November 1960), reviewed by Dore Ashton in the *New York Times*, 11 January 1960. See Linda Margaret Graves, "Contemporary Chinese Painting in Taiwan" (M.A. thesis, Oberlin College, 1965), 30 –31; "The Chinese Contemporary Painting Exhibition" at the Parrish Art Museum, Southhampton, New York (1963), organized by painter Sun Duo-tzi (Sun Duoci), formerly a professor at the National Normal University in Taipei; Painting Exhibition by Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che at the Art Gallery of Oberlin College, OH, co-organized by Linda Graves (1964); an exhibition of five Chinese painters, the Woodrow Wilson Society of Princeton University, organized by Lee Chu-yuan (Li Zuyuan), a Princeton architecture student from Taiwan. (February or March 1965).

Against the backdrop of Cold War politics where Taiwan was an American ally on the Pacific Rim and the only "China" recognized by the international community, the exhibition was a timely alignment of various interests enabled by circumstance: the emergence of new art in Taiwan; the rise of America on the global stage whose power manifested in various activities of cultural exchange with East Asian nations; a growing use of international art exhibitions to forge alliances and transmit ideologies in the postwar era; and the support of art historians who acted as interlocutors between Taiwan and America.

This chapter investigates the place of Chinese art in the international context of the 1960s as imagined and experienced by the organizers and participants of this seminal exhibition. It provides an enlarged, global framework to consider art from Taiwan beyond its usual scope within the contexts of Taiwanese art or Chinese art. By examining how the organizers selected, packaged, interpreted, and displayed the art by the postwar Chinese diaspora, a clearer picture of how Chinese painting is viewed in the postwar context will emerge.[2] How did the curators interpret art by the postwar Chinese diaspora for the U.S. audience? How did the themes of the exhibition capture or misrepresent the artistic pursuit of the artists, and how did the artists view the exhibition and the opportunity? How did audiences respond?

Several terms taken from the exhibition title guide the lines of inquiry of this discussion through a bifocal lens of Taiwan and America: "new," "Chinese,"

[2] In the context of this dissertation, the "postwar Chinese diaspora" refers to those who migrated from the mainland between 1945 and 1952, roughly. There were two waves of this diaspora: first, after Japan declared defeat in the Pacific War, many Chinese mainlanders moved abroad for various reasons; second, followed by the Communist takeover of the mainland, more people fled. The artists of the Fifth Moon, Ton Fan, Four Seas (*sihai*) Societies discussed in this dissertation belong to the latter category.

"landscape," and "contemporary." Mapping the network of forces that contributed to the construction of the canon will reveal two major findings: first, the various motivations of the Chinese and American individuals involved in the organization of the exhibition converged and culminated into a particular style of Chinese art; and second, the artists' individual beliefs in modernity and contemporaneity in art—in dialogue with the West—might be buried under such milestone-making, collective goal of the exhibition. Artists' negotiations in modernizing Chinese painting and their desire to gain recognition domestically and abroad complicate such trans-cultural endeavors. The discussion demonstrates that this particular construction of a Chinese visuality via Taiwan and America cast a lasting effect on the development of artists and the critical interpretation of their work in Taiwan and in the U.S.

The Exhibition Apparatus in Taiwan

In the late 1950s, young artists who dared to venture out of the classical ink painting realm or the Japanese-style oil painting in the tradition of post-impressionists were shunned by the annual Provincial Art Exhibition (*shengzhan*), a juried exhibition administered by the Ministry of Education, which still maintained the infrastructure and taste of the colonial era.[3] Originally established by the Japanese colonial government in 1927, the Provincial Art Exhibition was reinstated in 1946, after a wartime hiatus, by a group of Japanese-educated Taiwanese painters. These painters seized the opportunity to

[3] The exhibition's colonial predecessor, *Taiten* (*taizhan*), was the first of its kind in Taiwan, established by the Japanese in 1927 as an offshoot of the government-administered Japan Arts Exhibition (abbreviated as *Nitten*), which began in 1907; *Taiten*'s purpose was to propagate Japanese modern art styles in the colony, a strategy typical in colonial governance.

promote a local voice in art, which was silenced during the colonial years.[4] Under their direction, the postwar Provincial Art Exhibition sustained the colonial aesthetic standards—once a symbol of modernization for the colonial subject, but it also encouraged local subject matters and admitted classical Chinese ink paintings in an effort to re-sinicize in the search for a new cultural identity.[5]

However, several artists who came from mainland China protested vehemently against the continued prominence of Japanese-influenced styles in the annual exhibitions. The mainlanders possessed a sense of superiority in their "purer" Chinese art lineage that fueled their discontent toward the exhibition's Japanese slant and the island's lack of history of Chinese ink art. The argument superficially focused on artistic style, but deep down, the protracted fight centered on ideologies, origins, and authenticity. In the 1960s, the Provincial Exhibition gradually became more welcoming to the younger generation, most of whom graduated from the art departments of teacher's or military colleges or were students of those in the art establishment, but it still largely operated as a reinforcement of the conservative art establishment. The exhibition maintained the divisions of national painting (classical Chinese ink painting) and Western painting (Japanese-style oil and gouache paintings) and stressed the incompatibility of the two camps.

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[4] See Hsiao Chong-ray (Xiao Qiongrui), *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan: The Development of the Modernization of Chinese Art in Postwar Taiwan (1945–1970) (wuyue yu dongfang: zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou taiwan zhi fazhan*) (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), 133–44.

[5] The reinstated *Shengzhan* showed the agency of Taiwanese painters by ridding off the Japanese jury and allowing Chinese ink painting into the competition. However, the type of works accepted were mostly by Japanese-trained painters who were successful before the war and by mainland transplants who were favored by the elites of the Nationalist (Kuomintang) government. See Hsiao, 133–86.

Artists were largely isolated from the international art currents during this period of postwar recovery. With neither a commercial gallery system nor consistent patronage for modern art, young artists were left to their own devices.[6] At the time, the best way for artists to establish a reputation, gain exposure, and seek feedback was to put on their own exhibitions—the main activity of art societies like Fifth Moon. The international opportunities were rare, yet they held substantial weight to artists in their domestic context. Any form of acceptance of their work outside of Taiwan validated their artistic pursuits; by finding reassurance from a foreign audience, the young artists signaled to the old guard the advance of their creative direction. This in fact reflected a common feeling among people in Taiwan: as citizens of a government in exile, they sought various forms of support from international entities in the fields of politics, economics, the military, science, and art.

By the time the Fifth Moon artists started to stage exhibits in 1957, there were few available exhibition spaces in Taiwan.[7] Museums were under the jurisdiction of the government and were not designed for art exhibitions. The most long-standing institution at the time was the Taiwan Provincial Museum (today's National Taiwan Museum), a Japanese-constructed neo-classical style architecture in 1908 that was primarily used for natural history, ethnographical and archaeological exhibits. In 1964, the Fifth Moon

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[6] Art historian John Clark mentioned the "short lived, small galleries" in Taipei that "sold almost exclusively to U.S. military officers, advisers or diplomats." See John Clark, "Taiwanese Painting and Europe: Direct and Indirect Relations," *Modernities in Chinese Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 122. However, most artists and patrons told me the transactions were made directly.

[7] There were a few independent, non-commercial exhibition galleries in Taipei, such as Mei'erlian Gallery (started in the late 1950s and attached to a coffee house); Jubao'pen Gallery (founded in 1962. See "Venues for Art" (*meishu changyu*), National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art website: http://www1.ntmofa.gov.tw/artnew/html/2-3/102.htm, accessed 21 October 2016); and Hai-Tian Gallery (established in Taipei in the mid-1960s in a space belonged to a printing factory in the same building that was given to artists for exhibitions. According to artist Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 5 October 2016).

Group held their eighth exhibition there, which suggested an official approval of their art. Yet judging by archival photographs, the system of exhibition implementation was rudimentary.

The first modern-style museum built in postwar Taiwan—the National History Museum (NHM)—opened in 1956. Used for the purpose of exhibiting the collection of antiquities transported from the mainland under the governance of the Ministry of Education,[8] in 1961, it added the "National Gallery" (*guojia hualang*) within the museum building and began hosting art exhibitions.[9] Soon after its completion, the NHM became the government institution responsible for the Republic of China's submission to the Paris Biennial in 1959 and the São Paulo Biennial from 1957 to 1973.[10] In 1966, it hosted the "New Chinese Landscape" before its American tour. Another venue, the National Center of Arts (or National Arts Hall) was completed in 1957 and became the frequent venue for the National Exhibition (*quanguo meizhan*), an alternative to the Provincial Exhibition.[11] Chuang Che, a Fifth Moon artist, had his first solo show there in 1965.[12]

One international exhibition in particular slightly improved the underappreciated status of the young generation of Taiwanese artists: the Republic of China's participation

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[8] The museum was planned in the winter of 1955 and opened in the spring of 1956. Its collection came from the collection of Henan Provincial Museum and "relics recovered from the Japanese" after the Second Sino-Japanese war. "Building and Collections," National Museum of History website, http://www.nmh.gov.tw/en/about_9_2.htm; accessed 21 October 2016.

[9] See a detailed explanation in Léon Chang (Zhang Longyan), "On Painting Galleries" (*shuo hualang*), *Wenxing* 45 (1 July 1961): 28.

[10] According to Chiang Po-shin's research, from the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign affairs, the R.O.C. Embassy in Brazil sent an airmailed official message to the Ministry, and it passed on the information to the Ministry of Education, the governing organization of the National History Museum. Chiang Po-shin, "Mirror of Modernity: Piecing Together/Installing 'New Painting' in Taiwan and Brazil (1957–1973)," in *Collision between Regions and Styles of Times—Collected Papers from the Academic Conference on Subjectivity of Taiwanese Art* (Taichung: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 166–201.

[11] See Hsiao, 108–09.

[12] Chuang Che remembered that to exhibit at the National Arts Hall, one needed to fill in an application. Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 5 October 2016.

in the São Paulo Biennial in 1957.[13] Upon the invitation by the Brazilian government, the R.O.C. government began to realize that the international art exhibition was another important battlefield. Coordinated by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and the R.O.C. Embassy in Brazil, the R.O.C's participation was fueled by a determination to edge out the P.R.C.'s entrance into the Biennial and to seize the opportunity to boost its national image, to claim cultural legitimacy amidst political instability, and to flaunt the extraordinary quality of Chinese culture to the international community.[14] New art that fit the "international aesthetics" (observed by a top R.O.C. diplomat in Brazil at previous editions of the Biennial) and antiquities that highlight the glorious past were selected by the government. They planned the juxtaposition of the two extremes to showcase Taiwan's cultural superiority through heritage objects and young talents. As art historian Chiang Po-shin (Jiang Boxin) argues, abstract painting was "a tool that was being experimented with and improved upon in the diplomatic war between Nationalist and Communist China."[15]

Willingly or unwillingly, artists took part in a project of national image building. Yet this relationship—not built on artistic merit or mutual trust, but by circumstance—was tenuous. Success abroad did not guarantee immunity from political paranoia during the martial law era or promise stable living as a professional artist.[16] A number of artists

[13] The participation ended in 1973, mainly because Brazil terminated the diplomatic relations with the R.O.C. in August 1974.
[14] Artists of the P.R.C. officially entered the São Paulo Biennial in 1994. See Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "Major Events in Modern Chinese Art," *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 324.
[15] Chiang, 201.
[16] Artist Qin Song won an award at the 1959 São Paulo Biennial but later was almost persecuted because of a suspicious painting he exhibited in 1960. See Chapter Three, 93–94.

afraid of losing their artistic freedom emigrated abroad.[17] Yet regardless of its political implications, "The São Paulo effect" aided the gradual ascension of non-figurative styles in Taiwanese art. The showcase abroad brought a much needed boost to the confidence to their choice of style and career.

The self-esteem deficit in artists was so severe that the "foreign" endorsement did not need to be from a Western source to make a difference. The Hong Kong Modern Literature and Art Association, a group formed by writer and poet Shum Quanan (Cen Kunnan), poet Wai-lim Yip (Ye Weilian, b. 1937), poet and painter Wucius Wong (Wang Wuxie, b. 1935), and writer Li Yinghao promoting modernist forms of art and literature, showed and granted awards to works by artists in Taiwan at their annual International Painting Salon since 1960. Hong Kong, as a British colony, had more direct contact and exposure to Western art and culture, as well as freedom to explore and experiment with new ideas. To the Taiwanese, Hong Kong was the closest thing to an international community, with the added advantage of being first and foremost a Chinese society. News of artists Chuang Che, Fong Chung-ray, Liu Kuo-sung, and Chen Ting-shih (Chen Tingshi, 1913–2002) winning awards or shortlisted in Hong Kong exhibitions were reported in Taiwan an included in the artists' résumés.[18] The Hong Kong exhibitions that included artists from Taiwan solidified the alliance and allowed exchanges between the

[17] After Ku Fu-sheng's abstract oil painting won the São Paulo Biennial's "Honorable Mention" in 1961, his family who had long objected to his art career, finally agreed to let him study art abroad. Ku Fu-sheng (Gu Fusheng), interview by author, Rancho Cucamonga, CA, 16 May 2012. Hsiao Chin (Xiao Qin) left Taiwan for Madrid as early as 1956; Li Yuan-chia (Li Yuanjia) left in 1960 for Italy, and Hsia Yan (Xia Yang) emigrated to Paris the same year.

[18] See for example, "Hong Kong International Salon of Painting" (*xianggang guoji huihua shalong*), *United Daily News*, 26 June 1962, p. 8.

modernist literary and art circles in the two locations. Even so, the exhibition agenda was to promote the modern art ideas, but still without the proper exhibition apparatus.

In this context, Li Chu-tsing's exhibition had curatorial, intellectual, and scholarly authority and independence that none of the previous exhibitions had had, whether in or outside Taiwan. "The New Chinese Landscape" placed Taiwanese modern art into a broader, trans-Pacific, transnational perspective. The narrative for the exhibition bypassed the local debates fixated on status quo and ideology that entrapped the artists previously; it changed the conversation from politics to the art itself, and most remarkably, it was the first time Western spectatorship cast eyes upon new Taiwanese art.

The Forces behind the Exhibition

The background of the curators is crucial in understanding the motivation and conceptual framework of "The New Chinese Landscape" exhibition. Li Chu-tsing (1920–2014) was an art history professor at the University of Iowa and one of the pioneering scholars to establish modern and contemporary Chinese art as a field of study. After completing his university degree in English literature in wartime China, Li went to the U.S. in 1947 and received a M.A. in English literature and a Ph.D. on northern Baroque paintings, both from the University of Iowa. Li's exposure to the American academic and exhibition culture, as well as his knowledge of classical Chinese paintings and the cultural issues of modern Chinese art, laid a solid foundation to his appreciation for new art in Taiwan. Between September 1963 and August 1964, supported by the American Council of Learned Societies and his university to research Yuan dynasty painting, Li

visited Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. It was on this trip that he encountered the artists whose work he later included in the exhibition.

He described the experience in a 1964 letter to Porter McCray, the director of the JDR 3rd Fund:

> I found the situation in art in both Hong Kong and Taiwan very much the same as that of the time when I left China. There is still a sharp dichotomy between traditionalism on the one hand and Westernization on the other. Young artists simply have to choose between the two, but are not supposed to embrace both….However…I did encounter a number of interesting artists who seem to be able to absorb both the Chinese tradition and Western influence to achieve a new expression. The number of artists in this direction is very small, but, from my point of view, they represent the genuine creative effort in China today outside the mainland.[19]

Li's statement makes clear that he was captivated by a homegrown, hybrid type of art that synthesizes Chinese and Western styles, a route for new art that he deemed appropriate, or "genuine." Li, of course, had his personal biases as a member of the diasporic population and as an academic straddling between two cultures, but his semi-outsider status gave him at least the appearance of objectivity and clarity to the local situation. Most importantly for these young artists, Li treated the new art he discovered in Hong Kong and Taiwan as a continuation of the Chinese art lineage, a much needed validation.

Thomas Lawton, the supporting curator and local liaison of the project, was Li's M.F.A. student at the University of Iowa working on a Harvard Ph.D. in art history on a Fulbright scholarship in Taipei. Aside from researching in Taipei's Palace Museum collection since 1964, Lawton was an advisor to the Museum, helping with its English

[19] Li Chu-tsing to Porter McCray, 27 June 1964, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

correspondence and interpretation for scholarly lectures, editing the museum's bi-monthly publication, and assisting the publication of the English edition of the new museum handbook.[20] For the "New Chinese Landscape" exhibition, Lawton acted as a registrar and curator. He prepared the artworks for travel, coordinated the shipment and insurance with the American Federation of the Arts, and organized the materials for the catalogue. Since none of the Taiwanese artists had any professional experience or strong English language skills, Lawton played a crucial role in enabling the exhibition from the ground level.[21]

In the late 1950s throughout the 1960s, Taiwan was a meeting place for art historians, archaeologists, and Sinologists who had profound interest in the imperial collection relocated to Taiwan after the Civil War. In addition to Li and Lawton, James Cahill, curator at the Freer Gallery in Washington D.C.; Laurence Sickman, curator at the Nelson Museum (now Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art) in Kansas City; Richard Edwards, professor of Asian art at the University of Michigan; Wango Weng, collector, connoisseur, and documentary filmmaker who emigrated from China to the U.S. in the late 1930s, to name a few, all went to Taiwan for research.[22] These American pioneers of the foundation of Chinese art studies and museum collections, who later endorsed Li's project (as well as several young artists' careers) by giving personal recommendations or

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[20] "Docket Memorandum—The JDR 3rd Fund, Inc. Board of Trustees Meeting," 17 March 1966, Folder B-6664, Box 94, Art history-China, Lawton, Thomas, ACC collection, JDR 3rd Fund records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[21] Even though both Li and Lawton were billed as the exhibition curators, the exhibition concept and selection of artworks were by Li. Therefore, throughout this dissertation, when referring to the curatorial framework, I credit only Li, except for quotations from Li and Lawton's co-authored essays and catalogue.

[22] See Robert Mowry, ed., *A Tradition Redefined: Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Paintings from the Chu-Tsing Li Collection, 1950–2000* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2007), 64; Wengo Weng, "Memories from Making Photography at the Mountain Pavilion" (*shantang sheying yiwang*), in *The Palace Museum, Calligraphy, Chuang Yan* (*gugong, shufa, zhuang yan*), ed. Chuang Yan (Taipei: Lion Art, 1999), 262–65.

hosting exhibitions at their institutions, lent concrete support to artists outside of the establishment, lifting them above the local debate fixated on cultural authenticity, at least symbolically. Their presence in Taiwan and their support for the new art in fact pointed to a few issues specific to this time and place. The study of Chinese art history and interest in Chinese antiquities boomed in American universities in the postwar decades as a product of fervent collecting activities by institutions and wealthy individuals since the early twentieth century.[23] But because the interest only focused on historical, not contemporary art, the discovery of a possible new heir to the ancient heritage was exciting and a gratifying postwar recovery story. The support for new art by Li Chu-tsing and other Chinese art historians from America signaled the first crack in the model of "the contemporary West meets the ancient East" of cultural exchange and in the predominantly Western-oriented discourse of modern art in America.

Private Institutions with Eyes on China

Through curator and art historian James Cahill's introduction, Li approached Porter McCray (1908–2000), the director of the JDR 3rd Fund, about his discoveries of new talent in the Far East and proposed an exhibition of new Chinese art from Taiwan and Hong Kong. McCray was a skillful administrator experienced in organizing American exhibitions abroad. Before and during World War II, he worked for Nelson Rockefeller at the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a privately funded agency promoting cultural exchange between the Americas. In 1947, McCray was invited

[23] The adventures and stories are well documented in Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *The China Collectors: America's Century-Long Hunt for Asian Art Treasures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

by Rockefeller to join the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, of which he was the board's chairman, to expand and implement the cultural exchange programs supported by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.[24] With an impressive track record of mounting traveling exhibitions and collaborating with foreign governments and institutions, as well as a network of powerful political figures, scions, and tastemakers in his circle, in 1963, McCray brought his political and diplomatic savvy to the JDR 3rd Fund.

One of the most influential families in American culture, politics, international relations, and philanthropy since the early twentieth century, the Rockefellers had a consistent interest in Asian art and culture. The JDR 3rd Fund, founded by Nelson Rockefeller's older brother, John D. Rockefeller 3rd (1906–78), incorporated in 1963 "to stimulate, encourage, promote, and support activities important to human welfare," along with other organizations founded by the fund (such as Asia House, now known as the Asia Society), addressed the varied interests and ambition of its powerful patron. The Asian Cultural Program (1963–79) was one of the three major programs of the fund's activities. Its mandate was to promote East-West cultural understanding,[25] a rather vague remit for a high profile institution. True to its mission, the Asian Cultural Program supported projects and grantees in a wide range of fields such as music, visual art, dance, literature, design, archaeology, and museology with a geographical reach in East Asia,

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[24] Porter McCray, interview by Sharon Zane, New York, 25 April 1991, transcript, p. 25, The Museum of Modern Art Oral History Program, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_mccray.pdf; accessed 21 October 2016.

[25] "JDR 3rd Fund Activities," Rockefeller Archive Center website, http://rockarch.org/collections/rockorgs/jdr3orgs.php; accessed 21 October 2016. The fund was dissolved in 1979, but its Asian Cultural Program was continued by a new organization, the Asian Cultural Council.

Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia. However, the program excluded countries under communist regimes like Vietnam, P.R.C., and North Korea.[26] The geopolitical preference of the JDR 3rd Fund aligned with the American diplomatic and economic alliances during the Cold War. One only needs to reference the 1934 controversy and the subsequent destruction of Mexican artist Diego Rivera's commissioned realist mural depicting Lenin at the Rockefeller Center in New York to know the political beliefs of its commissioner.

The intersection between art, culture, politics, and diplomacy demonstrated by the leadership and programs of the JDR 3rd Fund brings nuances to their interest to support "The New Chinese Landscape." Prior to the exhibition, in 1965, the JDR 3rd Fund sponsored "The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture" exhibition at MoMA. The major exhibition showcased the latest "discoveries" of abstract paintings and sculptures from Japan. Many were by the members of the Gutai group, the Osaka-based art group that used their bodies and performative actions as a statement to rise against the primacy of painting. MoMA's own history of championing abstraction in the 1940s foregrounds the stylistic preference of the show, but the exhibition could not have taken place without the context of postwar U.S.–Japan relations, especially after the signing of the Security Treaty (known as "Anpo") in 1960.[27]

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[26] Grantee files, Folders 503 and 504, Box 60, Series 7, JDR 3rd Fund Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[27] Another possibility of the Fund's involvement may be related to the interest of its founder. During World War II, John D. Rockefeller 3rd served in the Navy and worked in a task force devoted to the planning of postwar policy for Japan. His involvement in U.S.–Japan relations fueled his interest in Japan, and later he became an avid collector of Japanese and Asian art. For the biography of John D. Rockefeller 3rd, see "John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, 1906–1978," The Rockefeller Archive Center, http://www.rockarch.org/bio/jdr3.php; accessed 5 September 2014.

Such exhibitions ushering contemporary Japanese artists onto New York stage—"the center of the liberal art world"—were undoubtedly loaded with a nationalist and Cold War agenda.[28] Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the American involvement in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars solidified Taiwan's position as a U.S. strategic base in the South China Sea. The R.O.C., the "Free China," was desperately dependent on foreign aid and alliances to stabilize, rebuild, and defend against the military threat from the mainland. In addition to American aid with the economy, military, medicine, and education on the island, cultural information from America, including that of literature, film, art, and music, poured in. The United States Information Services (USIS), the government-run outlet for American information around the world, established its branch in Taipei in 1945, headed by the renowned Sinologist John Fairbank (1907–91). One of the USIS library's main missions was to promote the understanding of American politics, economy, culture, and values, and this goal also followed the State Department policy of fostering international exchanges with allying countries to curb the spread of Communism.[29] Many literary and art figures coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan have credited the USIS library for offering abundant materials for their self-

[28] The formal affinity of postwar art in Japan to that in the U.S. have prompted many art historical inquiries on the issue of contemporaneity, and the motive and reasoning behind such importation. See Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015); Alexandra Munroe and Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 2013). Whether it was Americans reinforcing their cultural centrality and superiority over art from "peripheral" areas, or that organizers were more comfortable showing the development of abstract painting in Japan, is meant for discussion elsewhere.

[29] See Wang Mei-Hsiang, "Beauty/American Force: The Relationship between Postwar American Aid Culture and the 1950s and 1960s Anti-Communist literature and the development of Modernism" (*susha suiyue de meili/meili? zhanhou meiyuan wenhua yu wuliushi niandai fangong wenxue xiandai zhuyi sichao fazhan zhi guanxi*) (M.A. thesis, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan, 2005), 39.

education under a resource-deprived Taiwan.[30] For both state and private ventures, culture and politics went hand in hand at the height of the Cold War. The American cultural and political elite—the dominant "center"—wished to locate, incubate, groom, and nurture a Chinese visuality that would be harmonious to American values and aesthetic standards, while artists living under censorship-controlled, anti-communist Taiwan, naturally gravitated toward the U.S. as it was made available as a politically correct and desirable reference for modern art and culture.

The fund's activities in Taiwan officially began with "The New Chinese Landscape" (A grant of $8,800 was confirmed on October 19, 1965.)[31] Until 1979, the fund supported the overseas travel and studies for Taiwan-based scholars, artists, writers, educators, and museum professionals and played a pivotal role in advancing their careers, including those of the three young painters in Li's exhibition.[32] Liu Kuo-sung's travel grant was effective from March 1966 to December 1967, Chuang Che's from September 1, 1966 to December 31, 1967, and Fong Chung-ray's in the summer of 1971.[33] The grants from a major American organization—especially a powerful brand like Rockefeller— translated into the potential for more concrete opportunities that lay ahead for the artists. The impact of the grant on the artists' careers accentuated the

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[30] My conversations with most of the artists featured in this dissertation support this claim.

[31] McCray to Li, 19 October 1965, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA-Grant, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Grant records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[32] The fund also supported the travels of American scholars, performers, and other art-related practitioners to Asian regions. Folders 503 and 504, Box 60, Series 7, JDR 3rd Fund Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[33] The artists were notified by the JDR 3rd Fund in the following notices: "Docket Memorandum—The JDR 3rd Fund, Inc, Board of Trustees Meeting," 23 September 1965, B-6612 B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC; Porter McCray to Chuang Che, 11 April 1966, Folder DF-6804, B-6651, Box 107, Chuang, Che, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection; McCray to Fong Chung-ray, 19 October 1970, Folder B-7140, Box 110, Fong, Chung-ray, Painting/Sculpture-Taiwan, ACC collection; all from the Rockefeller Archive Center. However, they applied for extension to stay in the U.S. after they arrived, so the actual dates of their visit were different from the ones on the letters.

psychological reliance on America and the symbolic meaning of a developed nation's support to art and artistic freedom.[34]

Artists in the Exhibition: Three Generations of Artists Residing outside of China

The biographies of the participating artists informed the curatorial framework. The exhibition featured six mainland-born Chinese artists, which included two mid-career artists who had lived or was living in the U.S., Chen Chi-kwan and Wang Chi-Chuan; one elderly artist Yu Cheng-yao, who resided in Taipei; and three emerging artists based in Taipei, Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray. All artists in the exhibition left China around 1949, indicating that the locus of the "new Chinese painting" in Li Chu-tsing's formulation resided outside of the mainland. Li, himself a transnational figure straddling East Asian and Western cultures, was surely sensitive to these details in proposing an exhibition of Chinese art in the U.S.

Wang Chi-Chuan (Wang Jiqian, most known as C. C. Wang, 1907–2003) began his art career early in life in Suzhou, China, as an educator, painter, and connoisseur, and was widely exhibited. He moved to the U.S. after the Sino-Japanese War and experimented with a variety of techniques inspired by Abstract Expressionism while remaining deeply rooted in the ink and landscape tradition. At the time of Li's visit to Asia, Wang was finishing his visiting tenure as the head of the art department of the New Asia College in Hong Kong.

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[34] Based on my conversations with several artists who received American grants such as the JDR 3rd Fund and the Asian Cultural Council, though they were aware of their playing part in the drama of cultural propaganda, they cherished the experiences abroad.

Chen Chi-kwan (Chen Qikwan, 1921–2007)—a Beijing-born architect who obtained advance degrees in the U.S. and worked for the German architect and founder of Bauhaus Walter Gropius—is famous for co-designing the modernist landmark, the Luce Church, at the Tunghai University in Taichung, Taiwan with I. M. Pei (Bei Yuming) in 1963. Chen was the founding chair of the architecture department of the university at the time of the exhibition. He fused an architect's eye and a painter's brush to produce paintings that playfully connect the shifting perspective in Chinese landscape painting and layered sightlines in traditional Chinese garden design with the expansion of visual fields enabled by photography. Since the late 1950s, his work had been represented by commercial galleries in Boston and New York, including the Chinese-art focused Mi Chou Gallery in New York co-founded by C. C. Wang. [35]

Compared to Chen and Wang's international experience, the rest of the artists in Taiwan had limited exposure to the West. Yu Cheng-yao (Yu Chengyao, 1898–1993), the oldest and perhaps the least "contaminated" by Western art among the group, was a retired general who came to Taiwan from the mainland with the Kuomintang (KMT) government in 1949.[36] Without formal training, Yu picked up the brush after his retirement and painted exclusively landscape. His understanding of the nature was a result of his first-hand observation of Northern Chinese terrain as an army artillery captain during the Sino-Japanese War, where he developed a sensitivity in the scale of

[35] Mi Chou Gallery in New York was the first gallery focusing on Chinese-American art in the U.S. Its original location was at C. C. Wang's apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Fred Wong, interview by author, New York, 19 February 2014.
[36] Yu studied economics at Waseda University and military strategy at the Imperial Japanese Army Academy in Tokyo in the early 1920s.

landscape, as well as the details of rocks, vegetation, and streams.[37] Yu's landscapes are rigid to the point of being geometric in shape and follow the traditional composition of the forms of rocks, mountains, trees, and rivers, using meticulous, self-fashioned textured strokes.

Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray are mainland-born and moved to Taiwan in their teens with the KMT government. Liu (b. 1932) co-founded the Fifth Moon Society in 1957 with a few fellow graduates of the art department of the National Normal University. Chuang (b. 1934), a year behind Liu at school, joined the group upon graduation. Fong (b. 1934) was a member of the Four Seas Society, which consisted mostly of painters in the navy based in Kaohsiung, in southern Taiwan. He joined the Fifth Moon in 1961. In the early 1960s, the majority of the Fifth Moon painters experimented with abstraction, motivated by the urge to make Chinese painting relevant to modern times. The gestural, calligraphic, and spontaneous look of Abstract Expressionist paintings, such as those by Franz Kline, Mark Tobey, and Jackson Pollock, as well as early modern art by Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, (often viewed in poor reproductions) gave the artists in Taiwan an entry point to Western modern art. Sensing that abstraction had become the lingua franca of international art, the young painters brought new ideas to Chinese painting, but naturally they faced strong opposition from members of the art establishment.

The little exposure of these six artists in the U.S. was one of the reasons Li put together this exhibition. Li states in his formalized exhibition proposal in February 1965, that "such a showing of their works in America will help to give them an international

[37] Artist Yu Peng (1955–2014), interview by author, Taipei, 16 June 2014.

status they badly need to gain a new voice in their own society."[38] The statement highlights the struggles of artists in Taiwan, and demonstrates an awareness of the hegemonic structure of an art world defined by power and access. Balancing the roster of artists by mixing mid-career (with gallery representations in the U.S.) and emerging ones could secure an audience base and inject confidence into potential sponsors; it is a common exhibition strategy where young artists can benefit from being exhibited alongside senior artists. Exhibiting different generations of artists together showcases the plurality of artistic experimentations in Chinese art at a time when the West's knowledge of the field mostly stopped at the classical periods.

The story of the exhibition cannot be told without mentioning poet, writer, and critic Yu Kwang-chung (Yu Guangzhong, b. 1928). Li's introduction to new art in Taiwan was through him, his former student at Iowa. After finishing the M.F.A. program, Yu returned to Taiwan, taught at National Normal University, and penned essays and reviews supporting modern art and in particular the Fifth Moon artists.[39] At Yu's urging, Li saw the works by the young artists in Liu's apartment in Taipei and was surprised by the quality and energy of the works. Yu also introduced his uncle Yu Cheng-yao to Li. Li's trip to visit to Taichung, where the National Palace Museum and the National Central Museum collections were located, was hosted by Chuang Che's father, Chuang Yan (Zhuang Yan), the deputy director. Chuang Che, at the time an instructor in Tunghai University's architecture department headed by Chen Chi-kwan, met Li then. This tightly

[38] Li to McCray, 5 February 1965, Folder B-6625, Exhibition-China, AFA Exhibition, JDR 3rd Fund, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[39] Yu Kwang-chung, interview by author, Kaohsiung, 3 December 2012.

woven social network of scholars and artists facilitated the selection of the artists in the show and framed Li's thinking for the exhibition.

At the proposal stage, Li considered three artists in Hong Kong and in the U.S.: the founder of Hong Kong's New Ink movement, Lui Shou-kwan (Lü Shoukwun,1919–75); Oakland, California-based female painter and embroiderer in the abstract expressionist vein, Lu Wu-chiu (Lu Wujiu); and oil painter Kwong Yiu-ting (Kuang Yaoding, 1922–2011) who combined his Chinese, U.S., and U.K. training to create abstract painting reminiscent of landscape. Ultimately these artists were dropped, although the reasons remain unclear. Most likely Li wanted to simplify the exhibition logistics and coordination between Taiwan and New York, or perhaps out of budgetary constraints, the final list of artists was tightened to six.[40] His commitment to artists outside of Communist China—specifically from Taiwan—and those who already have a reputation in New York perhaps matched the JDR 3rd Fund's interests. Interestingly, Li did not consider artists who were already established internationally and living abroad, like Zao Wou-ki (Zhao Wuji, 1921–2013), Tseng Yuho (Zeng Youhe, b. 1921), Walasse Ting (Ding Xiongquan, 1929–2010), or Chang Dai-chien (Zhang Daqian, 1899–1983), the most revered figure of Chinese art (living in Brazil at the time).

Though his exhibition was independent from the political or diplomatic machine of the KMT government, his choice of artists to some degree followed the political

[40] In Li's first proposal to McCray on 27 June 1964, eight artists (excluding Fong Chung-ray) were listed as part of his discovery in the region. (He did explain that Chen Chi-kwan is only "a possibility," because "he is already quite famous in America.") His 5 February 1965 proposal eliminated Lui Shou-kwan and Lu Wu-chiu. Kwong Yiu-ting was removed from the new proposal, ""The New Chinese Landscape: An Exhibition of Paintings by Six Artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong," May 1965. All material from Folder B-6625, Box 98, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd group, ACC collection, AFA records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

borders, which excludes mainland China. Additionally, the artists eventually featured in the show shared similar diasporic experience with Li. His intended framework for this exhibition was clear: to give opportunities to artists who were just beginning to create their own style of modern Chinese painting, one that bridges a Chinese past and a global present and builds a new canon of contemporary Chinese art based in Asia. Though his main purpose was to give these artists international exposure, the exhibition opened up the discussion of Chinese art to a more cosmopolitan vista. It also enabled a "Sinophone alliance," putting artists in Taiwan and the larger Chinese diaspora in the same conversation.[41]

Landscape as Representative of Chinese Visuality

Packaged for an American audience, the exhibition essentially lays bare the looming question of "Chineseness," especially when "Chinese" is stated *twice* in the title. Landscape as the theme of the exhibition has high artistic, historical, and strategic significance. Li and Lawton explained in the exhibition catalogue that landscape "is traditionally the most respected mode in Chinese painting,"[42] and that "[i]t is still landscape that distinguishes the Chinese tradition from those of other parts of the world."[43] The curators justified the theme by inviting viewers to look at it from both international and Chinese angles. The seemingly conservative choice of landscape

[41] I borrowed literature scholar Shu-mei Shih's theorization of the Sinophone, which she defines as "a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenizing and localizing of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries." See Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4.
[42] Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1966), 4.
[43] Li to McCray, 27 June 1964.

actually has its own subversive currency. Li especially noted the quality of abstraction in the new landscape paintings that the Chinese artists managed to highlight: "Even though a few of these artists paint in a style close to complete abstraction, some traces of landscape can still be discerned."[44] This stereotypical Chinese subject, bearing such a burden of tradition, possessed an inherit asset that could withstand the hegemonic forces of Western modern art. Li consciously delivered what Western audiences expected, a kind of Chinese painting distinct from Western ones, and at the same time, ensuring its universal readability through its abstract quality.

Landscape, *shanshui*, or "mountains and rivers," refers to nature and to the concept of land and territory. Diaspora Chinese artists' continuous exploration of landscape is connected to the historical precedents where the subject served as ideological or political metaphors. In the lexicon of literati painters of the Song and Yuan dynasties, landscape was a common vehicle to express feelings of frustration, longing, refuge, or patriotism in the aftermath of foreign invasions and domestic turmoil. In the 1920s and 1930s, landscape was at the center of intellectual debates, during the first wave of Chinese cultural modernization, about national identity. Fighting against a strong current of total Westernization, *guohua* artists—those who committed to Chinese ink paintings, also called "national painting"—insisted on linking ink landscapes with a patriotic assertion of a Chinese identity during a crisis-stricken time. That particular history laid down the modern identity of landscape paintings.[45] The curatorial theme thus

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[44] Ibid.

[45] See Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "The Golden Age of *Guohua* in the 1930s" in *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 93–113; Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "Traditionalism As a Modern Stance: The Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 1–30; Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "The

linked the exhibition and its artists to a legacy that buttressed debates on national identity and showed that the classical genre continued to accrue meaning in contemporary times. Landscape as a sign of modernity—with its unparalleled status above all genres and its representative quality of Chinese art—underscores the strategic and artistic value to the exhibition organizer.

To artists in the exhibition, the mountains and rivers were representations of the homeland they were forced to abandon, and a visual tradition with which they wished to maintain a dialogue. For instance, Chuang's paintings incorporated texts, expressively written in oil or ink, of Tang dynasty poet Du Fu's famous verse: "The country has fallen; only the mountains and rivers remain." The text and the torn fragments of paper in Chuang's collages directly points to the personal experience of a painful separation and migration that haunted his generation. Similarly, the titles of Liu's works, such as "Wintry Mountain Covered with Snow," "Early Spring," evoke the nostalgic sentiments often associated with landscape paintings. Though Liu staunchly discarded traditional Chinese brushwork in his technique, the curators observed that, "his way of capturing the mystery and essence of nature—still a traditional characteristic of Chinese painting."[46] Fong's work, as Li described, "reveals a pure and quiet quality found in many traditional Chinese landscapes, although his style is the completely abstract one of the West."[47] Li's descriptions suggest that Fong's landscape is not a realist one, but rather a spiritual and allegorical idea. The new expressions, under Li and Lawton's curation, highlighted the

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Traditionalist Response to Modernity: The Chinese Painting Society of Shanghai," in *Visual Culture in Shanghai, 1850s–1930s,* ed. Jason Chi-sheng Kuo (Washington D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2007), 79–93.

[46] Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 10.

[47] "The New Chinese Landscape: An Exhibition of Paintings by Six Artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong," May 1965, p. 2.

artists' obsession over landscape as a physical presence, an heirloom art form, an emotional vehicle, and the artistic spirit of the Chinese literati. By emphasizing the artists' own attachment to landscape, the exhibition shows that different generations and individuals have different relationships with landscape which could be seen in the diverse visuality of the works, and that landscape as a concept and visual subject still served as a rich source for ideas for contemporary artists.

Through the subject of landscape, the exhibition established the historical legitimacy and cultural specificity of the exhibition, contextualizing the paintings within the history of the modernization of Chinese painting in the twentieth century. This narrative underlines a collective longing for both the landscape and what it signified. Highlighting nationalist and cultural associations of art implies an effort to retain subjectivity at the onset of abstraction as a global phenomenon. As an exhibition theme, landscape was a loaded and strategic choice from both Chinese and American perspectives.

"The New Chinese Landscape" and "The New Tradition of Chinese Landscape"

The exhibition title "The New Chinese Landscape" hinges on newness in terms of the visual product of landscape and the painters' approach, contesting the impression that the Chinese landscape painting remained unchanging. Li and Lawton introduced the new art as such:

> Some of the more ambitious artists are still trying to approximate the style of the Four Masters of the Yuan dynasty or the Eccentrics of the early Ch'ing. Others have searched for more appropriate means of expression, though still within traditional limitations. Many younger artists, under the impact of Western culture, have experimented with

> realism, expressionism, cubism, or surrealism. A few others, exposed to both Chinese and Western cultures, have attempted to combine the two to form a new means of expression. And so it is within this context of synthesis that the present exhibition has its limits.[48]

"New" in this passage refers to an attempt to depart from the pre-war sensibilities that dominated the official exhibitions and the art establishment in Taiwan at the time; it also deviated from what the West had typically thought of emerging art in the East. The tone made apparent that the curators saw little value in the regurgitation of classical Chinese art or of Western-style art and wanted to encourage a daring approach that would prevent Chinese art from being segregated from the global art discourse.

The exhibition's Chinese title, however, sends a slightly different message. "The new tradition of Chinese landscape" (*zhongguo shanshuihua de xin chuantong*) implies a kind of traditional Chinese landscape painting that would form a new convention (Figure 1.2). Oxymoronic as it sounds, the curators extrapolated their ideal for a "new tradition" in an *Art Journal* article about the artists in the exhibition: "They constantly experiment with new techniques, new media, new concepts of time and space, new symbols, in order to embrace the past and present, China and the rest of the world."[49] The curators recognized the value of experimentation as a means to negotiate with China's history and with its parallel Euro-American art world, even though there was a possibility that the tools and methods new to Chinese art may not be to Western art. Regardless, employing and importing new materials and methods into art-making, with the goal of "combining two cultures," as well as "embracing the past and present," suggests a form of hybridity that Li and Lawton wished to push forward.

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[48] Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 4
[49] Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, "The New Chinese Landscape," *Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1967–68): 147.

By making general, anachronistic allusions to Western art while emphasizing the Chinese roots of the works, Li championed a hybrid style. Li and Lawton praised Chen Chi-kwan's "unusual blending of Chinese vistas and Western vision" due to his training in Western architecture. Li noted, "There is something of the lyricism of Monet or Dufy in Chen Chi-kwan's work, but there is also a sense of humor and gaiety reminiscent of such a Chinese artist as Chang Hung (17th century)."[50] The catalogue notes that C. C. Wang's work resembled the Qing dynasty painter Wang Yuan-chi (Wang Yuanqi), "whose innovation in Chinese landscape painting are often compared to those of Cézanne."[51] These comments suggest that the curators saw work by Chen and Wang as sympathetic to early Western modernist sensibilities. Chen and Wang were both characterized as well-traveled and familiar with two cultures, which suggests that the "modern Chinese artist" that Li wished to introduce to the West was cosmopolitan and learned.[52] The exhibition also presented a plurality: some artists leaned heavier on traditions, while others—the young painters of the Fifth Moon society—invented their new techniques and adopted a language of abstraction familiar to Western contemporary art.

Li's belief in the promise of cross-cultural hybrids supported at least one objective of the exhibition: to instigate a change in the international image of Chinese art. In this sense, the "New Chinese Landscape" was conceived not just as an endeavor in exhibition making but a geopolitical metaphor—to reflect the political and cultural reality of the

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[50] Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 8.
[51] Ibid., 6.
[52] Li called Chen Chi-kwan and C. C. Wang "quite cosmopolitan, having travelled widely in America and Europe" in his proposal, "The New Chinese Landscape: An Exhibition of Paintings by Six Artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong," May 1965, p. 2.

time. The political division of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China not only split the population but also the paths of cultural development. The drastic changes in national boundaries presented a pressing task for artists to define the art of their specific locations with regards to the regional and international context. The artistic development in the three regions reflected the respective political circumstances and social demands that informed their site-specific relationships to Chinese heritage. The exhibition excluded artwork from the mainland, a clear statement debunking the outdated Western impression of a homogenous Chinese culture; it literally constructed a new Chinese landscape. In this new conception of the Chinese landscape painting, through the eyes of the diasporic artists and curators, the mainland became the imaginary, an abstract idea. The framework of this exhibition thus enabled the emergence of a new tradition of landscape in the form of cultural hybrids from the point of view of Taiwan.

Who's/Whose "Contemporary"?

To Li, there was an urgency to discover new expressions in Chinese art as part of a larger project to define a contemporary Chinese visuality. The ideas of "new" and "contemporary" are related, but the latter suggests simultaneity with the dominant Western art world—the audience who Li's exhibition targeted. In the past, the KMT government's participation in several editions of the São Paolo Biennial were attempts to show the country's contemporaneity with the rest of the world as well as its rootedness in tradition. "The New Chinese Landscape," therefore, was an attempt—one of the first—to show a potent version of Chinese contemporary art that could contribute to the larger discussion of international art. The exhibition thus served as a channel between two

parallel art worlds, two timelines of contemporariness, to bridge the gap of understanding between the Chinese and American art worlds.

In the face of an international spectacle, the unstable self-view taken by artists in Taiwan working in modernist abstraction vacillated between being at the center (of Chinese culture) and the periphery (of world culture). The shifting concept of identity can be attributed to the "transitional" mentality of many mainlanders in the decades following their relocation to Taiwan. Emotionally they were tied to the mainland, but intellectually they seized the chance to define their own place within Chinese culture. Their aspirations in some ways matched the KMT government's mission of guarding the essence of Chinese culture, yet the latter tied its war against the Communist to the cultural sector with a nationalist agenda. The strong political grip on the ownership of tradition explains why conservative, classical-style ink paintings by Huang Junbi, Pu Xinyu—the two artists who took the reigns at the art department of the National Normal University and were in close affiliation with the government—represented officialdom, even while new art by the next generation was chosen for international showcases.[53]

The insecurity mixed with cultural pride played out in the heated debates in the 1960s between the conservative heavyweights in the cultural gentry and the reformists who believed in the revitalizing potential of abstract art, including Liu, Chuang, and their ally, poet Yu Kwang-chung. For younger artists, while they were concerned about retaining Chinese art heritage, they were more occupied by identifying what could set

[53] Huang Junbi (1898–1991), a painting tutor of Madame Chiang Kai-shek and the head of the art department of the National Normal University, was known for his realistic landscapes. Pu Xinyu (1896–1963), a member of the Qing imperial family, represented the painting lineage of the Republican Beijing. Their appointment in the academia seemed inevitable, as no other ink painters had more appropriate or convincing lineage and connections.

them apart from their predecessors and made sense of their own, contemporary experiences. The debates, among other things, exposed the desire of the younger generation to make their art converse with their international contemporaries. Yu wrote in a triumphant tone in praise of this encouraging potential of new Chinese art:

> In essence, the "saddle-less riders" of Fifth Moon Society are neither *guohua* artists, nor Western artists, and of course not Japanese artists. They accepted fully Western art while acknowledging the true spirit of Chinese art. With these conditions, they become modern artists of China. Their art eradicates national boundaries, not smuggling along borders.[54]

Yu's words highlight the optimism in breaking through national confines and reaching common ground between East and West. For Liu and Chuang especially, this surge in mining Chinese aesthetic material for modern applications showed a widespread determination to preserve Chineseness and demonstrated confidence in the expressive qualities and timelessness of literati paintings, claiming their contemporary worthiness.

To American cultural administrators, "the contemporary" is something of which they claimed ownership. Cultural exchange was another means to reinforce their position of power. Porter McCray once said that Nelson Rockefeller had always believed very strongly in "the value of cultural interchange as one of the most important channels for winning friends and respect for another nation."[55] In this sense, the imagined Asian modernity by American cultural institutions is colored by a neo-imperialistic agenda that went hand in hand with their diplomatic goals. The Americans sought to propagate a Free

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[54] Translated by author. Yu Kwang-chung, "The Eve of Greatness: On the Eighth Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*weida de qianxi: ji dibajie wuyue huazhan*), *United Daily News*, 17 June 1964, New Art section, p. 8.

[55] Porter McCray, interview by Sharon Zane, New York, 21 June 1991, transcript, p. 60, The Museum of Modern Art Archives Oral History Program, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_mccray.pdf; accessed 21 October 2016.

World ideology and aesthetics, championing the individualism and expressionism that American artists enjoyed and embodied. But, at the same time, this can be read as the reinforcement of a cultural hierarchy. In the minds of the fund administrators, the U.S. held the status of the "center" and thus "arbiter" of postwar international art. McCray stated that bringing Asian artists to the U.S. would enable them "to come to grips with the spirit of Western painting rather than its outward forms and in the process acquire a vitality which frequently produces a new and stronger expression of their own."[56] The statement righteously advocates for a deeper engagement with Western art, but it also seems presumptuous that non-Western artists would produce newer, stronger work after seeing Western art in person. This reveals a rather complicated view on cultural exchange: those from the First World wanted influence over the creative output of the Second and Third Worlds and also expected the latter to come up with something independently fresh. McCray's ultimate goal to invite artists to the U.S. supported their further artistic development, but it inevitably reinforced a U.S.-centric view on the development of contemporary art.

The best example to characterize this sense of superiority in upholding the standard of the contemporary, and the conflicts and debates this view incited, is the aforementioned, "The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1966 (Figure 1.3). The exhibition began its tour in 1965 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, a co-organizer of the exhibition, and overlapped one year with the tour of the "The New Chinese Landscape." The show

[56] McCray to Li, 20 July 1964, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

included 103 paintings and sculptures by 46 artists. The co-curator and MoMA's director of the Department of Drawing and Prints, William Lieberman, admitted in the exhibition catalogue that the exhibition was "concerned only with Japanese art of international tendency." Here "international" can be read as Euro-American. His statement on future Japanese art continued almost verbatim of McCray's: "Japan will benefit by international contacts and stimuli from abroad, and from her native genius will produce an art distinctly her own."[57] Lieberman was well aware of the parallel developments of art—"international" and "native"—in Japan, but knowingly selected pieces that were most in line with Western styles, which complies with an institutional strategy to align its exhibits with its permanent collection and the habits or expectations of its audience. In fact, many works in the exhibition were purchased for MoMA's permanent collection or already part of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd's private collection.[58] These Japanese works, new to the general American public, already possessed a certain market value and potential and had already been validated as canonical by the launch of the exhibition.

The *New York Times* art critic John Canaday criticized the exhibition and mockingly suggested that it should be renamed "The Old International Clichés Embalmed." He elaborates:

> The trouble is that in Museum of Modern Art lingo, "vital currents" means first of all the school of abstraction that the museum has patronized and helped promulgate, that it has encouraged collectors to spend a lot of money on, and that for its own well being it must now continue to support no matter how stale and feeble the stuff is beginning to

[57] *The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), 11.
[58] The credit lines of the reproduction of the works and "Lenders to the Exhibition" section in the exhibition catalogue provide this information. Most of the private lenders were New York- or San Francisco-based, and the institutional lenders include public museums in Japan and commercial galleries in Tokyo, New York, Milan, and Paris. "Lenders to the Exhibition," *New Japanese Painting and Sculpture*, 114

> look and in spite of the fact that at the current rate of decline it won't be long before you are unable even to give it way.[59]

Canaday's prediction was obviously wrong. Japanese postwar abstract art in the collection, now steadily in the international art canon, is as important as ever. But his statement pointed out an institutional complacency, a weakness, perhaps, to only collect and display art with affinity to theirs, a key to maintaining a canon. In a typical case of institutional critique, Canaday faulted Lieberman for not choosing "better" works in traditional styles and media—both representational and abstract. In his harshest comment, he called the works in the exhibition "slanted-eyed Barney Newmans and Andy Warhols."[60] Though the critic rightly protested the standard dictated by MoMA's curators, suggesting they imposed their aesthetic standards on Japanese art, his dismissive comments on the works in the exhibition gravely overlooked the indigenous forces that pushed Japanese artists toward abstraction. As many scholars and curators have argued, Gutai artists deeply and conscientiously reflected on Japanese culture and society while keeping in mind the international currents.[61] By considering the Japanese modernist art at MoMA unoriginal or derivative, Canaday denied their productive and provocative potential and local specificity, reinforcing yet another imperialistic stereotype of the cultural First World, even though he criticized the very evaluation standard he and his world employed. The preference given to originality is palpable, yet when it came to non-Western art, the definition of originality seemed to mean something different. What he

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[59] John Canaday, "What Do You Mean, New?" *New York Times*, 23 October 1966.
[60] Ibid.
[61] See for example, Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Alexandra Munroe and Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 2013).

did not realize, perhaps, is that the Japanese art world also debated the same questions about their art's relationship with the West. His view that the more traditional styles and media would better represent Japanese art suggests a prejudice that non-Western art must retain its national or ethnic flavors in the contemporary art world to be worthy of merit. He seemed to reject the possibility of the development of a common language between the two contemporaneous art worlds. The exhibition and its surrounding criticism exposed how the New Yorkers and their institutions promoted and guarded the parameters of "contemporary art."

The American institutional viewpoint, built on the idealism of an artistic alliance across the Free World, met an urgency felt by artists in the so-called "periphery" to establish their own contemporary voice in the global arena. Their forced meeting points, at the exhibition at MoMA and the "New Chinese Landscape," are timely yet ironic, as they underscored the profound inequality of power in the international art world. Under this circumstance, the assurance that "The New Chinese Landscape" had given Americans their arbiter status in contemporary culture made room for the acceptance of a "hybrid" art that mixed Chinese and Western sensibilities.

However, Li was initially rebuffed by McCray after first proposing the exhibition to the JDR 3rd Fund. Despite his effort to paint the artists in an avant-garde light, Li's initial proposal, accompanied by a poor reproduction of some of the paintings, did not convince McCray. McCray responded that the fund had not "accumulated sufficient first-hand knowledge in this field to justify active participation," and that on McCray's research trip to Hong Kong in 1962, he did not find the art there mature enough to

"warrant importation."[62] His alternative suggestion, to provide travel scholarships to painters from Chinese regions, showed the fund's willingness to invest in having a larger influence and presence in the region. Undeterred, on November 28 and 29, 1964, five months after Li's initial proposal, Li arranged for McCray to meet artists, educators, and scholars in Taiwan, including a viewing of Fifth Moon artists' works assembled by Liu Kuo-sung.[63] The fruitful meeting resulted in the fund's sponsorship of the exhibition granted in October 1965.[64] Liu and Chuang Che also received study grants to travel to the U.S. in the following years.[65]

The Packaging of Chinese Visuality

Li and Lawton's core strategy in framing the exhibition was to highlight the "modernity" in the new Chinese art and its makers. Throughout the exhibition literature, the aim to change the West's preconceived notion of Chinese art as an antiquated, imperial style is prominent. The official press release of the exhibition read: "Taipei is the center of an active cultural life attuned to the twentieth century. Recently emerged and flourishing are many painters of all ages whose techniques refer to the great and ancient tradition of Oriental painting, but carry it forward in many highly personal ways due to the impact of modern Western art styles."[66] Raising the profile of Taipei seemed a

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[62] McCray to Li, 20 July 1964.
[63] Li to McCray, 20 November 1964. Folder B-6625, AFA Exhibition, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[64] McCray to Li, 19 October 1965.
[65] Docket Memorandum—The JDR 3rd Fund, Inc, 23 September 1965, B-6612 B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC; Porter McCray to Chuang Che, 11 April 1966, Folder DF-6804, B-6651, Box 107, Chuang, Che, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection. Both from the Rockefeller Archive Center.
[66] Press release, "Contemporary Paintings from Taiwan," Exhibition 66-22, The New Chinese Landscape, The American Federation of Arts archives.

worthy first step, and the rise of new hybrid styles by artists there qualified as potential attractions. The concern for what Western eye wanted in modern art was clear. In his exhibition proposals, Li emphasized more than once that the experiments by these artists might be "of interest and value to Western artists."[67] "There is no claim that their work represents all major directions in contemporary Chinese painting," reads the exhibition catalogue, "rather that the choices seemed justified because they are new voices which may well strike a chord of sympathy—intellectual, moral and aesthetic—in Western audiences."[68] With a tint of speculation, the exhibition organizers advertised a new Chinese art that spoke the same language as their Western contemporaries. This point of view marked a distinctive track for the art promoted in the exhibition: this was a kind of art that would have readability abroad, different from other kinds of Chinese art that had a limited, local audience.

The curatorial hope for an openness in the American art world—which later proved to be too optimistic—suggested a new way to understanding Chinese art in America. To critics, Li and Lawton may be guilty of choosing to promote works that employed familiar tropes of mid-century American abstraction, much like the curatorial choice in MoMA's "New Japanese Painting and Sculpture." However, unlike the MoMA curators who were not specialists of Japanese art, Li and Lawton were historians of Chinese art, familiar with how the artists "reflect[ed] Chinese culture at this juncture, confronting the growing pains of adjusting their traditional values to the modern world."[69] The underlining of this transitional, rite-of-passage moment, where artists self-

[67] Li to McCray, 27 June 1964.
[68] Li and Lawton, *New Chinese Landscape*, 4.
[69] Li to McCray, 27 June 1964.

consciously negotiate with traditions and juggle external and indigenous forces, was a laudable effort and a motivating factor for making the exhibition, and perhaps a major selling point to the potential sponsors.

An analysis of the way the curators introduced the artists and the reasoning behind their selections illuminates how they chose to present the new Chinese visuality to the West. In general, the exhibition rhetoric highlighted the international readability of the hybrid art and drew connections to the presumed vocabulary within the comfort zone of a foreign audience. For Yu Cheng-yao and Chen Chi-kwan, the curators highlighted the new applications and interpretations of traditional brushwork. Yu was first described in Li's exhibition proposal as the "Chinese Grandpa Moses" and as a "Chinese Henri Rousseau" for his "primitive" style, all due to his self-taught background.[70] Giving Yu, an outsider artist, the overdue attention turned his seeming domestic disadvantage into an international novelty. His constructions of landscape consist of angular shapes and layered masses covered in dense, self-invented, unrefined brushstrokes, maintaining the rigidity of mountain and rock formations in classical Northern Song compositions, yet are devoid of the visual expressions that most of the mainstream ink painters followed (Figure. 1.4). But his paintings are not expressionless; the rugged surface of mountains and rocks convey the earthy and solid quality of nature, and the panoramic view of nature within the painting's frame brings a much wider perspective than the localized, academic, and professionalized debate around him. His approach to the subject matter resisted the typical canonical treatment of it. The curators guided Western viewers to warm up to his work by likening it to early Western modernist conventions, writing, "Like Impressionist

[70] Li and Lawton, 147; Li to McCray, 27 June 1964.

painting, on close examination of his work shows a mass of small strokes, but when seen from a distance, there is a clear sense of form to the landscape."[71] This aptly describes how the new modern landscape paintings straddle between the representational and the abstract, the East and West.

Chen Chi-kwan was not included in the first edition of the exhibition proposal in June 1964 and was added in February 1965.[72] The press release of the American Federation of Arts separates him from the rest, suggesting that his work's "more balanced favor of both the West and the East merge into an individual style."[73] Among the participating artists of this exhibition, Chen was the lone colorist. Li described his work as "whimsical", "delightful," and "imaginative,"[74] adjectives normally not associated to Chinese landscape paintings in the Western context. Li's comments were generous, considering the Taiwanese art world had not given this architect-professor much credit for his ink paintings.[75] Yet his painterly reputation should be familiar to some New York audience. The artist mastered thin, delicate lines and dots in the service of pictorial depth, spatial contemplation, and architectural structures (Figure 1.5). The narrow, vertical format of his paintings recalls the traditional scroll, which extended the dimension and depth of his painted scenes. His painted environment combines the shifting perspective of

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[71] Li and Lawton, *New Chinese Landscape*, 5.
[72] In Li's recommended itinerary of Taiwan to McCray on November 20, 1964, he mentioned Chen for the first time, referring to him as "architect-painter." He wanted to convince McCray to help establish an art department at Tunghai University, where Chen taught, a school whose sponsorship by American mission boards might have proven to be helpful for inserting confidence in McCray of the Taiwanese artists.
[73] Press release, The American Federation of Arts, 2.
[74] "The New Chinese Landscape: An Exhibition of Paintings by Six Artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong," May 1965, p. 1.
[75] Chen's first exhibition in Asia was at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 1974. His first solo exhibition in Taiwan was not until 1980 at the National History Museum in Taipei.

Chinese landscape painting, informed by his practice of taking panoramic photography, and a sense of romantic lyricism and Daoist philosophical understanding of the world.

The curators painted C. C. Wang in a cosmopolitan light: he was the only artist in this group trained in traditional painting and connoisseurship before the Sino-Japanese War and was already a fixture in the New York society by the 1960s. The curators commended the audacity of Wang's landscapes for maintaining the structure of traditional paintings while decentralizing the role of lines, the primary element of Chinese paintings.[76] The curators highlighted the versatility of Wang's work, especially the technique of creating alternating effects of wet and dry ink by rubbing the surface of paper or letting the ink seep through a layer of paper for a more varied texture (Figure 1.6). They attributed the experimental energy to Wang's residency in New York, a major factor in the artist's shift toward semi-abstraction.

The rest of the artists, at this early stage of their careers, reconsidered the value of traditions in a semi-isolated environment of Taiwan. The curators highlighted Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray's effort in finding new instruments and material, rearranging the composition, and experimenting with surface texture and other techniques. Li described in depth their obsession with process and texture and their goal to maintain the poeticism in Chinese landscape paintings. The curators categorized them as a generation of artists re-evaluating their relationship with Chinese painting through the most rigorous self-reexamination.

At the time of Li's proposal, around 1964 and 1965, Fong was transitioning from oil on canvas to ink on paper. The ten works in the American exhibition in 1966 are all

[76] Li and Lawton, *New Chinese Landscape*, 6.

ink on paper mounted on hanging scrolls. Fong's paintings, the most abstract among the group, sometimes visually recall the splash ink and broad strokes of the preeminent artist Chang Dai-chien, or in Li and Lawton's words, resemble "the flung-ink technique of Jackson Pollock."[77] But, in fact, he achieved the effect through a large brush made by rolled palm leaves. The reference to Pollock deliberately tied Fong to a global style, but the curators qualified that the artist, "is never so forceful or violent as the American expressionist."[78] To the curators, Fong's abstract paintings, where lines yield to swept and saturated masses, captured a contemplative emotion rather than a spontaneous or gestural violence (Figure 1.7). They saw Fong's paintings retaining the traditional Chinese format of hanging scroll while "the strong sense of form, with all its lyric poetry, brings him close to the basic quest of modern Western artists."[79] They emphasized Fong's pursuit of pure form that might resonate with those who favored Western abstract painting.

Liu Kuo-sung, the artist who since the beginning had impressed Li the most, used a large brush used for house paint to make bold marks on custom-made rough cotton paper. Then he peeled off the paper's fiber to create surface texture that would mimic the effect of textured strokes in traditional landscapes. The stiff Chinese brush was completely discarded, a major breakthrough. His paintings usually allude to a combination of mountains, snow, clouds, and water by an arrangement of alternating negative and positive spaces (left by the void of paper fiber) and the inked areas (Figure 1.8). Li emphasized Liu's contribution of bringing awareness to new art as the leader of

[77] Ibid., 12.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 13.

the Fifth Moon group and his remarkable commitment to work exclusively with Chinese materials. At the same time, Li stressed the affinity of Liu's work to Western art. In the exhibition essay of Liu's solo exhibition at the National History Museum, Li compared Liu's paintings to Pollock, Giorgio de Chirico, Yves Tanguy, Franz Marc and Kandinsky.[80]

Li called Chuang Che "the most determined in his attempt to turn away from the tradition…he is the one among his group to have the potential for a most profound expression."[81] Chuang, the only artist in the exhibition who worked with oil, showed works of paper collage in "The New Chinese Landscape." First he created expressive dry and wet ink marks on paper. Then he tore the paper into various sizes and pasted them onto the canvas, creating the effect of multiple planes, instead of lines, in the picture. He added oil paint, sometimes mixed with ink, on top of the paper, making a varied, mixed-media surface (Figure 1.9). Li was especially impressed by his use of written poetry in painting.[82] Of Chuang, the curators wrote, "He has found from the American Abstract Expressionism a means most suitable to reveal his intense feeling for the land."[83] The resulting imagery, composed of fragments and interruptions, inherited the structure of mountains and rocks in monumental landscape paintings. The press release called the

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[80] Li Chu-tsing, "The Growth of a Modern Chinese Artist," in *Liu Kuo-sung* (Taipei: National Gallery of Art and Museum of History, 1969), 25, 35, 37.
[81] "A Request for Support for a Travelling Exhibition, 'The New Chinese Landscape,'" 5 February 1965, Folder B-6625, AFA Exhibition, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[82] Li Chu-tsing, "The Paintings of Chuang Che: Voices of an Intense Inner Life," in *Chuang Che Painting Exhibition 1965–1966* (Taipei: Hai-Tian Gallery, 1966), unpaginated.
[83] Li and Lawton, 150.

overall effect of his painting "one of rugged abstraction"[84] and in some ways aligned him with the macho qualities of the American abstract expressionists.

Li and Lawton understood that the abstract tendencies in the West since the early twentieth century and in the Chinese literati painting tradition since the Northern Song dynasty came from different sources and motivations, but through this exhibition, they opened the possibility for these parallel routes to intersect.[85] The language used in describing the young artists' work attests to this. However, not all of the participating artists agreed with the given framework. In a letter to poet Wai-lim Yip, Chuang expressed his discomfort with Li's interpretation of his work:

> Now I start to suspect that the impetus for Mr. Li to make this exhibition was completely limited by a vision based on history and tradition. Otherwise why name it the new landscape tradition.[86]

Chuang disagreed with Li's framing of new Chinese art in traditional painting theories because his own exploration began at the opposite end—Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist principles—in search for intersections with Chinese traditions.[87] Fong, who was less keen on interpreting his work through the ink painting tradition, recognized that at the time, Li had hoped that ink painting would continue to evolve, hence his insistence on drawing connections between the new art and traditions.[88] Though the reluctance to openly reject the curatorial interpretation was perhaps in part due to a genuine appreciation for the curators' belief in their art, it also shows how artists muted their

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[84] Press release, The American Federation of Arts, 1.
[85] Li Chu-tsing, "Fong Chung-Ray: An Appreciation," in *Paintings by the Contemporary Chinese Artist Fong Chung-Ray* (Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Center, 1967), unpaginated.
[86] Translated by author. Chuang Che to Wai-lim Yip, 19 June 1966, Wai-lim Yip personal archive, Del Mar, CA.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Fong Chung-ray, interview by author, Walnut Creek, CA, 4 June 2013.

opinions in service to the larger goal of the exhibition. The curatorial agenda to promote a new Chinese visuality, with serious consideration of what would best support their theories for new Chinese art and be marketable in the Western art world, overpowered the individual voices.

Realities of the Exhibition

Institutions and Audiences

Since the beginning, Li aimed to mount the exhibition in university galleries—especially Midwestern "Big Ten" universities, including the University of Iowa, where he taught. He wrote, "the intellectual atmosphere of the universities, the international outlook of their faculty and students, and the artistic interest of their art departments, will be able to appreciate the ideas and aesthetic quality of the exhibition."[89] Li's confidence in promoting the exhibition of new Chinese art in academic settings rode on a preexisting interest and infrastructure of American universities. In the 1960s, many universities in the Midwestern states organized academic exchange programs with Taiwan and had strong academic programs in East Asian cultures—one prominent example being the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa administered by Paul Engel (1908–91), who hosted many writers from Taiwan during the martial law era.[90]

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[89] Li to McCray, 27 June 1964. According to Li, the following institutions showed support: University of Minnesota, University of Michigan, University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Nebraska, and University of Iowa. See "A Request for Support for a Travelling Exhibition, 'The New Chinese Landscape,'" 5 February 1965. Both material in Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[90] For example, the Michigan State University had continuous academic exchange programs and collaborations with universities in Taiwan in the 1960s. Many of their young faculty members went abroad to Taiwan. Professors Warren Cohen, Bernard Gallin, and Rita Gallin, who were early patrons of the Fifth Moon artists, all went to Taiwan through this program. Warren Cohen, e-mail correspondence with author, 29 April 2012; Bernard and Rita Gallin, interview by author, East Lansing, MI, 12 October 2012.

Additionally, Li wanted the show to be in New York in April 1965 during the annual meeting of Asian Studies, specifying his main target audience for the show.[91]

As Li awaited funding approval from the JDR 3rd Fund, in 1965, he approached the AFA in New York and the International Exhibitions Foundation in Washington, entities that circulated American exhibitions internationally, and vice versa.[92] The AFA eventually took on the circulation task, though ultimately the curators and artists had several complaints with their service.[93] Nonetheless, Li secured the major touring venues through his own contacts, and Lawton managed the logistics of the works and local communication. The show was planned for fifteen venues, including a handful of top tier institutions: the Nelson Gallery of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, invited by Laurence Sickman and the Cleveland museum of Art, invited by Sherman Lee.

Li mobilized his colleagues in the field of Chinese art history to boost the importance of the exhibition and to attract potential sponsors. In addition to James Cahill at the Freer Gallery of Art, Li circulated images of the artworks on the checklist to

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[91] Interestingly, McCray encouraged Li to think about approaching private art institutions like the Guggenheim, the Jewish Museum, and the Union Carbine, the Pepsi-Cola Building. Li himself thought the Gallery of Modern Art (Huntington Hartford) near Columbus Circle would be the most suitable. (Li eventually did not approach these venues). Li Chu-tsing to Annemarie H. Pope, 5 July 1965 and Li Chu-tsing to Robert Luck, American Federation of Arts, 8 October 1965, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[92] Li to Pope. Until August 17, 1965, Li was still awaiting answers from both organizations. McCray wrote Li on October 19, 1965 to relay that Mrs. Pope will not handle the exhibition. Pope's husband, John Alexander Pope, was the director of Freer Gallery of Art, and she was nicknamed the "First Lady of International Art" in the museum world. She founded her own non-profit organization, International Exhibitions Foundation in 1965 after working at the Smithsonian for its traveling exhibition programs. See Barbara Gamarekian, "Working Profile; 'The First Lady' of A World of Art," *New York Times*, 24 November 1984.

[93] It is unclear how many venues the exhibition eventually toured to, as the AFA archive only has the initial list on the press release with no final confirmation. The AFA asked the artists to pay for the shipping of their paintings and asked to waive all insurance for their works during the course of the exhibition, which the curators and artists all found unacceptable. Li Chu-tsing to Porter McCray, 27 November 1965, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA New Chinese Landscape, Exhibition History, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Sickman, Lee, Aschwin Lippe of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, George Kuwayama of the Los Angeles County Museum, and Max Loehr of the Fogg Museum, the first three of which volunteered their endorsement or offered their own institutions as exhibiting venues.[94] Many of these heavyweight curators and scholars had spent extended time in Taiwan for research and met several of the artists featured in the exhibition. This "all-star" supporting cast of the exhibition and the major encyclopedic museums they represented played pivotal roles in shaping the Chinese and East Asian art history canon and for introducing a contemporary Chinese visuality in postwar America. Though they provided intellectual and critical weight to new Chinese art in America, and became the default audience for the exhibition, they could not help new Chinese art break out from "area studies" and enter the "contemporary art" discussion.

The limited venues interested in exhibiting new Chinese art reflected the taste of American cultural institutions. Two comparisons might illuminate how art from Asia was viewed in America during the postwar years. From May 1961 to June 1962, a selection of Taipei's Palace Museum collection toured to five major museums in the U.S.: the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; and De Young Museum, San Francisco, all encyclopedic institutions in major metropolises with impressive collections

[94] From Li's letters, the Metropolitan Museum did not have spaces available at the time. Lippe wrote to McCray to suggest instead the Museum of Modern Art as a venue. (Aschwin Lippe to Porter McCray, 22 June 1965, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.) In Li's letter to Robert Luck of the AFA, he mentioned he had shown the pictures of the works to the latter three of the list, as well as Hsio-yen Shih, Far Eastern Department, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, and Betty Maurstad, curator of the University Gallery at the University of Minnesota.

of Asian art and artifacts.[95] This was the first time the imperial collection—the foundation of Chinese culture—was presented in North America and the first time it traveled abroad since the 1932 exhibition at the British Museum in London, before the Japanese invasion of China and the major changes in China's political situation.[96] This background guaranteed the show's high media attention and popularity during its thirty-four-week run. In addition to being the Republic of China's proud and eager statement of political and cultural legitimacy in the eyes of her American ally, the exhibition itinerary proved that America had a strong appetite for traditional Chinese art. The exhibition fed into the popular and artistic imagination of Chinese culture preserved in its imperial past.

However, contemporary Chinese art in the 1960s did not enjoy the same popular and museological status. If anything, it presented a problem for American museums. The Palace Museum exhibition exposed that in the postwar American consciousness, Chinese culture belonged in a historical context, along with "world civilizations"; the contemporaneous output by Chinese artists, as it was mostly unknown to the West, were out of place in the American context. Sickman, the curator at the Nelson Gallery of Art, commented that only museums with "Oriental interest" would be likely to host contemporary art from China.[97] But even many of those places did not show much interest. According to Li, Cahill suggested Asia House's auditorium and basement rooms—usually not for exhibitions—as a possible venue, as the institution's galleries

[95] Li Lin-t'san (Li Lincan), "On the Return Journey of the National Treasures" (*guobao guihang manji*), *Wenxing* 58 (1 August 1962): 30–34.
[96] For more about the migration of the treasures, see Tsuyoshi Nojima, *The Separation and Reunion of Two Forbidden Cities* (*Liangge gugong de lihe)*, trans. Zhang Huijun (Taipei: Lianjing, 2012), 109–16, 122–47.
[97] Li to McCray, 27 November 1965.

were devoted to showcasing traditional Asian art.[98] But McCray verified that, as a member of the gallery committee, they would not sponsor contemporary work.[99] Contemporary art from China seemed out of place in the American context.

That logic did not seem to reflect the institutional treatment of Japanese contemporary art. MoMA's "The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture" toured to nine institutions, including the San Francisco Museum of Art (the exhibition's co-organizer), Denver Art Museum, Baltimore Museum of Art, and Milwaukee Art Center, between April 1965 and May 1967.[100] Most of these institutions are on the city or private level, not under university governance (except for the stop in the Krannert Art Museum of the University of Illinois). Their respective collections and missions focused on contemporary currents as well as worldly interests. The differential treatment for contemporary Japanese and Chinese art exposes the hierarchal and disjointed view on art from Asia. For lack of a better explanation, postwar America had a long-standing fascination with Japanese culture because of its political and economic relationship with the country since its occupation and domination over it after World War II. D. T. Suzuki, the Japanese scholar who propagated ideas of Zen Buddhism in the U.S., drew enormous attention from the American avant-gardes who sought to find new order and inspirational sources from outside of the Euro-American context. The American art world began frequent engagements with their Japanese counterparts in

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[98] Li to McCray, 20 July 1964

[99] McCray to Li, 27 July 1964, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA-B6625, Exhibition-China, ACC collection, JDR 3rd Fund records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[100] The exhibition catalogue lists eight venues, but the catalogue of "Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde," the MoMA exhibition in 2013 states there were nine venues. Nakajima Masatoshi, "Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde Chronology," in Doryun Chong, ed., *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 190.

the 1960s, notably the seminal visit of John Cage and David Tudor in 1962, the appearances of Nam Jun Paik and Yoko Ono, both bi-cultural avant-garde practitioners and interlocutors, at the Sogetsu Art Center, Tokyo in 1964, and various exhibitions by prominent American artists, including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, to name a few. Japan's national and municipal museums and institutions had already been in place since before the war, and a burgeoning commercial gallery scene was lively in the postwar decades. The visits of the American avant-garde to Japan synchronized their activities with the art scene in Tokyo and thus contributed to the wider acceptance of contemporary Japanese art in the American art world.[101] Taiwan, still considered cultural backwaters and a developing country, did not seem to merit the same discussion on its art as contemporary Japanese art did.

Lenders to the Chinese and the Japanese contemporary art exhibitions offer a glimpse of the market of contemporary Asian art in America. The "New Japanese Painting and Sculpture" had a diverse lender pool that included private American, European, and Japanese collectors (who owned more than half of the works in the exhibition), galleries and museums, as well as artists themselves. Among the collectors, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd lent nineteen works—the biggest private lender to the exhibition—and the collection she shared with her husband was credited on three pieces. Powerhouse galleries of the mid-century art world, like the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, Betty Parsons Gallery, Kootz Gallery, and Willard Gallery in New York, as well as those of rising international status such as Tokyo Gallery, Minami Gallery, and

[101] For more information on the interdisciplinary exchanges between Japan and America in the early 1960, see Doryun Chong, "Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde," in Chong, ed., *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde*, 70–73.

Yamada Gallery in Tokyo, also were lenders. MoMA and the San Francisco Museum of Art collected twelve works altogether. Michel Tapiés, artist and the unofficial liaison between the Japanese Gutai artists and the Western world, lent a piece by Yoshihara Jiro, the founder of Gutai. New Japanese art, though relatively new on the American stage, had already become institutionalized in contemporary art and digested by the market, and favored by artists.[102]

In contrast, only sixteen out of fifty-nine works in the "New Chinese Landscape" were in private collections, and all but one of these collections were American or European owned. Most of them were expatriate academics, curators, and military personnel in Taipei—not prominent art patrons. To the curators' frustration, most works were sold shortly after the plan for Li's exhibition was announced (before the tour began), which complicated the show's logistics.[103] But the sales were crucial for the artists' livelihood. The Mi Chou Gallery, which already showed Chen Chi-kwan's art since the 1950s, was the sole lender of his work to the exhibition. Lee Nordness, a New York dealer, was quick to join the bandwagon by acquiring works from Liu, Chuang, and Fong that he later lent to the exhibition.[104] He also held solo exhibitions for the young artists during or after the AFA exhibition. The difference in how the Chinese and Japanese artworks were consumed in the commercial art market shows their relative positions within the art world. The new Japanese art became institutionalized quickly

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[102] As early as 1958, Gutai artists showed their works at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. Martin Cohen, "Japan's Gutai Group," in *Art in America* (November/December 1968): 86–89, republished on the AiA website, www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/from-the-aia-archives-japanrsquos-gutai-group-1968/; accessed 22 February 2015.

[103] Li to McCray, 27 November 1965.

[104] For more about Lee Nordness, see Rita Reif, "Lee Nordness, 72, Art Dealer Who Promoted Crafts, Dies." *New York Times*, 23 May 1995. http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/23/obituaries/lee-nordness-72-art-dealer-who-promoted-crafts-dies.html, accessed 6 August 2016.

through the circuit of powerful patrons, while the Chinese art remained in private hands without the opportunities to enter the same orbit of contemporary art.

Practical Matters

The methods of framing and display of the artwork brought the question of artistic intention to the context of institutional environment. Many of the works were framed using Western methods. All works by Chuang and by Chen were framed.[105] Chuang had always framed his paintings the Western way. Only one of Liu's paintings was framed by its American owner and remained that way for the exhibition.[106] Thirty works—about half of the show—by Wang, Liu, Fong, and Yu were in the traditional scroll format, the marker of East Asian art to Westerners. Liu's painting scrolls are in line with his belief in the avant-garde possibilities of traditional formats. One hand scroll in the exhibition measures 600 centimeters in length and had a dedicated display case. Fong, who also mounted his paintings on scrolls, remarked that he wanted his modern paintings to retain ties to tradition. However, the decision was also partially financial: Fong remembered that mounting works into scrolls was more affordable than framing them.[107]

How the audience experienced new Chinese art was also contingent on a museum's facilities. In Western museum practice, scrolls are treated as works on paper in the museological categories, thus usually shown behind protection. For the scrolls in Li's

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[105] Thomas Lawton to Robert Luck, 28 February 1966, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA-Grant, Exhibition-China, ACC collection, JDR 3rd Fund records, Rockefeller Archive Center. Note that there are some discrepancies between Lawton's letter to AFA and the checklist in the exhibition catalogue, which is inevitable because contents of exhibition could always change last minute, inside the galleries.
[106] Originally there were two framed paintings by Liu in the exhibition. Lawton to Luck, 26 February 1966. One of them was removed from the tour's checklist due to the cost of shipping for an oversized framed work and its poor condition. Lawton to Luck, 16 March 1966, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA-Grant, Exhibition-China, ACC collection, JDR 3rd Fund records, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[107] Fong Chung-ray, e-mail correspondence with author (via Jerome Fong), 12 December 2014.

exhibition, he had argued with AFA organizers to have them shown without covers, as they had been shown in Taiwan like that and the artists were willing to sign waivers. Li preferred the traditional display method, which did not create a distance between the viewer and the art. The organizers, concerned with conservation and preservation, proposed to cut the works out of the current mounting to be framed instead.[108] Li's conflict with the AFA suggests his reluctance to treat the paintings like antique objects behind glass. After all, the ideal condition to view any Chinese painting is intimate and personal. As someone acquainted with the display strategy of East Asian art in Western museums, Li argued for a new attitude and treatment to contemporary works. Despite his protest, at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1968, the scrolls were installed in the object cabinets normally reserved for classical scrolls.[109] The hand scrolls, laid flat, are tightly placed on the base of the cabinets, just under the row of hanging scrolls (Figure 1.10). This may be due to the physical limitations of the existing facilities within the galleries, yet it nonetheless poses the question of where contemporary Chinese art would belong in a museum. The new Chinese paintings thus posed a problem with displaying hybrid forms—the Western museum practice had not caught up with the new ideas of Asian artists, nor was there leeway around the museum's existing interior. The old, inherited methods were a hindrance for new reading and presentation. The only advantage of the traditional display was that it expedited the viewer's identification of their foreign origin.

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[108] Li to McCray, 27 November 1965.

[109] The exhibition period ran from January 17 to February 25, 1968. According to the museum's press release, one portion of the exhibition (the non-scrolls) was closed on February 11 and the rest were closed on February 25. Press release, "Two Diverse Shows Begin 1968 Museum Exhibition Activities," 17 January 1968, Folder 8, Box 31, Exhibition Compendium, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives.

Reception

This first thematic presentation of new Chinese art in the U.S. calls for the following questions: Did it garner attention in America purely through the innovations of its visual language and techniques, or through its exotic origin? What were the expectations from American audiences? Did hybrid art by Chinese artists matter to Westerners and their views on the state of painting? Was it being judged only within the institutionalized parameter of Chinese painting and traditions? These questions interrogate the degree to which the parallel art worlds in America and Taiwan integrated with and segregated from each other, and how the canons were modified and altered as cross-cultural exchange progressed. Though not many reviews were given to "The New Chinese Landscape," they provide a glimpse of the treatment of contemporary Chinese art in the ecology of contemporary art and in the American public's consciousness.

During "The New Chinese Landscape" tour, both Liu and Chuang made their U.S. commercial gallery debut, showcasing works of similar style in the group exhibition.[110] In fact, both artists were in the U.S., invited as official JDR 3rd Fund grantees during the tour, and attended several of the group show's openings, as well as those of their own. Liu's debut at the Lee Nordness Gallery in January 1967 was the first of the Fifth Moon Group's appearance in the New York gallery scene. John Canaday of the *New York Times* calls Liu "a dashing exponent of traditional Chinese landscape painting hybridized with modern abstraction." Receptive of the allusion to landscape in Liu's paintings, Canaday noticed that "seas, mountains and valleys appear and

[110] According to Chuang Che, the Nordness Gallery chose some of the works before the tour began. Chuang Che to Wai-lim Yip, 15 November 1965, Wai-lim Yip personal archive, Del Mar, CA.

disappear" within the pattern created by the effect of collage.[111] The critic's attention to the surface quality of collage—a Western technique—becomes crucial to his understanding of the hybrid work as a follower of the globalized style of abstraction. His appreciation of Liu's work aligned with his criticism of the MoMA's presentation of new Japanese art: he preferred works that retain indigenous modes of art-making; Liu's ink on paper, it seems, satisfied this criteria.

In a similar vein, *The Plain Dealer* of Cleveland praised "The New Chinese Landscape" at the city's art museum and concludes, in an expression of relief: "the Chinese character survives a Western influence." The critic examined the format, media, and abstract style as areas where the artists had deviated from traditions and finally identified the scrolls "the most Chinese in the show." Also mentioned were the black-and-white tone and the medium of ink on paper as characteristic of Chinese art.[112] One can almost speculate that for an audience used to seeing the classical Chinese collection in the Cleveland museum's galleries, it is intuitive to link contemporary Chinese art and tradition, just as the press release reminded the viewers.[113]

The Ann Arbor News ran a lengthy article "Local Oriental Conquest Continues" on August 18, 1967, on the occasion of Chuang's one-man show at the Forsythe Gallery in Ann Arbor, Michigan.[114] The critic, Jean Paul Slusser, a former director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, identified Chuang's work as fitting easily into

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[111] John Canaday, "Art: Sample of Americana, From Copley to Calder. Other New Exhibitions are Summarized," *New York Times*, 21 January 1967.
[112] Helen Borsick, "Museum Treats the Jaded Eye," *The Plain Dealer*, 14 January 1968.
[113] Ibid.
[114] The exhibition was on view from August 13 to September 7, 1967. Thanks to the help of a Chinese art historian at the University of Michigan, Richard Edwards, and his wife, Chuang was able to land a show at this gallery near the University campus. The couple became friends with Chuang's family during their research trips to Taichung.

"the stereotype of current abstract expressionism, the new international style, but retains some of its Chinese flavor." [115] The reviews of the Fifth Moon artists' works—some only a few paragraphs—were generally positive and showed genuine curiosity toward contemporary Chinese art, but often remained on the formal level.

The reviews and documents show that American critics were sensitive to the innovations the artists made in relation to Chinese visual traditions. However, generally, their observations on the artistic innovations remained on the categorical and superficial level. The artists were labeled "avant-garde," and their work "returned to somewhat traditional Chinese expression and media from far more Western techniques."[116] The commentary centered on how the artists managed to bridge both China's past and present and the East and West, but did not expand on how they managed to do so or on the impact of their innovations in the field of painting. Chinese art, to the critics, seemed like a pleasant novelty that carried little critical weight in the context of American art. Interestingly, as American reviewers remarked on the work's affinity to Abstract Expressionism, they failed to mention the fascination of numerous Western artists of the postwar generation who took inspiration from Eastern philosophy and art. A cultural amnesia, or worse, a refusal to acknowledge that cross-cultural pollination went both directions in art and ideas, seemed to be a reoccurring issue in evaluating art from outside of the Euro-American parameter.

From these accounts, the critics seemed ambivalent toward the paintings' Chinese context. In the introduction to Chuang's solo show at the Forsythe Gallery, Richard

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[115] Jean Paul Slusser, "Local Oriental Conquest Continues," *Ann Arbor News*, 18 August 1967.
[116] Press release, Cleveland Museum of Art Archives.

Edwards, a professor of Chinese art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, recommended two frameworks to evaluate Chuang's work, one of which was culturally specific. He urged viewers to pay attention to "what the art says" and also stressed that the Chinese context should not to be ignored.[117] Edwards' frameworks was activated in a review by the influential art historian and curator of modern European and American art, Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006), then professor of art at Princeton University. In a memo to McCray, he relayed his view on "Five Chinese Painters at Princeton" in March 1965, an exhibition that included several of the Fifth Moon members, including Liu and Chuang: "I'm frankly not too much interested in their work and know very little about Oriental art today (or yesterday)."[118] The non-Chinese art historian's reluctance underscores the deterrence of a disciplinary barrier. However, he offered acute analysis on the pictorial, spatial, and surface qualities and the painter's intensions: "If Liu maintains such traditional motifs as vertical colophons and explicit landscape references, Che Chuang moves to a more Western version of abstraction, while sharing Liu's sensibility to delicate tonal modulations that create dense and shifting atmospheric spaces."[119] Rosenblum's reading of the work was actually close to Chuang's view, especially on the difference between his and Liu's art.[120] Even though an expertise in Chinese art may not be necessary for appreciating new Chinese painting, the cultural

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[117] Richard Edwards, Chuang Che Solo Exhibition leaflet, Forsythe Gallery, Inc. Ann Arbor, Michigan, August 13 to September 7, 1967. Collection files, 1967/2.37. University of Michigan Museum of Art archives.

[118] Robert Rosenblum wrote to McCray and explained that he wrote the review as a favor to his students. Robert Rosenblum to Porter McCray, 27 April 1965, Folders B-6612, B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[119] Robert Rosenblum, "Five Chinese painters at Princeton," March 1965, B-6612 B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[120] For more on the differences between Chuang's and Liu's art, see Chapter Four, 270 and Chapter Five, 325–26.

difference would prevent a trained historian from officially commenting on art outside of his expertise.

Interestingly, the critical review of the new Chinese art seemed to reveal that the curators rightly anticipated how the American reviewers would consume these works. Rosenblum called Chuang's expressive strokes a "whispered variation of such bold abstract calligraphers of the 1950's as [F]ranz Kline…."[121] One might wonder what he qualified as calligraphy, and which direction the influence of "bold" calligraphy went as the gestural strokes by Chuang and Kline have distinctively different origins but similar compositional effects. Rosenblum's approach to new Chinese art stemmed from his eloquence and familiarity with Western modern art, yet his calling Chuang's expressive strokes a "variation" of an established style in American art exposed an unflinching Western-centric attitude inevitably. This way of framing visual art from non-Western regions exposed the lack of a proper rubric for judging such art as increasingly rapid communication between different art worlds began to occur.

The Construction of a Contemporary Chinese Visuality

The exhibition brought forward several observations at the pivotal moment of East-West encounter. The new Chinese visuality, proposed by two U.S.-trained academics and conveyed through the exhibition "The New Chinese Landscape," emphasized the artists' strong roots in Chinese traditions—in the medium, spirit, attitude, or perspective—while showing their adaptive mode in synthesizing the Chinese past and

[121] A Princeton student Lee Chu-yuan (architect and artist) and friend of the Fifth Moon artists organized the small show on campus in March 1965, including Liu, Chuang, Fong, Han Hsiang-ning from the group plus himself and Chung Chun-hsiung. Chu-yuan Lee to Betsy Bayne, Folder B-6625, Box 98, AFA Grant B-6625, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd records, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the Western present. The exhibition showcased the fruitful search of artists in Taiwan for a language of modernity, a style of art suitable for international taste but that would also honor their Chinese origins. To the Fifth Moon artists in the exhibition, they presented "modern Chinese culture" to the "mainstream art world" in the U.S., a monumental feat that helped boost their confidence in making new art and elevated their domestic status. Western viewership mattered greatly in this respect. The curators of the exhibition and the artists shared a desire to demonstrate to Western viewers that Chinese art was no longer sequestered in the past and that global modernity included "China"—but via Taiwan and the diaspora in America, signaling a shift of cultural weight away from the mainland. As seen through the process of making "The New Chinese Landscape," curators showed concern for the presence of national character and indigenous creativity and for the ability to converse in the visual language of the West.

Remarkably, "The New Chinese Landscape" demonstrated the vibrant Chinese subjectivities emerging amidst the strong flow of American cultural imports. The plurality suggests that in the customary postwar framework of "center vs. periphery," artists in the latter designation did not take foreign ideas wholesale; instead, they activated their own cultural traditions. The use of landscape in these new paintings indicates that though artists tended to resist tradition, it became their most striking identity marker in front of a Western audience. Overall, the exhibition showed that a Chinese visuality emerging from Taiwan possessed multiple forms and outlooks, often integrating nationalistic fervor as well as personal preferences. To the curators, the exhibition could be seen "as the renaissance of literati painting in the modern world, or the beginning of a development in Chinese painting to become part of the international

art of the twentieth century."[122] In a sense, Li and Lawton found a new possibility in Chinese painting that would hold global appeal and would potentially diminish the gap between Chinese art and the dominant North American and Western European art.

The limited critical success of the Chinese paintings in America may be attributed to a few factors. The majority of the endorsement of the show came from Chinese art historians, not curators at major museums, and the touring venues in the U.S. did not extend much beyond university and regional galleries. The commercial success of the works was limited to mostly "amateur" collectors and did not transfer to critical success in mainstream American art. Initially, the American funders even showed a lukewarm response to the proposed exhibition. A strong contrast was America's interest in visual art from Japan, a country which it occupied and had strong trade relations since the end of the war. Moreover, the environment in 1960s Taiwan itself was not equipped to fully support an art movement because of the lack of a local economy for art consumption and the limited resources and institutional infrastructure to continuously and effectively promote artists on the international stage. And most evidently, there was still a stigma against works by non-Western artists in the 1960s mainstream, global art world.

Regardless of its failure to cause ripples in the U.S., "The New Chinese Landscape" launched a Chinese visuality in an international arena based on Chinese landscape painting principles with inspirations from Western technique, fueled by a fervent nationalism and a Cold War diplomatic agenda. The reputation of the exhibition solidified the place of abstraction in the development of art in Taiwan and launched the international careers of the Fifth Moon painters. More practically, the artists were able to

[122] Li and Lawton, 151.

sell their works to American patrons that immediately helped with their finances and confidence. The American patronage served as a validation and gave freedom to create in their own context.[123]

"The New Chinese Landscape" heralded a proper debut for Chinese artists in the field of painting globally. At the time of a cathartic cultural reflection and redefinition brewing in the minds of Taiwan's young artists, the experimentations in painting marked a significant moment of concrete connection to the ongoing conversation outside of Taiwan. Paintings were the most facile cultural product to transport to foreign contexts, and through "The New Chinese Landscape," major transformations happening in Taiwan were communicated. However, the seemingly harmonious convergence of the American agenda and Chinese aspirations—expressed through abstract painting—highlights the fact that the mainstream American art world remained unyielding to challenges from a Chinese abstraction. The study of the making and presentation of "The New Chinese Landscape" shows how the two aesthetic systems labeled their visual art and marked their terrains in their first round of negotiation in postwar modern art.

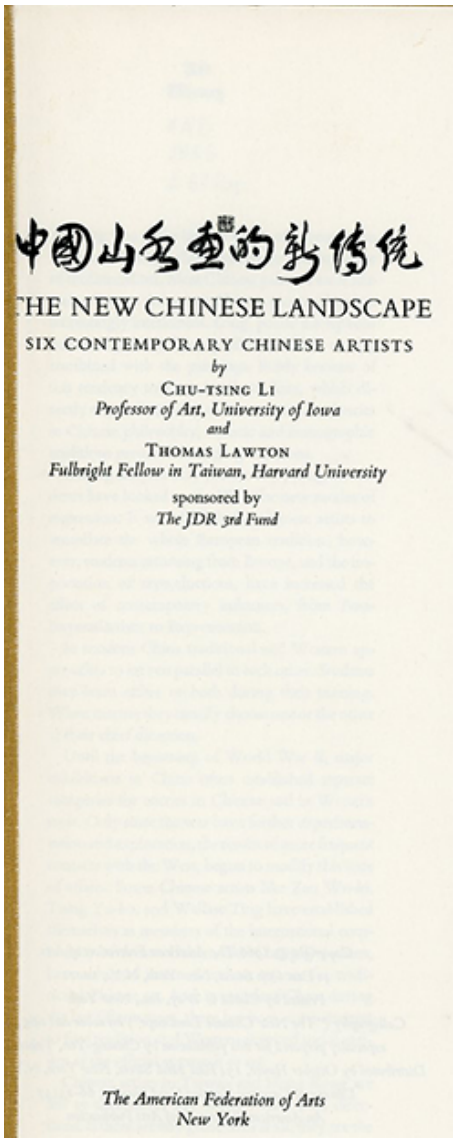
Chapter One is expanded and modified from the presentation: Ma, Lesley, "The Mountains and Rivers Remain: The Construction of a Chinese Visuality via Taiwan and America in the Nineteen-Sixties," in "State of the Field: New Frontiers in Chinese Art," at the College Art Association Annual Conference, Chicago, February 12–15, 2014. The dissertation author was the sole author of this presentation.

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[123] The situation in postwar Taiwan is not unlike in the 1990s when the growing art market gave mainland Chinese artists a sense of freedom and room to negotiate their art, albeit on a much smaller scale. See Jane DeBevoise, *Between State and Market: Chinese Contemporary Art in the Post-Mao Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).



Figure 1.1 Installation view, "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," Cleveland Museum of Art, January 17–February 25, 1968.
Chen Chi-kwan (left) and Liu Kuo-sung (title wall).
(All installation photographs of the Cleveland Museum of Art in this chapter are from: Folder 14, Box 33, records of the Registrar's Office,
Cleveland Museum of Art Archives.)


中國山水畫的新傳統

THE NEW CHINESE LANDSCAPE

SIX CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ARTISTS

by

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and

THOMAS LAWTON

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sponsored by

The JDR 3rd Fund

The American Federation of Arts

New York

Figure. 1.2 Title page, exhibition catalogue,
Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists*. New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1966.
Title calligraphy by Chuang Yan.



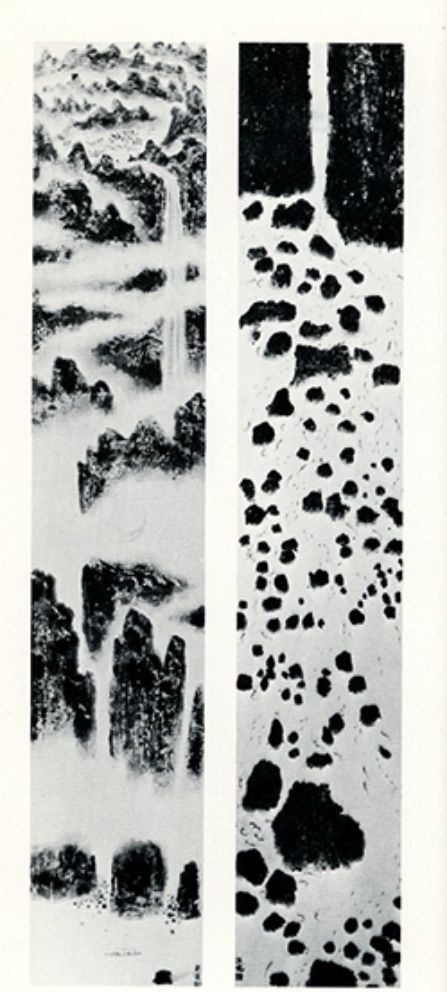
Figure 1.3 Installation view, “The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture,”
The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
October 19, 1966–January 2, 1967.
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



Yu Cheng-Yao

57. *Calm Mountain Stream*, n. d.
Scroll, ink on paper, 47⅛ × 22⅛
Collection, the artist

Figure 1.4 Yu Cheng-yao's painting in "The New Chinese Landscape," in Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 14.

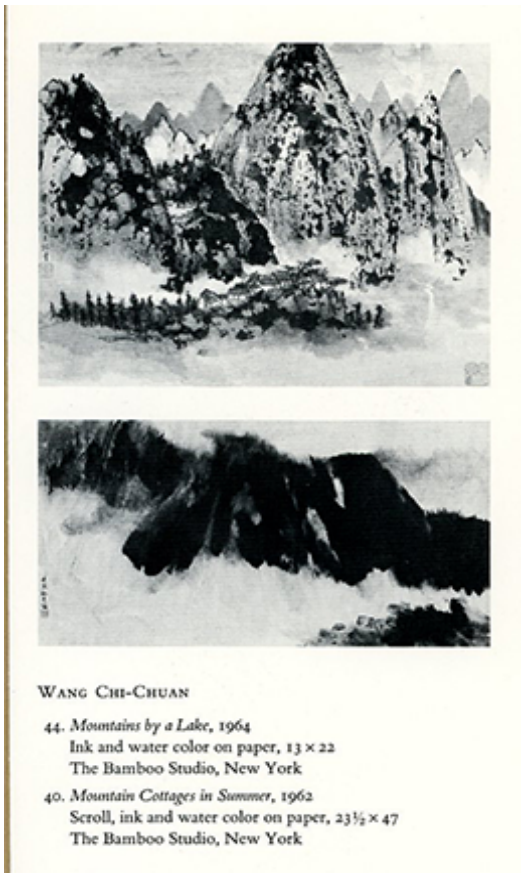


CHEN CHI-KWAN

2. *Road in Shu*, 1961 (left)
Ink and water color on paper, 47½ × 9
Mi Chou Gallery, New York

10. *Upstream*, 1964
Ink and water color on paper, 47½ × 9
Mi Chou Gallery, New York

Figure 1.5 Chen Chi-kwan's paintings in "The New Chinese Landscape," in Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 12.



WANG CHI-CHUAN

44. *Mountains by a Lake*, 1964
Ink and water color on paper, 13 × 22
The Bamboo Studio, New York

40. *Mountain Cottages in Summer*, 1962
Scroll, ink and water color on paper, 23½ × 47
The Bamboo Studio, New York

Figure 1.6 Wang Chi-Chuan's paintings in "The New Chinese Landscape," in Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 12.



Figure 1.7 Fong Chung-ray, *66-76,* 1966,
ink and color on paper on hand scroll, 55.8 x 236.22 cm. M+, Hong Kong.



Figure 1.8 Installation view, "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968.
Fong Chung-ray (two from far left) and Liu Kuo-sung (right and flat).



Figure 1.9 Installation view, "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968.
Chuang Che's paintings.



Figure 1.10 Installation view, "The New Chinese Painting: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968.
Yu Cheng-yao (hanging scrolls from left), Wang Chi-Chuan (far right),
and Fong Chung-ray (flat).

CHAPTER TWO

WENXING AND BIHUI:
MAGAZINES AND MODERNISM IN TAIWAN, 1957–1965

This chapter turns to the domestic context that shaped the modernist art movement in Taiwan. During the postwar decades, when cultural infrastructure was at its most primitive stage, print media became a leading site of intellectual activity and cultural production. Literature and arts magazines (*wenyi zazhi*) and newspaper literary supplements (*fukan*) were dominant print media formats in which the Taiwanese intelligentsia acted as both consumers and contributors.[1] Toward the mid-1950s, as military forces from the mainland continued to threaten Taiwan, and tensions surrounding Vietnam grew, aspiring writers and editors were keen to record and recount their experiences through poetry and essays and escape from an increasingly troubling reality. They sought alternatives forms of creative expressions, aside from the default propaganda and anti-Communist diet provided in a martial law-governed society. Print media offered new channels of knowledge production and distribution, providing a constant in uncertain times and the reassurance of a network of people and ideas.[2]

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[1] The word choice, "intelligentsia," or the general use of "intellectual" in this dissertation, should be explained further, as the constituents of the social and artistic elites in postwar Taiwan was unusual. The series of wars in China had resulted in a generation of youth who did not have proper education or academic degrees. Many mainland émigrés to Taiwan never finished middle school or high school as they came to Taiwan as enlisted soldiers. This applies to many poets and painters discussed in this dissertation, such as poets Lo Fu and Ya Xian, painters Fong Chung-ray, Hu Chi-chung. Their rise in the society relied on their talent, ingenuity, and drive, promoted by the self-published peer magazines in their specialized fields, and the help of respected elites in the cultural circle. However, the differences in education level or career track (academic vs. military) became an unspoken divide between some of the artists and poets. See Chapter Three, 219–23.

[2] The publishing culture thrived in colonial Taiwan between the 1920s and 1940s. Numerous poetry and literature and arts magazine in both Japanese and Chinese were published. The Japanese-language magazines served as vehicles of the colonial government's cultural ideology and often recruited Taiwanese

Postwar Taiwan witnessed a hitherto unprecedented boom in print.[3] Self-published newspapers, such as the *United Daily News* (*lianhe bao*), were key players in the growing polyphony of cultural voices in postwar Taiwan.[4] Newspaper literary supplements, published daily, reached great numbers at great speed, but they were subject to strict and frequent scrutiny from the authorities.[5] By comparison, literature and arts magazines reached a self-selected audience and had a larger capacity for content and a more generous lifespan (as bi-monthly, monthly, or quarterly publications).[6] Launched by educated elites, the magazines targeted those within their circle and a wider network of talents across disciplines. The literature and arts magazine, in which ideas across disciplines mingled and circulated, represented a highly condensed microcosm of the cultural sphere. *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, two literature and arts magazines, were born during a climate of blooming cultural activity in the late 1950s.

Literary scholars have identified the important contribution of literature and arts magazines to the development of their field in Taiwan and have turned postwar

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writers; the Chinese ones were mainly efforts by Taiwanese intellectuals and writers to (re-)claim Chinese subjectivity under the colonial rule. Interference and censorship were rampant. See Liu Shuqin, "Local, Modern, Pure Literature, Subject Structure: the Taiwanese New Literature Magazines during the Japanese Colonial Period" (*bentu, xiandai, chun wenxue, zhuti jiegou: rijushiqi taiwan xinwenxue zazhi*), *Wenxun* 213 (July 2003): 16–27.

[3] Nearly sixty literature and arts magazines were launched between 1949 and 1959. Many of the major and long-lasting literature magazines were funded by the KMT or by the military during this time, creating a cultural phenomenon in an unlikely society recovering after the war. See the diagram included in Ying Fenghuang, "A Survey of Literature and Arts Magazine of the 1950s" (*wushi niandai wenyizazhi gaikuang*), *Wenxun* 213 (July 2003): 34.

[4] The *United Daily News* was founded in 1953 by Wang Tiwu (1913–96).

[5] Lin Hai-yin (Lin Haiyin), the chief editor for the literary supplement of the *United Daily News* from 1953 to 1963, resigned amidst a controversy over a poem by poet Feng Chi (née Wang Fengchi) that was interpreted as criticizing Chiang Kai-shek and his government. She was an editor of *Wenxing* since its beginning in 1957.

[6] Scholar Li Ruiteng pointed out that today's *United Daily News* literary supplement could only host 6,000 characters maximum. Li Ruiteng, "A Guide to the Study of Literature and Arts Magazine" (*wenyi zazhi xue daolun*), *Wenxun* 213 (July 2003): 6–7.

Taiwanese print culture into an academic area of study.[7] Numerous iconic literary voices debuted and careers were made in the pages of magazines and newspaper supplements. *Bihui*, founded in 1959, is credited with the discovery of modernist writer Chen Yingzhen (1937–2016), the poster child of his generation. Previous studies in art history have also treated magazines as a major source for artist statements as well as critical reviews on artworks and exhibitions. Artists and art historians have credited *Wenxing*, a literature and arts magazine founded in 1957, for its major support of modernist painters in Taiwan.[8] However, little work has focused on the significant role of these two magazines in the field of visual art as "cultural producers" and "dialogue generators." Self-published literature and arts magazines became established cultural institutions in their own right during the postwar period, a period of intense transition between the old and the new and between Chinese and Western ideas of tradition and modernity. Furthermore, as products of the burgeoning industry of modern media with educational, critical, and communicatory functions, they tremendously augmented the legitimacy of and support for the modernist movement. They were instrumental in the construction of a visual culture in Taiwan.

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[7] The literary monthly *Wenxun* (*Literary News*, established on July 1, 1983) dedicated its 213th issue to postwar literature and arts magazines in Taiwan. Scholars including Li Ruiteng urged for more academic studies on magazines as well as newspaper supplements and their impact on the development of literature. See Li, 6–7.

[8] Historian Hsiao Chong-ray portrays the important role that *Wenxing* played in the ascent of Fifth Moon and Ton Fan societies in his book, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan: The Modernization of Chinese Art in Postwar Taiwan (wuyue yu dongfang: zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou taiwan zhi fazhan)* (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), 203. He also credits *Wenxing*'s role in enlightening its readers on artistic movements from the west in "The Pushing Hand of Artistic Movements: The Art of *Wenxing*" (*meiyun tuishou: yishu de wenxing*), *Wenxun* 313 (November 2011): 89–93. Li Zhiming's *Book-Binding in Taiwan: The Birth of Modern Books in Taiwan* (*zhuangzhen taiwan: taiwan xiandai shuji sheji de dansheng*) (Taipei: Lianjing, 2011) surveys cover designs of books and magazines in Taiwan since the Japanese colonial period. It showcases the graphic designs of many artists in the Fifth Moon and Ton Fan societies and emphasizes the camaraderie between the literary and visual art talents in the postwar decades. These scholarly narratives are episodic and anecdotal rather than analytical but nonetheless present a visual document of the publishing culture and book arts in postwar Taiwanese history.

Wenxing (Apollo Magazine), a monthly cultural magazine with a strong literary focus, founded in November 5, 1957 and terminated by the Taipei City government authorities in December 1965, produced ninety-eight issues (Figure 2.1).[9] He Fan (Xia Chengying, 1910–2002), the chief editor from the inaugural issue to the 48th (1 October 1961), was a long-term columnist for the literary supplement *United Daily News* and a dedicated supporter of young literary and visual art talents. He, along with two other seasoned editors, Lin Hai-yin (1918–2001) and Chen Lifeng (1918–63), invited modernist poets, writers, and artists to contribute to *Wenxing* at a time when modernism in Taiwan was in its formative stage and began disturbing an order controlled by conservative artists and critics. Li Ao (b. 1935), the chief editor from the fifth year until the forced termination, continued to include art coverage in the magazine even as he steered the magazine toward provocative and political commentary.

Bihui was a much smaller, niche magazine (Figure 2.2). After its initial launch on March 16, 1957 as a political bi-monthly in newspaper format, Yu Tien-t'sung (Yu Tiancong, b. 1935) took over the publication and rechristened itself on May 4, 1959 as a book-sized, peer magazine with a literary and cultural focus. The new iteration produced twenty-four issues until Yu ended the publication in November 1961 for personal reasons. Still in his third year of university studies at the time, the twenty-year-old Yu presented a fresh perspective on literature, visual art, and theater by recruiting young, twenty-something avant-gardes as well as senior cultural figures in theater and aesthetic theory to contribute.

[9] *Wenxing* restarted on September 1, 1986 with its ninety-ninth issue but terminated again, this time for good, on June 20, 1988, producing twenty-two issues in its resurrection.

Wenxing, organized by several seasoned members of the cultural elite, was a bigger enterprise in terms of organization and resources, while *Bihui* was chiefly an ambitious student effort. Funded by a bookstore owner (*Wenxing*) and through family support (*Bihui*), the magazines' editorial voices distinguished themselves from publications with party or military affiliations. The magazines were not merely supporters but active participants in the modernist discourse. Their circulation years overlapped with the most active time of two major modernist art groups, Fifth Moon Society (*wuyue huahui*) and Ton Fan Society (*dongfang huahui*), both founded in 1957. These two magazines acted as witnesses and companions to the birth and maturation of the modern art movement. Many artists in both Fifth Moon and Ton Fan were involved in *Wenxing* and *Bihui* to varying degrees and capacities: some were foreign correspondents or reviewers; others allowed the reproduction of their work or had their graphic designs published. Liu Kuo-sung, for instance, was in charge of editing and planning *Bihui*'s arts content, and he was also a regular contributor to *Wenxing*.

The three major aspects of the magazines—educational, critical, and communicative—anchor this chapter's investigation. Two major lines of inquiry guide the analysis. One is tracing the formation of the concept of modern art in these publications: how the editors came to define the idea of "modern" and invite the intellectual community to participate in their agenda; how modern art, explained through magazine articles and visual elements, fits into the editorial mission and the programmatic design. The other inquiry concerns the magazines' international consciousness: how these magazines engaged with twentieth-century modernist art movements in the West and also with Chinese art history; how the editors viewed the

domestic and international art worlds; and most importantly, how the designations of "modern artist" or "modern Chinese artist" were formulated and debated in the context of postwar recovery and at the advent of globalization.

A FEW NOTES ON SCENE SETTING

The Legacy of May Fourth

The unfinished project of the May Fourth Movement, a cultural reform and modernization movement that grew out of the anti-imperialist, nationalist fervor of 1919, was resurrected in Taiwan in 1950s.[10] An anti-Communist ideology had united the new May Fourth generation in Taiwan after the civil war, but the interference of American culture and politics under the Cold War structure, along with political instability, complicated their forthcoming goals. The degree of Westernization became one of the most divisive issues plaguing the intellectual community, including the poets and visual artists. The polemics of May Fourth began when Ji Xian (1913–2013) founded *The Modernist Poetry Monthly* (*xiandai shi*) in 1953.[11] Heralded as the first publication of "new poetry" in Taiwan, *The Modernist Poetry Monthly* was the first to publish Chinese translations of poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, T. E. Hume, D. H. Lawrence and others.[12] In 1956, Ji Xian's declaration that modern poetry should exercise

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[10] Some of the May Fourth followers moved to Hong Kong and brought their cultural re-evaluation project there. For instance, Ma Lang (Ronald Mar, b. 1933), a believer in Western modernist literature, published *Literary Current* (*wenyi xinchao*) in 1957 and brought to the British colony new ideas for the sake of revitalizing Chinese poetry and literature.

[11] Ji Xian is credited for singlehandedly initiated the birth and the subsequent discussion of new poetry in Taiwan. *The Modernist Poetry Monthly* (*xiandai shi*) inspired the founding of the *Blue Stars* (*lanxing*) and the *Epoch Poetry* (*chuangshiji*), two societies with dedicated poetry magazines organized by younger poets.

[12] The term "modern poetry" (*xiandai shi*) is often used interchangeably with "new poetry" (*xinshi*), which refers to poetry written in vernacular Chinese (*baihuawen*), one of the main revolutionary attributes of the May Fourth Movement. See Yi-li Kao, "Chinese Poetry and Painting in Postwar Taiwan: Angst and

"horizontal transplantation" (*heng de yizhi*) from the West, rather than the "vertical inheritance" (*zong de jicheng*) of the East, polarized the nation's intellectual circle. Ji Xian believed in freeing modern poetry from the dogmatic conventions of classical Chinese poetry, a common solution of self-reinvention after the disillusionment with Chinese values in a post-colonial, postwar society.[13] Many of Ji Xian's contemporaries opposed his proposal and advocated for a more gradual pace in breaking with Chinese conventions, preferring to preserve their roots while still absorbing useful Western elements.[14] The Taiwanese society at the time was faced with these various "pace" and "directional" questions, and although all were related to aesthetics, they were nevertheless political questions as well.

Wenxing and *Bihui* came on the heel of this major cultural debate. The editorial boards of *Wenxing* and *Bihui* held different views toward the legacy of May Fourth, especially toward one of the movement's leaders, Hu Shih (Hu Shi, 1891–1962). Still, in principle they held on to the core values of movement, such as re-evaluating tradition and incorporating Western thoughts, which led to their interest in the experimental nature of Fifth Moon and Ton Fan artists. The content of *Wenxing* and *Bihui* makes evident that the construction of a modern art style in Taiwan cannot be properly understood without knowing the impact of May Fourth.

Transformation in the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005), 14, note 22.

[13] Ji Xian made the declaration of "horizontal transplantation" at the official founding of Modernist Society (*xiandai shishe*) in January 1956. He further elaborated on the theory in the fall of 1956, in "On the Flower of Transplantation" (*lun yizhi zhihua*), in *Jixian on Modern Poetry* (*jixian lun xiandai shi*) (Yunlin: Landeng Chuban, 1970), 164–72, cited in Kao, 16–23.

[14] Younger poets, including Yu Kwang-chung (Yu Guangzhong, b. 1928), belong to the opposite camp that believed in more moderate measures of Westernization. See Kao, 23.

The Postwar Generation

The generational dynamic within the worlds of *Wenxing* and *Bihui* are crucial to understanding the context of the nascent stages of the modernization project. Liu Kuo-sung, Yu Tien-t'sung and their cohort belong to a generation who experienced firsthand two major wars, relocated to Taiwan as adolescents, and matured intellectually on the island. They are *waishengren*, or "people from other provinces," a demographic term that refers to mainland refugees, made up primarily of Chiang Kai-shek's military and political administration, and their offspring in Taiwan. As Taiwanese society struggled with balancing a post-colonial identity and anti-Communist ideology, the ultra-nationalist and authoritarian attitude toward culture, advocated by the Kuomintang (KMT) government, did not offer productive paths to a rising generation of artists. The younger generation at large felt suffocated by the conservative system, and artists, as well, experienced the same effect of ennui and stagnation.

The year 1959 saw two earthshaking literary works that came to define the generation of young artist. In July, poet Lo Fu (Mo Luofu, b. 1928), who came to Taiwan with the KMT military, published the epic, long-form poem "Death of a Stone Cell" (*shishi zhi siwang*), in *Epoch Poetry Quarterly* (*chuangshiji shikan*).[15] Composed when the poet was on active duty during the Quemoy Bombardment in 1958, the poem, exhibiting surrealist influences, exemplified the ethos of his generation: a collective anguish, loss, desperation, and fear. The exploration of an "inner reality" and anti-

[15] *Epoch Poetry Quarterly* is the longest-standing publication of poetry in Taiwan, founded in 1954 by Lo Fu and Zhang Mo (b. 1931) in Kaohsiung. Ya Xian (b. 1932), joined in 1955. The three are called the "Golden Triangle" of modern Taiwan poetry. Lo Fu began composing "Death of a Stone Cell" in 1958 when stationed in a stone bunker on Quemoy (Jinmen) Island during the August 23 bombardment by the PRC. It took him five years to complete the poem, which began to appear in the twelfth issue of *Epoch* in July 1959. The complete poem was published as a book, *Death of a Stone Cell*, in 1965.

traditionalism became the "theoretical foundation" of the poets of *Epoch*.[16] Soon after, in September, Chen Yingzhen, born in Miaoli, Taiwan in 1937, leaped onto the scene with the now classic *The Noodle Booth (Mian Tan*), in his literary debut in *Bihui*.[17] The short story put forward a humanist view on harsh realities, a strategy of self-comfort against the internal emptiness and external alienation. Both artists and their work would continue to electrify the cultural scene throughout the 1960s. The generation's fixation on the anxiety and uncertainty in life, fueled by romantic, surrealist, and escapist tendencies, gave shape to a distinct, generational subjectivity and taste that cross-fertilized with the visual art field.

Relationship to Japanese Culture

Throughout the course of twentieth-century Chinese art history, Japan repeatedly played important roles during moments of cultural crisis.[18] Postwar Taiwan was not an exception. The postwar generation retained an intellectual curiosity toward Japanese artistic and literary accomplishments, which, in the context of the official order of de-Japanization and the collective redefinition of a Chinese cultural identity, became a peculiar aspect of Taiwanese modernism. In *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, Japanese materials made notable impressions. An analysis of the cultural connections between Japan and Taiwan through these magazines—even when they were less prominent than the connections to America—offers clues to the nuances of the highly politicized and essentialist debates

[16] See Chen Fangming, "The Expansion and Deepening of Modernism in Literature" (*xiandai zhuyi wenxue de kuozhang yu shenghua*), *Lianhe Wenxue* (January 2002): 145, quoted in Kao, 37.
[17] Chen Yingzhen's *The Noodle Booth* was published in *Bihui* 1, no. 5 (15 September 1959): 38–41. He used the pen name Chen Shan.
[18] See Joshua A. Fogel ed., *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

boiling in the 1950s and 1960s and contextualizes Taiwan Modernism within the parallel tracks of other postwar East Asian modernisms.

The Sinophone Network

With a comparative framework in mind, this study brings attention to exchanges within the Sinophone network—most prominently, between Taiwan and Hong Kong. Literary scholar Shih Shu-mei proposed the concept of the Sinophone to construct a context for the diverse and complex visuality generated by members of Chinese-language communities outside of mainland China.[19] An understanding of the Taiwan-Hong Kong relationship would map out the distinct yet intersecting developmental paths of modern Chinese culture—outside of the mainland—after 1949. Under the American Cold War structure, Taiwan and Hong Kong each developed local modernisms and visual cultures based on the concept of China as the cultural motherland and incorporated external sources in very different geopolitical and social environments. The network of exchange between these two communities thus is crucial to understanding the articulations of modernism in each location. Several Hong Kong poets and artists' contribution to *Bihui*, for instance, highlights how the modernist ideas developed by the Hong Kong cultural set were considered in Taiwan. Additionally, the magazines' coverage on the diaspora artists in America and Europe, including Zao Wou-ki and Walasse Ting, brings attention to another dimension of the Sinophone: the strategies of an earlier generation of Chinese artists in defining their identities on the international stage. The expansive and layered

[19] See Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

network of the Sinophone communities is thus crucial in understanding the postwar modernist aspirations in the Taiwanese art world.

WENXING

Wenxing, a monthly magazine of arts and culture, was a part of a literary enterprise that started from a bookstore, and later, added a publishing house and a gallery.[20] Xiao Mengneng (1912–2004), the founder and owner of the *Wenxing* Bookstore (Book's World) in Taipei in 1952, started the literary and arts magazine in 1957. Hsiao's father was a former president of the state-controlled Central News Agency before World War II. His colleague, Yeh Ming-hsun (Ye Mingxun, 1913–2009), the publisher of *Wenxing*, was an experienced journalist fluent in English.[21] The inaugural editorial team of *Wenxing* included editor-in-chief He Fan, a weekly columnist for *United Daily News*, who was known for his commentary on international current events. His wife, Lin Hai-yin, the chief editor of the same paper's renowned literary supplement and an accomplished author, was the literature and arts editor, and another seasoned editor Chen Lifeng was the production editor. The *Wenxing* team shared journalistic connections and publishing acumen driven by their belief in the power of information, which is specially reflected in the magazine's timely coverage of world events and its perpetual quest for fresh voices. *Wenxing*'s welcoming attitude to new ideas is evident in

[20] Starting around 1967, Wenxing Gallery in Taipei hosted avant-garde exhibitions after the magazine terminated.

[21] Yeh Ming-hsun had a well-respected career in journalism. He was the head of the Taipei Bureau of the Central News Agency from 1946 to 1950 and the publisher of the KMT-owned *China Daily News* from 1951 to 1955. He was instrumental in the development of the advertising industry in Taiwan since the 1960s. Yeh was related to the influential businessman and politician Koo Hsien-jung (1866–1937) through his wife's sister. Koo's family, according to Yu Tien-t'sung, was an unnamed sponsor of the *Wenxing* enterprise. Yeh's connections and influence in public culture and communication were unparalleled, which further illustrates *Wenxing*'s aspiration and reach. Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 31 December 2015.

the staffing of He Fan and Lin Hai-yin, a power couple of the Taiwanese literary world, who had become the vanguard of journalistic and literary opinion since the early 1950s. Through their involvement with *United Daily News*, they nurtured the careers of an upcoming generation of writers. Their influence, through *Wenxing*, also reached beyond the literary circle.

The magazine's name proclaimed an emphasis on literature. "*Wenxing*," or "literary star," is the God of Letters in Chinese folklore and astrology, to which the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu alludes in a verse.[22] It is also the Chinese name for Apollo in Greek mythology, "the guardian of poetry, song, and music." *Wenxing* cultivated a cosmopolitan interest and appeal by tapping into both Chinese and Western cultural beliefs.[23] The title also echoed the magazine's aspiration to be a protected space (by said guardians) for freedom of the press and artistic creation.[24]

Wenxing, May Fourth, and Wholesale Westernization

To understand the ideological backbone of *Wenxing*, one must briefly turn to *Free China* (*Ziyou Zhongguo*), a political quarterly dedicated to democratic ideas. Founded on

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[22] In this poem, Du Fu praises his friend Li Mian as a literary star, traveling south to his new position: "*beifeng sui shuangqi, nandou bi wenxing*." The same celestial body in Western constellation is called Megrez. In "Going Against the Grain—in Place of an Inaugural Editorial" (*bu an paili chu pai—dai fakanci*), *Wenxing* 1 (5 November 1957): 2.

[23] Writer Yu Tien-t'sung explained that the "xing" (star) in *Wenxing*'s title alludes to a character in the style name for Taiwanese businessman, politician, and colonial collaborator, Koo Hsien-jung: Koo Yaoxing. His family had strong ties to the Japanese as well as the Americans throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yu believed that the Koo family had a huge financial stake in *Wenxing*. In the back cover of the second issue of *Wenxing* is an advertisement for the youth choir, Rongxing, proving a link between the magazine and the Koo family. Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 31 December 2015. It is difficult to find the hard evidence to support this discovery, but many writers of the period had noted to this author that *Wenxing* had American backing. This dissertation only investigates the connection to American culture from the content of the magazine.

[24] The magazine's third issue included a few articles on freedom of the press, and the mandate to change the inertia in news media was part of the magazine's goals. "Welcome the New Spring, Reinstate the Determination" (*yingjie xinchun, chongshen jueyi*), *Wenxing* 3 (5 January 1958): 2.

the mainland in 1949 by Lei Chen (Lei Zhen, 1897–1979), the publication listed Hu Shih, the leading figure of the May Fourth Movement, as its publisher. After it relocated to Taiwan, *Free China* was critical of the government's authoritarian control and propagated the principles of democracy and liberalism.[25] The editor Yin Haiguang (1919–69) and Mao Zishui (1893–1988) were early contributing writers to *Wenxing*.[26] After *Free China* was shut down in September 1960 by the KMT government over incendiary comments, and Lei was sent to jail for treason, *Wenxing* emerged as its unofficial surrogate.[27]

Even before then, the magazine's allegiance to May Fourth's values of total Westernization already appeared in the inaugural editorial manifesto. The editors, in describing their attitude toward magazine publishing, noted that knowledge "came from action, trial and error,"[28] a pragmatist rationale that reflects the modern scientific method in knowledge building and a progress-oriented view of Western-style modernism. Hu Shih, the leading figure of the May Fourth movement and a student of John Dewey, proselytized pragmatism in China in the early twentieth century. Hu's advocacy of "wholesale Westernization" (*quanpan xihua*) as a method to modernize Chinese culture

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[25] To clarify, the "liberalism" (*ziyou zhuyi*) in the postwar Taiwanese cultural context refers to the belief in a more open, democratic government, and an open attitude for materials from outside of the official parameter.

[26] In *Wenxing*'s first year, Yin Haiguang and Mao Zishui, who were both editors of *Free China*, contributed essays about Bertrand Russell in *Wenxing* 4 (5 February 1958): 3–4, and the latter also on Hu Shih in *Wenxing* 7 (1 May 1958): 8. Mao continued to contribute articles to *Wenxing* in its second year.

[27] A few scholars in Taiwan had studied the ties between the two publications. See Liu Shuzhen, "Heterogeneity, Cultural Reflection: *Wenxing* and the Chinese-Western Cultural Debate" (*yizhi tazhe, wenhua jingxiang: wenxing yu zhongxi wenhua lunzhan*), *Wenxun* 313 (November 2011): 78–82. Liu has included a few other citations on the subject, including Jian Minghai, "The Tradition of May Fourth in Taiwan" (*wusi chuantong zai taiwan*) (Ph.D. diss., National Chengchi University, 2009), cited in Liu, 82, note 1.

[28] Translated by author. "Going Against the Grain," *Wenxing* 1 (5 November 1957): 2.

and society made him a divisive figure in both cultural and political realms.[29] The rationale behind "wholesale Westernization" or "full globalization" (*chongfen de shijiehua*) was that one must let Chinese culture fully encounter and immerse itself in global culture in order to properly eliminate its outdated and inappropriate qualities, before reconstructing the fundamentals and rejuvenating itself.

Though Hu never wrote for *Wenxing*, his presence loomed large. Since the beginning, *Wenxing* editors followed the May Fourth tenets and widely imported information on Western culture. New, progressive ideas from Europe and America such as modern art movements, musical innovations, or examples of the fight for journalistic freedom were placed alongside articles about classical Chinese art and ancient philosophy. The eight published years of *Wenxing* were essentially a crash course in Western social and cultural advancements since the early twentieth century, as well as an attempt to re-familiarize readers with the moral and aesthetic values of Chinese culture. Because Hu Shih and his cohort never implemented their ideas in society, *Wenxing* was the first independent publication in Taiwan to carry out the social and intellectual experiment. The project of modernization through the re-education of Chinese intellectuals thus began in Taiwan in the late 1950s with the publication of *Wenxing*.[30]

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[29] Hu's pro-American views and affiliations also made his political position quite complicated. In addition to being a scholar, Hu was a former ambassador to the U.S., a key liaison between the Truman administration and the KMT during the civil war. Since 1957, he was the head of the Academia Sinica, the highest governmental research institution in Taiwan. Hu's allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek's government was at times unclear, yet he enjoyed a certain degree of immunity because of his social stature and strong ties to America. Rumor has it that Hu Shih was favored by the U.S. to form another political party to curb the rise of the Chinese Communists, as the Americans deemed the KMT under Chiang Kai-shek too corrupt.

[30] *Literary Current*, an independent publication in Hong Kong founded by Ma Lang on February 18, 1956, was the first to follow the tenet of May Fourth in the Sinophone world. It lasted for 15 issues until May 1, 1959. See note 9.

As a cultural producer, *Wenxing* self-consciously organized debates on the notion of "wholesale Westernization," similar to the numerous debates published in various newspapers and magazines in the 1930s. Six issues between December 1961 and May 1962 dedicated significant pages to the discussion of methods of modernization and comparative studies of cultures centering around Hu Shih and his ideas.[31] Prominent scholars, politicians, and journalists who sat on different sides of the issue, including Liang Shih-chiu (Liang Shiqiu, 1903–87), George Yeh Kung-chao (Ye Gongchao, 1904–81), Hsu Fu-kuan (Xu Fuguan, 1904–82), Hu Qiuyuan (1910–2004), as well as writers and critics of the younger generation, such as poet Yu Kwang-chung (Yu Guangzhong), a moderate, and writer Li Ao, an extreme radical and fierce defendant of Hu, all voiced their opinions. The intensity of the discussions—sometimes materialized through vitriolic attacks thrown between opponents across the pages—indicates a collective ambition and anxiety to redefine Chinese culture at this historical moment and determine the direction of future development.[32] It also made apparent the emergence of a younger generation of intellectuals at this crucial juncture. Li Ao, who took over the magazine's editorship after the 58th issue, was exemplary of this shift. *Wenxing* was not only a promoter and an

[31] Starting from issue 50 until issue 55, considerable space was reserved for the debate about the construction of the Chinese New Culture (*zhongguo xin wenhua*). Hu Shih appeared on the cover of issue 51, putting his contentious role in the cultural movement front and center. Because of Hu's death, issue 53 became a memorial issue devoted to a discussion of his ideas and legacy. The editorial in issue 54 elaborated on the motivation behind the organized debates: "those who believe in cultural preservation should bring concrete ideas of implementation; those who believe in wholesale Westernization should also bring concrete proposals. Those who believe in the theory of 'surpass and progress' should also draw the road map for achieving such goals." In other words, the editors believed that the only way to find out the appropriate route was to experiment as one moves forward. It was a mobilization of intellectuals to aggressively find solutions. "Report from the Editors' Room," *Wenxing* 54 (1 April 1962): 2.

[32] For a detailed analysis on the cultural positions of Li Ao, Yin Haiguang, and a few others, see Liu Shuzhen, 78–82.

executor of the May Fourth ideals but also an arbiter of opinions that had the power to constantly and consciously formulate and modify the plan of modernization.

"Going Against the Grain"

Wenxing's belief in total Westernization coextended with its support for creative minds seeking to break away from traditional modes of thinking and cultural production. On November 5, 1957—the same day the inaugural issue of *Wenxing* was published—He Fan penned an article in his *United Daily News* column, "On the Glass Top" (*bolidian shang*), that changed the fate of eight young painters in the first modernist art group in Taiwan, the Ton Fan Society.[33] He called them "The Eight Bandits" (*bada xiangma*) in his column, commending their audacity and urging the public to give their new art a chance, thereby giving them a stamp of confidence.[34]

The bandit spirit was exactly what He Fan channeled in *Wenxing*. In the editor's manifesto, aptly titled "Going Against the Grain" (*bu an paili chu pai*, literally, playing cards against logic), He Fan emphasizes the periodical's motto: "knowing the impossibility but doing it anyway."[35] Referring to the repeated frustrations in the publishing industry, especially the financially doomed fate of self-published magazines, he exclaimed, "If [we] culturati don't do this, then what?"[36] *Wenxing*'s audacity and determination underscored a social responsibility that the editors shouldered in the hope of broadening and diversifying the intellectual range of their compatriots. As if speaking

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[33] He Fan's daily column, "On the Glass Top," began on December 1, 1953 in the *United Daily News*.
[34] See He Fan, "Art Exhibition of the Bandits" (*xiangma huazhan*), *United Daily News*, 5 November 1957, New Arts, p. 6.
[35] Original words: "*zhi qi bukewei er weizhi*." "Going Against the Grain" (*bu an paili chu pai*), *Wenxing* 1 (November 5, 1957): 2.
[36] Original words: "*wenhuaren bugan zhege ganshemo*?" Ibid.

directly to the readers, the *Wenxing* editors mastered a friendly tone that downplayed the grave anxiety that came with their responsibility. Despite knowing the difficult future that lay ahead for the magazine, the editor's note showed faith in their publication and its industry, confident about its private and independent nature as well as its collaborative working method.[37]

The content arrangement follows the founding editorial vision of "Of life, of literature, of art" (*shenghuo de, wenxue de, yishu de*).[38] The tri-part focus signified the equal importance the editors placed on the three areas, constituting the criteria for a modern, cultured intellectual existence. *Wenxing*'s aspiration to put equal weight on life, literature, and art signaled the determination of a cultured class to fill an enormous void in their social and intellectual milieu, especially after a decade of impoverished existence both economically and culturally. In its third year, *Wenxing* modified its scope to "Of thought, of life, of art" (*sixiang de, shenghuo de, yishu de*) effectively inserting literature into the category of art and foregrounding intellectual thought. From then on, the percentage of theory and criticism, as well as the critical and artistic voices from the younger generation, increased. There was also more frequent reportage on Western modern and contemporary art. The articles ranged from reviews of international and local exhibitions, introductions to foreign art institutions, artist manifestoes, and translations of texts on art theory and artist biographies.

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[37] He Fan notes, "*Wenxing* is a purely private publication, a collaboration of a few friends" (w*enxing shi women jige pengyou hezuo de chun siren kanwu*.) Translated by author. "Going Against the Grain," 2. Even though it is independently funded, it sold advertisement to other publications, a common practice. Those who published advertisements in *Wenxing* included *Changliu*, a literature and arts magazine funded by the National Railways Association.

[38] Ibid.

Wenxing's cosmopolitan ambition, most evident through its reach across the Sinophone regions, is shown through its listed price. Within the first year, the magazine had expanded its readership to Hong Kong, the United States, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaya, and Thailand.[39] With a print run of four thousand each month, the magazine sold at four Taiwan Dollars per issue,[40] which was about four times the price of a simple meal. The price marked a readership within a socio-economic class of well-educated elites. In its standard length of forty pages,[41] aspects of modern life were widely covered: the sciences, education, sports, world culture, fine art, and music, with a strong emphasis on American contemporary and classical Chinese art and culture.

The magazine's penchant for Western cultural currents is especially evident on the covers. The editors, well-attuned to global affairs, frequently featured an accomplished figure from the West, whose profession ranged from writer to astronaut, to state leader to doctor. Ernest Hemingway graced the cover of the inaugural issue and set the literary weight and tone of the publication. Out of the ninety-eight cover persons in *Wenxing*'s lifetime, only three were Chinese, the first of which did not appear until the forty-third issue on May 1, 1961.[42] The cover layout was similar to that of *Time*'s Man of the Year.[43] He Fan, in the magazine's first anniversary issue, confessed that trying to find

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[39] Starting from the fourth issue, *Wenxing* began to publish the listed price in three currencies: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the U.S.; in the ninth issue, it listed prices in eight currencies.
[40] "The Continuous Attempt to Go Against the Grain—The Third Year of *Wenxing*" (*buan paili chupai de jixu changshi—wenxing mairu disannian*), *Wenxing* 25 (1 November 1959): 2.
[41] The 53rd issue increased to eighty pages because of its special memorial on Hu Shih, soon after his passing. Afterwards, the new length became the norm.
[42] Rui Lin writes in "On Magazine Cover Persons" (*tan zazhi fengmian renwu*), *Wenxing* 32 (1 June 1960): 33, that avoidance of using contemporary Chinese figures on the cover was to maintain journalistic independence and not to appear to curry favor to anyone.
[43] Starting in 1954, every December, He Fan introduced the candidate of *Time*'s Man of the Year in his column for *United Daily News*. In fact, the style of *Wenxing*'s cover feature resembles that of *Time*. For more on *Wenxing*'s cover design, see this chapter, 111–16.

a learned person for every cover was a troublesome, self-inflicted burden, but a task he clearly took to challenge.[44] One reader's response to the Hemingway cover confirmed the magazine's seriousness in the eyes of the public: "Putting a literary giant on the cover instead of a female celebrity proves that the content is reader-worthy."[45]

Wenxing's Educational Scope

Setting up the Authority

Wenxing took off in Taiwan's cultural community with the help of reputable editorial leadership, which gave the magazine almost instant legitimacy and clout. The editors invited a network of learned scholars and public intellectuals as contributors.[46] For instance, Liang Shih-chiu, the preeminent scholar of modern Chinese literature and the leading translator and expert on Shakespeare in the Chinese-speaking world, contributed a number of articles throughout the magazine's run.[47] Journalist and writer Zhang Jigao (1926–95), whose columns on music appeared in *Central Daily News* and *United Daily News* since 1954, contributed articles on multiple occasions.[48] Léon L. Y. Chang (Zhang Longyan, 1909–2009)—a French-educated cultural theorist and calligrapher, a former diplomat in Europe and in the U.S. before and after World War II, the president of the Taipei Arts College in 1957 and later a staunch supporter of the Fifth

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[44] Xia Chengying, "One Year of *Wenxing*" (*wenxing yinian*), *Wenxing* 13 (1 November 1958): 3.
[45] "Report from the Editors' Room" (*bianjishi baogao*), *Wenxing* 2 (5 December 1957): 17. Using female celebrities or socialites on popular magazine covers was a widely used trope, including cultural magazines in 1930s Shanghai. The reader's letter was to emphasize how *Wenxing* stood out from other publications.
[46] As stated in "Going Against the Grain."
[47] According to the editors, Liang Shih-chiu gifted a piece, "Tensed and Relaxed," to the second issue *Wenxing*. "Report from the Editing Room," *Wenxing* 2 (5 December 1957): 17.
[48] "Zhang Jigao (1926–95)," The Online Database of Taiwanese Musicians, http://musiciantw.ncfta.gov.tw/list.aspx?p=M030&c=&t=1; accessed 17 September 2016. Zhang Jigao used the pen name "Wu Xinliu" and contributed articles on music starting from the seventh issue of *Wenxing*, as well as to a column on music in the magazine's third year. See note 75 below.

Moon society artists—became the resident contributor for the magazine's art section. In the first year, his column, "Art Appreciation" (*yishu xinshang*), underlined the importance of the spiritual refinement of intellectuals and of artistic nourishment in an impoverished time, and emphasized that art did not have to be for the sake of politics.[49]

The spectrum of *Wenxing* contributors was wide, from conservatives and government-favored, to liberals and the non-mainstream, and from cultural critics to area specialists. Though most contributors were open to new styles of artistic production, *Wenxing* also allowed contributions from those with more conservative stances.[50] By including a range of opinions, *Wenxing* maintained its relevance, administered exchanges between those with different opinions, and satisfied the goal to educate and broaden their readers' view.

Nurturing Young Artistic Voices

Wenxing was committed to raising the profile of young talents. Starting from the first issue, the younger generation dominated the poetry and fiction sections. Hsiao Chin (Xiao Qin, b. 1935), a founder of Ton Fan Society who moved to Barcelona in 1956 to further his arts education and to pursue a career as a painter, was the first artist of his generation to have first-hand experience with Western modern and contemporary art. As

[49] He Fan confessed that the magazine's editors did not have enough expertise in the arts, so they had enlisted various help from within the community. Xia, "One Year of *Wenxing*," 3.
[50] Su Xuelin (1897–1999), an ultra-conservative writer and critic who had denounced Lu Xun in the 1930s and openly criticized the new poetry movement in Taiwan, published a few essays of non-political nature in *Wenxing* such as "Publishing a Book" in *Wenxing* 2 (5 December 1957): 6. Yu Junzhi (1912–75), a philosophy scholar and a former chief editor of the government-backed, anti-Communist-themed publication *Wenyi Chuangzuo*, also published essays in *Wenxing*. His involvement with *Wenxing* proves that the lines between officialdom and the alternative may not be absolute.

a European correspondent for the *United Daily News*,[51] Hsiao published articles on overseas exhibitions and cultural sites beginning in *Wenxing*'s second issue. *Wenxing*'s commitment to art news from Europe and to a young trailblazer in need of a stipend living overseas demonstrates its dedication to the importation of new information and the recognition of talents.[52]

Other young visual artists came on board in the magazine's third year. Liu Kuo-sung debuted in the 34th issue (August 1, 1960) with an article titled "On the Appreciation of Abstract Painting" that emphasized individualism as the most desired quality in art. Ho Kan (Huo Gang, b. 1933), a Ton Fan Society artist, contributed an article in the 41st issue (March 1, 1961) on Walasse Ting, a Shanghai-born artist who sojourned in Hong Kong and Paris before arriving in New York in the mid-1950s. The Fifth Moon artist Chuang Che's first contribution to the magazine was a critical account of his experience on the judging panel of the São Paulo Biennial exhibition, in the 42nd issue (April 1, 1961). After these appearances, Liu, Ho, and Chuang—all mavericks in the cultural scene under thirty years old—gradually published opinion pieces in the

[51] Hsiao Chin's column in UDN appeared frequently—average about five to six times a month from 1956 to 1960. They often read like personal travelogues focused on art, sharing his view on various local exhibitions and his interviews with artists. His exhibition reviews could count as the first of its kind in the Taiwanese media. According to his Ton Fan cohort, artist Hsia Yan (Xia Yang), without the aid of pictures, Hsiao's readers in Taiwan had to imagine the European contemporary art through purely textual descriptions. Hsia, interview by author, Shanghai, 3 February 2015.

[52] *Wenxing*'s rate for article submissions was forty Taiwan Dollars per thousand words according to its advertisements. Hsiao Chin's essays in *Wenxing* were of greater length than those in the newspaper and were accompanied by illustrations. (See *Wenxing* issues 2, 10, and 14). As *Wenxing* began to shape its identity in the publishing and cultural world, Hsiao's fresh accounts from abroad were relegated to a special section of *Wenxing* reserved for foreign-based writers. A few other correspondents in this section were also studying abroad, including novelist Yu Lihua (b. 1932) and composer Huang Yautai (1912–2010). They published articles on the subject of their expertise or the city of their residency. (Yu on Princeton, NJ in the third issue; Huang on opera in Rome appeared in the eighth and ninth issues.)

magazine. *Wenxing* gave authority and a much needed stage to the rising generation of artists.

Visual Art in *Wenxing*

Arts in *Wenxing* included visual art (painting, sculpture, calligraphy, and woodcut prints), architecture, craft, film, music, theater, and dance. The arts complemented the cultural commentary, reportage, and literature sections. In each of the first thirty issues (spanning two-and-a-half years), under the editorial mission of "Of life, of literature, of art," about one-third was devoted to arts, and within that, visual art articles comprised the majority, about one or two articles, and often in the format of a picture spread. Though not substantial, the magazine was concerned with disseminating the basic tools to appreciate art, and at the very least, promoting an appreciation toward arts and culture. It consistently covered traditional Chinese art throughout its eight years of circulation, including articles or picture spreads on calligraphy, landscape paintings, ancient bronzes and other genres of material culture.

Wenxing made an early attempt to introduce "modern painting" in the second issue, even though it did not have systematic coverage on modern art until its third year. Prompted by an astonished audience at the inaugural Ton Fan Society exhibition, the article by Nu Xian (pen name) demonstrated *Wenxing*'s commitment to current affairs in the arts. The exhibition in question included works by ten contemporary Chinese artists (including the Eight Bandits of the Ton Fan Society) and by fourteen Spanish artists, some of whom belonged to the Barcelona-based Grupo Sílex that made abstract art inspired by primitive motifs. It marked one of the earliest instances where foreign art was

seen in the flesh in Taiwan.[53] The author acknowledged that abstraction had already become the lingua franca of international art and provided a succinct overview of art of the early twentieth-century European masters, including Picasso, Matisse, Dali, and Klee. He argued that the recognized breakthroughs in Western modern painting, namely the abstract and expressive qualities, existed in classical Chinese painting. This expressed a view that Chinese painting qualified as modern by international standards, proven by their "integration" into or "citation" by Western art movements. For Nu Xian, modern painting from the West could be explained through the concepts and terminology of Chinese art. Thus, modern painting was a "melding of the East and West" and the cross-cultural exchanges would "naturally eliminate the formal differences in painting."[54]

The seemingly preposterous, or premature prediction, of a convergence of Chinese and Western painting reveals a complex psychology prevalent in Chinese thinking when facing the pressure to modernize. At a time when the intelligentsia in Taiwan struggled to grasp what Chinese culture, and by extension, Chineseness, meant to them, they sought to reposition Chinese painting within the field of painting internationally. To compensate for its marginal status geopolitically, the author insured the readers of the superiority and enduring quality of Chinese art. While it took Western art centuries of development to culminate to the great ideal of expressionist abstraction in the twentieth century, classical Chinese art had followed the same principles for centuries, so the argument went. Thus a vision for synchronicity, or an eventual convergence, between East and West seemed reasonable.

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[53] Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 116.
[54] Nu Xian, "Introduction to Modern Painting" (*xiandai huihua jianjie*), *Wenxing* 2 (5 December 1957): 18. Nu Xian also previewed the event the day before the opening in the *Central Daily News*, the main paper of the KMT.

Léon Chang's "Art Appreciation"

What defined the magazine's position on modern art was undoubtedly the monthly column "Art Appreciation" (*yishu xinshang*) by Léon Chang, the president of the Taipei Arts College in Taipei. Running liberally through time periods and across geography, the column supplied necessary knowledge on Western art and culture from a Chinese perspective. In the first five months, Chang promoted a general attitude on art appreciation (first through third issues) and wrote major articles on music (fourth and fifth issues). From the sixth issue onward, the column focused more on visual art. Chang explored how the ideas in Chinese art theory might intersect with Western art and analyzed the affinities and differences through a formalist lens. The essays include the theories of calligraphy and a bibliography of stele masterpieces (sixth and seventh issues), a clarification of the definitions of "classic" and "modern" (eighth issue), the practice of emulation versus creation (ninth issue), space and composition (tenth issue), and form versus content (eleventh and twelfth issues). Discussing art from both China and the West fluidly, the column essentially became a syllabus of modern art education with a special focus on unpacking theoretical issues.

In a self-reflective essay in *Wenxing*'s second year, Chang professed the purpose of his column: to enrich one's life experience. He quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Blake on the transcendental dimension of aesthetic appreciation and production to support his belief.[55] The aspiration to elevate the aesthetic literacy of citizens through self-enrichment and cultivation puts him in direct conversation with Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), the former Minister of Education who in 1917 called for an emphasis on aesthetic

[55] Léon Chang, "Art and Life" (*yishu yu shenghuo*), *Wenxing* 13 (1 November 1958): 17.

education (*meiyu*), which he believed could improve a citizen's moral health and overall national performance. Chang's column demonstrated a similar wish to ensure the renaissance of Chinese culture and tapped into the diasporic mentality of the mainlanders in Taiwan. His belief in the social benefits of art appreciation in some ways echoed the KMT government's directive to re-familiarize its population with Chinese culture, but Chang had a more progressive, worldly approach. He reaffirmed the contemporary value of Chinese heritage, while being extremely conscious of its readability in an international context. An ideal image of a modern Chinese intellectual, who must be well versed in classical Chinese aesthetic philosophies and artistic masterpieces and literate in the visual arts of Europe and America, emerged from the column.

Written in an erudite, eloquent, and semi-literary style, Chang's texts are extremely dense, full of historical references and literary quotations, as well as names, phrases and terminologies in both English and Chinese. The prose was significantly harder to read than the rest of the magazine, even though its intention was to popularize art and culture. Some readers complained about the demanding characteristic of his articles.[56] Constantly at risk of overloading his readers with exhaustive information, some of his most imaginative articles read like free associations of Chinese and Western art history, aesthetic theories, and philosophy, jumping across time and geography. A sense of urgency to disseminate essential cultural information was palpable.

The article "Conquer the Space" (*zhengfu taikong*) (tenth issue) which discusses the topic of painting compositions, displays Chang's breadth of knowledge and his ambition to cultivate a class of worldly, modern citizens. Chang painstakingly listed

[56] Ibid., 16.

examples of works in major museum collections in the West, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, The Frick Collection, the Museum of Fine Art Boston, and the Prado Museum. For Chinese artworks, he noted the registration numbers in the National Palace Museum and named the masterpieces in American collections. He even cited museum catalogs, art history books, and news sources like *Time* for image reproductions.[57] The level of detail was unusual for a monthly magazine that sought to cultivate a mass following. Chang's professorial effort spoke to his seriousness in providing his compatriots with specialized information on culture and the world art and restoring the confidence and familiarity in Chinese art and culture. Later on, when Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray traveled to America on the JDR 3rd Grant, they included these world-class art institutions on their itineraries. In fact, *Wenxing*'s purview of culture was not restricted to visual art but reached music, film, theater, and poetry. It provided fresh and pertinent material for the self-education of the fledgling intellectual class. *Wenxing*'s arts section essentially functioned as a sourcebook for contemporary culture.

Wenxing's Critical Stance on Modern Art

The Meaning of the Modern: *Gudian* and *Modeng*

The defining characteristic of *Wenxing* as a major cultural producer in the late 1950s and early 1960s Taiwan was its involvement in proliferating and defining the concept of "modern." Facing a well-developed and widespread notion of the modern

[57] Léon Chang, "Art Appreciation 10—Conquer the Space" (*yishu xinshang zhi shi—zhengfu taikong*), *Wenxing* 10 (1 August 1958): 13–16.

from the West, *Wenxing* tailored the concept for its constituents. Though the idea of the "modern" was addressed by various disciplines in the magazine, Chang's essay in the eighth issue titled "Classic and Modern" (*gudian yu modeng*) was the first time it confronted the complicated and controversial terms. He began by refuting the popular usage of the adjective "*modeng*" (modern) as the opposite of "*gudian*" (classic). He clarified that the English, German, and French meanings of "*modeng*"[58] describes something "instantly new" (*jishi xin*) and "perpetually new" (*ririxin*). The concept of time is central to this discussion, and Chang cited Buddhist and Daoist philosophies on the fleeting nature of time. Hence, things that withstand the test of time are "*modeng*."' Deploying Chinese philosophy on interpreting an imported term was a process of assimilation to ground a foreign concept in a local vocabulary and knowledge system. Chang arrived at the conclusion that "considering the value of perpetual newness, 'classic' and 'modern' are synonyms."[59] Works of art that maintain a timeless value or aesthetic quality based on its connection to the past as it spurs new meaning in the present could merit the designation of "modern" and obtain the status of a "classic." Confucius' Analects and Yeats' poetry, in Chang's analysis, belong to this category.

Chang demonstrated the interchangeability of *gudian* and *modeng* with the example of the controversy surrounding Edouard Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Chang chided its critics for failing to acknowledge Manet's citation of the precedents of

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[58] "*Modeng*" was phonetically translated from the French (*moderne*) in the first half of the twentieth century and incorporated into the Chinese language since. For studies of visual culture focusing on the idea of modern (*modeng*), see: Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semi-Colonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[59] Translated by author. Léon Chang, "Art Appreciation 8—Classic and Modern" (*yishu xinshang zhi ba—gudian yu modeng*), *Wenxing* 8 (1 June 1958): 17.

paintings of nude women outdoors, such as Giorgione's *Fête Champêtre* (which he included as an illustration) and Raphael's *Judgment of Paris* (which he cited from page 38 of the May 9, 1955 issue of *Time*). For him, Manet's painting emulated and preserved the qualities of classical beauty, even though its provocative subject matter caused uproar. Certain successful tropes of art could be repeated to great effect if the maker adds his or her own voice, a concept understandable through the Chinese practice of emulation and self-expression.[60]

Chang often discussed Western artworks out of their original social and historical context. To a readership not familiar with Western art history, his unorthodox method of comparison of cultural materials may not have mattered. Chang's extraction of materials, such as treating Manet's nude as an example of self-expression based on historical precedents, was useful in his immediate context, where the question of modernity and the new directions in visual art and poetry were in development. Chang's arguments seemed to push for a wider acceptance of artistic experiments that are "instantly" and "perpetually" new. Half a year before the publication of this essay, the Fifth Moon and Ton Fan societies had launched their inaugural exhibitions. Chang's proposal of the interchangeable meaning of "modern" and "classic" established *Wenxing*'s future stance on modernity and modern culture.[61]

Convergence and Distinction between Chinese and Western Concepts

[60] Ibid., 14–16.
[61] To correct the common error in usage, Chang designated two other terms to strictly refer to the timeline of recent art works: "*xiandai*" for modern and "*dangdai*" for contemporary, which are commonly used today.

A key objective for Chang's articles was to map out the affinities and the distinctions between the art of the East and the West and find a feasible path for Chinese culture in the present time. A major breakthrough that Chang's essays brought to *Wenxing* was his critical examination of Chinese art principles in comparison to the approach in Western modern art. The article "Conquer the Space," testifies to this effort. Chang used a title that would be easily mistaken as a news headline about the space race. It was, in fact, a meandering discussion about the strategies of pictorial composition. He opened the essay with an extensive quote from a chapter titled "Fusion" (*yinyun*) in Qing dynasty painter Shitao's *The Recorded Remarks on Painting of Monk Bitter Melon* (*kugua heshang huayu lu*), one of the most important painting theories in Chinese art. In Shitao's theory, the "ideal fusion" between "the movements of the brush" and "the materiality of the ink" would give rise to a "successful self-expression" on the painting surface.[62] Shitao reasons that, to diffuse the "Primordial Confusion" (*hundun*), one must rely on the "One-stroke" (*yihua*)—the potent and precise action that would eventually unify the body (the painter's hand), the material, and the spirit—and strive for the goal of "let[ting] light shine forth through Primordial Confusion."[63] Chang explains Shitao's treatise for unifying the action and the visual effect of mark-making in laymen's terms: Every artwork begins with chaos, a blank slate; hence, the strategies for composition are to conquer space.[64] He uses Piet Mondrian's abstract paintings—one from the "Composition" series, *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray* (1926) (Figure 2.3),

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[62] Jonathan Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 275–76. Translated by Hay and by Richard Strassberg, *Enlightened Remarks on Painting by Shi'tao* (Pasadena: Pacific Asia Museum, 1989), 71.
[63] Ibid., 212.
[64] Chang, "Conquer Space," 13.

and the other the *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943)—as his first examples.[65] Mondrian's simple lines and grids that activate and integrate both two- and three-dimensional spaces present Chang's—and Shitao's—points convincingly. Through his innovative comparison, the classical Chinese ideal of presenting harmony in the physical and metaphysical worlds on paper is applied to contemporary terms and to modern abstract art from the West. While he educated his readers about Western art, he also evaluated the utility of Chinese art theories, and in an effective way, proved that they could withstand the test of time and reactivated their significance in contemporary usage.

Notably, "Conquer the Space" drew examples from European and American art broadly. The examples used to illustrate compositional strategies in European art include the aforementioned works by Mondrian, and a mix of classical and modern works such as Panini's *Intérieur de St. Pierre de Rome*, Chavannes's *Pauvre Pêcheur*, de Chirico's *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*, and Balla's *Dog on Leash* (1912). Chang deemed Balla's realistic rendering of the dog's legs in motion a mere borrowing of the multiple-exposure effect in photography, and while he guided the readers to understand the Futurist's pursuit, he proudly pointed out that the concept of time is already inherent in the format of Chinese scrolls. To him, space and time—*yu* and *zhou*, respectively, or together meaning "universe"—should ideally be insinuated, not literally portrayed.[66] With this in mind, the title of the article is a double entendre alluding to the race between

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[65] Ibid., 13–14. Chang cited the works from *The Museum of Modern Art: Masters of Modern Art, 1954*. Both works are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. See MoMA Collection online: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79059?locale=en; https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78682?locale=en; accessed 4 November 2016.
[66] Ibid., 16.

the East and West to reach the most effective and poetic ways of arranging a picture. The winner, to Chang, was clear.

While seeking commonalities between Chinese and Western art, Chang emphasized their distinctions. On the subject of pictorial depth, Chang defended the conventions of Chinese art. He wondered: if Cezanne, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Klee, Miro, and Gorky were championed for breaking the perspectival conventions of European art, why were Chinese paintings criticized for not having perspectival depth? He presented as evidence the long-standing methods of conceptualizing and creating depths and distances within the pictorial frame in Chinese landscape painting. Citing Song dynasty landscape painter Guo Xi (ca. 1020–90)'s theory on the treatment of illusionistic depth and height, in *Lofty Message of Forest and Streams* (*linquan gaozhi*), he argued, "compositional strategies in Western art, which is essentially the 'arrangement of blank areas' (*bubai*), is what our compatriots were already accustomed to and had known for a long time."[67] Chang's *Wenxing* column was thus a project to reiterate the timelessness and reclaim the "modernity" of classical Chinese art and to propose communicability between Chinese art and Western modernist principles.

Chang's writing hugely impacted Liu Kuo-sung, an adroit promoter of the Fifth Moon society and the most vocal among his generation of artists. He had already been in charge of the visual art section of *Bihui* since 1959, and was a recognized provocateur, after unleashing strong attacks toward the arts establishment regarding the categorization of Japanese art as "national painting" in official exhibitions and competitions.[68] Liu's

[67] Ibid., 15.
[68] Liu's main outlet was the *United Daily News*, but he also contributed to other publications.

Wenxing debut in 1960, "On the Appreciation of Abstract Painting" (*lun chouxiang huihua de xinshang*), echoed Chang's view on art appreciation in both argument and tone.[69] It even cited the same verses from Shitao's painting theory. What differentiates the two is that Liu wrote from the point of view of an artist and emphasized the belief that individualism should be the sole driver behind making art. Liu would go on to write many more articles for *Wenxing* and reinforced the artistic stance of the magazine.

American Art in the Taiwanese Consciousness

Flipping through eight years of *Wenxing*, one finds an extraordinary amount of content on American contemporary culture and society. The coverage on the visual arts field reveals an editorial interest in the mechanisms of the American art world as well as the individual artistic endeavors. An extensive account of the history, operations, and even the gallery distribution of the MoMA in New York, shows an interest in museology and the enabling factors surrounding the canonical organization of modern art.[70] A picture spread in the twenty-fourth issue introducing the concept of abstract art featured a work by Franz Kline, with a famous Hans Namuth photograph from *Life* magazine of Jackson Pollock making a drip painting (Figure 2.4).[71] The attention on New York, the center of the postwar international art world, on MoMA, and on the most prominent contemporary artists in contemporary art, suggests a desire not just for knowledge but for synchronicity.

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[69] Liu Kuo-sung, "On the Appreciation of Abstract Painting" (*lun chouxianghua de xinshang*), *Wenxing* 34 (1 August 1960): 23–24.
[70] Ren Lan, trans., "Thirty Years of the Museum of Modern Art, New York" (*sanshinian lai de niuyue xiandai yishuguan*), *Wenxing* 21 (1 July 1959): 28–29.
[71] "Examples of Abstract Painting" (*chouxianghua juli*) *Wenxing* 24 (1 October 1959): 19–20.

Hsiao Chin's report on the 1960 Venice Biennial in the thirty-fifth issue is the first in-depth review on an international exhibition in the magazine.[72] The coverage on international art exhibitions suggests an expansion of interest from educational, theoretical essays to the lively reporting of art world happenings. By this time Hsiao had moved to Italy from Spain and entered the first experimental phase of his art career. In the review, he surveyed the artists in several national pavilions and analyzed the trend of the year. He was sensitive to the rapid rise of American art in the international scene and especially highlighted the works in the American pavilion, represented by painters Franz Kline, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, and sculptor Theodore Roszak.[73] From an artist's perspective, his review focused more on the visual language, stylistic choices, and technique of the works, much different from Chang's philosophical musings. By 1960, American art had begun to display its power in the international art world, especially at the Venice Biennial, and that dominance was duly felt in Hsiao's accounts and transmitted back to Taiwan.

As if to double-underline the importance of American culture on the world stage, the cover of the thirty-fifth issue is graced with the animator and entrepreneur Walt Disney. The feature celebrates his innovative achievements as the "colorful cartoon master." Inside the magazine, the monthly picture spread featured a selection of contemporary American paintings. While American cultural material had appeared with

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[72] Hsiao Chin previously reported on the 1958 Venice Biennial in the *United Daily News* on two occasions: a preview on June 29, 1958 and a review on October 24, 1958. The review reported heavily on the prevalent, abstract style. Mark Tobey, who won an award in the 1958 edition of the biennial, was highlighted for the "Eastern flavor" and the incorporation of calligraphic methods in his paintings. Hsiao called Tobey's paintings "the latest abstract Chinese art." Hsiao Chin, "Trip to Italy V: Venice Biennial" (*yidali jixing zhi wu: weinisi guoji ernian zhan*), *United Daily News*, 24 October 1958, p. 7.

[73] Hsiao Chin, "A Critique of and Introduction to the 30th Venice International Biennial of Art" (*pingjie di sanshi jie weinisi guoji ernian meizhan*), *Wenxing* 35 (1 September 1960): 26–28.

frequency in the magazine, this issue especially foregrounded the diversity and the far reach of a robust American visual culture, showcasing an intersection between fine art, entertainment, and industry. Published a few days before the abrupt termination of *Free China* and amidst an infectious fear among boundary-pushing intellectuals who had high hopes for true democracy and artistic freedom, the issue highlighted the potential of a free, enriching environment in America through its robust cultural production.

While previous issues of the magazines had introduced works by American artists such as Pollock, Kline, Tobey, and Calder, only in this issue were the artists featured without their European predecessors and contemporaries. In a two-page picture spread, portraits of John Sloan, Edward Hopper, Kline (a cropped image from *Life*), and Tobey were placed alongside images of their paintings (except for Kline, whose work is an illustration for Hsiao Chin's article later in the issue), as well as those by Lyonel Feininger, Morris Graves, and Pollock (Figure 2.5). Sloan's urban scene in New York City, *Six O'clock, Winter* (1912), from the Phillips Collection, represented the Ashcan School. Abstract Expressionism was represented by Tobey's award-winning painting in 1958's Venice Biennial in the "white writing" style and Pollock's *Number 23* (1950) in Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd's collection. Also featured were *Early Sunday Morning* (1930), one of Hopper's most iconic work in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Graves' *Flight of Power* (1955) also in the Whitney's collection, and finally, Feininger's *Blue Coast* (1944) that was once in the collection of Columbus City Museum of Art.[74]

[74] "Twentieth-Century American Painting" (*er'shi shiji meiguo huihua zhi yiban*), *Wenxing* 35 (1 September 1960): 20–21.

The selection reflected the standard institutional narrative of twentieth-century American art. The spread compacted multiple aspects of the American visual art profession and museum culture to its readers. No other foreign artistic circles received this kind of comprehensive treatment in *Wenxing*. The picture spread provided a spectrum of artistic voices and gave emphasis to the works' visual quality, since no detailed descriptions of each work were present. The American cultural life had entered the consciousness of Taiwanese intellectuals through *Wenxing*.

The Channel of Communication for Modern Intellectuals

The Rise of Modern Art and Artists

After *Bihui* terminated its circulation in 1960, *Wenxing*, already one of the earliest facilitators and promoters of modern art, became the primary publisher of materials on foreign and local art, activities, and theoretical discussions. As a new decade began, on January 1, 1961, *Wenxing* launched a new section, "The Painting Field" (*huayuan*), an editorial initiative to establish "urgently necessary, well-meaning and pure criticism" on modern art.[75] Lasting for over a year, the section's focus shifted from "the arts" (*yishu*) to "painting" (*hua*). The establishment of the special section substantially expanded the magazine's role as a critical voice on painting in the domestic scene.[76] It signaled a more secured status of the young artist-writers as prolific practitioners and public intellectuals,

[75] Sui Ren, "The Hopes for The Painting Field" (*huayuan de xiwang*), *Wenxing* 39 (1 January 1961): 28.
[76] *Wenxing*'s coverage of music has undergone similar evolutions: in the first two years, articles on music were mostly introductions to renowned musicians, conductors, or composers; from the third year onward, more theoretical essays on the direction of Chinese music as well as criticism on local concerts and competitions began to appear. Similar to the motivation behind "The Painting Field," a column focused on music was launched also in *Wenxing*'s 39th issue (1 January 1961), titled "The Musical Convention" (*yuehui*). For a summary of the progression and trend of music-related coverage in *Wenxing*, see Yan Lüfen, "The Musical *Wenxing* and the Music in *Wenxing*" (*yinyue de wenxing, wenxing de yinyue*), *Wenxun* 313 (November 2011): 94–97.

and a stronger presence of modern art in the public consciousness. In short, the social status of visual art had reached a mature level. "The Painting Field" came just a year after the conclusion of the protracted fight between young artists and the old guards on the categorization of Japanese-style paintings in "national painting." The annual National Painting Exhibition committee had finally succumbed to popular demand and separated *nihonga* from the *guohua* section.[77] With a commitment to contemporary paintings, the column reflected the immediate concerns of the Taiwanese art circle and established a discourse on modern and contemporary art and more rigorous writing about art.

A new social phenomenon had arisen as a number of young artists pulled double duty as leading critics and theorists. Together with their artwork, they put on public display their process of discovery in finding their artistic voices. Among the younger generation, Chuang Che and Ho Kan debuted their critical voices in this section, alongside Hsiao and Liu, who wrote, respectively, the review of an exhibition titled "Arte e Contemplazione" in Venice (49th) and the anti-Communist stance of abstract paintings (48th).[78] The poet Yu Kwang-chung authored reviews and criticism on paintings and exhibitions by Fifth Moon artists. Léon Chang, the senior critic, also joined in on the accolades of the Fifth Moon exhibitions. With more frequent coverage on the activities of the Fifth Moon group, *Wenxing* became the unofficial channel of communication for the group. Simultaneously, more systematic and in depth coverage on Western art

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[77] In 1960, the Ministry of Culture of the Provincial Government officially separated *nihonga* from Chinese ink scroll paintings in the *guohua* department of the annual exhibition. For more details of the prolonged arguments over the years, see Hsiao Chong-ray, 174.

[78] Hsiao Chin, "Review of the Arte e Contemplazione Exhibition in Venice" (*pingjie weinisi yishu yu jingguan zhan*), *Wenxing* 49 (1 November 1961): 33; Liu Kuo-sung, "Modern Art and the Theories of Literature and Arts of the Soviet Bandits" (*xiandai yishu yu fei'e de wenyi lilun*), *Wenxing* 48 (1 October 1961): 30–32.

movements appeared. Yu became a regular as he translated numerous biographies of artists, such as Klee, Picasso, and Giacometti.[79] These articles elevated the understanding of Western art beyond superficial pictorial recognition to a more detailed comprehension of modern art as a field with social and historical significance.

Young artists also began to historicize their own movement. Huang Chaohu (b. 1938), a painter, chronicled the history of avant-garde (*qianwei*) art in Taiwan between 1948 and 1962, focusing on the formation of art societies, the collective effort in defining modern art for their own context, and the milestone exhibitions in Taiwan and abroad that cemented their reputation and contribution to the field.[80] The article recapitulated the achievements of emerging artists and the maturation of the Taiwanese art scene, underscoring *Wenxing*'s close relationship to the movement.

Wenxing's status as the main channel of communication for new art and literature became even more visible when Li Ao, the *enfant terrible* of his generation, took the helm as lead editor after the founding publisher, Yeh Ming-hsun, and the editor-in-chief, Chen Lifeng, stepped down. Beginning from August 1962 (58th), Li led *Wenxing* to a direction of more radical politics, which attracted the attention of the public and eventually the authorities. The provocative personality of the magazine coincided with the rising social recognition of the young avant-garde, especially those in the Fifth Moon group. The most representative voices of the young generation, Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, had developed mature artistic voices. Chuang's articles in *Wenxing* were

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[79] Yu contributed his translation work to the feature on Picasso in "Picasso—The Magician of Modern Art" (*bikasuo—xiandai yishu de moshushi*), *Wenxing* 48 (1 October 1961): 3–6 and articles on Giacometti in "Sculptor Giacometti" (*diaosujia jiakemeidi*), *Wenxing* 46 (1 August 1961): 22–25.

[80] Huang Chaohu, "A Retrospective and Projection of Avant-Garde Painting in China" (*zhongguo qianwei huatan de huigu yu zhanwang*), *Wenxing* 61 (1 November 1962): 56–59.

personal contemplations of high intellectual caliber and emotional intensity, tackling grand questions of national cultural identity and the development of painting. A series of six essays titled "Writings on Painting" (*huayu sanlun*), from November 1964 to October 1965, chronicled his investigations of aesthetics, philosophy, and formal strategies, formulating his vision for Chinese modern painting in an international context. Liu's essays were either exhibition reviews or personal commentary on art and culture and exhibited a strong sensitivity toward the direction of public opinion. His essays, written in an authoritative and often defensive tone, presented his critical assessment of the conditions of Chinese modern art that also served as justifications for his own artistic decisions in painting or direct responses to certain criticism. *Wenxing* later published anthologies of the young artists' writings, an enterprising collaboration that further formalized the ties between the publication, the artists, and the new art movement and solidified the position of the modern art movement within Taiwan's society.

The Dynamics between the Visual Art and Literary Communities

Beginning with the inaugural issue, modernist poets, including Lo Fu and Ya Xian (Wang Qinglin, b. 1932) of Epoch, as well as Yu Kwang-chung and Xia Jing (b. 1925) of The Blue Stars, published regularly in *Wenxing*. This happened much earlier and more prominently in *Wenxing*'s run than for the visual artists. At the time, theories of and experimentation with modernization in poetry were much more developed and accepted in Taiwanese intellectual circles. New poetry can be read as creating a foundation and a desire for new art and visual culture in Taiwan. As demonstrated by Yi-li Kao, the modern painting movement in Taiwan, as well as the debates that accompanied its ascent

to prominence, rode on the wave of an existential search initiated by the modern poets.[81] Reciprocally, poets looked for a visualization of their feelings through paintings by their peers. Lo Fu projected his surrealist methodology and aesthetics of modern poetry onto modern art, stating, "modern art does not seek to express how objects originally appear, but what is hidden inside of objects—such as hidden feelings and images, which have their own independent value."[82] As mentioned before, Yu was an active supporter of the Fifth Moon group. Between 1961 and 1964, his four essays and a poem in *Wenxing* on the group's exhibitions coincided and were credited with the rapid ascent of the group. Ya Xian contributed an essay in praise of Fifth Moon artist Han Hsiang-ning's paintings in June 1965.[83] The magazine bore witness to a mutual support between artists and poets, thus facilitating the formation of a network of creative minds.[84] With a solid roster of young artists and writers as the magazine's core contributors, *Wenxing* shifted its original position as the importer and distributor of knowledge to a major player in the canonization of avant-garde art, poetry, literature, and other forms of cultural production.[85]

Wenxing's Covers and Its Modern Identity

In the age of modern media, magazine covers are the most straightforward channels of communication for a publication's identity and value. *Wenxing* absorbed

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[81] Kao, 95–202.
[82] Lo Fu, "Five Years Later," *Epoch Poetry Quarterly* 13 (October 1959): 1, cited in Kao, 37, note 71.
[83] Ya Xian, "Looking at Han Hsiang-ning's Paintings" (*kan han xiangning de hua*), *Wenxing* 92 (1 June 1965): 52. In 1968, Ya Xian became the chief editor of the literature and arts magazine Young Lions (*youshi*) and continued to publish the writings of modern artists of his generation.
[84] Debates about cultural directions appeared in newspapers and other cultural-politically oriented publications. Oftentimes writers would respond to each other by publishing in different publications, and *Wenxing* was one of the venues for back-and-forth responses and provocations.
[85] Chapter Three discusses at length about the relationship between the poetry and art circles.

much of its media strategies from its American predecessors. First and foremost, the *Wenxing* cover layout strikingly resembled *Time,* the American news weekly. An article in the thirty-second issue analyzed the philosophy and strategy of selecting cover figures of two American magazines with circulation in Taipei, *Time* and *Saturday Night Evening Post*. It highlighted how *Wenxing*'s editors aspired to *Time*'s rigorous selection process of cover figures and placed the two cover samples side by side.[86] The connection between the two was further solidified in the 34th issue where Henry Luce—the China-born American media tycoon, transnational industrialist, philanthropist, and the publisher of *Time* and *Life*, arguably the most circulated English-language periodicals in the postwar Free world—was the cover feature.[87] Luce actively proliferated the American ideals of "modern life," a decidedly urban, middle class aspiration, and the merits of journalistic freedom and integrity, to other parts of the Free world.[88] The *Wenxing* editors' enlightened views on free press, informed by Luce's publications, directly clashed with the censored, singular news source of the KMT regime.[89]

The ninety-eight *Wenxing* cover figures, portrayed by photographs or drawings, make up a "Who's Who" of the Cold War international arena and encapsulated a particular intellectual environment in Taiwan. American politicians and leaders made frequent appearances on *Wenxing*'s covers, from President Eisenhower (40th issue) to President Hoover (69th) to Martin Luther King Jr. (85th) and Robert Kennedy (94th),

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[86] Rui Lin, 32–33.
[87] *Wenxing* 34 (1 August 1960). Henry Luce was the benefactor of Tunghai University in Taichung, a Catholic institution, founded in 1955. On the Tunghai campus stood Taiwan's first modernist architecture, Luce Church, designed by I. M. Pei (Bei Yuming) and Chen Chi-Kwan (Chen Qikuan) in 1963, which cemented Luce's legacy.
[88] Wang Hongjun, "Luce, Time, Life" (*lusi, shidai, shenghuo*), *Wenxing* 34 (1 August 1960): 3.
[89] In the third issue, an article titled "The Year of the Dog's Report on Journalistic Freedom" attracted criticism from the official press of the government. See Xia, "One Year of *Wenxing*," 3.

alongside other key political heavyweights of the era, such as Winston Churchill (32nd) and Franz Joseph Strauss (47th). The most significant representatives of mid-twentieth century scientific innovation—namely, scientists who led and contributed to the atomic and space races, including Niels Bohr (9th), Otto Hahn (24th), and Wernher von Braun (28th)—were also featured, though they were likely not household names. Their appearances put on display *Wenxing*'s favorable attitude toward technological advancements of mankind.

Staying true to the magazine's remit as a cultural magazine, accomplished writers—many were Nobel or Pulitzer Prize winners—took the top percentage of covers: Hemingway (1st), W. Somerset Maugham (2nd), Albert Camus (3rd), Ramón Jimenez (5th), Aldous Huxley (19th), Juan Archibald MacLeish (22nd), T. S. Eliot (27th), William Faulkner (45th), John Steinbeck (54th), Robert Frost (64th), J. D. Salinger (63rd), Henry Miller (84th), to sample a few. This heavily American roster of writers seemed to dominate the reading lists of Taiwanese intellectuals. Interestingly, a subversive undercurrent characterized *Wenxing*'s preference for modern literature. Some of the authors, like Camus, had left-leaning politics and work that dwelled on themes of existential crisis and resistance to social conventions and authority. The editors, however, brushed past potentially problematic details that might alarm the censors.[90]

The feature article on Hemingway best illustrates how *Wenxing* editors cautiously selected and packaged information from the appropriate angles. Hemingway was

[90] For instance, in the cover profile of Albert Camus in the third issue, in addition to his literary achievements, the editors emphasized his transformation from a Communist to an anti-Communist after World War II. They speculated that his smart decision to refuse to be deceived by Communist ideology was the main reason he won the Nobel Prize. "The Sternly Anti-Communist Camus" (*jianjue fangong de camiou*), *Wenxing* 3 (1 January 1958): 8–9.

portrayed as a fearless idealist, a seeker of truth and freedom, a romantic rebel, and an unparalleled talent, not as an alcoholic or ideologically suspicious character. The magazine downplayed his history as a sympathizer of the Chinese Communist and focused on his literary achievements.[91] Hemingway's personal past could have been problematic in the eyes of the authorities, but his international renown was too great to deny. The choice of the inaugural cover suggests a careful editorial identification of the symbolic value of Hemingway and the risk that the editors were willing to take.

Sinologists, who in the mid-twentieth century played important roles in demystifying and influencing the international opinion on China and Chinese culture, received veneration in *Wenxing*. Those featured include John Fairbank (78th), Arnold Toynbee (8th), Osvald Siren (10th), Bernhard Karlgren (55th), all prestigious professors and scholars in Europe and America, as well as the American novelist Pearl S. Buck (25th), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938 for her biographical accounts and the depiction of China in *The Good Earth*. In selecting these figures as covers, *Wenxing* communicated a particularly positive and scholarly image of China and Chinese culture, perceived by the Western world.

The first Chinese person to make the cover was the president of Tsing Hua University, Mei Yi-chi (Mei Yiqi, 1889–1962), on the occasion of the launch of a nuclear reactor at his university. The reactor was named a "modern product of Free China," and elevated the nation to the same level of scientific advancement with their international allies.[92] Interestingly, the only three Chinese on *Wenxing* covers, Mei, Hu Shih, who

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[91] "Biography of Hemingway" (*haimingwei de shengping*), *Wenxing* 1 (5 November 1957): 10–12.
[92] Ju Haoran, "The Tireless Teacher Dr. Mei Yi-chi" (*huiren bujuan de mei yiqi boshi*), *Wenxing* 43 (1 May 1961): 3–4.

appeared on the fifty-first cover, and Tsiang Tingfu (Jiang Tingfu, 1895–1965), the R.O.C. Ambassador to the U.S. from 1961 to 1965 (72nd), all had deep relations with America through their educational backgrounds and career. The statistics above confirm that *Wenxing*, though primarily a cultural magazine, had strong pro-American political inclinations, and the selection of these three Chinese figures further exemplifies that political and cultural stance.

The postwar decades also saw the rise of an image-based visual culture, in film, television, and advertisement, bolstered by capitalism, and *Wenxing* reported on and participated in such phenomenon. Cover stories on Disney (35th), Orson Welles (81st), Brigitte Bardot (83rd), Lawrence Olivier (60th), and Ingmar Bergman (77th), to list a few household names, showed the growing dominance of Western culture in media and entertainment in the lives of Chinese people. Paired with such popular covers are essays by emerging filmmakers and photographers on foreign films and festivals and critiques of the domestic film market. In this vein, the nature of *Wenxing* showed kinship with the popular magazine *Liangyou* in Shanghai of the late 1920s through the 1930s, which explored the intersection of specialized field and popular culture.[93] *Wenxing*'s cover choices connected its readers to the international phenomenon of entertainment and participated in the proliferation of popular culture materials. Yet in contrast, the visual artists on the covers only included Chagall (36th) and Picasso (48th), which implied that the editors still were more certain of the legacy of the European masters even though

[93] For more on *Liangyou*, the modern pictorial in pre-war Shanghai, see Paul Pickowicz, Kuiyi Shen, Yingjin Zhang eds., *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis*, 1926–1945 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

important American artists had already taken the art world by storm and appeared in *Wenxing*'s inner pages.

Wenxing's cover underwent major cosmetic changes in the 55th issue (May 1, 1962), re-designed by Long Siliang (1937–2012), an academy-trained artist and experimental photographer, who in 1963 became the artistic director of the first television station in Taiwan and was artistic director of several magazines prior. The cover figure remained but it no longer followed the format of *Time.* Long, along with a few other young artists, including Huang Huacheng and He Zhaoqu, gave *Wenxing* a new visual identity and incorporated elements of graphic design.[94] The magazine covers had become a new playground for adventurous artistic expression, where graphic design, a burgeoning discipline with a commercial outlook, intersected and challenged the logic of the traditional medium of painting. Soon after *Wenxing* ended, Long and Huang ventured into more conceptual, anti-art approaches to art-making and layout design for other publications. *Wenxing*, at the end of its run, reflected the fledgling alternatives to modernity that it had endorsed from the beginning and quickly institutionalized.

BIHUI

"*Bihui*" translates to "a depository for pens," a metaphor for the gathering of voices, thoughts, and writers. Its new edition began on May 4, 1959, roughly two years after its first iteration as a political magazine, founded by a few members of the Chinese Writer's and Artist's Association (*zhongguo wenyi xiehui*), a non-governmental cultural

[94] Huang Huacheng (1935–96)—an artist graduated from the National Normal University with Chuang Che—later became the key member of *Theatre* (launched in 1965) and the first Dada-ist, conceptual artist and filmmaker in Taiwan. He Zhaoqu (b. 1931) contributed a few features on European and Japanese artists.

policy institution closely aligned with the KMT's cultural agenda in 1950.[95] Yu Tien-t'sung took over the chief-editorship of *Bihui* in 1959 by the invitation of his uncle, Ren Zhuoxuan (1896–1990), the publisher and an original founder, who was a French-educated scholar, a Communist in the early 1920s, and the owner of a respected independent bookstore, Pami'er, in Taipei. Though once the head of KMT's propaganda department, Ren was an outcast because of his earlier belief in socialism. A liberal minded scholar, on several occasions he shielded Yu and his publication from the persecution of conservatives.[96]

Bihui had a modest circulation of two thousand copies per issue.[97] It had subscribers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and several areas overseas. The price of each issue started from three Taiwan Dollars in the first year to four Taiwan Dollars in the second year. It struggled to stay afloat and did not offer any contributor's fees. Financially, the magazine relied on the support from Ren and his wife, as well as from their friends, who held important positions in academia and the publishing industry.[98] The magazine's title

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[95] The founding members of *Bihui* were founding members of the Chinese Writer's and Artist's Association, which was in charge of the "Cultural Cleansing Movement" (*wenhua qingjie yundong*) and "Combative Literature and Arts" (*zhandou wenyi*) initiatives that vowed to eradicate "red, yellow, black" materials (Communist, pornographic, gang crime subjects) in the early 1950s. For basic information, see "Cultural Cleansing Movement," the National Museum of Taiwan Literature website, http://tln.nmtl.gov.tw/ch/m2/nmtl_w1_m2_c_6.aspx?k=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9C%8B%E6%96%87%E8%97%9D%E5%8D%94%E6%9C%83&Sid=34; accessed 11 September 2016. Hsiao Chong-ray also mentioned the makeup of the Chinese Writer's and Artist's Association in *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 310.

[96] Ren Zhuoxuan and a few other *Bihui* founders organized the Cultural Cleansing Movement (see previous note). He was anti-Communist, despite being a member of the Chinese Communist Party between 1923 and 1927 in France. But compare to the others in the Chinese Writer's and Artist's Association, he was adamant about operating only for the sake of politics.

[97] A few "Afterword" (*bianhou shouji*) in the first year state the ambition to increase the subscription to five thousand, but they did not seem to reach the goal. *Bihui* 1, no. 4 (15 August 1959): 52 and *Bihui* 1, no. 6 (20 October 1959): 54.

[98] Yu's uncle and aunt were respected scholars yet were never in the inner circles of the KMT because of their belief in more transparency and democracy than the administration offered. In *Bihui*'s second year, *Bihui*'s funding ran short, so Yu's professor Wang Meng'ou asked Wu Yumin, a long-term publisher of *Changliu*, a bimonthly funded by the Taiwan Railways Administration from 1950 to 1991, for help.

calligraphy, inherited from its earlier iteration, was by Wu Zhihui (1865–1953), a French-educated linguist, senior member of the Kuomintang since the 1920s, and a supporter of Chiang Kai-shek (though Wu never served in his government). His calligraphy marks the magazine's political position as slightly outside of the mainstream.[99] While the emerging tastemakers of Yu's generation deemed the older generation's view on culture archaic and inadequate, in the process of self-discovery and self-definition, they carefully managed their associations with several senior figures with respectable credentials and invaluable knowledge on certain topics. *Bihui*'s ties to cultural figures like Ren, who maintained an amicable yet distant relationship with the regime, remained important in its livelihood and reputation.

The May Fourth movement was as inherent in *Bihui*'s DNA as it was for *Wenxing*. The first article of the new *Bihui*, written by Ren, was of a revisionist view on Chen Duxiu's role in May Fourth, seeking justice for the writer who was deliberately ignored in the KMT narrative because of his later association to the Chinese Communist Party. In Ren's view, Hu Shih's vision for cultural reform was too conservative. He argued against the public's blind adoration of Hu's role in the modernization project and reminded his contemporaries about the unsatisfactory outcome of the May Fourth Movement. Ren's sharp and daring criticism remains central to the publication and testifies to how his and Yu's generation continued to wrestle with the legacy of May Fourth.

Changliu was a government-backed publication. (Yu Tien-t'sung, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014.) Wu Yumin thus became the publisher of *Bihui* for six issues from August 1, 1960 to January 5, 1961. Yu's uncle was the publisher from the inaugural year as well as the last six issues.

[99] Yu was unsure if Wu Zhihui wrote the two characters specially for the magazine, or Ren simply took the two characters from different sources by Wu. Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 31 December 2015.

Yu adamantly steered *Bihui* toward a new identity. He invited a few schoolmates at the National Chengchi University to serve as principle editors. He envisioned the "reformed" *Bihui* to "keep the purity and clarity of thought," and be self-reliant, without content contributions by senior scholars unless absolutely necessary.[100] The new *Bihui*, as a result, reflected the taste and concerns of the first postwar generation in Taiwan. It functioned as a peer magazine, created by and targeted to young intellectuals. The editors stated the publication's aspirations in its second issue: "*Bihui* is of the Chinese, the times, the youth."[101] In *Bihui*'s third issue, Yu called attention to the rise of his generation's modernism and was critical of Hu Shih's misunderstanding of such a concept.[102] The revisionist effort proclaims *Bihui*'s vision of a new landscape for Chinese intellectuals as it aspired to distance itself from the baggage that the previous generation had trouble shedding.

Bihui editors solemnly stated the magazine's cultural position:

> Culture is the accumulation of human experience, and "accumulation" demonstrates its nature of progress. Therefore we should not implacably revive ancient ways (*fugu*) nor blindly follow the West (*chongyang*). We should meld Chinese and Western cultures in one pot. Taking other's strength to patch up one's weakness is the most effective way to maintain Chinese culture…This then requires the promotion of the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures…Therefore, we believe in modernization.[103]

Cautious in tone, the statement encourages the employment of Western ideas to boost Chinese culture. Essentially a version of May Fourth's central belief,

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[100] Yu Tien-t'sung, "During Those Days, Everyone Pursued and Searched Non-Stop! Remembering the Days of *Bihui*" (*zai nayang de rizi, dajia buduan di zhuixun! huainian bihui suiyue*), *Wenxun* 204 (October 2005): 69.
[101] "Afterword" (*bianhou shouji*), *Bihui* 1, no. 2 (10 June 1959): 53.
[102] Yu used a pen name, Duanmu Hong, to publish "Talk with Dr. Hu Shih about Modernism" (*yu hushi boshi tan xiandai zhuyi)*, *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (15 July 1959): 27–28.
[103] Translated by author. "To the Readers" (*xiangei duzhe*), *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 2.

Bihui's vision for modernization was to be achieved through moderate cross-cultural stimulations.

For Yu, visual art was a major component of modern culture and thus a key section of the new *Bihui*. He admitted that his knowledge of visual art was rather superficial, despite his passion for it.[104] So he entrusted Liu Kuo-sung—a childhood friend, high school art teacher, and the leader of the newly formed young artist group Fifth Moon Society—to be the arts advisor.[105] In Liu's view Chinese art remained static after May Fourth because it did not received the same attention in the modernization process as the field of literature.[106] With Liu's input, *Bihui*'s first year's covers were essentially a curated selection of European modernist movements in the first half of the twentieth century, moving chronologically through works by Dufy, Matisse, Modigliani, Rouault, Picasso, Braque, Gris, Léger, Boccioni, Arp, de Chirico, and finally, Miro. Each artist received a treatment of articles on their biography and artistic development. The curated covers, focusing only on European artists making breakthroughs since the turn of the century, challenged the post-impressionist style taught in academies. The desire to broaden the field of vision to a wider variety of modern styles went hand in hand with protest against conservative taste. *Bihui*'s covers thus made public this radical position. The covers visibly and assertively announced that visual art was front and center of *Bihui*'s modernization movement. In addition to the purpose of self-education and of

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[104] Yu, "Days of *Bihui*," 70.
[105] Because of the editors' young age, the mandatory military service intervened in its publication and resulted in a few lengthy gaps in *Bihui*'s two years (twenty-four issues) of publication. The three gaps in *Bihui*'s history are between its political commentary beginning and its revamped iteration (May 1959); between April 1960 (v. 1, no. 12) and August 1960 (v. 2, no. 1); January 1961 (v. 2, no. 6) to May 1961 (v. 2, no. 7).
[106] Liu Kuo-sung, interview by author, Taoyuan, 8 November 2015.

attracting readership, the covers were statements of the magazine's determination on wholesale Westernization.

Creating a Generation's Canon through Self-Education

Under Yu's stewardship, *Bihui*'s new edition began on a day of historical significance: May Fourth, signifying the publication's ideological and theoretical backbone and aspiration. A cerebral magazine for the young generation, the editors opened the inaugural issue by addressing the readers: "Friends living in bitterness and difficulty."[107] The description refers to more than the hardship associated with the aftermath of the civil war and the mass migration to Taiwan. It points to a highly policed state that oppressed divergent views, and a cultural desert that barely allowed new voices. It also alluded to a stagnant society where the outlook of the younger generation was bleak. In "Death of a Stone Cell," Lo Fu wrote,

> I swept my gaze over the stone wall
> At the top two bloody runnels were bored into it[108]

The poem captured the sense of loss, the frustration toward an inability to break free, and the internal violence of the young, passionate artists in Taiwan. Yu later described the social atmosphere in the 1950s and 1960s as "confused (*miwang*)" and "depressive and suffocating (*chenzhi*)," and his generation "nihilistic (*xuwu*)."[109] He attributed the cultural climate to the political interference and a paralyzing conservatism in the society.[110] More specific to the art world, Liu Kuo-sung characterized it as "silent (*chenji*)" and "slow-

[107] "To the Readers," 2.
[108] Lo Fu, *Death of a Stone Cell*, trans. John Balcom (Monterey, CA: Taoren Press, 1993).
[109] Yu, "Days of *Bihui*," 64, 73.
[110] Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014.

moving (*ningzhi*)."[111] Chuang Che recalled how the meditation on death, feeling of despair and disillusionment in T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* struck a cord in his mind when he first encountered it.[112] The utter frustration toward the present condition permeated through *Bihui*, which distinguishes it from *Wenxing*'s masking of such negativity.

For Yu and his editors, making each issue was a learning process. To effectively establish credibility in the cultural world and differentiate the publication from others, Yu actively sought support from a handful of experts of the older generation. Yet his choices were mostly scholars who held alternative views on certain cultural topics that deviated from the party narrative or were outside of the mainstream. As mentioned before, publisher Ren Zhuoxuan's critique on the May Fourth movement in the first issue sets a progressive tone to the publication and exemplifies the older intellectuals associated with the magazine. Wang Meng'ou (1907–2002), Yu's professor at the department of Chinese literature at National Chengchi University, planted the backbone of literary theory and criticism for the magazine. Using his pen name Liang Zongzhi, he surveyed the grounds of aesthetic judgment in Chinese history and philosophy in the inaugural *Bihui*, laying solid theoretical foundations for art and literary criticism in the magazine. The essay fluidly and succinctly combed through the viewpoints of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, as well as pre-modern poets, prose writers, and literary critics alike. It also examined beauty and its relations to rationality, ethics, and the spiritual dimension. "Refined elegance (*dianya*)," a Confucian concept, is the "orthodox concept of aesthetic judgment" in Chinese culture, Liang Zongzhi argued, but it should also infuse Daoist,

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[111] Liu Kuo-sung, "Not a Manifesto—Written before the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*bushi xuanyan—xiezai wuyue huazhan zhiqian*), *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 27.

[112] Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 16 May 2015. Many writers (including Yu Tien-t'sung) emerging in the decade also cite T. S. Eliot as a literary kin or inspiration.

Mohist, and even Buddhist ideas to prevent it from becoming a superficial quality.[113] His advocacy for a non-Confucian centric moral and aesthetic philosophy diverged from the cultural renaissance program of Chiang Kai-shek's regime. Remarkably, though *Bihui* outwardly projected its ambition in expanding aesthetic knowledge to European modern art, at its core was a Chinese cultural perspective—one that encouraged reaching beyond the dominant views of Confucianism. Along with his other critical essays on the state of literary criticism and several focused studies on poetry and fiction, Wang navigated both the Chinese and Western literature terrains and created a comparative literature discourse in *Bihui*. His essays created an important theoretical foundation of the emerging narratives of modernism in both literature and art that the young *Bihui* editors set out to unravel.

Other senior contributors were closer to Yu in age. He Xin (1922–98) a seasoned editor and translator, who in his career fought to maintain the independence of literature from ideology and politics, contributed articles on American novelists Thomas Wolfe, John Dos Passos, Erskine Caldwell, all little known in Taiwan at the time. (He Xin, also a contributor to *Wenxing*, wrote a few articles on literature—using both his real name and his pen name, Jiang Sen—on Camus, Hemingway, and John Steinbeck.[114])

Yao Yiwei (1922–97), a self-taught scholar of theater who was wrongfully jailed for a year during the height of White Terror, lent his support by writing on the theory and criticism of drama. As a text-oriented magazine, the dramatic material of theater and film in *Bihui* is viewed through the lens of literature, rather than from the angle of moving

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[113] Liang Zongzhi, "Peering into the Sources of Chinese Aesthetic Thought" (*zhongguo shenmei sixiang kuiyuan*), *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 12–13.

[114] He Xin's articles on Camus and Hemingway appeared in the second issue; Steinbeck was in the tenth issue.

image-making or performances. Yao authored important articles on the oeuvres of Shakespeare (first issue), American playwright Eugene O'Neill (eleventh issue), and Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa (tenth issue), the first in-depth studies in Taiwan on these cultural heavyweights. Yao's seminal article on Kurosawa's 1958 hit "The Hidden Fortress," arguably the first piece of film criticism in Taiwan, conducted a comparative study of dramatic and visual forms, as well as a brief overview of the current image-making technology, and the conflicts between popular and artistic taste. Yao's introduction of the Japanese auteur to the Taiwanese audience planted the seeds for the artistic community's later interests in Alain Resnais, Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini, and was responsible for a burst of interest in experimental filmmaking, theater, and photography in Taiwan.[115] The extraordinary syllabi of literary and visual art information aimed to spark curiosity in foreign materials and propose alternative perspectives on Chinese history and culture.

For the visual art section, young artists, led by Liu Kuo-sung, took charge. In the first year, the majority of introductory articles on European artists or movements were written by a Chinese literature major at the National Normal University, Bai Ling (sometimes credited as Ling Zi, her pen name), who also contributed newspaper articles on art. Liu also shared duties with Bai in these articles using his pen name, Lu Ting.[116] The information was culled from various English art history books, most likely from the United States Information Service library in Taipei. The cover art and features constituted

[115] From Yu, "Days of *Bihui,*" 75.
[116] The introductions to art movements and artist biographies cited various English sources: *A Pocket Library of Modern Art*, *How to Understand Modern Art*, *Enjoying Modern Art*, to name a few, as noted at the end of several articles. Yu Tien-t'sung mentioned he and his editor cohort spent a significant amount of time at the library of the United States Information Services (USIS). So it is possible that these sources were from the library, but no artist or writers remember the specifics. Yu, "Days of *Bihui*," 72.

a self-designed curriculum of modern Western art for the *Bihui* editors and their readers. Its coverage on important modern artists and movements was more thorough and systematic than *Wenxing*'s. *Bihui* only published two articles by senior art critic Léon Chang throughout its circulation, showing its commitment to a younger generation.[117]

Chuang Che made his debut in *Bihui* a few months after he joined the Fifth Moon group. For the magazine's third issue (July 5, 1959), he translated an article by Sam Hunter, an American art historian, about the state of modern art in postwar France and America, making note of the increasingly divergent paths of artistic styles in the two places and the freedom that the American environment afforded its artists.[118] The article was the first discussion on postwar American art in *Bihui*. Chuang would go on to write many more critical and theoretical essays for *Bihui* and other publications, including *Wenxing*. His eloquent challenge to the preexisting categories of "ink painting" or "Western painting" that preoccupied the art world made him one of the most original art writers of his generation. Through the support of liberal thinkers of the senior generation and the audacity and self-motivation of the younger generation, *Bihui* constructed a new canon for aesthetic judgment and criticism.

The Critical Potential of *Bihui*

A Serious Commitment to Visual Art

[117] In Chang's first article for *Wenxing*, he explored the connection between the metaphorical and intangible feelings in Chinese landscape to that in Cubist abstractions. Lei Weng [Léon Chang], "Making 'Representation' in National Painting and 'Cubist Painting'" (*guohua de zao xiang yu litihua*), *Bihui* 1, no. 5 (15 September 1959): 14–17.

[118] The article notes: "Translated from *French Modern Art*" (*yizi faguo xiandai huihua*). Chuang Che, "The State of Contemporary Painting" (*huihua de xianshi*), *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (15 July 1959): 17.

Yu remarked that his magazine was conscious of its local condition while dedicated to promoting an understanding of Western art and literature and motivating Taiwan society toward modernization.[119] During *Bihui*'s first year, the cultured class still reeled from the aftermath of the debate on "horizontal transplant," which was essentially wholesale Westernization in 1956, ignited by poet Ji Xian, who was Yu's high school teacher. The existential crisis of a generation of displaced mainlanders, Yu later analyzed, propelled some people to reject Chinese culture and over-correct in the form of total Westernization, such as the editors of *Free China*.[120] Severing ties from one's mother culture became a paradoxical symptom, or antidote to a post-traumatic sentiment, and hence, reactivated the unfinished business of May Fourth. Moreover, the rebellious act of total Westernization was accelerated in an environment infiltrated by strong American cultural products and values. Yu and his cohorts confronted the emotional complexity troubling his generation by familiarizing themselves with the West and simultaneously forcing themselves to reexamine Chinese culture on their own terms, unsatisfied by the superficial effort they had witnessed. While the main effort of the magazine's first year was to introduce a selection of foreign literature and arts, the articles by Ren Zhuoxuan, Wang Meng'ou, Léon Chang, and others on a Chinese approach to the aesthetic experience and philosophy reflect *Bihui*'s deep-rooted concern for Chinese cultural revitalization.

One aspect that sets *Bihui* apart from *Wenxing* and other literature and arts magazines was its commitment to visual art, even though it was primarily a literary

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[119] "To the Readers" (*xiangei duzhe*) *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 2.
[120] Yu, "Days of *Bihui*," 75.

magazine. Compared to *Wenxing*'s record of having only two artists, Chagall and Picasso, on its covers, visual art played a pivotal role in formulating *Bihui*'s identity and perspective on modern culture. Moreover, *Bihui* differentiated its approach to visual art by using artworks, not artist portraits as covers. In the first year, visual art occupied the highest percentage within the arts coverage in each issue. In the second year, articles on art theory and criticism flourished, and the coverage on the art of young Chinese artists increased, especially through the reproduction of their artworks, further underlining the magazine's commitment to its own generation of artists.

As *Bihui* shaped its identity throughout its first year, it sharpened the arts focus and decreased the number of articles on political commentary. Starting from the tenth issue, the editors put forth ten consecutive, thematic issues. It was originally a solution for when the core editorial team was dispersed on military duty.[121] The first thematic volume was dedicated to the novelist André Gide, paired with Dada artist Hans Arp on the cover, inspired by how "Dada artists had called Gide their (spiritual) 'uncle.'"[122] The eleventh issue on modern theater put American playwright Eugene O'Neil under the spotlight; the twelfth issue examined French poet Baudelaire's oeuvre. A splendid intersection of world literature, modern art, and local new poetry and short stories became the hallmark of the magazine's modernization project.

In *Bihui*'s second year, the thematic issues focused on genres instead of individual artists. The topics included one-act plays, poetry, painting, film, criticism, and fiction, with a fortified theoretical rigor. Notably, two issues focused on modern art. The October

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[121] Yu, "Days of *Bihui*," 76.

[122] "Afterword" (*bianhou shouji*), *Bihui* 1, no. 10 (28 February 1960): 13. In the proceeding issue, Yu Tien-t'sung also interprets Dada as a response to a psychological void and political apathy of its era. See Yu, "The Movements after Naturalism" (*ziran zhuyi yihou de liupai*), *Bihui* 1, no. 9 (20 January 1960): 9–14.

1, 1960 issue particularly featured critical theory on abstract painting and expressionism, and the May 15, 1961 issue provided a survey of the postwar art development in Paris, New York, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the U.K., as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan (billed as "Modern Art Movement in China"). It was a concerted effort to explore modern painting in depth both locally and internationally. Liu wrote at least two out of seven articles of the special issue on modern art movements, with additional contribution from Gu Xianliang (1914–79), Chuang Che, Hong Kong writer Paul Lu-yinn (using his pen name Zhang Xuexuan), and Hong Kong poet-painter Wucius Wong.[123] Though the roster exposed a shortage of knowledgeable writers, the effort underscored *Bihui*'s ambition in treating contemporary art and criticism as a serious discipline and an essential aspect of contemporary culture for its readers. With the constellation of writers that appeared in *Bihui*'s second year—Rilke, Eliot, Rimbaud, Michaux, Chekhov, Camus, Saroyan, Akutagawa, to name a few—the magazine created a romantic, poetic, and scholarly sourcebook of artistic nourishment and inspiration for the young Taiwanese intelligentsia.

A Formalized Relation between *Bihui* and the Fifth Moon Society

Liu's defiant debut, "Not a Manifesto—Written before the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition," was the first official declaration of *Bihui*'s position on modern art. Using his real name in the byline, Liu essentially appointed himself the spokesperson of the group and exhibited little trepidation in voicing his dissatisfaction toward an art world resistant to change. In addition to re-emphasizing the injustice of Japanese painting dominating the

[123] Liu used his own name and another pen name, Er Mei, to write two articles. There are three other (pen) names billed as authors in this issue, and Liu did not remember who they were. E-mail correspondence with Lin Lee, 2 November 2016.

"national painting" division of official exhibitions, which he had already expressed in newspapers since 1954, Liu stated the mission of Fifth Moon Society. First, provide independence to artists from existing systems and standards. Second, encourage alumni of the art department at National Normal University to pursue their art careers and offer opportunities to exhibit their work. Third, instigate change in the stagnant cultural atmosphere. The article reflected the nascent identity of the group. Additionally, Liu argued for the legitimacy of the art group, citing historical references such as the avant-garde art associations, the Tianma Society and the Storm Society, of 1930s Shanghai. He was clear about the goal of the art group, yet still vague about the type of art they preferred, except for the non-Japanese and non-academic. New art did not necessarily mean non-figurative art, and form was not the only aspect of renewal they sought.[124] At this point not all of the Fifth Moon artists made abstract art, but the slogan of the group at the time, determined by Liu, was indeed "wholesale Westernization."[125]

At the end of the article, Liu appealed to his readers that the revitalization of Chinese culture and nation relied on the success of new art experimentations and the nurturing of young artists. The ultimate objective was "to give young artist the opportunity to participate in international exhibitions (such as the São Paulo Biennial and the Venice Biennial) in order to compete with international artists and to claim a territory in the international art world."[126] The desire to join the international art world was palpable, clearly visible in the serial features of Western artists on the covers. Liu's characterization of the modernization of art as a benefit to the nation was a strategy to

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[124] Liu, "Not a Manifesto," 28.
[125] Hsiao Chong-ray discussed the styles exhibited at that year's Fifth Moon exhibition in *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 251–52.
[126] Liu, "Not a Manifesto," 28.

legitimize and elevate the status of art within the social and cultural register. The statement reveals how personal explorations in art were conflated with the rhetoric of building a national identity, a reminder that May Fourth originated as a political movement that later manifested in radical reforms of various disciplines. In Taiwan's postwar, postcolonial context, the high-modernist notion of art was often deployed to further the national mission of creating a viable international identity. Liu's aspirations accentuated the role that the international art world played in validating the art of young artists and the self-perceived sophistication of a nation. Yet it also exposed a predicament: as much as artists opposed to the conservatism of the cultural authority, they seemed to rely on that very authority's power to bring them abroad.

Solidarity between *Bihui* and the Young Artists

In many ways, *Bihui* editors' lack of experience in publishing and editing became a liberating factor in developing an innovative style. As a literature-oriented enterprise, *Bihui* exhibited an extraordinary sense of aesthetics through its visual art components. In addition to the daring cover art material that built the magazine's reputation and announced its modernist aspirations, it was the first literature and arts magazine to publish images of young artists' works, more than one year before *Wenxing* did the same.[127] *Bihui* editors' ability to identify talents in both visual art and literature came from a ready access to their peer group, but they also had the prescience to recognize the iconic status of the works, even when the decision was sometimes driven by cost-saving

[127] In *Wenxing*'s twenty-fifth issue, it published a half-page article about modern printmaking and featured a small image by a young printmaker, Chiang Han-Tung (Jiang Handong, 1929–2009). The image of the work functions more like an illustration rather than the impact of a full spread. *Wenxing* 25 (1 November 1959): 34.

measures. Just like the way *Bihui* garnered a certain amount of respect from the field after publishing the early writings by Chen Yingzhen and Liu Daren, who both became well-acclaimed authors, *Bihui*'s decision to publicize new art helped define a new generation's visual style and further linked its name to avant-garde movements.

The first work of a young visual artist published in *Bihui* is an oil painting by Ku Fu-sheng (b. 1934) on the back cover of the tenth issue (February 28, 1960), chosen by Yu.[128] *Empty Embrace* (*kongxu de yongbao*) (Figure 2.6) was exhibited in the "Modern Oil Painting Exhibition" in Taipei in January 1960. The work impressed many who had seen it at the exhibition, including critic Bai Danfu, who reported on it in *Bihui's* "Cultural Corridor" section, which is open for submissions on current events.[129] With simple lines and variants of gray, the painting is semi-abstract and Western in technique and material. In the center stands an unnaturally thin male body in a white tank top. The verticality of the canvas makes the body appear even longer and the color of the white shirt flushes with the background and lightens the body's presence even more. His elongated arms are raised as if he was given (or was giving) an embrace, but with no recipient, leaving the crossed limbs to dangle in mid-air, and his head and face buried in between. The simple composition and scene carry an unbearable sorrow and despair. The son of prominent KMT general Gu Zhutong and a closeted gay man, Ku, a member of the Fifth Moon group, could only express his frustration through his emotionally intense and melancholy paintings. The extreme "bitterness, suffocation, and loneliness" (*kumen he*

[128] Yu Tien-t'sung, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014. The English title of the artwork came from Kenneth Pai Hsien-yung (Bai Xianyong, b. 1937), writer and a close friend of Ku Fu-sheng. Ku Fu-sheng, e-mail correspondence with author (via Michael Becker), 11 August 2015.
[129] Bai Danfu, "Three Painting Exhibitions in the New Year" (*xinnian zhong zhanchu de sange huazhan*), *Bihui* 1, no. 9 (20 January 1960): 24. Bai later became a successful filmmaker and changed his name to Bai Jingrui.

jimo) emanating from the painting, just as the caption describes, captured his generation's malaise. It also resonated with the feelings embedded in the literary works in the issue, among which was a short story by Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. The magazine connected the local artists' interior turmoil to those of their foreign idols. As a cultural producer, *Bihui* created an "imagined community" through juxtapositions of art and literature across time and geography to address the artistic interests and concerns of its immediate environment.

In the Painting Special issue (*huihua teji*), a four-page plate section presented abstract paintings and sculpture by twelve artists between the ages of twenty-two and forty-four: five artists of Fifth Moon, three artists of Four Seas, three of Ton Fan, and one mid-career artist (Figures 2.7, 2.8).[130] The works shared a visuality that was messy, unregulated, non-representational, and rough-surfaced, following no narrative or conventions. This striking assembly of recent works announced the emergence of abstraction as a common artistic language of the youth generation. The subject of the paintings concerned the interiority of the artist communicated through gestures, brushwork, semi-abstracted symbols and materiality, not through a fixed image or narrative. The artists seemed to avoid distinctly "Asian" elements in their work, therefore neutralizing ethnic and nationalistic readings. The only "Asian-ness" that could be gleaned from their work was the gestural curves or blots of paint that recalled the material quality of ink. The works crammed onto the small-sized pages intensified their power of agitation. With this picture spread, *Bihui* announced the arrival of a generation's style and confirmed solidarity between the artists and the publication. Though the art in

[130] Plate section, *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): unpaginated.

these pages was without detailed medium information and not to scale, viewed collectively, the direction of new art was clearly defined, and *Bihui*'s identity became tied to these stylistic breakthroughs.

Noteworthy was the impressive appearance of works by young printmakers. A member of the Modern Woodblock Print Society (*xiandai banhua hui*), Qin Song's folksy woodcut prints were scattered in the interior pages as illustrations.[131] Chen Ting-shih (Chen Tingshi)'s *Spring Mud* (1960), a stunning work exhibited in the First Hong Kong International Salon of Paintings organized by the Modern Literature and Art Association in April 1960, graced the cover on January 5, 1961 (Figure 2.9).

Bihui played a pivotal role in the endorsement and crowning of this emerging abstract style, half a year ahead of *Wenxing*, which would not publish a full spread of new works by young (Fifth Moon) artists until May 1, 1961. The very issue also cemented *Bihui*'s status as the leading generator critical discourse of the first generation of artists in postwar Taiwan. It includes six essays covering topics on abstraction, individuality, and expressionism in art, written by Chuang Che, Liu Kuo-sung (three articles), Léon Chang, and Hong Kong painter Lui Shou-kwan.[132] Their personal, theoretical formulations of modern painting boosted *Bihui*'s theoretical rigor. In summary, the first year of *Bihui* was an incubation period where the editors pursued various interests and searched for like-minded colleagues and new editorial directions. It coincided with several painters' own search for their individual voice and their social space. Toward the end of the first year of *Bihui*, a strong stylistic preference began to take shape. By the seventh issue of the

[131] Qin Song's woodblock prints can be found throughout *Bihui* 2, no. 1 (1 August 1960).
[132] Liu used one name for each article: his real name, and pen names Lu Ting and He Xiaokang. Lin Lee, e-mail correspondence with author, 2 November 2016.

second year, a clear aesthetic direction for short story, poetry, art, music, and theater, as the thematic issues indicated, began to crystallize.

Bihui as Dialogue Generator

Building an Art Community

Beginning in the second issue, a section called "Cultural Corridor" (*wenhua zoulang*) welcomed submissions of reports on the local art scene.[133] Though the texts are short and the section takes up only a small proportion of the magazine, the lay writing counterbalances the density of other articles on modern art and literature. Different from *Wenxing*, which only started to incorporate reviews of local exhibitions in its third year (in 1959), *Bihui* was keen from the beginning to establish its relevance and critical voice in the community. Yu explained that the purpose of setting up this section was to maintain a relevance of the magazine and to appease the elders who bestowed him with the publication.[134] The column included reviews on the third annual exhibition of Fifth Moon Society (second issue); a solo exhibition of Wang Jiyuan (1893–1975), a renowned painter of the Tianma Society in Shanghai (third issue); a catalogue of the collection from the National Palace Museum (fourth issue), to name a few. It also published a number of pieces critical of cultural authorities, submitted by its readers, which further established the magazine's position as a facilitator of independent thinking. By creating this platform, *Bihui* fostered a culture of critique and peer-review in the local visual art community. The

[133] See for example, *Bihui* 1, no. 2 (10 June 1959): 34.
[134] Yu Tien-t'sung, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014 and 31 December 2015.

section received notable popularity, which suggests a curious reader base and the formation of an art ecosystem.[135]

In his writing debut in *Bihui*'s second issue, Fong Chung-ray—a member of the Four Seas Society (*sihai huahui*), an art group of naval officers based in Zuoying, Kaohsiung—contributed a review that expressed discontent toward the inclusion of Japanese painting in the national painting section in the Taiyang Art Exhibition.[136] In the sixth issue, Liu echoed Fong's protest in a letter to the Minister of Culture to address the absurdity of Japanese painting being categorized as *guohua* in *Shengzhan*.[137] The articles, selected or even invited by Liu, show how *Bihui* became a public, virtual space where young artists would find allies who shared their thoughts and frustrations. In a society where proper art criticism did not exist as a discipline, *Bihui* offered a forum for feedback and reflection.

Bihui **Covers as Stylistic Statement**

Graphic design is a key component of modernism in Taiwan and developed along the same trajectories of fine art, media, and publishing. The cover of *Bihui*, designed by peers, shows a self-reliant spirit. Compared to *Wenxing*'s covers, *Bihui* sought a more refined but no less progressive image. The inaugural issue presented a drawing of a man playing cello by Raoul Dufy (1877–1953), the Fauvist painter and illustrator (Figure 2.2).

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[135] In two separate issues, the editors report that they had re-launched the section in order to address the readers' protest during the section's absence. "Editor's Room" (*bianjishi*), *Bihui* 2, no. 5 (5 December 1960): 2 and "Editor's Room" (*bianjishi*), *Bihui* 2, no. 6 (5 January 1961): 2.

[136] Fong Chung-ray, "Do Not Pass Off the Fake with the Genuine—After the Taiyang Art Exhibition" (*buke yumuhunzhu—shu taiyang meizhan hou*), *Bihui* 1, no. 2 (5 June 1959): 32.

[137] Liu Kuo-sung, "On the Provincial Art Exhibition—Respectfully to Minister Liu Zhen" (*tan quanzheng meizhan—jingzhi liuzhen tinzhang*), *Bihui* 1, no. 6 (20 October 1959): 25–28.

This rather simple line drawing, possibly from the 1940s, plainly yet forcefully presented a new phase of the publication.[138] The rather optimistic and cheerful depiction of a Western musician—a representation of leisure activity in a cultured bourgeois class—indicates *Bihui*'s cultural compass pointing toward European modern art and culture. Having such a subdued line drawing as the first cover of *Bihui* seems incommensurate with the weighty content of the inaugural issue, which included essays on the May Fourth movement and the principles of Chinese aesthetics. One practical explanation is that foreign material within the editors' reach was scarce, and the black-and-white image of the drawing was less costly.[139] The drawing, though seemingly innocuous in its subject matter, differed greatly in style and tone from those endorsed by the art establishment in Taiwan. It signified a sense of freedom, ease, and joy to the readers and seemed to be both an ideological and pedagogical choice. The feature article on Dufy gave further justification for the cover choice: the young editors of *Bihui* aspired to the romantic and poetic qualities and the independence of Dufy's artistic output.[140]

The cover of the second issue, a drawing of a female frontal nude by Matisse, caused a stir. Conservatives accused it of moral contamination. Though not overtly graphic, the wild, energetic lines in the drawing seemed to suggest an honest sexuality more threatening than the oil nudes by painters like Lin Fengmian (1900–91) and Pan Yuliang (1899–1977) in the 1930s, which the Taiwanese cultural authorities likely had

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[138] In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, a lithograph of a man playing cello titled *Raoul Dufy, Aquarelle et Dessins* similar to *Bihui*'s first cover, is dated 1947. See MoMA Collection online, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/5312?locale=en; accessed 30 January 2016.

[139] Liu Kuo-sung, interview by author, Taoyuan, 8 November 2015. Also noted in "About Matisse's Nude and Others—Respectfully to the Readers" (*guanyu madisi de luofu ji qita*), *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (15 July 1959): 53.

[140] Bai Ling, "Optimistic Painter: Dufy" (*leguan huajia: dufei*), *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 20–21.

been exposed to before. Its provocation was exaggerated in the public sphere because *Bihui*'s publisher Ren Zhuoxuan, a member of Cultural Cleansing Movement, was supposed to be against any pornographic materials. The reaction to the cover revealed a highly politicized and insular climate fearful toward unfamiliar material. The editors formally addressed the issue by asking readers to analyze their emotions: "besides not being familiar with this kind of image, did you feel stimulated as if seeing a pornographic image?" By further explaining that the work was published internationally and part of *Bihui*'s planned series on Western art, the editors seemed to gain back their footing on this issue.[141]

The cover artwork of the first six issues, vertically-oriented and all with human figures as subjects, are framed by black grids, which separate the art from the title calligraphy and other informational texts. It is possible that Liu Kuo-sung had learned about Mondrian's grid compositions through Léon Chang's *Wenxing* article in 1958, or maybe even earlier in his own research. However, according to Yu, the gridded lines were another solution for cheaper printing, and so were also used in the interior pages as section or heading dividers.[142] In the inaugural design, the top right and bottom left rectangles and the title fonts each has a designated color, while the artwork images are black and white. The lines and grids give the magazine a sense of order and seriousness, fitted for a rational modern intellectual.

From the seventh to the twelfth issues, the number of gridded lines and colored spaces were reduced, and the artworks switched to a horizontal orientation, occupying

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[141] "Matisse's Nude," 53.
[142] Yu Tien-t'sung, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014.

only the bottom half. The overall design became even simpler, giving the artwork its deserved presence and weight. The cover art had also progressed toward more abstract styles, with Miro's painting on the last cover, emphasizing the form more than the subject and corresponding to a shift in the magazine's content toward a more academic focus and identification with a distinct modern style of art. Notably, for the last three issues of *Bihui*'s first year, a single work by a Taiwanese contemporary artist is featured on the back cover. The first was Ku Fu-sheng, followed by the Japanese-educated sculptor Yang Yingfeng (1926–97; eleventh issue, March 28, 1960), Four Seas painter Hu Chi-chung (Hu Qizhong, 1927–2012; twelfth issue, April 29, 1960).[143] A supportive gesture, the back covers were exemplary of the editors' confidence in the quality of art by their peers. The front and back pairing of a Western and a local artist also emphasizes a sensibility to a larger, historical context. By forging a dialogue between European and Taiwanese works, *Bihui*'s design visualized how the discrete tracks of modernization shared certain strands of affinity by the content that was sandwiched between.

In the magazine's second year, the cover design discarded the grid altogether. The covers acquired a freer appearance, more confident than its freshman year. From the first to the sixth issues, three covers were abstract marks and patterns by Liu Kuo-sung, one was a painting by Liu, another an award-winning print work by Chen Ting-shih, and the other was an illustration of an abstract, theatrical figure for the "one-act play" issue. The non-representational shapes or patterns and the artwork gave the magazine a distinctively poetic appeal. The grid concept was then transferred to the table of content pages.

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[143] *Bihui*'s second year put Han Hsiang-ning (5 December 1960) and Ton Fan artist Chiang Han-Tung (5 January 1961) on the back covers, but these are paired with cover art by Liu Kuo-sung and Chen Ting-shih, respectively (See Figure 2.9)

Chuang Che, who took over the responsibility of cover design from the seventh to the end of *Bihui*'s run, returned back to abstract designs. While it retained the typography of the previous editions, the cover now only had vertical, straight black lines, some parallel and some intersecting one another, almost like a bundle of sticks—or pens—that were dropped and caught in mid-action (Figure 2.10). Each issue had a different color for the top block in the grid layout. The uniformed look of geometric abstraction befits the seriousness of the magazine's gradually specialized, theoretical content, though it also could again be a practical solution.[144] Overall, the simple abstraction on the second-year covers maintained the style of the previous year and well illustrated the thematic and theoretical content in the magazine's second year.

JAPANESE LITERATURE AND VISUAL ART IN WENXING AND BIHUI

An analysis on the different approaches of *Wenxing* and *Bihui* to Japanese arts and culture reveals the editorial objectives of the two magazines pointedly. One curious commonality is that neither reported on Japanese avant-garde art. By the late 1950s, members of the Gutai Art Association, founded in Osaka, had made headway in exploring new art forms and had made impressions on the Western art world. In the early 1960s, performance and other conceptual art had begun to take place in various circles in Tokyo.[145] However, throughout the circulation of *Wenxing* or *Bihui*, none of these new advancements in Japanese art was ever mentioned. The artists in Taiwan did not seem to

[144] Nearing the end of *Bihui*'s run, Yu fell ill, and other key editors and contributors were about to report to military duty or study abroad.
[145] For more on Japanese art, see Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Doryun Chong, ed., *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012).

know about them until later when they traveled abroad.[146] The reasons behind the information vacuum concerning Japanese contemporary art in Taiwan are beyond the scope of this study. But one speculation is that Europe, rather than other Asian countries, was the location of the Gutai movement's transnational ambition.[147] Also possible was that Taiwanese artists' measure of success lay in Western institutions like the Museum of Modern Art, the Venice Biennial, and the São Paulo Biennial, and Gutai, as well as the performances and avant-garde practices on the streets, were not yet recognized institutionally or commercially.

Wenxing's coverage on contemporary Japanese culture includes a small portion on Japanese art.[148] In his *Wenxing* report on the Venice Biennial in 1960, Hsiao Chin gave special attention to the Japanese Pavilion, the first Asian nation to have a permanent space in the most important international exhibition of contemporary art. Hsiao was impressed by four painters in particular—Toshimitsu Imai, Yoshishige Saito, Kei Sato, Kaoru Yamaguchi—for their lyrical and uninhibited abstraction; Tadahiro Ono for his "radically destructive style of sculpture" that seemed to "reflect the post-atomic bomb condition;" and Yozo Hamaguchi for his Japanese-flavored symbolist and surrealist prints that ranked highest in his mind among the entire exhibition.[149] Hsiao placed a high value on the tropes of Western abstraction in the works and the artists' fluency in the

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[146] Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 25 October 2012; Liu Kuo-sung, interview by author, Taoyuan, 8 November 2015.

[147] Ming Tiampo's book discusses the Gutai artists' strategies of "internationalism" mostly targeted European audiences. See Tiampo, Chapters Three, Four, and Five, 75–146.

[148] *Wenxing* also reported on the currents of Japanese literature or published translated pieces, but not as in depth, frequent, or dense as *Bihui*. For example, it covered works by Tatsuzō Ishikawa in *Wenxing* 7 (1 May 1958): 35–38; "Popular Books in Postwar Japan" (*zhanhou riben changxiaoshu*), *Wenxing* 25 (1 November 1959): 26–27.

[149] Hsiao Chin, "Venice International Biennial," 28. Saito, Sato, and Hamaguchi in the Venice presentation were included in the 1966 exhibition "New Japanese Painting and Sculpture" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

international language that had circulated in recent editions of the Venice Biennial. Hsiao seemed especially impressed by a "Japanese sensibility and poeticism" in the abstract paintings. Hsiao's praise suggested an affinity he might have identified between the Japanese works and those by him and his Ton Fan colleagues. How Japanese artists preserved certain cultural markers and conversed with Western art in the face of international spectatorship seemed informative to Hsiao's own understanding of operating within the global arena.

Notably, the Japanese names were written in English in the article (except for Imai), rather than the Chinese characters in which Japanese names were usually presented in a Chinese context, indicating Hsiao and the Taiwanese audience's unfamiliarity with the artists. As there were no visual materials accompanying the article, the report may not have had a significant impact on the readers. *Wenxing* only later published additional information on Saito from the Venice exhibition and also Kengiro Azuma (b. 1926), a Punto artist who was in Hsiao's cohort in Milan, and in both instances the artists had made abstract paintings in Europe or America, meaning that they had not been part of the native Japanese art scene.[150]

Hsiao's article in *Wenxing* suggested a growing modernization and international recognition of contemporary Japanese art, while Taiwanese artists were still stuck in the debilitating debate of the proper designation of Japanese-style paintings in the art infrastructure. In one way his article verified the outdated quality of Japanese-style

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[150] Saito was reported by He Zhaoqu in "Introduction to Four Modern Artists" (*xiandai zuojia jianjie*) *Wenxing* 63 (1 January 1963): 42. Azuma appeared twice: one in a review of Arte e Contemplazione in Venice's Palazzo Grassi by Hsiao Chin, *Wenxing* 49 (1 November 1961): 33; the other is a report on the Milan-based Punto art group that also included Hsiao Chin and Li Yuan-chia (Li Yuanjia), *Wenxing* 70 (1 August 1963): 39.

paintings in Taiwan; more positively, it lifted his own sights beyond the muddy debates back home and toward the center of contemporary art. Hsiao urged the government to treat this international exhibition as an important opportunity to showcase recent efforts in non-objective art by his compatriots. Not the first time a young artist sent such pleas through a media channel, Hsiao's remarks underscored the desire for artists in Taiwan to participate in the international conversation.

While *Wenxing* sporadically reported on cultural news from Japanese society, its interest in Japanese visual culture seemed confined to woodblock prints, calligraphy, and classical nude paintings seen through an archaic, imperialist lens. Woodblock prints by Shikō Munakata appeared in *Wenxing* multiple times. Mostly known for his role in the Mingei movement, *Wenxing* contributors highlighted Munakata's success on the international stage.[151] Munakata's art, different from the other foreign artistic styles in Wenxing, seems to demonstrate an example of an indigenous expression uncontaminated by Western art. Other articles emphasized the role of calligraphy as a cultural link between the Japanese and Chinese cultures.[152] The only progressive view on Japanese art came from Léon Chang. Seeing the potential of calligraphy in an international context, he praised the works of several Japanese calligraphers for "invigorating lines and breaking

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[151] "A Selection of Great Woodblock Prints in the World," *Wenxing* 3 (5 January 1958): 21; He Zhaoqu, "The Internationally Renowned Japanese Printmaker, Shikō Munakata" (*yumanguoji de riben banhuajia—dongfang zhigong*), *Wenxing* 57 (1 July 1962): 59.

[152] One example: Niu Xianming, "The Painting and Calligraphy in Song and Yuan Dynasties—from the Chinese Art Exhibition Organized by Japan" (*song yuan de shuhua—cong riben zhuban de zhongguo meishu zhanlan shuoqi*), *Wenxing* 48 (1 October 1961): 33. Another example is a report on the exchange exhibition of Chinese and Japanese calligraphers (which included works by high government officials) in Tokyo, in Léon Chang, "Chrysanthemum-Filled Calligraphy Tour" (*hanhua dongtian shudao ji*), *Wenxing* 62 (1 December 1962): 20–23. In fact, this framework remains common in today's media and in the rhetoric of museum exhibitions, praising the extraordinary care and scholarly research that the Japanese has consistently poured into their holdings of Chinese art. A recent case in point is the recent tour of the treasures from National Palace Museum, Taipei to Japan, 2014.

the traditional confines of characters."[153] In summary, *Wenxing*'s portrayal of Japanese visual culture focused on the pacified, tradition-embracing side, remaining more or less uninformed of its radical, anti-art trajectory.

While *Bihui* devised an active program on Japanese literature, it likewise neglected the more radical aspects of Japanese modernist art. Yu Tien-t'sung had aspired to expand their horizon to foreign literature.[154] As a result, in the magazine's first year, *Bihui* offered numerous essays on theory, criticism, and translations of Japanese poetry, literature, and film, in addition to works by European writers. One of its most remarkable contributions to the development of modern Chinese literature was the systematic translation of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's oeuvre. Organized by one of the core editors, the Tainan-born writer Ye Di (1931–2006), Akutagawa's short stories were printed in four issues in *Bihui*'s first year (2nd, 8th, 9th, and 12th). Judging by Yu's later reflection and a reader's critique on Akutagawa, Taiwanese intellectuals found a kinship in the emotional intensity in his work that reflected their own circumstances.[155] Other Japanese writers included in *Bihui* are Horiguchi Daikagu (1892–1981), a prominent poet, writer, and translator of French Surrealist literature to Japanese, and Yōjirō Ishizaka (1900–86) and Tomita Tsuneo (1904–67), both novelists. And as mentioned before, Yao Yiwei's review

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[153] See Léon Chang, "A Continued Conversation on Calligraphy—A Reprise on Modern Japanese Calligraphy" (*hanhua dongtian shudao xutan—zai lun xiandai riben shudao*), *Wenxing* 68 (1 June 1963): 36–38; Chuang Yan, "Shōsō-in and Its Tang and Song Antiquities Collections" (*zhengcangyuan ji suocang tang song guwu*), *Wenxing* 14 (1 December 1958): 24–26.

[154] Yu published an article on the reform of the university departments of Chinese literature. Yu Tien-t'sung, "Where Does the Chinese Literature Department Go From Here?" (*zhongguo wenxue xi wang hechu qu*), *Bihui* 1, no. 2 (5 June 1959): 27–28.

[155] Yu Tien-t'sung, "Days of *Bihui*," 74; Shu Lu, "Two, Three Things about Ryūnosuke Akutagawa" (*jiechuanlongzhijie er san shi*), *Bihui* 2, no. 4 (15 November 1960): 18–19.

of Kurosawa's "The Hidden Fortress" electrified the cultural field in Taiwan and added a powerful aspect of Japanese postwar culture to the Taiwanese consciousness.[156]

In the only article in *Bihui* on Japanese visual art, Chen Jingrong (b. 1934), a Fifth Moon artist who left the group to study oil painting in Tokyo in 1960, reported on an exhibition in Taipei of his sketches alongside works by two young Japanese woodblock printmakers, co-organized by the Fifth Moon society, *Bihui* Monthly, and the National Arts Hall. The exhibition lasted for six days.[157] Chen described the popularity and development of printmaking in Japan, its connection to the ukiyo-e tradition, and the semi-abstract style of the prints by the Japanese artists on view. It also mentioned Shikō Munakata's reputation.[158] The article portrayed a rare and concrete connection that temporarily linked the art worlds of Taiwan and Japan. One must recall the works by printmakers Qin Song (1932–2007), Chiang Han-Tung, and Chen Ting-shih that were featured in *Bihui*, indicating a strong local interest in printmaking and a rare moment of synchronicity—though tenuous—between the postwar art worlds of Taiwan and Japan.

Bihui's emphasis on modern Japanese literature reveals three important characteristics of the magazine. One, *Bihui*'s interest in culture is not entirely a European and American palette, contrary to what its covers would suggest. Yu explained that the lure of Akutagawa's work lays in its strong moral and humanist philosophy, driven by an Eastern core that proposed a counterargument to the influx of Western, capitalist

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[156] A founding member of *The Modernist Poetry Quarterly*, Ye Ni (Dai Lancun, 1924–2011), was one of the early contributors to *Bihui* on the theory of poetry and the literary review of Gide, also translated from Japanese literature for the magazine.
[157] Upon his arrival in Tokyo, Chen Jingrong became a correspondent for *United Daily News* until 1962.
[158] Chen Jingrong, "Japanese Woodblock Print Exhibition and My Impressions" (*riben banhuazhan ji wo de suxie*), *Bihui* 2, no. 10 (1 September 1961): 41.

values.[159] The editors seemed conscientious about the balance between Japanese and Western materials, but not only for the sake of balance. More profoundly, they were attracted to literature rooted in a surrealist, humanist, rather than an allegorical or nationalist angle. Thus, its selection of foreign material seemed to be based on an open-minded principle. The rejection of a grand narrative and a return to the artists and individuals characterized the aesthetic of *Bihui*, which was a stark contrast to the type of anti-Communist literature promoted by the KMT government at the time. The penchant for individuality and for relatable human experiences is consistent with the focus of the original works by Taiwanese writers and artists that it published. In other words, *Bihui* is interested in a search for common grounds between cultures and their creative expressions under the modern condition, regardless of the time and place of production.

Two, *Bihui* was one of the first publications in Taiwan to initiate a comprehensive translation project as an ignition to renew domestic cultural curiosity and energy. This drive was powered by an anxious desire to fill the gaps of vocabulary and knowledge left by the trauma and interruption of war and dislocation. *Bihui*'s preferences in Japanese art and culture were not entirely dictated by Western standards of success, but by self-initiated criticality and interest. The selection of Japanese cultural materials shows that *Bihui* held a different cultural compass from *Wenxing*, whose selection of foreign materials was primarily dominated by American sources. *Bihui* took risks in publishing Japanese literature when the Japanese language was still banned. *Bihui*'s in depth approach to Akutagawa's work was comparable to its treatment of European art movements and artists. Interestingly, both Akutagawa's works and the featured

[159] Yu Tien-t'sung, *Looking Back at Our Times* (*huishou women de shidai*) (Taipei: Ink, 2011), 264.

European art were from the pre-war period, indicating that *Bihui*'s aesthetic compass was not of its contemporary times, but about four decades prior, around the time of May Fourth. *Bihui*, in a way, seems to have determined that the foundation of knowledge for its generation should begin from where the May Fourth generation had left off. One could posit that *Bihui*'s editors were conscientious of a generation robbed of its proper education of foreign material and hence sought to close an important knowledge gap.

But with the translation of prewar Japanese classics came a cautionary tale: in an article titled "On the Traits of Japanese Modern Literature," the Taiwan-born, preeminent writer and scholar of Japanese literature Yeh Shi-tao (Ye Shitao, 1925–2008) (using his pen name Ying Zhen), chronicled the dead end that contemporary Japanese literature had reached. Decades of imitating tropes of Western literature had made the development of Japanese literature stagnant. Generations of writers had erased the cultural roots of Japanese literature and detached its relevance from the personal and the everyday in order to learn Western techniques and methodology.[160] Yeh's assessment warned his compatriots of a blind emulation of foreign material. In other words, while *Bihui* painstakingly chose important art and literary material for its readers, it saw the common pitfalls of a rushed, complacent modernization. This marked the third characteristic of *Bihui*: a strong self-consciousness and criticality behind its drive to find raw, new talent in order to combat the urge to copy and regurgitate foreign styles and methodologies.

[160] Ying Zhen [Yeh Shi-tao], "On the Traits of Japanese Modern Literature" (*lun riben xiandai wenxue de tezhi*), *Bihui* 1, no. 5 (15 September 1959): 26–27, 10.

SINOPHONE AND DIASPORA ARTICULATIONS

Hong Kong's Role in Taiwan Modernism

From the pages of *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, a vivid network of connections between the art and literary worlds of Hong Kong and Taiwan emerged. Both magazines were sold in Hong Kong, and regardless of whether the decision to do so was a matter of business or ideology, it was clear that both editors valued their Hong Kong-based readers. The following analysis maps the exchange of ideas, information, and influences between the two Sinophone regions to shed light on Hong Kong's pivotal role in the making of modernism in Taiwan, an aspect not yet fully recognized in the visual art field.

To evaluate Hong Kong's contribution to the formulation of modernism in the postwar context, one must take a quick detour to understand the American (and the leftist) forces that nested in postwar Hong Kong. The United States Information Services (USIS), a media and publishing service set up by the State Department in strategic locations worldwide, had a headquarters and distribution center in Hong Kong. The goal of USIS was to ensure security and freedom in Asia against Communist forces and to secure the influence of American power and values across the region. The USIS in Taiwan, which began in 1945, was effectively a branch of the one in Hong Kong, which published, translated, and distributed material to the USIS offices in the neighboring nations. World Today Publishing, one of its most successful ventures, not only published Chinese translations of American literature but was also a major employer for many prominent literary figures, such as T. A. Hsia (Xia Ji'an, 1916–65), Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing, 1920–95), Yu Kwang-chung, tapping a talent pool across Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Chinese living abroad. In 1952, *World Today* (*jinri shijie*, previously named *America*

Today)—a bi-weekly popular magazine focused on American life, society, culture, and perspective—was launched. With its circulation in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines as well as other Southeast Asian countries, *World Today* was arguably the most influential official publication in the Asia Pacific by the USIS. The Hong Kong USIS tailored *World Today* editions for Hong Kong and Taiwan to suit the local taste and context, which suggests an editorial recognition of the interconnectedness of the culture and politics of the two regions.[161]

Wang Mei-Hsiang, in her investigation of the rise of postwar modernism in Taiwan, reasons that the layered meaning of Chineseness in the postwar era was used as a political and ideological tool, even when the actual "location" or parameter of Chineseness was under-defined. Emphasizing and enhancing Chineseness served the KMT government in constructing its centrality and legitimacy and in uniting those who were against Communists ideology. The strategy of conflating anti-Communist ideology with protecting orthodox Chinese values befitted American interests in keeping Asia, especially those areas with Chinese ancestry or cultural roots, free from Communist contamination. In turn, literature and other forms of culture coming out of ultra-Chinese and anti-Communist communities with the influence of American culture reinforced the international credibility and legitimacy of Taiwan.[162]

Hong Kong, to Taiwanese artists and intellectuals, was a place with much more civil liberty and foreign exposure and often embodied a romantic ideal. To Hong Kong

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[161] Wang Mei-Hsiang, "The Beauty/American Force of Chilling Times: The Relationship between Postwar American Aid Culture, the 1950s and 1960s Anti-Communist Literature and the Development of Modernism" (*susha suiyue de meili/meili? zhanhou meiyuan wenhua yu wuliushi niandai fangong wenxue xiandai zhuyi sichao fazhan zhi guanxi*) (M.A. thesis, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan, 2005), 38, 53–55.
[162] Ibid., 70–71.

artists, on the other hand, Taiwan, the Free China with sovereignty, offered a sense of legitimacy and officialdom in its Chinese identity, even though Taiwan's authoritarian society was a hindrance. In the 1950s, students from Hong Kong started to enroll in universities in Taiwan, further increasing the contact and movement between the two intellectual circles. Many "*qiaosheng*," or overseas students, who enrolled in prestigious universities in Taiwan, became interlocutors between the two communities, including poet Wai-lim Yip, painter Ma Hao (b. 1935, a Fifth Moon society member and wife of Chuang Che), sculptor Cheung Yee (Zhang Yi, b. 1936), and many others. For artists in Taiwan, participating in exhibitions in Hong Kong was considered a stamp of recognition from "overseas" that helped their reputation and social standing. In fact, when artists exhibited in Hong Kong, they billed the experiences as "international."[163] The Modern Literature and Art Association, an independent organization founded in late 1958 by young poets, writers, and artists in Hong Kong, organized the first Hong Kong International Salon Exhibition from April 19 to 23, 1960 and included thirty-six artists, half from Taiwan.[164] The subsequent exhibition initiatives did not last long, but it demonstrated a strong collegiate, cross-regional alliance.

Hong Kong artists also sought opportunities to exhibit in Taiwan. Hong Kong artist Wucius Wong participated in the R.O.C. delegation of the sixth São Paulo Biennial in 1961, an occasion reported in Chuang Che's article for *Wenxing*.[165] As an artist who received a British colonial education, Wong chose traditional Chinese material to recover

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[163] This was considered a common practice among artists, noted in several exhibition catalogues. The 1961 Fifth Moon Exhibition catalogue is the most telling.
[164] *First Hong Kong International Salon of Paintings* (Hong Kong: The Modern Literature and Art Association, 1960).
[165] Chuang Che, "Judging the São Paulo Biennial" (*sheng baoluo guoji meizhan de pingxuan gongzuo*), *Wenxing* 42 (1 April 1961): 26–27.

his link to his mother culture. Roughly a year later, *Wenxing* published excerpts from Chuang and Wong's correspondence. (The latter had gone to the U.S. to study design.) The two artists argued about whether a distinct separation of Eastern modern art from Western was necessary and reasonable. The opening paragraph by Chuang summarized their shared concern for painters in Taiwan and in Hong Kong: "No matter they live overseas or in this country, those who make modern paintings all feel the importance of being Chinese. In other words, they all feel the importance to express an Eastern, Chinese soul."[166]

Wong's peripheral role in the Taiwanese art scene is further proven by his paintings in that year's Fifth Moon exhibition, reviewed by Yu Kwang-chung for *Wenxing*. An image of Wong's work appeared in the accompanying picture spread featuring works by the participating artists.[167] Both Chuang and Yu were impressed by Wong's technique. Chuang, in his first encounter with Wong's work, commented that his ink-based abstraction was an "overseas" tendency, because it stood out from the large number of oil paintings by artists in Taiwan. As a jury member of Taiwan's submission to the 1961 São Paulo Biennial, Chuang made a distinction, perhaps unconsciously, to consider Wong's work part of the new modernism in Chinese art, but not of Taiwan.[168] This offhand comment clues us to the invisible parameters of modern painting during its period of rapid development in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Bihui, true to its commitment to new and challenging material, developed close relationships with the peer publications in Hong Kong. The editors maintained solid

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[166] Chuang Che, "From Two Letters" (*cong liangfeng xin shuoqi*), *Wenxing* 55 (1 May 1962): 68.
[167] Yu Kwang-chung, "The Plain Fifth Moon" (*pusu de wuyue*), *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 53, 72.
[168] Chuang, "São Paulo Biennial," 27.

exchanges with several important independent magazines and associations: *Wenyi Xinchao (Literary Current)* founded in 1956 by poet Ma Lang; and *Xin Sichao* (*New Currents)*, launched in 1959 by members of the Modern Literature and Art Association, which included Wucius Wong and Wai-lim Yip. The Modern Literature and Art Association, an important platform of exchange, was instrumental in bringing refreshing, new literature and art to Hong Kong's cultural sphere.[169]

The nascent modernization project in Hong Kong took shape in parallel to Taiwan's own and spread to Taiwan via these publications. Ma Lang (b. 1933) sought to resurrect in Hong Kong the 1930s and '40s Shanghai modernist ideals and founded *Wenyi Xinchao* in 1956.[170] Both *Wenyi Xinchao* and *Bihui* shared a passion for importing and translating foreign materials of literature and art and serving as curators and distributors of knowledge. The two magazines overlapped for about a year, in 1959. The cover design of *Bihui*, in fact, is strikingly similar to that of *Wenyi Xinchao*, where a work of European art from the twentieth century was selected as the feature of each issue.[171] Also, *Wenyi Xinchao* and *Xin Sichao* both published artworks and poems from Taiwan. The frequent exchanges and collaborations between Hong Kong and Taiwan in these magazine pages thus made evident the cross-fertilization between two Sinophone regions.

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[169] The associated stated this as their aim. "Inaugural Statement" (*chuangkan ci*), *Xin Sichao* 1 (1 May 1959): 2.
[170] Ma Lang, telephone interview by author, 7 September 2016.
[171] Quanan Shum noted the similarity between the covers of *Wenyi Xinchao* and *Bihui*. Shum, "The Self-Awakening in Literature" (*wenxue de zijue yundong*). *Xin Sichao* 5 (1 June 1960): 6. According to Wai-lim Yip, *Wenyi Xinchao* could not be distributed in Taiwan, so the issues had to be mailed. Yip, interview by author, Del Mar, CA, 31 December 2014.

Bihui first showed its ties to Hong Kong when it reprinted the translation of Gide's novel, *Thésée* (1946), previously published in *Wenyi Xinchao*.[172] The shared reading list between writers in Taiwan and Hong Kong suggests a similar interest in modern European literature and its utility for Chinese writers. In support of *Xin Sichao*, *Bihui* made a special, half-page notice in its pages with the subscription information.[173] The show of collegiality and support toward their Hong Kong colleagues suggests *Bihui*'s interest in building a network of like-minded peers across the Chinese region. *Bihui*'s collaboration with Hong Kong publications is more than just an act of curiosity, but a more profound interest in integrating Hong Kong's young thinkers' formulations on modernism into its own, as well as using such formulations to stimulate its own creativity.

Bihui made impactful contributions to the visual arts in Taiwan by publishing critical writing by Hong Kong artists. The rigor of the critical theories and literary accomplishments of Hong Kong's modernist writers, poets, and artists appeared in almost every issue of *Bihui*'s second year. Most of them also contributed to or edited *Wenyi Xinchao* or *Xin Sichao*. Lui Shou-kwan, the leader of the New Ink movement in Hong Kong, started experimenting with abstract painting using ink on paper beginning in 1959, ahead of any artists in Taiwan. Lui rebelled against the Lingnan tradition that originated from Guangdong province and practiced by his father. Though he was never academically trained, Lui held private classes starting in the early 1960s on ink painting and counted Wucius Wong, among others, as students. Written for *Bihui*, "Free, Independent, and Absolute Art" (*ziyou duli de juedui yishu*), was published in two

[172] André Gide, Luo Miu trans., "Thésée" (*dexiusi*), *Bihui* 1, no. 10 (28 February 1960): 41–61.
[173] "New Currents" (*xin sichao*), *Bihui* 2, no. 1 (1 August 1960): 40.

separate issues and advocated art for art's sake, not for politics or religion. To substantiate his ideas, Lui presented a historiography of Chinese art theory to demonstrate how individuality and the true nature of expression always fared as the highest virtue of art. He did not reject the incorporation of useful Western art ideas or turn away from Chinese traditions, but encouraged artists to search for their own meaningful interpretation. He concluded that a middle road that would solve the conflict between traditional and contemporary values, and between the East and the West, seemed feasible.[174] His essay had a pedagogical tone. It was clarifying for his readers in Taiwan, as no one had yet stated publicly the idea of "individualism," one of the most revered values of Western modernism, with historical substantiations. Lui's thorough re-evaluation of Chinese art theory, perhaps prompted by being a colonial subject in need of cultural repatriation, was opposite to the interest of artists in Taiwan who seemed to have taken Chinese art history for granted. A Hong Kong-inflected liberalism and dedication to modern Chinese culture that was open to Western ideas was thus injected into the Taiwanese intellectual consciousness.[175]

In *Bihui*'s special issue dedicated to modern art movements, Wucius Wong summarized the development of new art in Taiwan and Hong Kong and grouped them as "China." The article marks the first in its field to critically assess new art movements in both locations simultaneously. To justify the inclusion of Hong Kong in the narrative, Wong asserts: "Hong Kong is a part of Chinese culture, and is the only part that has the possibility to conduct research and development freely and to broadcast its glory.

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[174] Lui Shou-kwan, "Free, Independent, and Absolute Art" (*ziyou duli de juedui yishu*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 32–36.
[175] For more on Lui Shou-kwan's ideas in art, see Chapter Three, 201–2.

Wouldn't the readers agree?"[176] Provocative in its delivery, especially in the context of Taiwan, Wong's claim exposed a complex mixture of superiority and anxiety felt by Hong Kong artists. Yet closer relations with the "center" of Chinese culture in Taiwan offered a sense of belonging to Wong and his peer group of artists.

Liu Kuo-sung, in his essay arguing for the intuitiveness of abstract art, quoted from Wucius Wong's article in *Xin Sichao*, to explain how abstraction is a direct expression of an artist's heart and soul without the mediation of representation.[177] In Liu's prolific writing career up to this point, he most frequently cited ancient classics or words from senior figures like Léon Chang and Yu Junzhi, rarely from a peer. His reading of *Xin Sichao* implied a curiosity toward modernist ideas generated by members of another Chinese society and a strategy of using enlightened material from overseas to impress those in Taiwan. Regardless, Liu made use of Wong's more developed propositions of modernism to enrich his own theoretical footing.

To *Bihui* and its readers, the inclusion of Hong Kong artists diversified and broadened the scope of the modernist movement and offered strains of liberal mentality unavailable in their own environment. Lui Shou-kwan and Wucius Wong had strong theoretical foundations as well as the advantage of distance from Taiwan to make objective observations, from which their colleagues in Taiwan benefited. Yu Tien-t'sung went as far as to credit Hong Kong artists for bringing in a true sense of individualism to Taiwan.[178] More importantly, *Bihui*'s interactions with Hong Kong writers and artists

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[176] Wucius Wong, "Modern Art Movement in China" (*xiandai huihua yundong zai zhongguo*), *Bihui* 2 no. 7 (15 May 1961): 18.
[177] Liu Kuo-sung, "The Essence of Modern Painting—and to Answer Mr. Fang Qi" (*xiandai huihua de benzhi wenti—jian da fangqi xiansheng*), *Bihui* 1, no. 12 (27 April 1960): 17–18.
[178] Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014.

forged a coherent Sinophone network through print media that was responsible for the formation of a new Chinese aesthetics. In a way, the magazines—*Bihui* more prominently than *Wenxing*—formed institutional networks and attested to the vitality of the strands of modern Chinese culture outside of mainland China.

Diaspora

The ambition to construct a new narrative of modern Chinese painting is further played out in *Wenxing* and *Bihui* through their portrayal of Chinese artists residing and working in Europe and America. The most prominent case was Zao Wou-ki, a graduate from the National Art Academy, moved to France in 1948, and found success in the international art scene with his lyrical abstract paintings. Zao and his work, throughout the 1950s and '60s, served a symbolic function for artists in Taiwan as a distant lighthouse for Chinese modernism. The wish to claim him as one of their own speaks to an anxiety from the lack of representation of Chinese art in the international arena, the feeling of entrapment in the art-world backwaters of Taiwan, and an aspiration for the potential direction of modern Taiwanese painting. In the spring of 1958, Zao was on an exhibition tour in America, Japan, Hong Kong, and Bangkok. During a three-month stay in Hong Kong, the press in Taiwan showered him with accolades and analyzed his every move as if he were a movie star. Historian Hsiao Chong-ray credited the attention on Zao with a powerful and timely encouragement to young modernist artists fighting their cause in Taiwan, even though Zao did not visit Taiwan.[179] But a year later, a major

[179] His success in the West, characterized by his success in exhibitions and the high prices his paintings fetched, had been widely reported in the Chinese language press. See Hsiao Chong-ray, 204.

disappointment unraveled in *Bihui* and made the Taiwan artists rethink their position within the international art world.

In Zao's candid account, originally published in the Japanese periodical *Geijutsu Shincho* (*New Wave*) in 1959, he described his artistic trajectory and struggles, starting from his time at the National Art Academy up to the present. Without exhibiting any sense of existential conflict or remorse, Zao opened his essay with a note on his ongoing application for French citizenship and his emotional attachment to China as he returned for a visit. He explained in detail his determination to adapt to life as a Parisian artist, citing his indebtedness to Paris for nurturing his artistic career. "If I had stayed in the Chinese art world, now on the brink of suffocation by its own narrow traditionalism, I would never have unleashed the ancient Chinese traditions within me." He continued, "I never thought of myself as the representative Chinese artist in Europe, nor have I thought about doing anything for the homeland…Even if an artist disregards his nationality, his ethnicity would still naturally be embedded."[180] Liu Kuo-sung apparently deleted a sentence from Zao's essay ("From now on I will never admit that I am Chinese,") perhaps to avoid unnecessary attention from the authorities, but more likely due to his disapproval of the statement.[181] Liu's introduction to the article sought to neutralize what the essay was about to reveal: "As a Chinese, we object to his rejection of statehood and anti-nationalism."[182] In the "Afterword" of the issue, the editors also tried to steer the readers' attention toward the inertia of the arts establishment and the persistence that Zao

[180] Translated by author. Wang Deng, trans., "Zao Wou-ki's Statement" (*zhao wuji de zibai*), *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (5 July 1959): 31–32.
[181] Translated by author. Yu Tien-t'sung, interview by author, Taipei, 20 December 2014.
[182] The Editors, Foreword to "Zao Wou-ki's Statement," *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (15 July 1959): 29.

demonstrated, which any young painter should emulate, rather than drawing attention to Zao's new citizenship.[183]

This article was the first time Zao's philosophy of making art was formally heard in Taiwan. But his denial of his Chinese nationality exposed a gaping ideological problem for artists in Taiwan. Zao's inability to identify with either China or Taiwan was apparent during his only stop in Hong Kong. His declaration directly insulted the official narrative of the "great cultural" China to which the young Taiwanese artists subscribed. Even the most radical intellectuals who were vocal about the deep shame they felt as Chinese would not have made this explosive announcement. Hsiao Chin, who had already reported frequently on Zao's art for the *United Daily News*, lamented Zao's inclusion in the French pavilion of the 1960 Venice Biennial: "a pity for a Chinese artist."[184] While he praised Zao's painting for its "Chinese classical refinement, integrating the forms of oracle bone characters, the color of lacquer and the atmospheric space of landscape," he cautioned him for being "too sweet and decorative."[185] Although the young artists' hope to build connections to Zao seemed to be wishful thinking, they still felt a sense of affiliation to him. This is demonstrated by many Taiwan artists' admiration for the sense of liberation and individualism in Zao's work and his ability to traverse cultural borders. They remained abreast of his overseas endeavors and continued to scrutinize his work until his death.[186]

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[183] "Afterword" (*bianhou shouji*), *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (5 July 1959): 54.
[184] Hsiao Chin, "Venice International Biennial," 28.
[185] Ibid.
[186] For example, artists like Ku Fu-sheng and Chuang Che, who traveled to Paris in the 1960s, both visited Zao and appreciated his generosity toward young Chinese artists. Ku, interview by author, Rancho Cucamonga, CA, 14 April 2012; Chuang, interview by author, New York, 10 July 2012. Chuang still

After this essay, *Bihui* did not report on Zao again. While it did report on Beijing-born, Hawaii-based scholar and artist Tseng Yuho's visit and the symposium she held with artists in Taiwan, in general, the Sinophone visual art focus of the magazine turned domestic. [187] It seemed that the editors shifted their attention to more immediate and relatable art worlds, a move that hinted at the magazine's beginning in developing an aesthetic and discourse distinctly for Taiwan, and the diverging path of the pursuit and methodologies of artists in Taiwan and living abroad.

The artists found a surrogate for their international aspirations perhaps in Walasse Ting, who, like Zao, had never set foot in Taiwan prior to his immigration abroad. In the late 1950s and 1960s, Ting was making a name in the heady abstract art circle of New York City. Ho Kan, in his enthusiastic report in *Wenxing*, emphasized Ting's appreciation for the classical Chinese cursive script and his liberal use of the technique in his abstract painting. Ho was impressed by Ting's expressive, gestural paintings, full of vitality. He also praised Ting's loyalty to his Chinese background, "It is reported that a gallery in the U.S. offered to buy thirty works in exchange for him to apply for U.S. citizenship and he readily refused."[188] Ting's alleged patriotic move, opposite of Zao's, helped put him in favorable light in the Taiwanese public eye.

Wenxing and *Bihui*'s coverage on Chinese artists living abroad reveals the complicated psychology behind the (seemingly intuitive) move to build a Sinophone

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scrutinizes Zao's work today, as Zao would appear in almost all interviews with author. For more on Chuang's view on Zao, see Chapter Five, 309.

[187] Liu Kuo-sung, "On the First Modern Painting Panel Discussion" (*ji diyizi xiandai huihua zuotanhui*), *Bihui* 2, no. 6 (5 January 1961): 60–62.

[188] Ho Kan, "An Introduction on a Young Overseas Modern Painter of Our Country—Walasse Ting and His Recent Works" (*jieshao woguo luwai qingnian xiandai huajia—ding xiongquan ji qi jinzuo*), *Wenxing* 41 (1 March 1961): 29–30.

network of artists. Both magazines recognized the importance of connecting to their audience and other like-minded readers abroad. In light of the isolation artists experienced in Taiwan, information from Hong Kong and overseas artists afforded revelatory insights on possibilities to break away from the bind of tradition and conservatism rampant within the establishment. Strategically, the success of Zao and Ting abroad brought extremely effective support for the burgeoning styles of modern painting in Taiwan. They served as examples of artists having independent, professional careers, a luxury that artists in Taiwan did not have. These factors help explain why their success stories were so compelling in Taiwan. In a typical act of aggrandized national pride, even when diasporic artists did not have any concrete relationship with Taiwan, they were considered one of its own and given important positions within the context of modern Chinese art.

The inclusion of a Hong Kong point of view on the modernity of Chinese culture in the magazines constituted a shift in the parameters of Chinese culture generally, as prior to the Second World War, Hong Kong and Taiwan both played marginal roles in the official art history and political discourse. *Bihui*'s importation of theories by Lui Shou-kwan and Wucius Wong exposed the parallel tracks on which artists in Taiwan and Hong Kong were running. Furthermore, the inclusion of a Hong Kong perspective enabled a broadening of sources of modern thinking in Taiwan beyond that of mainland Chinese, Japanese, European, and American influences, while also activating a network between Hong Kong and Taiwan that would become a constructive force in the region's development of modern culture. I argue that *Wenxing* and *Bihui* make visible a Sinophone network that would become a force balancing the influx of new material from

Japan, America and Europe during a crucial, formative time in Taiwan, even when Hong Kong and Taiwan had begun to settle into their own version of modernities in the decade that followed.

CONCLUSION

Wenxing and *Bihui* were born when Chinese culture was at a major crossroads, forty years after the May Fourth movement led an expedition of cultural reform. As a sense of place and history began to take shape in the minds of the younger generation of artists, literature and arts magazines became the primary site for them to contemplate the question of identity and modernity. The magazines reveal the plurality of choices that the intellectuals had, including traditional values and the alluring dominance of Western cultural products and standard of advancement. Both magazines were charged with a dose of postwar optimism and the belief in progress and reconstruction. The contradictions in the minds of the intellectual class were played out in the magazines: they resolved to catch up with the West while they prided themselves as the center and the proper heir to Chinese culture. *Wenxing* and *Bihui* both began as publications proposing alternatives to the one-party dominated status quo and anti-Communist rhetoric. They helped artists to gradually acquire critical artillery in a battle against conservatives within the Taiwanese society and to set a divergent course of modern culture from the Western world. The magazines progressed in tandem with the artistic development of young artists and writers. In turn, they facilitated and witnessed the growth of the artists into mature and articulate practitioners and representatives of new strands of modernism in their particular context. The nature of the magazines also changed as they progressed

from being a window to international information to an instigator of a generational, local movement. As seen in this chapter, the magazines were microcosms of the society at large. The discussions reveal how a local modernism and visuality crystallized, and most importantly, how Taiwanese artists, with the help of the magazines, carved out a space and claimed legitimacy for their art in the larger context of Chinese culture.

A magazine launched by experienced editors with powerful connections to cultural luminaries, *Wenxing* was a shiny, financially and socially well-supported enterprise that lasted for eight years. As a literary and arts magazine with popular appeal in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and across Southeast Asia, *Wenxing* was hugely successful in "going against the grain" by providing a range of new materials on arts and culture that were otherwise not widely available in Taiwan. It packaged itself as a pioneer, setting out to reconstruct and rejuvenate the cultural scene. As a major filter of foreign culture in the late 1950s and early '60s, *Wenxing* bore witness to the rise of visual culture as a global cultural phenomenon. The cover choices provide a glimpse to the surrounding international climate and the kind of value and visual culture that the magazine aspired to construct in Taiwan. American industrial, scientific, and artistic power drove the circulation of ideas in the postwar Free World, and there is no doubt that *Wenxing* was attracted to such values. The editorial goal to promote cosmopolitanism—though they did not use this description—was realized by introducing a wide range of topics heavily influenced by American taste and lifestyle. Its content demonstrates a reliance on imported American information. It seems that the ideal modern intellectual in postwar Taiwan in the eyes of *Wenxing* editors must be *au courant* to worldly events—and more specifically, they must participate in a virtual discussion among the Free World nations in

the Cold War. At the same time, *Wenxing* consciously propagated the glory of classical Chinese culture. The treasures in Taipei's Palace Museum collection and axioms from classical texts remained staples within its pages. Through this combination of sources, *Wenxing* created the prerequisite knowledge for a worldly Chinese intellectual and promoted this image to its readers.

The contentious legacy of May Fourth lingered throughout its eight years of circulation. Scholars with contrasting views and from different generations ferociously argued about the movement's heritage and its practical applications. The many rounds of debate in *Wenxing* made apparent that the discourse on modernization was more than a cultural one, but a national and a political one. The magazine's own agenda as a advocate of all forms of freedom, oftentimes against the KMT's authoritarian, conservative ranks of politicians and cultural figures, inflicted a political reading on all cultural issues that it reported on.

For the first few years, *Wenxing* was a magazine that held its sights chiefly on the West and the liberalism it admired. The only room saved for young talents was in the poetry section, with some exceptions in the foreign correspondence section. Only after its third year, around 1960, did it begin to give substantial room to reviews of local exhibitions and writing by first-generation postwar artists. A handful of these young artists, mainly those from the Fifth Moon group, gradually became regular contributors, turning *Wenxing* into the main posting board for their artistic statements and their critique of the art field. The magazine's embrace of young artists signified its recognition of a new point of view and its validation of their connection to certain values that it had preached. Images of Fifth Moon artists' paintings also began to appear in the magazine,

distinguishing a new visuality suitable for its time and *Wenxing*'s pursuits. When its chief editor changed to the more politically provocative Li Ao in 1962, who was of the same generation as the artists of Fifth Moon and Ton Fan, *Wenxing* continued to publish artistic statements by artists. The magazine helped usher an aesthetic standard and theoretical backing that satisfied the magazine's ideal for an anti-Communist, pro-American, and liberal stance toward individualism, but also exposed how the cultural field gradually reached an impasse with its wholesale Westernization mandate. Upon its termination in 1965, *Wenxing* had successfully escorted the artists of the Fifth Moon society to a prosperous direction of art-making and sent them on their way to regular and solo exhibitions as well as international opportunities.

If *Wenxing* stood as a cosmopolitan, popular, outspoken yang in the field of literature and arts magazines, then *Bihui*, a modest peer magazine with academic seriousness was its corresponding yin. A contrast to the ostentatious covers of *Wenxing* featuring a stream of personalities dominating world headlines, *Bihui* chose as its public face drawings and paintings with more a subdued power of provocation. While the decision was cost-driven, it visually set *Bihui* apart from other similar magazines in the field. Launched by an ambitious group of twenty-somethings, *Bihui* struggled to stay afloat throughout its two years of existence. Yet in a mere forty-pages of content, each month *Bihui* managed to pack in the most essential "coursework" in world literature and art for young intellectuals, selected and translated by their own peers. Its twenty-four issues accumulated an invaluable reading list from Europe, America, Japan, and Hong Kong across the first half of the twentieth century that summarized the main diet of a budding generation responsible for cultivating a modernist taste in Taiwan. With a

positive attitude of self-improvement and generational responsibility, *Bihui* was determined to establish a consistent, critical voice to subvert conservative inertia and collective complacency.

Bihui's stance toward cultural revitalization was decidedly more radical than *Wenxing*'s. This position stemmed from its revisionist view toward the May Fourth movement. The editors believed Hu Shih's version of modernization in Chinese culture was too reserved and rational-minded and only achieved the goal of eradicating old habits without bringing in any new, concrete contributions. *Bihui*'s overall attitude may be attributed to the magazine being heralded solely by a younger generation with no political affiliations, rather than those already within cultural institutions with more at stake. It widely cast its net of modernist influences to absorb a fuller understanding of the various strands of modernism throughout the twentieth century in order to break from the ideological stalemate the Taiwanese circle had reached. Literary scholar Lü Zhenghui well summarizes the modernization that the young editors advocated: to "face the now in Taiwan.[189]

Bihui's commitment to developing a grassroots aesthetic in Taiwan is evident in how it welcomed experimental works by artists, writers, and poets from the very beginning. Poetry by members of Epoch, Blue Star, and Modern Poetry, and short fictions by Chen Yingzhen and Liu Daren provided the magazine with respect from the field. *Bihui*'s core editors and contributors were not entirely made up of *waishengren*, which perhaps resulted in a conscientious attitude and compassion toward the multitude

[189] Translated by author. Lü Zhenghui, "From *Bihui* to *Wenji*" (*cong bihui dao wenji*), *Wenxun* 213 (July 2003): 43.

of suffering in Taiwan society: including the diasporic mainlanders and the former colonial subjects. This perhaps explains the stronger representation of Japanese modern literature in the magazine. Through *Bihui*'s curriculum of Western artistic movements, namely Surrealism, Fauvism, Dada and Futurism, one sees that young artists in Taiwan were attracted to the creative possibilities generated from a resistance to authority and conventions and from a respect for the emotional depth of the individual. Through Japanese and English literature, artists found kinship in the iconoclasts of previous generations and were motivated to convey their true inner selves. *Bihui* was also receptive to viewpoints from others in the Sinophone network, namely writers and artists based in Hong Kong. It was welcoming in introducing the ideas of their enlightened peers in Hong Kong to revitalize the stagnant air in Taiwan. *Bihui*'s integration of their ideas into its intellectual register differed from *Wenxing*'s strategy, which stood at the center of Chinese culture and lectured *to* other Sinophone populations, rather than treating them as equal partners. The wider imagination of the *Bihui* editors made the writings and artworks they publicized possess a strong local relevance and international communicability among the Sinophone regions.

Notably, *Wenxing* and *Bihui* looked to different periods of Western art movements for inspirations. *Wenxing* introduced European and American modern art from the early twentieth century to the immediate postwar era. As it published translated material on specific artists and movements of the past rather regularly, it also sprinkled updates on important international exhibitions and art movements, such as the Abstract Expressionists and the Punto artists, accompanied by limited illustrations. *Bihui*, on the other hand, spent its first twelve issues on the formation of Western modern art in the

early twentieth century. *Bihui*'s understanding of art and modernism grew out of a thoughtful digestion of foreign material mainly from the interwar period. On one occasion, in *Bihui*'s second year, it surveyed the postwar art scene in several European countries, but only through dense text and no images. Since not many in Taiwan had direct contact with Western art, the knowledge was mostly second-hand and mediated. This explains how the discussions about Western art were often focused on the composition and sensations a painting could conjure and less about other painterly concerns such as technique, texture, scale, and intention. Hence, the beginning stage of modernism in Taiwan, which coincided with *Wenxing*'s early years and *Bihui*'s entire life, was a text-based revolution.

The interest in European art from the interwar era shows that the Taiwanese art world did not engage in the same conversations as their European and Japanese contemporaries. Even while artists in Taiwan paid attention to artists like Pollock, Tobey, and Kline, and to international exhibitions of contemporary art—judging by their reactions and comments in *Wenxing* and *Bihui*—their understanding of foreign artists' motivation and practice was extremely limited. The detached state of Taiwanese art consciousness from the pulse of the international art world was a result of its simultaneous and perhaps greater concerns over how their own art would be placed within the context of Chinese art history. As the discussions in *Wenxing* and *Bihui* can attest, artists invested nothing less than their national identities. The modernity project had as much to do with national image as with advancement within the art world, even though artists wanted to escape from such a burden. This overarching assignment would

dictate the direction and the performance of Fifth Moon and Ton Fan artists for most of the decade.

In both magazines, one can see a gradual shift of attention from Western material to the search for psychological and emotional relevance in their immediate environment. *Wenxing* leaned heavily on Western art to boost its credibility until its third year when it began to include more content on local art. *Bihui*, though it invested in the local art scene from the beginning through reviews of local exhibitions and publishing of the Fifth Moon society manifesto, the magazine's own preference in the arts shifted from predictable Western flavors to local, acquired tastes. Such a schizophrenic state of foreign material-mongering enabled the next phase of recovery and rediscovery. This explains why while *Wenxing* aspired to a more populist, pro-American cosmopolitan modernism and *Bihui* harnessed a taste for more academic, locally-grown experimental interests, they both ended up supporting a indigenous visuality that had a gestural, expressionist basis, alongside the tonality and appearance of ink and calligraphic brushwork, and traces of artistic interiority that became synonymous with the type of literary modernism they championed. Their shared sensibility was especially highlighted after *Bihui* ended, the same set of artists gravitated to *Wenxing*, as there were few suitable periodicals for artist statements and theorizations. The two magazines formed an indelible force that pushed for a new era of modernist art in Taiwan.

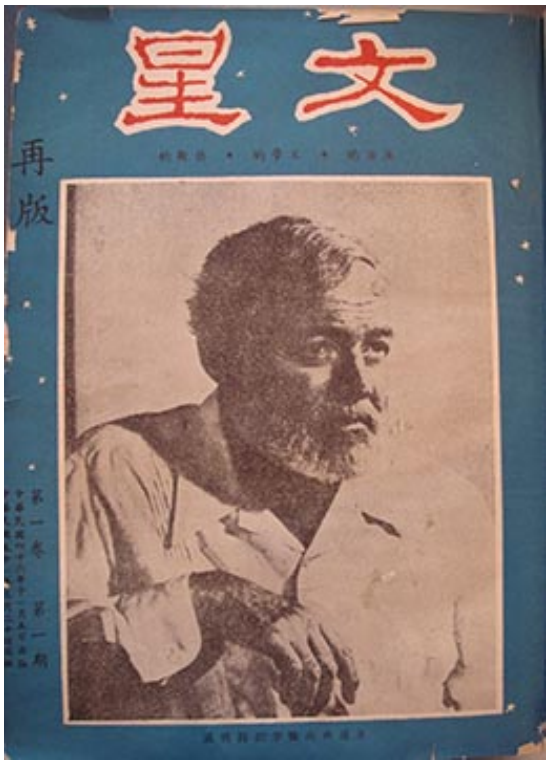


Figure 2.1 *Wenxing* 1 (5 November 1957).
Cover figure: Ernest Hemingway.



Figure 2.2 *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959).
Cover feature: Raoul Dufy. Cover design: Liu Kuo-sung.



Figure 2.3 Piet Mondrian, *Tableau I: Lozenge with Four Lines and Gray*, 1926,
oil on canvas, 113.7 x 111.8 cm diagonal measurements. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

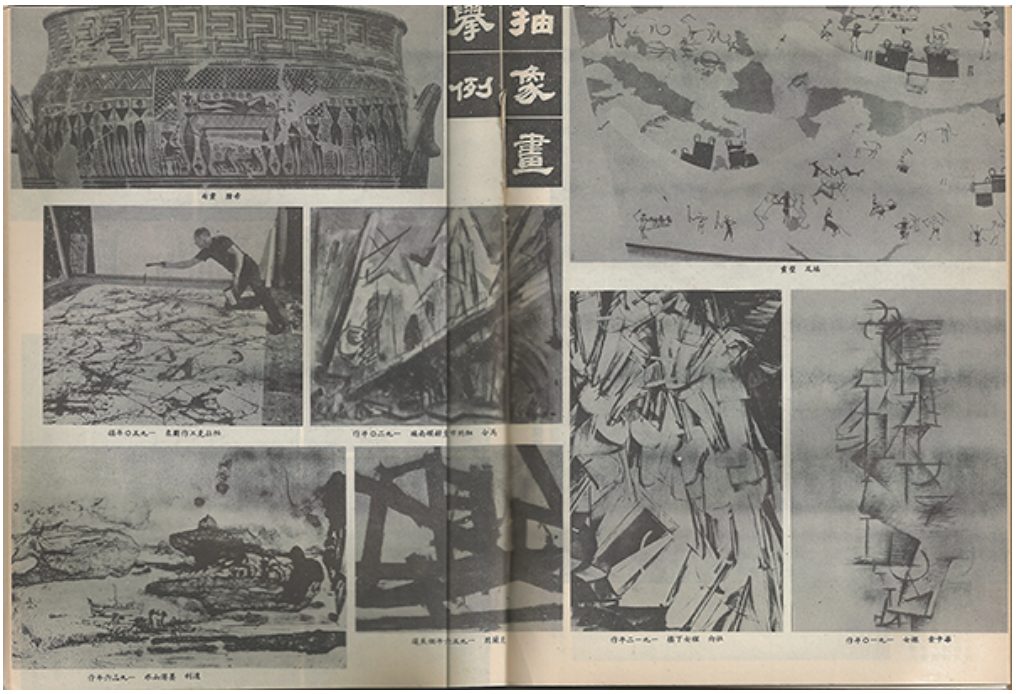


Figure 2.4 “Examples of Abstract Painting,” *Wenxing* 24 (1 October 1959): 19–20.

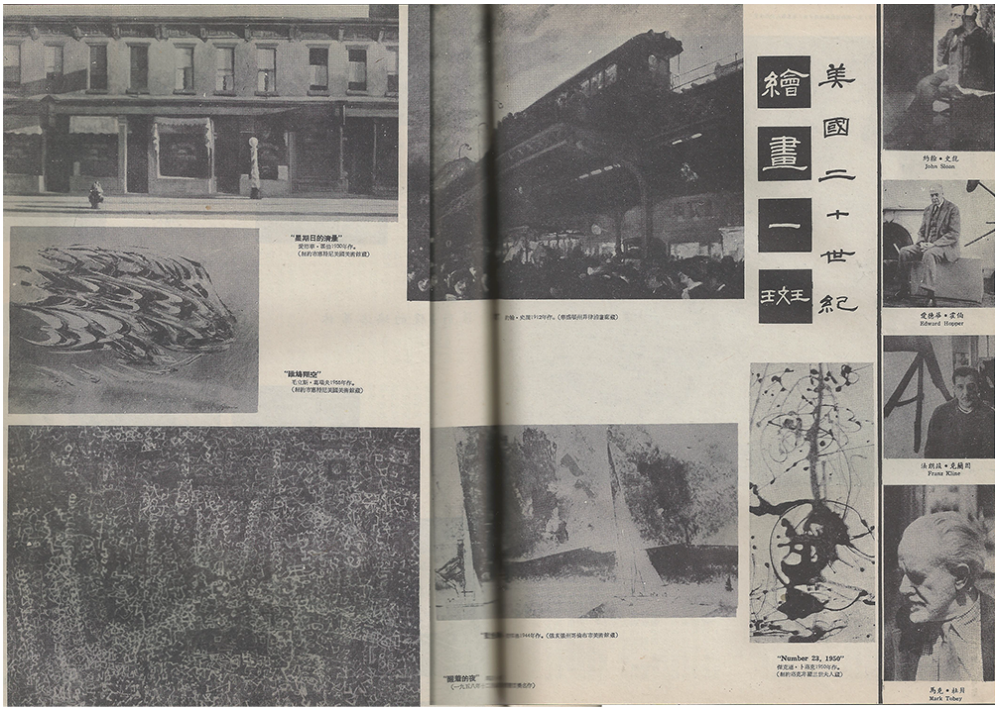


Figure 2.5 “Twentieth-Century American Painting,”
Wenxing 35 (1 September 1960): 20–21.



Figure 2.6 Ku Fu-sheng, *Empty Embrace*, ca. 1959 (right).
Bihui 1, no. 10 (28 February 1960), back cover.
A painting by de Chirico is on the cover of the next issue (left).

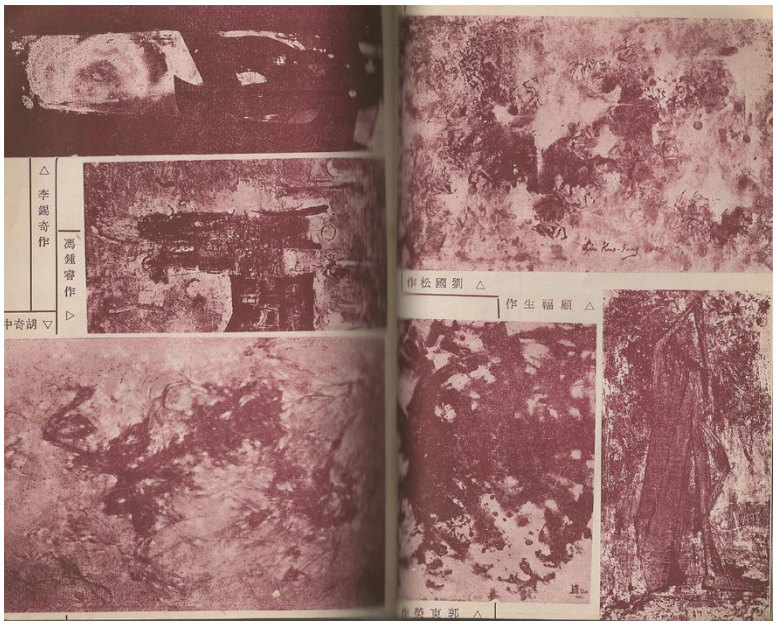


Figure 2.7
Plate section, *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960), unpaginated.
Works by Fifth Moon, Ton Fan, Four Seas, and other avant-garde artists.



Figure 2.8
Plate section (continued), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960), unpaginated.
Works by Fifth Moon, Ton Fan, Four Seas, and other avant-garde artists.

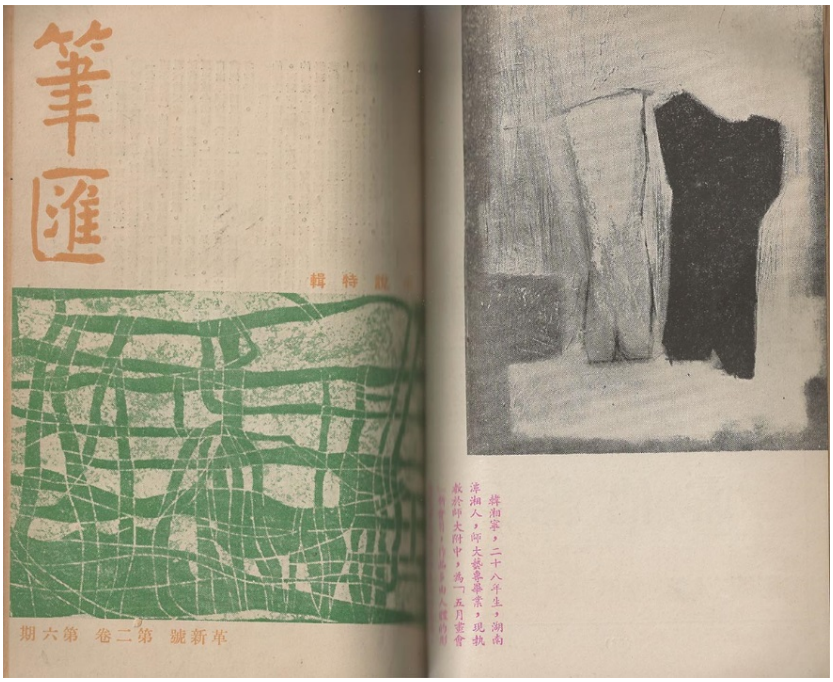


Figure 2.9
Left: Chen Ting-shih, *Spring Mud*, 1960, woodblock print.
Bihui 2, no. 6 (5 January 1961), cover.
Right: Han Hsiang-ning, *Untitled*. *Bihui* 2, no. 5 (5 December 1960), back cover.



Figure 2.10 *Bihui* 2, no. 7 (15 May 1961), cover.
Design: Chuang Che

CHAPTER THREE

ABSTRACTION IN POSTWAR TAIWANESE ART, 1953–1965

This chapter investigates how artists in Taiwan arrived at abstraction in their feverish pursuit of the modern in the postwar decades. From 1957—when the Fifth Moon Society (*wuyue huahui*) and Ton Fan Society (*dongfang huahui*) formed—until the mid-1960s—when abstraction became the dominant visual style of Taiwanese modernism—the meaning and function of abstraction went through many formulations. This chapter explores the social, cultural, and artistic factors that shaped how artists understood abstraction, and how it became the almost inevitable choice due to its critical potential in the context of Chinese art and its international appeal. This chapter follows the methodological and theoretical formulations made by artists and critics attempting to find the optimal artistic language that was both abstract and Chinese. It examines how artists negotiated the demands of the Chinese cultural identity and the products of Western modern societies, and how these competing aesthetic systems contributed to the style of paintings produced during this time. The prolonged debate about abstraction in Taiwan, taking place roughly from 1953 to 1965, brought about the first comprehensive and collective review of Chinese art and painting theory since the May Fourth movement—which was primarily a reaction to foreign expansionism during early globalization. Ultimately, this chapter shows that "abstraction" in postwar Taiwan art was not always defined in opposition to representation—as is typical in Western art—but rather by the knowledge system within Chinese art theory; and its practice was supported first by European modern art and then by American abstract art.

Linking the Ancient with the Modern

Abstract paintings by Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, and Fong Chung-ray in the 1966 exhibition "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists" represented the character of Taiwanese modern art in the international arena. They extracted aesthetic principles from traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy and incorporated Western abstract painting techniques. The new style presented itself as heir to the narrative of Chinese art history as well as conversant with international art. These artists, however, were not the first among their peers in Taiwan dedicated to making abstract paintings. Nor were they the most articulate about their ideas. It was the artists later associated with the Ton Fan society who were the actual trailblazers of abstraction among the postwar generation of artists in Taiwan.

In 1953, the *United Daily News* published one of the first texts in Taiwan on twentieth-century Western abstract art. The article states: "At its pure state, [it] is to disburden from all the constraints of tradition, customs, and ideas, to say the least."[1] The statement underlines the subversive and critical function of abstraction in established systems of art-making and knowledge. As a vehicle for liberation, abstraction could contain political underpinnings through its anti-authoritarian connotations, a sensitive topic in a society under martial law. In the early 1950s, Li Chun-Shan (Li Zhongsheng, 1912–84), a Guangdong-born artist who had participated in the Storm Society, a modern art group in Shanghai in the early 1930s and subsequently in Tokyo's avant-garde art

[1] Dao Lin, "The Birth of Abstract Painting" (*chouxiang huihua de chansheng*), *United Daily News* Supplement, 5 September 1953, p. 6.

associations, gave private lessons to a group of young, aspiring artists who sought alternatives to academy-approved styles. Li introduced European modernist styles from the early twentieth century in articles in the *United Daily News* and encouraged his students to "use concepts of modern art to combine with the essence of Chinese traditions."[2] Among his students, Chen Tao-ming (Chen Daoming, b. 1931), later a founding member of the Ton Fan Society, began to explore abstraction around 1953, designating him the first among Taiwanese artists.[3] Two of his cohorts, Hsiao Ming-hsien (Xiao Mingxian, b. 1936) and Li Yuan-chia (Li Yuanjia, 1929–94), each produced abstract paintings that were chosen to represent the Republic of China at the fourth São Paulo Biennial in 1957, which made them the first Chinese participants in the international event. Though outnumbered by the twenty-one Japanese-style paintings, the young painters' inclusion in the official representation was a boost to a budding new style. Hsiao's work, *Composition* (*goucheng*), is no longer extant.[4] Also gone is Li's *As in Art* (*zuopin A*), which, judging from a small printed reproduction, is a vertical oil painting with lines making a grid-like structure in the center of the picture (Figure 3.1). Patches of paint resembling the effect of ink washes cover the grids while small script-

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[2] See Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan: The Modernization Movement of Chinese Art in Postwar Taiwan* (*wuyue yu dongfang—zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou taiwan zhi fazhan*) (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), 102. From Hsiao Chin, "Li Chun-Shan, a Hermitic Art Professional" (*li zhongsheng, yige yinju de yishu gongzuozhe*), *Yishujia* 17 (October 1976): 6.

[3] Hsiao Chin, interview by Wai-lim Yip, in *Dialogues with Contemporary Artist: Growth of Modern Chinese Painting* (*yu dangdai yishujia de duihua),* (Taipei: Dongda, 1987), 103. Chen Tao-ming's first abstract work from 1953 is non-extant. *The Mysterious Flute Player* from 1956, a painting in the cubist style, was selected by the KMT government for an exhibition in Thailand during a national celebration; artist's website, http://blog.artintern.net/article/192127; accessed 20 October 2016.

[4] In a similar style to the 1957 work, Hsiao Ming-hsien's *Painting A* from 1960 won the top prize at the First Hong Kong International Salon of Paintings, organized by The Modern Literature and Art Association. Hong Kong poet and artist Wucius Wong commented on "the form of the seal script and the clerical script" and "the color of jade and bronzes" that Hsiao had incorporated into his abstract oil painting. Wucius Wong, "The Artist in Self-Discovery" (*zijue zhong de yishujia*), *Xin Sichao* 5 (1 June 1960): 10, back cover.

like symbols appear on the periphery of the masses. Its formal resemblance to Kandinsky's abstract painting in the 1910s is striking.[5] Yet according to Li, the point of departure for his experimentation was ancient Chinese script. He wrote:

> Modern art is the expression against naturalism and of strong interior activity. Therefore it has the attributes to imply, symbolize, and abstract. Among [the types of modern art], abstract painting is the most direct way of expression. Its main principles are in dialogue with the abstract beauty of our nation's inscriptions on ancient bronze and stone tablets. I have for a few years been searching in oracle scripts and inscriptions on bronzes for the distinguished characteristics of our country's abstract art, in order to find the key element that defines our modernity, the distinguished trait of our national character, and the spirit of the modern.[6]

To Li, abstract art (*chouxiang yishu*) was not a foreign idea. In fact, abstract art was first understood in Taiwan as a component of ancient cultures. The aforementioned 1953 *United Daily News* article on Western modern art noted that "abstract or almost-abstract art" could be found in pre-historical life and in ancient Greek, Chinese, Arab cultures.[7] Léon Chang (Zhang Longyan), the resident arts writer for *Wenxing*, listed Egyptian mural art and abstract patterns on Greek earthenware as examples of "abstract paintings" (Figure 2.4).[8] Under these influences, the young artists found a path to modernize Chinese art through reexamining ancient visual material, such as primitive scripts, symbols, and patterns, to uncover a native-born modern quality. For example, Chen Tao-ming turned to seals and the oracle script, and Wu Hao (b. 1932) to the use of

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[5] Li Yuan-chia also referred to the inspirations from Kandinsky's use of lines and colors in the first Ton Fan exhibition catalogue. See Hsiao Chong-ray, 121.
[6] From Li Yuan-chia's application form for the Fourth International Biennial of the São Paulo City Modern Art Museum, 2 February 1957. See Chiang Po-shin, "Mirror of Modernity: Piecing Together/Installing 'new Painting' in Taiwan and Brazil (1957–1973)," in "Collision between Regions and Styles of Times—Collected Papers from the Academic Conference on Subjectivity of Taiwanese Art," (Taichung: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 170–71. Translation modified by author.
[7] Dao Lin, "Birth of Abstract Painting," p. 6.
[8] "Examples of Abstract Paintings" (*chouxianghua juli*), *Wenxing* 24 (1 October 1959): 19–20.

lines in Dunhuang murals, for inspiration.[9] To the artists, archaic symbols are akin to the imagery of European automatism and Surrealism by way of the uses of lines.[10] The retrospective approach was not to blindly return to ancient ways; rather, it was meant to rekindle a sense of belonging to a mother culture and perhaps to claim legitimacy in front of an international audience.

The Ton Fan artists' engagement with the ancient Chinese script was not an anomaly in the history of modern Chinese art. In the moments of national crisis in the 1920s, Chinese artists looked to historical artifacts and relics for inspiration, as a way of reassuring one's cultural legitimacy. Painter Huang Binhong (1865–1955) studied bronze and stone scripts in an effort to preserve "national essence."[11] Though Huang's fascination with the ancient script differed from Li Yuan-chia's direct use of it in paintings, the artists shared the impulse to return to archaic cultural roots at moments of identity crisis. Returning to ancient symbols has also been a strategy of mid-century American artists to fortify one's connection to the native culture. Unbeknownst to the artists in Taiwan, in the late 1930s and 1940s, Jackson Pollock, Adolf Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman incorporated symbols borrowed from ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, pre-Columbian artifacts and Northwest Coast American Indian culture for their work. Reverting to primitive and archaic art forms was a way to explore "American profundity," and constituted a turn away from European styles of abstraction and an

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[9] Hsiao Chong-ray quoted from the Ton Fan exhibition catalogue in 1957. Hsiao, 121–22. The preview article of the exhibition in the *United Daily News* included similar descriptions of the artists and their works. "Ton Fan Painting Exhibition and its Artists" (*dongfang huazhan jiqi yishujia*), *United Daily News*, 8 November 1957, p. 6.

[10] "Ton Fan Exhibition," p. 6.

[11] Huang Binhong founded the Chinese Epigraphy, Calligraphy, and Painting Study Society (*zhongguo jinshi shuhua yiguan xuehui*) in the mid-1920s, which aimed to "preserve the national essence and carry forward the glory of our nation; research arts to inspire in people loftiness of mind." See Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 97.

objection to the idea of "pure" abstract art drawn up by museum curators and critics.[12] There seems to be an anachronistic parallel wherein artists across the globe explored the interconnectedness between the ancient, the native, and the modern.

In the postwar period when Chinese ink paintings and Japanese-style art dominated the arts establishment in Taiwan and the government promoted an anti-Communist ideology, the Ton Fan artists' new direction could be read as a gesture of rebellion and a rejection of making art in service to politics. The Ton Fan artists' interest in archaic symbols produced an abstraction not defined by opposition to representation, but by a desire to divert from the restrictive creative environment. While making abstract art inspired by ancient Chinese civilization seems to be a strategy to completely dissociate from any possibility of a political reading of their work, the total de-politicization suggests an anarchic tendency.[13]

Though abstract painting occupied merely two spots in the 1957 São Paulo presentation, the impact of international exposure was significant to the young artists. The endorsement by the national organizations—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National History Museum—also meant that their new style had no problems with the authorities. They saw an opening in the otherwise impenetrable hierarchy of the domestic art world. Shortly after the success in Brazil, the Ton Fan Society launched their first

[12] Katy Siegel, "Not Really Abstract: The 1940s in the United States," "M+ Matters: Postwar Abstraction in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan," M+, Hong Kong, 27–28 June 2014, http://www.mplusmatters.hk/postwar/paper_topic4.php?l=en; accessed 20 Oct 2016.

[13] From my conversations with Ton Fan artists Hsiao Chin and Hsia Yan, I gathered that neither of them was interested in engaging in dialogues with the authorities; Li Yuan-chia also did not seem so. I suspect there is an anarchic undercurrent and disinterest in institutional involvement in their work and outlook as artists, which could explain why most of Ton Fan artists left Taiwan as early as they could.

exhibition in Taipei in November of 1957.[14] The Ton Fan artists reinterpreted Chinese visual materials through concepts imported from Western modern art movements, which gave the launch of their group more stylistic solidarity than the Fifth Moon artists, whose group identity was primarily based on the shared alma mater.[15] Despite gaining recognition, the status of the young artists within the art field was far from secured. The first Ton Fan exhibition was met with utter puzzlement and vicious response from within the cultural scene. In some of the exhibition articles published before and after the opening—many of which were written by the group's supporters—descriptions like "opaque," "mystic," "dream-like," "unadorned," "bleak," and "decay" showed a slight skepticism toward the works.[16] These descriptions hardly followed the moral-boosting rhetoric of the government. The paintings were poised to rattle the existing aesthetic order.

Abstract Painting against the Cultural Bureaucracy

In the postwar decades, the Kuomintang (KMT) government essentially made its war against the Chinese Communist into a cultural one. By endorsing traditional ink

[14] In September 1957 the works by several of Li Chun-Shan's students were selected for the National Art Exhibition and sent to an international exhibition in Thailand. The year before, several artists in this group were also selected for the National Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition. These events all bolstered the artists' confidence to form Ton Fan Society. See Hsiao Chong-ray, 108–09.

[15] The strongest reason that held the Fifth Moon artists together at first was not their stylistic beliefs but the shared academic pedigree—the department of art of the National Normal University, which had legitimacy and officialdom.

[16] As noted in the previous chapter, He Fan called the artists "Eight Bandits" in two preview articles in the *United Daily News*; Nu Xian's article in support of new art appeared in the second issue of *Wenxing* (5 December 1957), a month after the exhibition. Several reviews and reports of the shows include: Shiy De-jinn, "Review of the Ton Fan Exhibition" (*ping dongfang huazhan*), *United Daily News,* 12 November 1957, p. 6; "Ton Fan Exhibition," *United Daily News,* 8 November 1957, p. 6; He Fan, "Art Exhibition of the Bandits" (*xiangma huazhan*), *United Daily News*, 5–6 November 1957, p. 6. Hsiao Chong-ray's book recounts other reviews of the exhibition. Hsiao, 120.

painting styles from the mainland, they tied the mission of guarding and glorifying the true essence of Chinese culture to their national agenda. The cultural establishment thus valued lineage and ideology more than innovation; this was best represented by mainland ink painters Huang Junbi and Pu Xinyu.[17] In the eyes of the ink painters, Japanese-style paintings were of the outdated post-Impressionist style, and most importantly, not Chinese. However, since the mid-1940s, Japanese-style paintings were considered in the "national painting" category in the annual provincial and national exhibitions. A public debate about the proper designation of Japanese-style art began in 1951 and became a full-blown power struggle in the period of cultural self-reflection and identity reconstruction in a post-colonial, post-civil war community. This was a delayed response to the vacuum of artistic innovations in Chinese art since the May Fourth movement. Mainstream art and its discourse in Taiwan were preoccupied by rampant ideological battles, which left little room for artistic self-expression or innovation.

The São Paulo exhibition in 1957 exposed a predicament in the cultural bureaucracy: the government wanted to show international audiences Japanese-style paintings and sculptures—which seemed more aligned with Western taste—alongside new abstract paintings. Domestically, in contrast, they let the ink painters of mainland origin and Japanese-trained artists take the helm in art academies and official exhibitions. The asymmetry meant there was no conceptual framework uniting cultural policy beyond maintaining the status quo. The lack of direction in policy created a hyper-conservative cultural environment that was prone to disruption by any sign of deviation.

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[17] For brief biographies of Huang Junbi and Pu Xinyu, see Chapter One, note 53.

Abstraction: Freedom and Individuality

The Ton Fan artists' deliberate avoidance of political matters afforded them room to explore an entirely new visual language.[18] Li Yuan-chia's 1957 artistic statement acknowledged the use of modern art to explore an artist's interiority; modern art became a tool against uniform expressions of a conservative art establishment. This tenet would hold true for the rest of the career of this reticent and introverted artist as well as for several other Ton Fan artists. The search for modernity progressed in parallel to the search for individual identity and for freedom. Artists not only explored the modern potential of archaic Chinese script, but also reached into the metaphysical meanings of the symbols that evoked primitive, mystic, or personal feelings, something that the diasporic youth desperately needed. The surrealist methodology of "automatism" also provided inspiration for artists who sought to break from constraints.[19] Abstract art offered a social and creative framework and formal strategy for reform during the formative years of this group of artists.

Hsiao Chin, who moved to Madrid in 1956, played an important role in introducing a cross-cultural perspective on Chinese art with the knowledge of Western abstract art. The first among his generation to have first-hand experience with Western abstraction, Hsiao introduced Art Autre (*lingyishu*), including Informel (*fei xingxiang zhuyi*), to his Taiwanese peers through his articles for the *United Daily News*. He also facilitated the import of several Spanish artists' work in the inaugural Ton Fan exhibition

[18] Hsiao Chong-ray argued that Ton Fan artists did not participate in the debate because they were more open toward artistic sources, medium, and technique. Hsiao, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 177.
[19] Artist Shiy De-jinn (Xi Dejin, 1923–81), in his review of the first Ton Fan exhibition, highlighted the use of automatism in several Spanish Informel works on view in the exhibition. Shiy, "Review of Ton Fan Painting Exhibition," p. 6.

in Taipei. The highly gestural techniques and spontaneous approaches of Antoni Tàpies and Mark Tobey appealed to him. Hsiao especially favored Tobey's calligraphy-inspired abstraction and credited him with bringing the East to Western attention; Hsiao even called Tobey's work "the latest abstract Chinese art."[20] Recognizing a common language between Asian art and the international trend of abstraction prompted Hsiao's own search within the philosophy and history of Chinese painting in his art. The impact of foreign cultures and environment also renewed his interest in Chinese art.[21] He proposed that appreciation for the exalted spiritual, immaterial realm (*yijing*) of Chinese art—which most of his compatriots already had—was a valuable asset to understanding the formless art (*fei xingxianghua*) of the West.[22]

Early Critical Interpretation of Abstraction

Though abstraction's assault on Western realism in painting happened as early as 1910, the legacy of this revolt was not felt in Chinese art until the late 1950s. While the conservatives in Taiwan maintained that Chinese landscape painting was the best representative of the country's visual art, several more progressive critics began to re-evaluate classical Chinese art in search of a modern quality equivalent to that of their Western counterparts. For the first time in the history of Chinese art, theorists considered Chinese art alongside European or American art, rather than treating it as a recipient of foreign ideas. The expanding acceptance of this perspective is illustrated in a few

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[20] Hsiao Chin, "Trip to Italy V: Venice Biennial" (*yidali jixing zhi wu: weinisi guoji ernian zhan*), *United Daily News*, 24 October 1958, p. 7.
[21] Hsiao explained that the impact of Western culture upon his arrival in Spain pushed him to look back in Chinese culture to find inspiration and usable sources. In Yip, *Dialogues*, 103.
[22] Hsiao Chin, "Deciphering Non-Objective Painting" (*shi: fei xingxiang huihua*), *United Daily News*, 6 November 1958.

examples of critical essays. Nu Xian, an early supporter of Ton Fan artists, argued that modern painting is global (*shijiexing*), not regional (*diyuxing*)."[23] The scholar Léon Chang, among the first in the senior generation to embrace non-presentational art, also demonstrated this thinking in his writing. In his early 1958 column for *Wenxing*, Chang introduced two concepts, "re-presentation (*mohui*)" and "presentation (*biaojian*)," which was an all-encompassing classification of artistic creations in the poetry, theater, sculpture, music, and painting of world cultures. To Chang, figurative, narrative works fall into the former group: fourth-century painter Gu Kaizhi's *The Admonitions of a Court Instructress*, the Buddhist sculptures in Dunhuang, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes, Chardin's still life, and Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. The latter group consists of works that "present" the maker's feeling or opinion: Chinese literati paintings, classical, non-narrative Western music, paintings from Post-Impressionist to the Expressionists, and modern sculptures by Brancusi, Calder, and Arp, to name a few.[24]

Chang's article reflects the ongoing concerns within the Taiwanese cultural circle about modern art and abstraction. While Chang did not privilege either of these categories, he seemed intent on building an audience for a new visual art that was free of representation. To Chang, the distinctions between the two categories were the expressive quality communicated by the artist and the freedom granted the viewer. He especially emphasized the free-reign imagination a viewer should exercise based on his or her own moral capacity and experience. Chang recognized the inaccessibility of non-representational works, so he approaches this new language of art through other angles or

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[23] Nu Xian, "Introduction to Modern Painting" (*xiandai huihua jianjie*), *Wenxing* 2 (5 December 1957): 18.
[24] Léon Chang, "Art Appreciation 3—Infinite Joy" (*yishu xinshang zhi san—wuxian qingyu*), *Wenxing* 3 (5 January 1958): 12–15.

disciplines. Most remarkably, and typical of his scholarship, Chang used Chinese philosophy and art theory as the foundation for explaining all things artistic regardless of their origin or time period, a common strategy to use familiar vocabulary to explain unfamiliar concepts and visual material. A proposal to treat art appreciation as a universal, human experience; an interpretation of artistic creations based on a Chinese sensibility and value judgments; an attempt to erase hierarchical reading by placing Chinese art in the same discussion as non-Chinese, foreign cultures, Chang's methodology of contextualizing abstract art ensured the connection of Chinese art to the international discourse. The underlying thread that emerges is a sense of national pride and reassurance of the inherent advances that Chinese painting already possessed its relevance in the contemporary world.

Calligraphy and Abstraction

In *Wenxing*'s twenty-fourth issue, Chang put forward the most compelling argument to date for abstraction in an essay titled "Cursive Script and Abstract Painting" (*caoshu yu chouxianghua*). Chang delivered a Chinese perspective on abstract art and forcefully put Chinese calligraphy in direct conversation with examples of Western abstraction. Calligraphy, Chang argued, as a matter of fact, is "abstract, non-objective art," and so are Chinese characters. In naming the commonality between Chinese calligraphy and non-representational European and American art, Chang "tamed" the concept of abstract art for Chinese viewers. He promoted the idea that, as long as one comprehends the beauty of form, the linguistic dimension (in the case of calligraphy) or the structure of the form (in the case of Euro-American abstraction) is secondary. He drew parallels

between a few examples of Western abstract art and Chinese art: the balance between color and composition in Kandinsky's and Mondrian's work, as well as the spiritual profundity in Malevich's *White on White* from 1918 that align with the principles of Chinese aesthetics.[25] To affiliate abstract art to the Chinese literati culture, Chang used the famous verse by the fifth-century poet Tao Qian's "content with superficial meaning" (*buqiu shenjie*) to encourage his readers to perform minimal engagement with the object in order to yield the highest level of comprehension.[26] The kind of intangible, personal gratification offered by abstract art that Chang promoted seems to echo the sublime, the transcendence that many abstract painters pursued in their painting.

A two-page pictures spread, titled "Examples of Abstract Paintings" (*chouxianghua juli*), precedes Chang's article in the magazine and traces the development of abstraction in Western civilization (Figure 2.4). It emphasizes Chang's preferences in abstraction: a blend of archaic symbols, gestural lines, and surrealist, expressionist tropes. The spread includes an Egyptian fresco; abstract patterns on a Greek earthenware; Picasso's charcoal on paper *Femme nue debout (Standing Female Nude)* (1910); Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase* (1921); John Marin's watercolor of a New York City street corner (1920); Franz Kline's calligraphic abstraction from his solo exhibition in 1956; Dali's Surrealist painting (1936), and the iconic photograph by Hans Namuth of Jackson Pollock painting in action (1950). Dali's Surrealist dreamscape is captioned an "ink landscape" (*moshen shanshui*). Even the mechanical lines in Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase* (which first appeared in Chang's column in

[25] Léon Chang, "Cursive Script and Abstract Painting" (*caoshu yu chouxianghua*), *Wenxing* 24 (1 October 1959): 31.
[26] Ibid., 19–20, 28–31.

Wenxing's tenth issue), was implicitly linked to the gestural movement of the Chinese brush, central to the practice of cursive calligraphy.[27] While the picture spread seemed like a quick and wide sweep of art history, Chang included works that represented watershed moments in Western modern art: the Picasso drawing marked the definitive moment of his impact on the American art world[28] and Duchamp's painting scandalized America in the 1913 Armory Show in New York. It seemed that an element of shock was intended for the Chinese readers.

The best demonstration of Chang's belief in abstraction was a set of illustrations inserted in his text. Chang presented detailed, black-and-white images of four works: Huaisu (ca. 730s–770s)'s *Autobiography* calligraphy hand scroll (eighth century, Figure. 3.2) and Sun Guoting's (608–907) *Essay on Calligraphy* hand scroll (seventh century), both in the collection of Taipei's Palace Museum collection; Kandinsky's *Improvisations No. 30 (Cannon)* (1913) from the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago and Jackson Pollock's *Number 18* (1950) now in the Guggenheim Museum Collection (Figure 3.3).[29] The selection of illustrations reinforces his preference for the expressionist, liberal gestures of abstraction, as opposed to the geometric style. All four works record the artists' energy directly through the lines, marks, or colors (though the reproductions are

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[27] Ibid.

[28] The Picasso drawing *Femme nue debout (Standing female nude)* is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Picasso hung the work in his Paris studio and was pictured in December 1910 with it in a photograph in the collection of Musée Picasso, Paris. The photographer Alfred Stieglitz exhibited *Femme* in the first American exhibition of work by Picasso in his gallery at 291 Broadway, New York, in 1911, which became a revelation to American artists. See Leah Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," in Dickerman, ed., *Inventing Abstraction 1910–1925—How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 17.

[29] The Pollock painting, an oil and enamel on Masonite (measuring 56.0 x 56.7 cm) entered the Guggenheim Museum's collection in 1991, but it is unclear where Léon Chang had seen the work (in person or in publications) prior to 1959. Guggenheim Museum collection record online, https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3484;, accessed 15 October 2016.

black and white). By presenting only cropped frames of the works, Chang highlighted the variety, rhythm, and exuberance of the lines and discarded the scale of the original works. The magnified effect reveals a striking visual similarity between the clusters of lines in the oil paintings and the suites of strokes in the calligraphy in their expressive content and the exposed creative process. The linguistic meanings of the characters and the effect of colors in the oil paintings are secondary to the pure, explosive power of the lines themselves. The only distinction between the Chinese and Western works is that there remains a logic that governs the calligraphic lines—for the Chinese readers—while the composition of the Western paintings seems completely spontaneous. Here, Chinese classical calligraphy is effectively positioned as a critical and visual counterpart to European and American modern art.

Pollock resonates throughout this comparative study. His two appearances in the same issue of *Wenxing* signals his international fame and reach in the consciousness of Chinese intellectuals, especially through Namuth's photograph for *Life*. As the only artist's body presented in the picture spread, it underscores a new mode of art making, in which the "action" of dripping and pouring onto a surface, the disconnectedness of the painter's hand from the canvas, and his body's disproportion to the scale of the work were communicated to Chinese readers. Pollock's extended right arm holding a paint-dripping stick, his off-kilter body balanced precariously on one knee on the canvas and the back foot at an angle, and the black-and-white contrast created by the lines on the canvas, as well as other canvases leaning against the studio wall, convey how an artist was fully immersed in his work. The body language of a free, assertive artist in the

process of creation must have stimulated many young, desperate artists in Taiwan.[30] Chang likened the flow of energy in the gestures that take hold of his body to the practice of calligraphy. He notes that Pollock's painting requires one to "hold the breath and observe, then it is music to the ears."[31] Chang's lateral thinking not only found symmetry in the visual production of the two cultures but also gave strong emphasis to the process of making art. The images of Pollock at work seemed to dispel the doubts toward paintings with no apparent subject matter and give the local readers a nuanced understanding to modern abstract art and its practice that was never available before.

Historian Hsiao Chong-ray argues that Chang's connecting Chinese cursive script and European-American modern abstract art was a self-protective strategy to introduce unfamiliar, foreign art ideas to a society where conservatism and societal pressure could extinguish any sparks of the avant-garde. Hsiao interpreted Chang's statements as critical reasoning for new art, gave new meaning to the calligraphic abstraction, and catapulted Liu Kuo-sung's future experimentation.[32] Indeed, Chang, along with the *Wenxing* editors, attempted to demystify and de-politicize the way foreign abstract art was understood by conservatives. I would argue further that equating calligraphy to abstract painting allows calligraphy to stand firmly as a cultural asset and an aesthetic advantage for Chinese artists, critics, and intellectuals of the era, against the dominance of abstract art in the West. Going abstract by way of calligraphy also eliminates the need to reduce to immaterial form, which was the primary concern of Western artists. While Chang

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[30] Liu Kuo-sung referenced the Namuth photograph of Pollock dripping paint in the 7 November 1959 issue of *Life* in a *Bihui* article on abstract art. Liu, "On Abstract Painting" (*lun chouxiang huihua*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 28, 32.
[31] Chang, "Cursive Script," 31.
[32] Hsiao Chong-ray, "The Pushing Hands of Art Movements" (*meiyun tuishou*), *Wenxun* 313 (November 2011): 90.

embraced the iconic examples of European and American modern art, he emphasized the equal—if not more—weight calligraphy held over the late-booming abstraction of European and American art. Through his theoretical formulations, Chang proposed a bridge between Chinese art's marginality with the central, Western position, and gives license to artists in Taiwan to mine their own artistic heritage for inspiration. Chang validated a nationalistic direction for rejuvenating painting. In a time when cultural inferiority and urgency to reform were felt across the Taiwanese artistic circles, Chang offered a point of view that was both forward thinking and self-aware. His push for calligraphic abstraction also anchored the future explorations of artists of Fifth Moon Society including Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che.

Liu Kuo-sung's Emergence

While Ton Fan society artists mined ancient Chinese script and artifacts for inspiration and avoided the politicizing of their art, Liu Kuo-sung, still enrolled in the fine art department of the National Normal University, chose to actively engage in a political battle. Writing in the *United Daily News*, and later in *Bihui*, Liu threw himself into the heated debate surrounding the problematic designation of Japanese-style painting in the cultural infrastructure. Liu protested vehemently the cronyism of the Japanese-style painters who dominated the selection committees of the Provincial and National exhibitions. In numerous essays critiquing the establishment, Liu began, unabashedly, to point fingers directly at senior painters. His first use of the term "abstract" (*chouxiang*) was in a critique of Japanese-trained oil painter Lee Shih-Chiao's mid-career exhibition in 1958. Liu relegated Lee's work into the outdated mimetic tradition of Western art. By

citing the translated and abbreviated theories of Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl, Liu argued that modern oil paintings had progressed from mimetic impulses, and that the goal was now to free the object from the "unending flux of being" in order for the maker to confidently master an external world.[33] Though the main aim of Liu's turn to Western art theories was to debunk the Japanese-trained artists' claim to modernity in their paintings, this article marks the first occasion where Liu declared the centrality of abstraction in modern art.[34] Abstract art, at this point, embodied an enormous potential to reset artistic standards, which suited the mentality of recovery and reconstruction that Liu and his colleagues initiated. Modern abstract art, in other words, provided a way out for the young generation.

Liu did not begin to make abstract art immediately after this point, however. He was still devoted to "total Westernization," without committing to a specific style.[35] His thorough swallowing and digesting of foreign art helped him make his own informed choice of artistic style. He made semi-figurative works with surrealist, fauvist tendencies. In "Not a Manifesto" of May 1959, his first essay for the Fifth Moon Society, he seemed to reserve from declaring total abstraction or any designated style and pleaded for room for more personal explorations. He wrote:

> Some people have the wrong idea that all "formless" (*fei xingxiang*) is "new," but they didn't know that "new" means newness in thought and expression, not just in "form." Modern painting is not limited to the concerns for "figures," because the reinvention of form does not count as

[33] Liu Kuo-sung, "The Philosophical Thought of Modern Painting—Also a Review of Lee Shih-chiao's Painting Exhibition," *United Daily News*, 16 June 1958, p. 6. English translation references the quotes of Worringer in Dickerman, "Inventing Abstraction," 23.
[34] Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 180.
[35] Liu's period of total Westernization is approximately from right after his graduation from university to around 1959. Liu, interview by author, Taoyuan, 5 December 2012.

> revolutionary or progressive. Therefore, whether or not our work is figurative, it should convey our personal feelings.[36]

Though Liu almost reached a theoretical justification for abstract art in the realm of Chinese art, he seemed hesitant, or even resistant, to complete the leap. His hesitancy suggests that the stage of their development did not seem to require total abstraction. Many contemporaries of Liu also stayed in this grey area. Artists of the Modern Printmaking Society (*xiandai banhuahui*), including Chen Ting-shih (Chen Tingshi), Qin Song, Chiang Han-Tung (Jiang Handong), Lee Shi-Chi (Li Xiqi, b. 1938), and Yuyu Yang (Yang Yingfeng), formed in 1958, explored woodcut prints that retain somewhat figurative, often symbol-like forms reminiscent of the archaic scripts that Ton Fan Society members like Hsiao Chin and Li Yuan-chia explored. While Liu's summary of the Fifth Moon group's objective allowed artists more time and room to ponder the foundational questions of painting, such as technique and method, it also proposed another challenge for artists: how would they render legible their emotional content, thoughts, and feelings through new ways of painting? How should the new mode of expression reflect the new state of Chinese mentality?

The Rise and the Setbacks of Abstract Art

By the end of the 1950s, new, abstract styles by Taiwanese artists prevailed in international exhibitions, which pushed the artists to continue down this audacious path.[37] Literature and art magazines that supported the young artists, like *Wenxing*, *Bihui*, and

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[36] Translated by author. Liu Kuo-sung, "Not A Manifesto—Written before the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*bushi xuanyan—xiezai wuyue huazhan zhiqian*)," *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 28.
[37] For example, Qin Song's woodcut print in semi-abstract style won an award in the São Paulo Biennial in 1959. See Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 231.

the modern poetry magazine *Epoch* (*chuangshiji*) started to occupy a more significant portion of the intellectual sphere as they increased their coverage of modern art, which added to the movement's public presence. In January 1960, the National History Museum organized the "Modern Oil Painting Special Exhibition" (*xiandai youhua tezhan*), featuring "pure abstraction" by Hu Chi-chung (Hu Qizhong), Liu Kuo-sung, Shiy De-jinn, Ku Fu-sheng (Gu Fusheng), and Chuang Che. A critic reported that Hu created abstraction with "fluid, calligraphic lines" and sequenced numbers as titles while Liu made works reminiscent of the colors and atmosphere of traditional ink painting, with titles extracted from poetry.[38] For the National History Museum to host an exhibition mostly of abstraction indicated a significant rise in their social recognition. In 1959 the Today Art Society (*jinri huahui*), launched by the oil painter Lee Shih-chiao (Li Shiqiao, the very artist that Liu ferociously criticized), made opposition to abstract art its mandate,[39] which suggests the fast-rising status of abstract art. The establishment of Today Art Society also indicated a divide within the art community based on origin: it consisted of Taiwan-born recent graduates of several teachers' academies, which set them apart from the mainland-born (*waishengren*) artists making abstract painting.

The multiple styles that coexisted in Taiwanese society around 1959 reflected a relatively tolerant cultural environment as well as a promising outlook for the artists.[40] Following the stream of successes in domestic and international exhibition arenas, the

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[38] Bai Danfu, "Three Painting Exhibitions in the New Year" (*xinnian zhong zhanchu de sange huazhan*), *Bihui* 1, no. 9 (20 Jan 1960): 24.
[39] "A Chronology of Art Media and Space from 1960 to 1980," *Art Critique of Taiwan* 60 (1 October 2014): unpaginated.
[40] Chuang Che used the phrase, "none may encroach upon the precincts of another" (*jingshui bufan heshui*) to describe the coexistence between different styles in the art world. Chuang, interview by author, New York, 7 August 2014.

Chinese Modern Art Center (*zhongguo xiandai yishu zhongxin*)—an independent organization comprising seventeen art societies from across the island and at least 145 artists—convened for an inaugural exhibition at the National History Museum on March 25, 1960. The Center sought to fortify the legitimacy of the modern art movement. While not all of the art societies advocated abstract art, they were bound together by an enthusiasm for new possibilities. At the exhibition preview, however, members of the Chinese Art Association, an affiliate of the propagandist machine, accused Qin Song's new oil painting *Spring Lantern* (*chundeng*) of treason (Figure 3.4). The painting's all-over composition, with bold, black and perpendicular strokes on top of a mysterious primal red, yellow, and grayish ground, somehow conjured an upside-down image of the character "Jiang," the surname of President Chiang. The unfounded accusation of overthrowing the leader resulted in the museum cancelling the exhibition before the opening. The painting in question was confiscated and the promising Center disbanded before its formal launch.[41]

This incident happened during a social and political storm in Taiwan. A few days before the exhibition, Chiang Kai-shek was elected to his third term as president. Many intellectuals, including Lei Chen (Lei Zhen) of *Free China* (*ziyou zhongguo*), opposed the undemocratic electoral process. Their highly vocal demand for a balanced party politics was met by severe punishment by the Chiang government. *Free China* was shut down in September and Lei was imprisoned. It was thus little surprise that a painting suspected of containing a hidden anti-Chiang message set off alarms. Although the conservatives had

[41] The work apparently remained sealed and in the storage of the National History Museum until 1993. Now it is in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum collection.

close ties with the government, no official terms of censorship were issued.[42] The possibility of a political reading of art was always present in the postwar Taiwanese society, yet it was the atmosphere of fear and self-silencing that triggered the unfortunate event. Abstraction was the victim of an aesthetic discord, politicized and interpreted through the lens of suspicion and fear, in a highly repressed cultural environment under martial law.

The derailment of the Chinese Modern Art Center marked a definitive moment for some artists rethinking their strategy and rhetoric or seeking ways to move abroad.[43] The art world descended into a debilitating debate after the setback. On the surface, the debate was a power struggle between artists making different styles of art. At the core of the debate, however, was the question of cultural identity: of how to hold Chinese culture against the infiltration of Western ideas due to globalization and power redistribution after the war. Additionally, the challenge to the status quo in the art establishment was misconstrued as an attack on the one-party, autocratic government, which further complicated the issue. The effort to demystify abstraction was complicated by the widespread, poisonous suspicion of the rebellious nature of abstract art.

The unpredictability of governmental attitudes about art did not necessarily have many practical implications on the career of artists, however. Despite the controversies surrounding the Qin Song incident at the Chinese Modern Art Center, abstract paintings

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[42] Art historian John Clark has also observed that abstract artists in Taiwan were not subjected to direct political constraint. He writes, "whether this was in the end due to the foolishness of his opponents' arguments, to the vigor of the defense by Liu and other artists, to the unsuitable nature of 'abstract' artists as targets for tarring with a 'red' brush (many were mainlanders who had already done service in Taiwan), or to the ruling coalition of factions in the Guomindang not wishing to get involved in what, for them, was probably a peripheral issue." See John Clark, "Liu Guosong's *The Road of Chinese Modern Painting*," in *JOSA* 26 & 28 (1995–1996), 52.

[43] Li Yuan-chia left for Italy in 1961, Ku Fu-sheng for Paris in 1962, and Hsia Yan (Xia Yang) for Paris in 1964.

by young artists dominated the national representation in the 1961 São Paulo Biennial, and Chuang Che, a Fifth Moon artist, was part of the seven-person jury.

During this confusing period, the philosopher and scholar Hsu Fu-Kuan (Xu Fuguan) published a series of newspaper articles starting in August 1961 that denounced abstract art; he deemed it illogical and merely a transitional phase of art. A scholar of Confucian philosophy and not trained in art connoisseurship, he fixated on the disruptive function of modern art movements and questioned their sustainability in contemporary society.[44] Hsu's distrust of modern art was not based on the quality of the art or its revitalizing potential for painting, but on its threat to Chinese values on a social level. He did not see any possibility for a convergence of the two aesthetic systems, nor for the value of Western art in enriching Chinese expression (or vise versa). The ultimate insult that Hsu gave the modern art movement was that "abstract art paves the way for Communism."[45] Because such a serious accusation could have triggered unimaginable political consequences, Liu Kuo-sung responded profusely with counter-attacks and corrections, showing evidence of how European modern artists were, in fact, anti-Communist and that the Chinese Communists favored only Soviet-style realist paintings.[46] Hsu and Liu's debate, taking place across several newspapers including *United Daily News* and *The Overseas Chinese Daily* (*Wat Kiu Yat Po*, a Hong Kong paper), and occurring in the context of what seemed to be a national exercise in debating

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[44] For a detailed summary of Hsu Fu-kuan's theorizations against modern art, see Hsiao Chiong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 314–23.

[45] Translated by author. Hsu Fu-kuan, "The Path and Trend of Modern Art" (*xiandai yishu de guiqu*), in Liu Kuo-sung, *The Road of Chinese Modern Painting* (*zhongguo xiandai hua de lu)* (Taipei: Wenxing, 1965), 181.

[46] Liu Kuo-sung, "Why Give Modern Art to the Enemy—To Mr. Hsu Fu-kuan" (*weisheme ba xiandai yishu huagei diren—xiang xu fuguan xiansheng qingjiao*), *United Daily News,* 29–30 August 1961, p. 10.

the consequences of Westernization, reflects the conservative class's chronic psychological unease about Western values, visuality, and the idea of modernity. As much as artists sought to separate art from politics, the social and political climate held their art hostage. Up to this point, the modernization project had navigated gingerly between the promises of the Western approach toward art, the protective conservatism of Chinese society, and the insistence of determined artists to change the look of Chinese paintings.[47]

These two incidents—and Liu Kuo-sung's active role in seeking to change the social opinion toward new art—show a contrast in how the Fifth Moon and Ton Fan artists handled their relationship with tradition and their social image. Most artists in the Fifth Moon Society occupied a higher social position because of the superior ranking of the National Normal University, which trained high school teachers. Ton Fan artists, on the other hand, were either air force personnel or elementary school teachers who graduated from the Taipei Normal College. The difference in background contributed to the divergence of the two groups' behavior, direction of art, and career progression.[48] The Ton Fan group never denounced tradition, as the group's name honored the "Eastern" heritage, though they certainly did not support the status quo. Their decision to return to archaic and philosophical sources for their art, to maintain a low profile in the media, and to relocate to Europe in the early 1960s, seem to suggest a reluctance to draw any

[47] Chuang Che commented the reason he did not participate in the controversies surrounding the issue is because he saw that Hsu Fu-kuan fundamentally did not understand art and thus examined it with an anti-Communist perspective. Yet he admired Hsu's books on the philosophy of Zhuangzi and Chinese aesthetics which he used for teaching his class at Tunghai University after 1968. Chuang, interview by author, New York, 7 August 2014.

[48] Hsiao Chong-ray also shares this view. Hsiao, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 295–98.

political attention to their causes.[49] While Ton Fan artists seemed to withdraw from any potential political entanglements, Fifth Moon artists, especially Liu and to a certain extent Chuang, seemed more concerned with the official and popular reception of their work, and they thus more frequently inserted their presence in the media to confront the establishment. This difference in approach would also affect the style and the fate of their art in the coming years.

In Defense of Abstraction: Ideology and Aesthetics

The controversies in 1960 and 1961 prompted artists to move beyond questions of East and West and instead to prioritize the dissemination of their own theoretical formulations about abstraction. This urgency resulted in a flurry of writings on abstraction in cultural magazines regarding its definition and its usefulness to the state of Chinese art and to art-making. Liu's media savvy in particular played an important role in educating the public and raising the profile of abstract art. "If there are no new theories to support new production, our work would not stand the test of time," he wrote in 1962.[50] Starting in 1960, his articles in *Bihui* and *Wenxing* focused on abstraction as a major concept of modernization instead of on the shortcomings of the existing academy styles, arguments that had defined his public persona since the mid-1950s. In an attempt to demystify the origin of twentieth-century abstract art, Liu emphasized that Western abstract art had taken inspiration from Chinese fine art and philosophy. He argued that it

[49] Hsiao observed that Ton Fan artists never advocated "anti-tradition." Their strategy of innovation was not to criticize the conservatives but more positively portray the potential of traditional material. Hsiao, 207–08.
[50] Liu Kuo-sung, "The Past, the Present, the Tradition" (*guoqu, xianzai, chuantong*), *Wenxing* 59 (1 September 1962): 18.

shared the purpose of self-expression with Chinese classical painting, an echo of Léon Chang's way of explaining abstraction to a Chinese readership. Liu especially emphasized that "individual thought" championed by abstract art was the direct opposite of the "collective thought" of Communist societies.[51] Declaring the political correctness of modern abstract art shows Liu's awareness of the psychological reassurance and stability that aligning abstraction with the KMT ideology would bring to his cause, even though the authoritarian rule of that regime often also threatened such freedom of expression. Liu's interpretation sought to underline the apolitical motivation of making modern abstract art to repair the damage that the Qin Song incident may have brought.

One of the most remarkable contributions to the discourse of modern art was the special issue of *Bihui* in October 1960 dedicated to modern painting. With Liu as the chief arts editor of the publication, the issue featured several key voices from two generations and from two Sinophone locations—voices including Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, Léon Chang of Taiwan and Lui Shou-kwan (Lü Shoukwun) of Hong Kong.[52] The seminal issue addressed the history, logic, necessity, and progressive features of modern art, with the goal to "rejuvenate Chinese art."[53] It substantially increased the critical weight of the abstract art movement and shaped the discourse on the subject. One of Liu's two articles chronicled the development of Western art since the late-nineteenth century and recorded how abstraction became the chosen visual language in the twentieth

[51] Liu Kuo-sung, "The Essence of Modern Painting—And to Answer Mr. Fang Qi" (*xiandai huihua de benzhi wenti—jian da fangqi xiansheng*), *Bihui* 1, no. 12 (27 April 1960): 18–19. In the August issue of *Wenxing* in the same year, Liu wrote a piece with similar arguments, titled "On the Appreciation of Abstract Art," *Wenxing* 34 (1 August 1960): 23–24.
[52] Another contributor to this volume, He Xiaokang, is in fact Liu Kuo-sung using his pen name. Lin Lee, e-mail correspondence with author, 2 November 2016.
[53] Editorial, *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 2.

century in the West. Bitterly, he concluded: "Twentieth-century art is an era for abstraction . . . however, our country's art scene still does not see this. As conservatives tried to obstruct the development of a global phenomenon, they will eventually be buried under the magnificent era of abstraction."[54] In the other article, sprawling over nine pages, Liu covered the intent, content, meaning, and technique of abstraction, and he frequently drew examples from classical Chinese art and theory to illustrate how abstraction is not foreign to Chinese art.[55] A defensive tone permeates Liu's essays, as if they were composed for the purpose of debate, contrasting Chang's articles, which connoted a more welcoming, pedagogical tone.

In the same issue of *Bihui*, Chuang Che shared his contemplations on abstraction and the modern potential of Chinese calligraphy in "Poetic, Un-Poetic, and Modern Art." The essay demonstrates the depth of Chuang's understanding of Western modern art and his appreciation for its ability to convey the inner world of artists. Interested in how Chinese art and aesthetics fit in the discourse of Western art, Chuang separated the "poetic" (*shi de*) ("human being," "self-consciousness") from the "un-poetic" (*fei shi de*) (rational, unemotional) in Western modern art since the late-nineteenth century.[56] Chuang was thoughtful in discerning the differences between Kandinsky's interests in the rhythm of line and color and Pollock's flamboyant traces of drips and splashes, rather than grouping them in the same category the way Chang had. Chuang favored the poetic type of abstraction for Chinese art—or in his words, "un-European" (against European

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[54] Translated by author. Lu Ting, "The Development and Trend of Recent Art" (*jindai huihua de fazhan ji qushi*), *Bihui* 2, no.3 (1 October 1960): 10.
[55] Liu, "On Abstract Painting," 25.
[56] Chuang's original translation in the essay, "Poetic, Un-Poetic, and Modern Art" (*shi de fei shi de yu xiandai yishu*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 11.

scientific and industrial paradigms), passionate, romantic, expressionist—as opposed to the geometric, rational, reductive styles of Constructivism or Neo-Plasticism.[57] In short, Chuang leaned toward the humanistic, emotional dimension of abstraction more than toward the compositional or perceptual concerns of early European abstraction. This preference for the poetic quality of painting would remain the guiding principle of Chuang's art-making for the rest of his career.

Lui Shou-kwan's seminal essay, "Free, Independent, Absolute Art," alongside writings by his Taiwanese counterparts in the same special issue of *Bihui*, asserts that art must be free from constraints—politics, society, and the format and form of art—in order to achieve individuality.[58] The aspiration and optimism imbued in the audacious declaration of art's independent value was encouraging to artists in *Bihui*'s circle. In his writing, Lui conducted a thorough investigation of the history of Chinese art in his essay (split into two parts and published in separate issues of *Bihui*) that set his viewpoint apart from the writings by Liu and Chuang, which concentrated on analyzing Western modern art movements. Liu later used Lui's abstract ink paintings that came from his deep engagement with traditional art as the best support for the legitimacy of abstraction.[59] Lui's devotion to Chinese culture could be attributed to his being a colonial subject in Hong Kong compensating for a lack of proper tutelage on Chinese art, justifying his participation in the modernization project of Chinese art. The colonial environment was

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[57] Ibid., 11–14.
[58] Lui Shou-kwan, "Free, Independent, Absolute Art" (*ziyou duli de juedui yishu*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 33. The second half of the article was published in *Bihui* 2, no. 8 (15 June 1961): 21–26.
[59] Liu Kuo-sung, "The Mr. Lui Shou-kwan I Know: An Abstract Artist that Matured from Traditional Painting Scrolls" (*wosuo zhidao de lü shoukwun xiansheng: yige cong chuantong huazhou zhong chengzhang de chouxiang huajia*), *United Daily News*, 20 February 1963, p. 6. The article also notes that Lui had an exhibition in Taipei.

generally tolerant, yet it isolated the artists from the cultural legacy in China and from the revival movements in Taiwan, as well as from the "mainstream" development in the U.K. In stating that modern art must contain an individual's cultural identity, Lui urged artists to search within Chinese art and tradition for its contemporary relevance, and at the same time strive to be independent from its burden.[60] Lui's emphasis on the individual expression of artists enlightened his colleagues in Taiwan, where absolute freedom from politics or social burden was not easily obtained.[61]

In May 1961, The Fifth Moon Society's first manifesto appeared in its fifth annual exhibition catalogue. It announced the group's desired style: abstract art. In a defiant tone, the essay declared that young avant-gardes must "stand on the continuum of tradition and at the forefront of a new tradition" by "holding onto the consciousness of abstraction embedded in [Chinese] traditions and the magnificent spiritual power it would generate after being conveyed through form" and by "widely absorbing Western movements in recent history to nurture a new look of the modern painting of China." The ambitious goal is delivered with a sense of urgency that seemed to lament its own belatedness in achieving modernity. This lament was made especially poignant because the essay opened with a quote from Kandinsky about the spiritual dimension of art and emphasized that it was from fifty years ago.[62] This was the first time the group articulated its view on the position of modern Chinese art: to bridge traditional Chinese culture and Western modern art. While the goal seems broad, it presents the scope of the artists' vision and their desire for the freedom to explore the possible intersections of both

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[60] Lui, "Free, Independent, Absolute Art (Continued)," 26.
[61] For more on Lui, see Chapter Two, 152–53.
[62] Translated by author. *Fifth Moon Exhibition 5* (*wuyue huazhan*), 11–14 May 1961, unpaginated.

cultures. The manifesto clearly had culminated from earlier critical theories and progressed from declaring what not to do to asserting what ought to be done.

The manifesto marked the group's departure from their previous goal of total Westernization, a shift indicating that artists had found value in the abstract qualities of Chinese painting. Though the allegiance to traditional values of painting seemed strategic and preemptive in rebutting malicious accusations (and to prove that they had mastered the study of traditions), it actually allowed artists liberty to explore the meaning of Chineseness in painting from metaphysical or metaphorical approaches. To clear the doubts of any who might still accuse them of total Westernization, the text explained that in the new art, "the superiority of Chinese ethnicity [. . .] is deeply saturated in the pure spiritual realm rather than expressed through tools and materials."[63] The statement sought to produce a language of abstraction specific to Chinese culture.

The momentous fifth exhibition of the Fifth Moon Society included thirty-six paintings by seven artists, the largest number of participants to date (Figure 3.5). New recruits strengthened the group's advocacy of abstract painting: Fong Chung-ray and Hu Chi-chung, two Four Seas Society artists in the navy based in Kaohsiung, who had already garnered a reputation for their abstract paintings for the past few years; and a newcomer to the scene, Han Hsiang-ning, who had just finished a certificate at the department of fine art at the National Normal University, and who made an impressive debut at the São Paulo Biennial that year with his austere oil paintings. The works in the exhibition are predominantly abstract oil paintings. A picture spread in *Wenxing*'s feature on the exhibition and the catalogue show a spectrum of abstract paintings: from the

[63] Ibid.

romantic calligraphic strokes by Hu Chi-chung, to the abstract-expressionist eruptions by Kuo Tong-yung (Guo Dongrong, b. 1927), and Chuang Che, to the scratchy patches of black by Liu Kuo-sung and atmospheric washes of Fong Chung-ray, to the solemn, contemplative rectangular blocks by Han Hsiang-ning and Ku Fu-sheng.[64] None of the works look like classical Chinese paintings, and almost all of them employed an all-over composition. They seem to unanimously convey turbulent, chaotic emotions, with resolute executions.

The disconnection between the turmoil expressed in the works themselves and the theoretical clarity in the exhibition manifesto shows an art movement in transition. This presented a difficulty for reviewers. Léon Chang noticed the darkened mood of the paintings, yet he argued that the emotional readings are excessive to the work themselves, perhaps in an effort to protect the artists from ill-meaning ideological readings.[65] Yu Kwang-chung (Yu Guangzhong), while noticing the emotional drama in the pictures, largely ignored the collective gloom in his review in *Wenxing*. He labeled the works "absolute abstraction," and "absolute abstract expressionism," though the works were not subjectless but were only without representational imagery. The two critics, both instrumental in shaping the discourse and understanding of the new art, downplayed the artists' internal struggles and the sentiments of discontent toward the state of the art, and they found alternative ways to interpret the works. Yu provided a guide for viewers to read each abstract painting. He analyzed the uses of color, compositional strategies, and

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[64] "Selection from the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan xuancui*), *Wenxing* 43 (1 May 1961): 22.
[65] Lei Weng [Léon Chang], "A Prelude to the Fifth Moon Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan xiaoyin*), *Wenxing* 43 (1 May 1961): 23.

the surface texture to posit his theories on how those qualities connect to the processes and emotional intensity of the works.[66]

The exhibition signaled a shift in the style of critique. While personal interpretations of the visual material remained valid in art criticism, the discussion had shifted from the classical formula of referencing historical works, lineage, or techniques to free association. Yu's review touched on belief systems (Chuang Che's painting evoked a mystic, religious aura), music (Hu Chi-chung's work likened to the sound of a viola), personal tragedies (the recent death of Kuo Tong-yung's mother), Western abstraction (Han Hsiang-ning's work compared to Mark Rothko's), and modern poetry (Liu Kuo-sung's work recalled Chou Meng-tieh's poetry).[67] The proponents of the new style of art set an example for viewers to relate to the work through personal experiences—a modern approach—rather than treating them as isolated, "self-sufficient" paintings. The critical review was instrumental in increasing the accessibility of abstraction for the lay reader and in underlining the individuality of the artists.

Abstraction: Mindful Contemplation (*jingguan*)

Around the time that Hsu Fu-kuan lashed out with his criticisms of abstraction, Hsiao Chin, Li Yuan-chia, and a few other European and Japanese artists launched the Punto International Movement in Milan. Punto, "the point" in Italian, signifies both a beginning and an end. To the artists, the point was "solemn, pure, positive, eternal and

[66] Yu Kwang-chung, "Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan*), *Wenxing* 44 (1 June 1961): 25–26.
[67] Ibid.

constructive."[68] According to Hsiao, their group emphasizes "the most pure aspect of art," which is the energy of self-examination (*neixing de jingshenxing*). In other words, Hsiao anchored his subjectivity on the mind during the creative process. The artistic movement valued the constructiveness that spiritual substance could bring to their chaotic, materialistic society, a value particularly suited to the postwar condition.[69] By then, Hsiao had moved to Milan and met Lucio Fontana and other artists who had replaced the Informel generation in leading the reinvention of painting. Hsiao had since renounced his admiration for Informel and chided the nihilism and cynicism of Neo-Dada and Neo-realism, deeming these movements non-constructive.[70] Instead, he favored a new kind of contemplative art by an international group of artists, including Mark Rothko, Sam Francis, Fontana, and Kengiro Azuma, in a 1961 exhibition titled "Art and Contemplation" in Venice. These paintings presented reduced actions and measured gestures to achieve abstraction through a variety of materials, and they required the viewer's contemplative participation. Although spontaneity and expressiveness were still somewhat visible, Hsiao was partial to the more positive, constructive ends of these expressions, as opposed to the kind that indulged temperamental, existential woes.[71] In other words, he favored a mindful control during the process of painting (Figure 3.6). His

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[68] Huang Chaohu, "Introduction to Punto International Art Movement" (*pangtu guoji yishu yundong jianjie*) W*enxing* 70 (1 August 1963): 43. Translation of the terms by An-yi Pan, in "Modern Taiwan Ink Art: Postwar Internationalism," "M+ Matters: Postwar Abstraction: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan," M+, Hong Kong, 27–28 June 2014. http://www.mplusmatters.hk/postwar/paper_topic3.php?l=en, accessed 20 October 2016.

[69] Hsiao Chin, "Modernity and Tradition—Writing before the Inaugural Punto International Art Movement in the Country" (*xiandai yu chuantong—xiezai pangtu guouji yishu yundong shouci zai guonei zhanchu qian*), *United Daily News*, 28 July 1963, p. 8.

[70] Hsiao Chin, "Review and Introduction of the Arte e Contemplazione Exhibition in Venice" (*pingjie weinisi yishu yu jinguan zhan*), *Wenxing* 49 (1 Nov 1961): 33.

[71] The Venice exhibition took place between July and October of 1961 at the Palazzo, and included works by Kengiro Azuma, Lucio Fontana, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Martin Bradley, Walasse Ting, Mark Rothko, Bram Van Velde, Antonio Tapies, Wols, Emilio Scanavino, and Paul Emile Bor.

proposal for Punto came from the desire for a more spiritual approach to art, an inward reflection that recalls the emphasis on an artist's interiority during the early stages of the Ton Fan society. But the scope of Hsiao's ambition for abstraction has since expanded. In forming the Punto group with Antonio Calderara, Pia Pizzo, Azuma, and Li, Hsiao called for a cosmopolitan engagement of ancient Eastern philosophies, not just in form but also in terms of thought, "not restricted by national boundaries and racial barriers."[72] Enriched by his Chinese background, Hsiao formulated the aesthetic basis for Punto with his goal being to lessen the differentiation between cultures. He believed that the qualities of timelessness and internationalism would testify to the works' perpetual newness.[73]

As a foreigner absorbing various artistic currents in Milan, a postwar hub of European and American artists, intellectuals, and industrialists, Hsiao must have been aware of, if not acutely sensitive to the polemics of realism and abstraction and the political implications of both in the aftermath of Mussolini's regime. The bare, carefully manipulated canvases that Fontana and his cohorts generated were the antithesis to Fascist-era art and were a reaction to both American Abstract Expressionism and the gradually industrialized world.[74] Punto's aesthetics aligned with the attitude of questioning progress in civilization and with the postwar return to philosophy and nature. Hsiao's ideas also seemed to benefit from the international network of artists in Italy at the time, as evidenced by his blending the knowledge of various perspectives and

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[72] Cited in Diana Yeh, "Utopic beyond Cosmopolitanism: A Translocal View of Li Yuan-chia," in *Viewpoint: A Retrospective of Li Yuan-chia* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2015), 45.
[73] Hsiao Chin, "Exhibition in Venice," 33.
[74] See Nicholas Cullinan, "The Empty Canvas," in *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void 1949–1962*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 232; Marcia E. Vetrocq, "National Style and the Agenda for Abstract Painting in Post-War Italy," *Art History* 12, no. 4 (December 1989): 453–54, quoted in Cullinan, 232, note 29.

philosophies, and which contributed to the international make-up of the Punto group.[75] His utopian proposal to make art that transcended cultural boundaries seemed to speak to the stagnant art scene back home. On the occasion of the inaugural exhibition of Punto in Taipei, he wrote, "I hope this exhibition not only brings stimulants to our nation's art expression but also provides an opportunity to self-examine the wholesale imitation of the West by the people of East Asia….Our nation's artists should truthfully understand our nation's brilliant spiritual tradition and express that through modern forms."[76]

Neither Liu Kuo-sung nor Chuang Che agreed with Hsiao's new style, however. Liu was outright in his criticism, stating Punto would not make any contribution to Chinese art. He believed that group's rational, curbed, slow, geometric shapes and planes originated from the Western tradition, "almost like basic design taught in university architecture departments." Invoking the concept of "constant movement" (*dong*) in the *Book of Changes*, Liu argued that Chinese modern artists would represent contemplative spirit through energetic lines and dots.[77] Hsiao Chong-ray had argued that Liu was not only explicitly defending the type of gestural abstraction he favored, but was in fact also defending the philosophical underpinnings of his own work.[78] Chuang also was critical of Punto's methodology, but he was more encouraging of the contribution that the "mindful contemplation" would have on abstract art. He thought Punto's rational style of

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[75] In the 1950s, American artists Cy Twombly, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and others had all visited Italy (Rome or Milan) and had various encounters with local artists. See Cullinan, 232–33. While it was not clear whether Hsiao Chin had encountered the American artists directly in Milan, he seems to have shared the same sensibility as the Italian artists in rejecting (most of) the American way of abstraction.

[76] Hsiao Chin, "Modernity and Tradition," p. 8.

[77] Liu Kuo-sung, "From the Punto Art Exhibition to Talk about the Differences in Chinese and Western Painting—and Review of the 'Punto' International Art Movement Exhibition" (*cong pangtu yizhan tan zhongxi huihua de butong—jianping pangtu guoji yishu yundong zhan*), *Wenxing* 70 (1 August 1963): 46–47.

[78] Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 356.

abstraction contradicted the romantic ("poetic," or "*shi de*" in his own terms) spirit in Chinese philosophy and literati art. He questioned Punto's methodology of arbitrarily adhering to philosophy rather than gradually, organically developing an artistic theory out of a practice. Inspired by Li Yuan-chia's successful use of ink and the album format (Figure 3.7) to retain Chineseness in his work, however, Chuang gave a constructive criticism: he believed that if one employed Western materials and tools while still expressing Chinese essence, then the art could connect to the Chinese contemplative spirit.[79] This in fact was not Li's intention, yet it describes a life-long challenge that Chuang would pose for his own practice.

As much as Liu and Chuang's critique strived to be fair and welcoming, the underlying message was that the Punto paintings simply did not embody Chinese philosophy. Hsiao, in tune with the ebb and flow of European art trends, sought to propose an enduring alternative to abstract art in anticipation of the expiration of Abstract Expressionism and of the oncoming trend of conceptual art. His proposal for Punto fell flat in Taiwan because the need to outwardly express Chineseness in visual art dominated the artistic community; the European-born aesthetic of contemplative abstract painting that verged on conceptual art seemed to have little potency in Taiwan. The unenthusiastic reception of Punto demonstrates how radical art—even though it had transnational potential—may get lost in translation. Not only was there cultural protectionism in Taiwan, but the strategy of making a near-empty picture with extremely minimal manipulation proved incompatible to and insufficient for the artists in Taiwan. While the

[79] Chuang Che, "Punto and the Chinese Contemplative Spirit" (*pangtu yu zhongguo jingguan jingshen*), *United Daily News*, 2 August 1963, p. 8.

artists in Taiwan wished to connect to international art through Chinese philosophical ideas, the restrained visuality that the Punto artists advocated did not leave much impact on the Taiwanese art scene.[80] As a consequence of being rejected in Taiwan, Hsiao and Li shifted their focus to the exhibition opportunities in Europe, into which they were promptly absorbed.[81]

By the time the Punto exhibition opened in Taiwan in the summer of 1963, modern art had firmly established its place in Taiwanese art (Figure 3.8).[82] Artists of Liu and Chuang's generation were already well-acquainted with European and American artistic development.[83] The discussions surrounding Punto no longer revolved around the political leanings of abstract artists, but instead focused on the essential questions of visual styles, material choices, and spiritual expressions. The artistic concern shifted to a more nuanced look at how Chineseness should be represented visually. The discussions about how European modernism justified Chinese artists' own abstract tendencies—so important in the early battles against the conservatives in the mid to late 1950s—were no longer necessary.

Landscape as the Primary Content and Goal for Abstraction

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[80] Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 356. However, the conceptual strain of Punto would return to Taiwan in the 1980s by way of the Daoist sculptural paintings of Taiwan-born, British-educated Richard Lin (Lin Shouyu, 1933–2011), though his concept was independent of Punto.

[81] Li Yuan-chia was included in "anno 62," an exhibition in Rotterdam including artistic working in kinetic art and monochromes. He began to exhibit at the Signals Gallery in London in 1965, Hsiao Chin in 1966. Both have since joined the circle of conceptual artists and critics in London, which included Filipino artist David Medalla. For more details, see "Chronology," in *Viewpoint*, 104–05.

[82] In May 1963, the Fifth Moon annual exhibition took place at the National Arts Hall, which signaled the group's mainstream status. Hsiao Chong-ray also shares this view. Hsiao, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 305.

[83] Much evidence points to how artists understood European modern art by this time. For example, one issue of *Bihui* (15 May 1961) was dedicated to modern art movements, including survey articles on art in China, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the U.K., and New York.

Liu Kuo-sung's and Chuang Che's wariness toward the European-born abstraction of Punto indicated a definitive change in their theory and practice. During the fifth annual exhibition of the Fifth Moon in May 1961, the artists emphasized the need to retain and display national characteristics in the new tradition. Earlier that year, Chuang noted this tendency of reversion to Chinese painting (as a jury member on the 1961 São Paulo Biennial representation), calling the phenomenon "a rapid reversion to the origin."[84] The drive to readjust the Fifth Moon group's position on how to integrate Chinese characteristics in new art came partially from the apprehension of their painting appearing too Western and partially from their desire to stand out amidst international modern art, especially in international arenas.[85] In 1962, Chuang stressed the importance of Chinese characteristics in painting for preventing the loss of the Chinese character in the pursuit of individuality, when he wrote:

> Modern art makers…feel the importance of expressing the soul of an Oriental, a Chinese in modern painting (certainly the soul here is the holistic being, not distinguishing form from content), and as a result it is imperative to make distinctions from Western art; this mechanism can be described as 'to retrace the origins' (*huisu*), 'to reexamine' (*zai tixian*), 'to awaken' (*juexing*)."[86]

The task for artists had turned to the practical question of how to recover and reclaim a Chinese character in modern painting. In 1962, Liu took a forceful step to connect

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[84] Chuang Che, "The Judging of the São Paulo International Art Exhibition" (*shengbaoluo guoji meizhan de pingxuan gongzuo*), *Wenxing* 42 (1 April 1961): 26–27.

[85] Artist Chang Dai-chien, who was greatly admired by artists in Taiwan, was a resident of São Paulo since 1953. His monumental abstract ink work was exhibited at the 1961 Biennial, displayed prominently in the exhibition hall. His participation was recorded in a text and a documentation photograph in Wang Zhiyi's memoir, *My Friend Chang Dai-chien* (*wode pengyou zhang daqian*) (Taipei: Hanyiseyan, 1993). It was unclear though whether artists in Taiwan knew about Chang's work on display at the time. I thank Chiang Po-hsin for providing the citation and other relevant information.

[86] Translated by author. Chuang Che, "From Two Letters" (*cong liangfengxin shouqi*), *Wenxing* 55 (1 May 1962): 68.

Chinese *xieyi* painting to abstraction, a conceptual match that defined his future approach to art-making. In one of the representative essays in his career, he argued that "the ultimate goal of *xieyi* (expressionistic) painting was to liberate painting from all external bounds and to render painting its independence, that is, 'pure painting'—the founding of abstract painting."[87] With this statement, he identified abstraction's Chinese origin and grafted the ultimate goal of Western abstract art onto the revered value of the Chinese landscape tradition. It was a further step from what Léon Chang had argued in 1958 about the kinship between expressionism and *xieyi* painting and calligraphy. The alignment of abstraction and Chinese *xieyi* paintings not only underscored his ties to Chinese culture, but also had the advantage of appearing politically correct in a society under martial law.[88] From this point onward, Liu located the theoretical departure point for his abstract painting: it came directly from the viewpoint of Chinese tradition.

In fact, Liu's argument was an echo of Hong Kong artist Lui Shou-kwan's belief in the "free, independent, absolute" nature of art, published in *Bihui* two years before. Liu elaborated that individuality, a concept which not only referred to one's own personality in art but also to a national, cultural, or ethnic specificity, is how one could create the "new tradition" of Chinese art and simultaneously take a place in the international art world. Philosophically, he believed that the "all encompassing" and "transcendental"

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[87] Translated by Yi-li Kao. See Kao, "Chinese Poetry and Painting in Postwar Taiwan: Angst and Transformation in the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005), 117–18; Liu, "Past, Present, Tradition," 19. Also included in Liu Kuo-sung, *Road of Chinese Modern Painting*, 21.

[88] In the "The Past, the Modern, the Tradition," Liu acknowledged the government's promotion of traditional culture. In his argument for "making new tradition," he invoked the phrase, "Chinese Renaissance" (*zhongguo wenyi fuxing*), which in 1966 became a KMT-initiated cultural and political policy to further support the orthodoxy of Chinese culture. Liu, "Past, Modern, Tradition," 20.

spirit of tradition allowed him to combine what he learned from Western art with Chinese art; practically, he forbade any limit on material and tools.[89]

Similarly, Chuang Che pushed back against Hong Kong artist Wucius Wong's proposal for a separate painting system for Chinese modern painting. Where Wong advocated limiting painting exclusively to the Chinese brush, Chuang voiced his doubts. Such sharp division between the East and the West—based on materials and tools—Chuang believed, was unproductive and did not fit contemporary experience. He found utility in Western abstract art in the way it melded the subconscious with its immediate context. He appreciated, for example, how de Kooning's abstract work depicted the energy of its societal conditions; and how Rothko's contemplative, blurry squares represented an intense portrayal of the collective nihilism of urban populations. To Chuang, American abstract paintings reflected human conditions that transcended cultural boundaries.[90] Hence, Chuang sought to achieve a type of Chinese painting that would connect contemporary reality and classical ideals to convey a spiritual content that would overcome the boundary of time and culture.

Since the beginning of his career in 1957, Chuang had immersed himself in the exploration of abstraction with oil paint on canvas. In his early involvement with the Fifth Moon society, he was known for highly charged, explosive painting in the abstract expressionist style, best exemplified by his works in the 1961 Fifth Moon exhibition and the Paris Youth International Biennial. In late 1961, however, Chuang began to realize

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[89] Ibid., 19–20.
[90] Chuang, "From Two Letters," 69. The letters were written in August and September 1961, respectively, and published in 1962.

the limits of object-less, intensively expressionist painting. The return to the Chinese origin was a measured and gradual effort for Chuang from 1961 until 1963.

A series of essays in 1963 reveals how Chuang developed the theoretical rationale for using landscape as the vehicle of his artistic ideas. By calling the new type of art "modern painting of China" instead of "modern Chinese painting," Chuang officially rejected the narrow, hardened narrative of national legacy in Chinese art.[91] He used Yu Kwang-chung's analogy of the "United Nations of modern paintings" to express the idea that one must have a unified national identity. That identity, Chuang believed, is the eternal value—the all-encompassing human temperament and the ever-changing nature—manifested in landscape painting. That was how the interwoven physical and psychic experiences in Fan Kuan's *Sitting Alone by a Stream* (eleventh century, Figure 3.9) could still resonate with contemporary people.[92] Chuang sought to represent the spiritual and sensorial dimension through visual language, but not to merely replicate the conventional forms of the past. His pursuit of continuing the timelessness of landscape was reminiscent of Léon Chang's idea about the perpetual newness and modernity in the "classics."[93]

In November that year, Chuang firmly identified landscape as his primary content and artistic goal in a succinct and persuasive essay, "Visual Symbols and Chinese Painting." Chuang cited the new book, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China*, by the British historian of Chinese art, Michael Sullivan, whose acute analysis of the unique characteristic of Chinese landscape painting—the visual symbol—was enlightening to the study of Chinese art in the West. Using Sullivan's now iconic work on the history of

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[91] Chuang Che, "To Remove Doubts of 'Chinese Modern Painting'" (*ti zhongguo xiandaihua shiyi*), *Wenxing* 63 (1 January 1963): 43.
[92] Ibid., 44.
[93] For more on Chang's concept, see Chapter Two, 98–100.

Chinese landscape painting was an effective strategy to adopt a more objective perspective on art history from a foreign, respected expert. It also showed that landscape painting was the most fascinating genre to foreign experts and showed Chuang's concern for the readability of his paintings to an international audience. He raised the plausibility of changing the indexical symbol while retaining the cosmic, humanistic, and natural forces in the landscape tradition. He boldly predicted that "the landscape painting of the future will go on the path of symbolism beyond referential matter. I don't call it the path to pure abstraction because abstraction has a tendency to completely detach from reality."[94] Paradoxically, Chuang's proposal to convert the intangible physical and psychic experience into the tangible visual symbol actually reverses the process of abstraction. In a rebuttal to Liu's methodology, he questioned the necessity of restrictions to only abstract works, because to him, commitments should be to a philosophy rather than a style.[95] In Chuang's investigation of a new visual language, he resolved to bring the amorphous yet concrete concept of *xiang*—a philosophical idea, an image, an indication of the cosmic order, an attitude toward image making—into contemporary painting.

In late 1963, as Chuang began to move into his most productive period of his signature collage paintings, he continued to question the limitations of abstraction in his art practice. To Chuang, keeping a strong connection to landscape traditions could avoid the pitfall of total abstraction, which ran the risk of merely indulging the maker's personality, like Jackson Pollock's chaotic, late works. It could also prevent the

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[94] Translated by author. Chuang Che, "Visual Symbol and Chinese Painting" (*shijue xiangzheng yu zhongguo huihua*), *Wenxing* 73 (1 January 1963): 52.
[95] Chuang Che, "From Vision to the Rebirth of Reality" (*cong shijue chufa kan xianshi de zaisheng*), *Wenxing* 88 (1 February 1965): 43.

downward spiral into the use of obscure representational signifiers, like Surrealist works by Dali going into a psychological extreme.[96] Chuang's constant reflections on and references to Western art throughout his theoretical formulations showed his thorough, comparative research. His theoretical rationale not only stemmed from the Chinese approach, but came out of a consideration for painting in general, a commitment that demonstrated his awareness of the most publicized types of art across the globe.

Calligraphy: Conceptual Ally for Abstraction[97]

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the late 1950s, Taiwanese artists began to experiment with abstraction due to a growing awareness of the affinity between certain types of abstraction and the Chinese script and calligraphy. Yet the practical uses of calligraphy in painting strategies are less uniform. As Chuang and Liu diverged in their approaches to tradition, they both looked to calligraphy as a creative source for abstraction. It also became a point of contention between them. Although both citied Zao Wou-ki's successful incorporation of oracle symbols into his painting (Figure 3.10), Liu focused more on the formal transplantation Zao managed in oil painting, and Chuang concentrated on the emotional and tactile capacity that Zao had endowed individual strokes.[98] Chuang did not completely reject the idea of "pure construction" (*chuncui de zucheng*) in his approach to calligraphy. He also did not subscribe to the dogma of non-

[96] Chuang Che, "The Criteria of Romantics—Notes on Painting II" (*langman de jiben xingge—huayu sanlun zhi'er*), *Wenxing* 86 (1 December 1964): 47.
[97] In Chapters Four and Five, I will discuss the attitude and incorporation of calligraphy in the abstract paintings of Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che respectively.
[98] Liu, "The Development and Trend of Recent Art," 10; Chuang, "Poetic, Un-Poetic," 14.

referential painting in absolute terms. This "middle-ground" view precipitates Chuang's later choice of style and use of deconstructed strokes as a key vocabulary of his paintings.

In 1964, in response to a comment from American curator Thomas Lawton about the Chinese quality lacking in Chuang's abstract painting, Chuang began to incorporate bold, exaggerated, deconstructed characters into his collaged pictures. In some cases, the inscriptions were his own poetry; in others, he quoted verses from poems by Tang dynasty poet Du Fu, whose writings cried for a lost nation (Figure 5.1). The writings were usually placed in the center of the composition and were embedded in the intrinsic meaning of the paintings, rather than simply appearing on the margins as they did in traditional paintings. Chuang's incorporation of characters into his painting blurred the boundaries of the disciplines of calligraphy and painting quite literally. In a way his invention provided a new interpretation of the theory that calligraphy and painting are of the same origin (*shuhua tongyuan*). However, Liu dismissed Chuang's use of poems to be retrograde, as defeating the purpose of discarding tradition, and as exposing his lack of confidence in the purity of the abstract picture.[99] Liu's own incorporation of calligraphy into his painting is motivated by the formal beauty of lines. To him, the lines, with no linguistic function, are the ultimate expression of the abstract principles of "anti-formalism, anti-realism, and anti-naturalism."[100] Around 1964 Liu's paintings began to resemble magnified gestural brushwork caught in mid-action, accomplished by hairline-thin fiber pulled off of the inked surface. The result evokes the contour and rhythm of landscape painting. Liu followed Léon Chang's line of reasoning in directly linking

[99] Liu Kuo-sung, "Chuang Che and I" (*zhuangzhe yu wo*), in *Copying Sketching Creating* (*linmo xiesheng chuangzao*) (Taipei: Wenxing, 1966), 190.
[100] Liu Kuo-sung, "On Brush and Ink" (*tan bimo*), *Wenxing* 90 (1 April 1965): 53.

cursive calligraphy with abstraction, highlighting the dynamism and beauty of a simple line. Though calligraphy held different functions in their paintings, both Liu and Chuang used clusters of lines with altered surfaces to highlight the tactile quality and the painter's hand at work in addition to the lyrical meaning of the poetic lines.

External Factors in Support of the Abstract Art Movement[101]

The Palace Museum Exhibition, 1960

What prompted Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, who were both in favor of Westernization, to return to Chinese origin? The most forceful reminder of Chinese tradition in the midst of the artists' explorations was possibly the landmark exhibition at the National History Museum in July 1960, where reproductions of three hundred works from the former Beijing Palace Museum and Central Museum went on display for the first time since the war with Japan had begun.[102] The exhibition showed the collection's strength in paintings from the Tang to Qing dynasties, with Song dynasty paintings comprising the highest percentage.[103] Widely reported in the media, the exhibition was intentional political propaganda for the glory of mainland Chinese culture and of the legitimacy of the KMT government in Taiwan.[104] It also satisfied practical research requests from foreign scholars and museums.[105] The international tour of the Palace Museum collection, from 1961 to 1962 in six American cities, also brought national pride

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[101] Kao Yi-li also argued that Liu Kuo-sung's abrupt conversion from an anti-traditional modern artist to one embracing the tradition he once opposed as derivative of rapidly changing external forces. However, her discussion is limited to the field of modern poetry and did not include Chuang Che. See Kao, 113, 123.
[102] For more details, see Introduction, 1, and Chapter One, 50–51.
[103] Zhang Wan, "Review of the Three Hundred Famous Paintings of the Palace Museum Collection" (*ping 'gugong minghua sanbaizhong'*), *Bihui* 1, no. 4 (15 August 1960), 33.
[104] *Wenxing*, *Bihui*, *United Daily News* were among the media that reported the exhibition.
[105] Zhang, 32.

back home. It probably played a part in reinforcing artists' confidence in traditional arts, while keeping an international audience in mind.[106]

To Liu, the 1960 exhibition provided crushing evidence of the achievements of Chinese painting in the face of loyalists to Japanese-style painting. It also reaffirmed Liu's admiration for literati painting, as he illustrated by citing the brilliantly skillful variations of ink and color and the advanced compositional strategies in Song paintings. His report from the exhibition shows him paying close attention to the techniques and visual effects of the works.[107] The exhibition might have a lesser impact on Chuang Che, whose father Chuang Yan was deputy director of the Palace Museum collection in charge of organizing the exhibition. Chuang grew up with the privilege of constantly viewing the original ink paintings, so his sense for Chinese aesthetics was nurtured over time, rather than from a single exhibition like Liu. Chuang's upbringing perhaps explains his initial artistic choice to pursue Western expressionist-style abstraction, a turn away from what he knew, before he returned to reinvent it. Liu's and Chuang's relationships to Chinese art are relevant to their attitudinal differences toward the Chinese traditions they selected for their respective practices.

Modern Poetry and Its Relation to Abstract Art

Pioneers in modern Chinese poetry encountered similar challenges in parallel spheres of culture in regards to the directions and methods of modernization in postwar

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[106] *Wenxing* reports the tour in the 58th issue. See Li Lin-t'san (Li Lincan), "On the Return Sail of the National Treasure" *(guobao guihang manji*), *Wenxing* 58 (1 August 1962): 31–34.
[107] Liu Kuo-sung, "Personal Insights after the Viewing of Pictures of Famous Paintings" (*minghua zhaopian zhanlan guanhougan*), *Bihui* 1, no. 4 (15 August 1960): 35–36. Liu also spoke of the significance of the exhibition to Li Chu-tsing (Li Zhujin). Li Chu-tsing, *Liu Kuo-sung: Growth of a Modern Chinese Artist* (Taipei: National Gallery of Art and Museum of History, 1969), 26–27.

Taiwan. As Chapter Two noted, the rapport between the modern poets and artists was well documented by the essays the poets wrote for their friends in the visual arts. But their interconnections ran even deeper, and this next section looks at the similarities in approaches to craft and personal relationships that facilitated the movement of ideas across media.

In the early 1960s, at the peak of the revolution in modern poetry, poets started to reflect upon sustainable ways to continue progressive movement toward a new language and style. They began to seriously think about how to make their work distinctively "Chinese" in the face of negotiations with the West. After his polarizing 1956 proposal, "horizontal transplantation," to exterminate the burden of tradition to make room for new poetry, poet Ji Xian made an appeal in 1961 to soften the approaches to modernization. He called for a "classicalization of modern Chinese poetry" (*xiandaishi de gudian hua*) to establish modern poetry as a new tradition and to place it in the center of literary and social discourse.[108] The same year, Zhang Mo and Ya Xian (Wang Qinglin) of the modern poetry society Epoch (*chuangshiji*), edited the first anthology of modern Chinese poetry, *Selected Poetry of the Sixties* (*liushi niandai shixuan*). Compiling around two hundred poems by twenty-six modern poets, the groundbreaking book was a deliberate effort to canonize achievements in new Chinese poetry. Around the same time, Yu Kwang-chung, an opponent of Ji Xian's radical ideas in the 1950s, offered his solution for achieving orthodoxy in Chinese modern art and culture: he asked poets, artists, and composers to familiarize themselves with traditions from both East and West in

[108] Translated by Yi-li Kao. Kao, 126, 50–51.

preparation to transform their native culture.[109] Using a moralist tone, Yu argued for "a vertical transfusion from ethnical arts and culture rather than a horizontal transplantation from the West" in order "to carry on the past and inspire the future" (*chengxian qihou*).[110] These poets were urgent in their call to "make new tradition," which echoed the declarations in the Fifth Moon society's 1961 exhibition catalogue about their mission to modernize Chinese art. The only difference between their respective projects, perhaps, was that poetry could by default identify its Chineseness in its language. In other words, the poets could deviate from the subject of Chinese culture yet still be Chinese because of the linguistic component; abstract visual art by contrast required more effort in producing cultural markers.

In 1961, Yu published "Heaven Wolf Star" (*tianlang xing*), which is considered the first and most important long-form poem at the beginning of the 1960s. The poem intended to reveal the struggles of the modern poets as they confronted Western ideas and quested for a new set of aesthetics and methodology. The poem's reception promptly ignited what literary scholars called "the second debate of modern poetry" between Yu and Lo Fu (Mo Luofu), a founder of *Epoch*, about the pace and method of reform in the modern poetry movement. Yu's poetry is straightforward, more accessible to general audiences, and it elicits a hopeful attitude, which he believed to be a steadier strategy for expanding the territory of modernism. Lo Fu considered Yu's poetry too retrograde and simplistic, reminiscent of mainland poetry of the 1920s and 1930s, and he thought it

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[109] In fact, Yu's promotion of understanding both East and West is his life goal. His articles on selected European artists and modern art movements in *Wenxing*'s fourth year (throughout 1961), is evidence of such diligent scholarly research. In my interview with him, he more than once mentioned the virtue of an erudite, "learned in both Chinese and West" (*xueguan zhongxi*).

[110] Yu Kwang-chung, "Greet a Chinese Renaissance" (*ying zhongguo de wenyi fuxing*), *Wenxing* 58 (1 August 1962): 4.

reeked of conventional ethics and morality. In the late 1950s, Lo Fu maintained his preference for a more rebellious, destructive, and decisive breakaway from traditions. The language of his poetry, exemplified in "Death of a Stone Cell" (*shishi zhi siwang*) was obscure, dark, unsettling, and full of surrealist imagery suggestive of a bleak outlook. The sharp opposition between the visions of Lo Fu and Yu is not only visible in their attitudes, styles, source materials, and creative processes, but also in the expanse and direction of their versions of modernism.[111]

Lo Fu, Ya Xian and the editor of *Bihui*, Yu Tien-t'sung (Yu Tiancong; a student of Ji Xian's), who opposed Yu Kwang-chung's strategies of modernizing Chinese poetry, embraced the work of the Fifth Moon artists. But so did Yu Kwang-chung. The united interests of modernist poets can be explained in several ways. First, the poets and artists shared the painful experience of displacement, being uprooted from the mainland to Taiwan. They also took responsibility for advancing Chinese culture, just as their painter friends did. Second, though the two camps challenged conventions of poetry and language in different styles, both desired a certain level of "abstraction" in poetry and could appreciate and benefit from the methods of abstraction developed by visual artists. The poets sought in abstract paintings ways to best visualize modern poetry and internal experience. In his poems, Lo Fu chose abstract, surrealist imageries to express the deep sorrow, rupture, fear, and disillusionment that people of his generation had no other ways to release. Chuang's work creates a deeply unsettling emotion through broken surfaces, which struck a chord with Lo Fu and Ya Xian's poetry. In a letter exchange, Chuang expressed emotional closeness to Lo Fu, Ya Xian, and Wai-lim Yip's work and suggested

[111] See Kao, 46–48.

that his own new painting would be suited for the cover of Lo Fu's soon-to-be-published *Death of a Stone Cell* (Figure 3.11).[112]

Yu Kwang-chung used descriptive language and references, in a manner similar to traditional Chinese poetry, to conjure certain abstract pictures of inner states of mind. His belief in using a modern approach to traditional material, and in maintaining an iconic sense of Chineseness, explains his support for the works of Fifth Moon artists. Liu Kuo-sung's abstract landscapes create a sense of longing through an allegorical and positive manner, which matched Yu's aesthetic preferences. In addition to his support for Liu, Yu wrote essays for Hu Chi-chung and Fong Chung-ray's one-person exhibitions. He also admired Chuang's works in the 1962 Fifth Moon annual exhibition. In a glowing review, he wrote, "I think the style of my modern poetry at this stage is closest to Mr. Chuang's." He continued, "modern literature and art are said to show bitter frustration, conflict, struggle, and even nihilism. I don't think this is necessary."[113] Interestingly, Chuang's aesthetic seems to sit perfectly between the two polarizing ends of the poets' aesthetics: between Lo Fu's radicalization (hence the broken-picture aesthetics) and Yu Kwang-chung's insistence on maintaining tradition (hence the reverence for landscape aesthetics). Poets of both styles found kindred spirit in the visual artists as they sought to transform the diasporic experiences into new artistic possibilities.

The third way to understand the mutual support between the modernist poetry and painting worlds is the important personal relationships among key figures, which

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[112] Chuang Che, "Art, for Nobility? To Lo Fu, 1964," in Zhang Mo ed., *Anthology of Correspondence between Modern Poets* (Taichung: Pu Tian, 1969), 352–53. Chuang's painting eventually became the cover of Lo Fu's poetry publication in 1965.

[113] Translated by author. Yu Kwang-chung, "The Plain Fifth Moon" (*pusu de wuyue*), *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 72.

guaranteed the flow of ideas. Most of the artists in the poetry and art circles were separated from their families as a consequence of war, so their friends became their surrogate kin. Yu Tien-t'sung and Liu Kuo-sung became friends in the Descendents of the Revolutionary Army, a middle school in Nanjing that relocated from the mainland to Taiwan with the KMT. Ton Fan artists Ho Kan and Li Yuan-chia were also schoolmates with Liu and Yu. Artist Fong Chung-ray and poet Ya Xian, both hailed from Henan Province, joined the navy at the same time as teenagers, fled China with the KMT, and settled in the Zuoying military base in Kaohsiung. They met Lo Fu at the base, who was one year older than them and shared a room with Ya Xian. For the groundbreaking anthology *Selected Poetry of the Sixties*, co-edited by Ya Xian and Zhang Mo, Fong designed the striking modernist cover (Figure 3.12).[114] This canonical volume exemplified the marriage between modern art and poetry. The poets and artists of military origin developed similar aesthetics and approaches to modernization, not only because their life experiences fueled the content of their art, but also because their base in southern Taiwan, far away from the political center of Taipei, gave them more sense of freedom. Their anti-academicism did not react to tradition from a deep involvement with it, as did Ji Xian, but rather the opposite: the anti-academicism came from a lesser regard for tradition and authority, mostly due to their "improper" training and their migratory patterns as military members. In comparison, Yu Kwang-chung became acquainted with Liu Kuo-sung through an academic link, after he took a teaching position at the National

[114] Cultural historian Li Zhiming notes that Fong Chung-ray's cover design for *Selected Poetry of the Sixties* was inspired by the works of Czech artist Frank Kupka. Li Zhiming, *Book Design in Taiwan: The Birth of Modern Book Design in Taiwan* (*zhuangzhen taiwan: taiwan xiandai shuji sheji de dansheng*), Taiwan: (Taipei: Lianjing, 2011), 244–45. However, Fong did not in fact know of Kupka's work at the time or even now. Fong Chung-ray, e-mail correspondence with author (via Jerome Fong), 20 April 2016.

Normal University in Taipei, the alma mater of the Fifth Moon artists. The rivalry between Yu and Lo Fu in aesthetics, content, and viewpoints could be explained by the former being a scholar-poet while the latter had no formally credited education, though he had plenty of first-hand experience in combat and as a wartime journalist. Nonetheless, these modernist poets and painters joined forces in toppling the aesthetics of the previous generation and in building their own canon of modern art and poetry. Their close relationships and their collective efforts in constructing new aesthetics in their respective disciplines formed a unique foundation for Taiwan Modernism, in which theories of poetry and painting developed in an intertwined, co-dependent fashion.

Critical Support with Political Intensions

The essay that elevated the Fifth Moon society to the realm of high art and that ushered them into the mainstream was written by Yu Kwang-chung. Published first in the exhibition catalogue of the Fifth Moon Society in 1964, and again in *Wenxing*, the essay coined a new term, "Clairvoyancism" (*lingshi zhuyi*), to describe the group's collective abstract style. Yu used it for what he saw to be the "dualism" (*eryuanxing*) in the creative process of making abstract paintings. One side of the dualism is "clarity," or the equilibrium between the ego and the Dao; the other is the act of "seeing," or the connection to the external world. Yu commended the Fifth Moon painters for the use of classical Chinese spirit in their methodology, thereby "inheriting traditional temperament of the Chinese" and "intuitively journeying towards the mysterious center of Chinese

philosophy."[115] He purposefully positioned the works in comparison to Western modern art movements to demonstrate how the art of Clairvoyancism would outlast all the proceeding movements. Acting like an influential critic in his extremism, he denied the efficacy of Abstractionism, Futurism, and Surrealism in European art, as all of them were reactionary to a contemporary condition without any enduring value.[116] Throughout the essay, Yu framed the Fifth Moon works through Daoist philosophy almost without any acknowledgement of the context of Chinese art history. He proudly observed that the Fifth Moon artists' treatment of negative space and the monochromatic palette glorified the classical traditions, thereby enhancing their modern edge.[117] In Yu's interpretation, the content of Fifth Moon artists' works *is* Daoist philosophy and their creative process is exemplary of Daoist ideals. Abstract art in Yu's formulation became synonymous with Daoist harmony and mysticism.

The Daoist-inspired reasoning and the spiritual dimension that Yu championed in the work of Fifth Moon artists is in fact similar to the contemplative qualities of Hsiao Chin and Li Yuan-chia's roughly contemporaneous Punto work. These artists favored an even more restrained and subdued expression and ventured into a conceptual art that was perhaps too rational for Yu's taste, and their art production, faraway in Europe, was less urgent to domestic audiences than the work by the Fifth Moon artists working at home.[118]

The essay intellectualized Fifth Moon's art and placed them on high spiritual grounds. Yu's status as a young, American-educated professor, poet, and public

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[115] Translated by Yu. Yu Kwang-chung, "On From Clairvoyancism," in *Five Chinese Painters* (Taipei: Wenxing, 1964), unpaginated, in Chinese and English.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Yu Kwang-chung did not know the Ton Fan artists as well as he did the Fifth Moon ones, which perhaps contributed to his support for only the latter group. Yu, interview by author, Kaohsiung, 2 December 2012.

intellectual gave the art group a theoretical boost and intellectual clout—and an almost sensational branding—which helped raise their profile. The Fifth Moon's annual exhibition of 1964, held at the National Arts Hall, is indicative of their rising fame in the cultural sphere. Inventing the term "Clairvoyancism" marks Yu's attempt to launch a counterpart or an alternative to Western geometric and expressionist abstractions and to reject subjugation to foreign artistic theories or trends. The concept of Clairvoyancism also played into the mysticism of the Far East. By accentuating the philosophical depth in the works by Fifth Moon artists, Yu backhandedly reprimanded critics of the new art for not being able to perceive such sophisticated meaning and for negating a significant art movement.

Like most savvy cultural critics at the time, in his support for Fifth Moon, Yu recast his politics in aesthetic terms. Shortly before the Clairvoyancism essay, in *Wenxing*, Yu published "Lowering the Flag of May Fourth to Half-Staff," in which he called the reform of Chinese culture, initiated by Hu Shih and the other intellectuals of his generation, a total failure. He criticized their blind, ineffective, shallow efforts to Westernize, and he ridiculed them for supporting only Chinese literary works with social functions, which he claimed missed the important value of aesthetics in modernity.[119] In *Wenxing*, a magazine that staunchly supported May Fourth and Hu Shih's vision, Yu's polemics against the editors' spiritual leader seemed intentionally provocative, bringing attention to his ideas and to those who embraced the same. As Yu urged his own

[119] Yu Kwang-chung, "Lowering the Flat of May Fourth to Half-Staff" (*xia wusi de banqi*), *Wenxing* 79 (1 May 1964): 4.

generation to write the "second chapter" of the revolution initiated by May Fourth, he identified the Fifth Moon artists as the perfect companions to his signature literary style.

Yet not all Fifth Moon artists agreed with Yu's theoretical masterpiece. In a letter to Lo Fu, Chuang Che confessed that he almost withdrew from the 1964 Fifth Moon exhibition because he could not agree with Yu's essay. He stayed with the group because he did not want to seem petty and because he felt that he should sacrifice his own opinion for the sake of the group.[120] In an essay in *Wenxing* the next year, Chuang explained that Yu's end goal of abstract mysticism (*xuanxue*) was too constricting.[121] His dissatisfaction exposed a pitfall of artistic movements. Although Liu and Chuang adopted different philosophies for their abstraction, the ordinary viewer—and even discerning intellectuals in the literary circle—often lumped them together for the sake of convenience or for the benefit of the group. Nevertheless, Yu's essay captured the general outlook of their work and boosted the scholarly potential of the Fifth Moon artists.

The Political and the Subversive Potential of Abstraction: A Comparative Study

A discussion on the promotion, reception, and rhetoric of abstraction in parallel art communities is crucial for fully understanding the rise of abstract art in Taiwanese society in the mid-1960s. In early-twentieth century Europe, abstraction began as an avant-garde idea in the visual arts and it rippled across the sphere of visual culture, music, and literature. It accompanied the historical shifts in various fields of science and technology, mechanical production, philosophical thinking, and it incubated in

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[120] Chuang Che, "Art is a Long Term, Patient Pursuit. To Lo Fu, 1964," (*yishu shi yizhong changjiu de naixin de zhuiqiu—zhi luofu, wushisan nian*) in Zhang, 350.
[121] Chuang Che, "A Few Questions on the Pluralism of Modern Painting" (*cong xiandai huihua de duoyuanxing tan jige wenti*), *Wenxing* 87 (1 January 1965): 52.

interconnected people and ideas.[122] The postwar situation in Europe and in America narrowed the definitions of abstraction and representation, and they were viewed as ideological polar opposites. Suddenly, abstraction was part of the capitalist democracy; realism was of Communist or Fascist societies, anti-intellectual and populist. The rivalry between abstraction and realism in postwar Italy, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was one example of the latter situation.

Across the Atlantic, American artists strived to develop their own styles for resisting European avant-garde influences and to build their own new tradition. The new global political and economic order—with the U.S. in the lead—accelerated this stylistic process. Innovation and individuality became the quintessential postwar American spirit and sources of global power. The triumph of American art at the Venice Biennial in the 1950s and in other international arenas, where national representation was the organizing principle, underscored the way American art was associated with its own national power. With art critics like Clement Greenberg's advocacy and the support of curators, dealers, patrons, and institutions, Pollock and his fellow abstract expressionist artists became the representatives of a "homegrown" art style. Many artists themselves, however, rejected such preconceived notions and labels. Barnett Newman, for instance, vehemently rejected the idea of "pure" abstract art as the pinnacle of modern art development.[123] The social context alone gave the paintings political readings—previous studies of how American abstract art was hijacked by various governmental institutions and museums to become a

[122] See Dickerman, 12–37.
[123] See Siegel.

propaganda tool and representative of an era have already demonstrated this point.[124] The haute status of Abstract Expressionism within American art was in part constructed by Greenberg's crusade against kitsch, and in part a response to the type of lowbrow, populist cultural production in an increasingly commercialized world that has contaminated the pure, sacred mission of fine art.[125] The moral superiority Greenberg ascribed to Abstract Expressionism elevated the perception and status of the style and its makers, overriding all other genres and styles of art at the time.

The postwar Italian and American situations wherein abstract art acquired political and critical potential are indicative of a worldwide phenomenon in which abstract pictures, because of their illegible, formless nature, became tabula rasa, prone to political uses and mis-readings. Against the backdrop of Cold War political extremes, abstract art in Taiwan and in America were both cast as the archrivals of Communist-endorsed, socialist-realist paintings. In Taiwan, abstract art was used to combat cultural bureaucracy, to explore and preserve individuality, to express a sense of longing and nostalgia, to uncover the modern aspect of traditional Chinese visual culture, and to represent the modernity of Chinese art on an international stage. Combining social and political utility, abstract art became the antithesis to any populist, pedestrian, unsophisticated, colonial, or antiquated renditions of visual expressions. The moral and aesthetic high ground that characterized abstract art in postwar Taiwan, if considered in the context of Chinese art and society, obtained a status similar to what literati art once had. The conflict between progressive artists and cultural conservatives was analogous to

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[124] Serge Guilbaut discusses how Greenberg linked abstract art to politics in Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, Arthur Goldhammer trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 33–38.

[125] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* (Autumn 1939): 34–49.

that between literati painters and court artists during the dynastic era. Literati painters, in general, despised court-commissioned professional painters, who the literati believed catered to the preferences of the imperial court and had limited creative freedom or innovations. The literati tradition consequently flourished in the amateur painter-scholar circle outside of court, and it pursued art purely for personal improvement, pleasure, aesthetics, and spirituality. In a similar fashion, artists of the Fifth Moon and Ton Fan societies disagreed with the conservative painters in academia. But even as they gained recognition, the lack of an economy for stable patronage or a steady infrastructure for art meant that they were still outcasts in the art establishment and could not hold positions in university art departments; these artists could only teach in architecture departments, high schools, or elementary schools. The possibility of becoming a full-time artist is almost impossible.

The Fifth Moon artists chose as their source material for reinventing Chinese art the iconic and orthodox genres of Chinese visual culture, landscape painting, and calligraphy. In some ways, the deliberate and inevitable choice automatically designated their art the successor to the particular traditions they wished to revamp. For that reason—in addition to their training at the most prestigious programs for art—they found allies in scholar-critics best represented by Yu Kwang-chung, Léon Chang, and Li Chu-tsing. All three scholars were academics with Western educations who believed deeply in the enduring quality and inspirational potential of classical Chinese art. Their bi-cultural backgrounds and academic credentials raised the profile of the Fifth Moon artists and ushered abstraction into the social strata originally reserved for literati art. At a time in which art criticism was not a fully formed field in a Chinese society, their dedicated

essays provided a new standard for evaluating art, and they catapulted abstract art to a higher moral and intellectual hierarchy and artistic superiority, though scholarly interpretations may not accurately describe their intentions. Abstract art by the Fifth Moon artists, with all the diverse styles grouped together as new and modern, consequently became the elite of Chinese modern art. Due in part to the backing of print media like *Wenxing* and *Bihui*, the abstract art by Fifth Moon artists defined a renewed "literati style" for its modern audience. Ton Fan artists, on the other hand, did not base their experiments on the landscape painting tradition, which perhaps contributed to their lesser presence in cultural circles of the 1960s, despite the fact that they were the first group to declare interest in abstract art in the early 1950s.

But even before reaching the point of theoretical sophistication, works by Fifth Moon and Ton Fan artists were already labeled "national" due to their selection by government officials for participation in international exhibitions. The diplomatic affair during the crucial years of artistic development, gave abstract art a political utility under the banner of nationalism, even though some artists considered the international exposure and validation more personally gratifying than actually representing the nation. The political interpretations given to abstract art differed in the American and Chinese contexts, due largely to their vastly different power positions in the international communities. While American postwar abstraction developed a hegemonic, global ambition—perhaps involuntarily—of seeking power, abstraction in Taiwan focused on reinvention, justification, and salvation for cultural traditions, in the hopes of seeking recognition and becoming global.

Conclusion

The project to modernize Chinese painting in postwar Taiwan took more than ten years to reach its desired outcomes. Mainland émigré artists devoted their early careers to excavating useful conceptual, philosophical, and formal components from Chinese visual art, while they were also impacted by Western modern art practices. These artists began making art that broke with traditional methods of picture making; they searched for content through their internal worlds. Their work blended surrealist and abstract tendencies in a way that mirrored certain Western early twentieth-century visual vocabularies, but that also applied to completely different circumstances. Abstraction, used by artists as a revitalizing agent for Chinese art, has an ability to connect the ancient with the modern and contemporary, to constrain and release artistic energy, and to soften while reinforcing certain cultural boundaries vis-à-vis Western art. Abstraction enabled artists to retrieve the formlessness in ink art, without their having to adopt wholesale the methods of Western abstraction, making room for a resistance to hegemonic global trends. As demonstrated in this chapter, artists and critics in Taiwan in favor of abstraction had long discovered ways to interpret its expansive and elusive qualities using the vocabulary and concepts already existent in Chinese art. Abstraction facilitated a dialog between the avant-garde art of Europe and America with Chinese art during the nascent stage of its transformation—at least in the imagination of Chinese artists. Abstraction, with a history of overthrowing the status quo in Western art, prevailed as the

most provocative and widely applicable method for modernizing Chinese painting, poetry, fiction, and music.[126]

Art historian David Clarke observed that postwar artists in Taiwan (and Hong Kong) had to juggle the need to produce images that would be "legible within the international arena of contemporary art with the need to create works that asserted some kind of Chinese identity and connectedness to native visual languages."[127] The two needs, to Clarke, appear "conflicting." I would consider the two needs more "competing" at the beginning of the artists' experimentation, a competition which proved to be a productive, creative force. They then became increasingly "restricting" as the decade progressed. How artists dealt with or reacted to the external and internal pressures was affected by the general intellectual climate in the 1960s. Concurrent with the artists' quest for modern art, intellectual circles were consumed by the power struggle between two strains of philosophy: "total Westernization" (*quanpan xihua*) and "Maintaining the Chinese Core and Adopting Western Devices" (*zhongti xiyong*), a conflict that had been lingering since May Fourth and that was especially fraught in 1960s Taiwan. The situation exposes the anxiety of Taiwanese intellectuals about determining the Chinese core; after exile from the homeland, that core seemed to be synonymous with the KMT rule. Modern artists, as well as their colleagues in the fields of poetry and music, were deeply embroiled in this existential crisis, and they were forced to find a way out of the ambiguity and insecurity

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[126] While this chapter does not cover the impact of abstract art in fiction and music, articles in *Wenxing* and *Bihui* showed that theories of modernist music, which appeared alongside those in modern art, developed in parallel to abstract art. And as I learned through my conversation with various writers, such as Yu Tien-t'sung of Taiwan and Quanan Shum of Hong Kong, they looked to Western literature for inspirations to reinvent Chinese literature and also found inspiration in Western modern art. Yu, interview by author, Taipei, 31 December 2015; Shum, interview by author, Hong Kong, 17 October 2016.

[127] David Clarke, *Chinese Art and Its Encounter with the World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 138.

of their cultural-political status. Painting, in other words, was tasked with defining a new Chinese visual identity.

Although abstract art seemed to satisfy the competing needs of artists, its implementation also posed issues in the fraught cultural atmosphere. The difficulty was resisting the essentialism trenchant in the intellectual environment lest they become enslaved by Western ideas; every pictorial strategy was thus pregnant with the potential of either extreme. The artists of Ton Fan Society, like Hsiao Chin and Li Yuan-chia, generally avoided the party-centric, patriotic narrative and explored the more emotional, spiritual aspects of abstraction that conjured Chan philosophy in their pictorial logic. To domestic audiences in Taiwan, their paintings seemed too reserved and the artists received criticism for appearing Western; yet to European audiences, their work struck an affinity with growing conceptual tendencies that garnered attention for the successful enrichment of abstraction with Eastern philosophical ideas. The diverging views on Ton Fan art reflect the effects of the social and cultural contexts that could be imposed on artworks and over artistic choices.

At the same time, the Fifth Moon artists Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, with the support of Léon Chang and Yu Kwang-chung, turned to Chinese landscape painting for answers. This genre had been the most orthodox and unmistakably nationalistic of Chinese painting since the early twentieth century. After many rounds of experimentations and debates, Liu and Chuang, respectively came up with new styles of abstracted—or reconfigured—landscapes. They reinvented the genre of landscape paintings, a move that satisfied the need to be both international and Chinese. They took away the most recognizable aspects of the genre, such as the formulaic depictions of

rivers, mountains and rock formations, textured strokes, and traditional composition, and they substituted with Western-inspired, process-oriented techniques to create new signifiers for landscape components. For both artists, the inspiration they drew from Western art was the very act of reducing the marks on the paper, doing away with the traditional brush, and manipulating the painting's surface. For Chuang in particular, Western art provided the concepts of collage and deconstruction, concepts which exposed the artist's process directly within the painting's composition. The two artists both deployed elements of calligraphy and relied on work titles that contain poetic references to nature or the homeland to tether their abstract paintings securely to the realm of Chinese imagination. Their newly reformed landscapes challenged viewers to rethink what constitutes a Chinese painting.

The 1960s discourse on the modernizing of art reveals the restrictive side effects of the rising national identity in Taiwanese society. As artists and critics labored to develop a critical theory for explaining and supporting their practices, they further accentuated the distinctions between Chinese and Western painting. This reinforcement of the cultural barrier that the artists had originally sought to knock down shows how the earlier efforts at total Westernization was originally intended for the benefit of reinventing Chinese art; at the same time, it shows that the artists' confidence in their own artistic tradition had exponentially increased. The societal fixation on the East-West distinction limited the radical breakthroughs available in painting, but it was also a symptom of the difficulties in a society that was still recovering from physical and psychological defeats by both domestic and external forces, and a society that did not have a well-rounded art ecosystem. Artists were inevitably constricted by the social

pressures to affirm the cultural identity of their work, so they could only narrow the scope of their experimentation and aimed to challenge the knowledge system of Chinese painting from within. This point is proven by the fact that even though works by artists after the Abstract Expressionist generation, like Louise Nevelson, Robert Rauschenberg, Roberto Crippa, Yves Klein, came into the pages of *Wenxing*, the kinds of practice did not seem attractive or useful to this group of Taiwanese artists.[128]

Liu Kuo-sung's and Chuang Che's abstraction, and Hsiao Chin's and Li Yuan-chia's Punto works thus represent each artist's own visualization of their perspective on the legacy of Chinese culture. They challenged the classical form of ink painting because it no longer reflected contemporary experience or the demands of the international art world. To this generation of mainland-born artists, the nostalgia, pain, loneliness, and nihilistic tendencies brought on by the forced migration, displacement, and loss of the mainland fueled the emotional dimension of their paintings. The complex emotions that they invested in their paintings encapsulated their contemporary condition, paid homage to tradition, and, most significantly, gave abstract painting a distinctively personal, local, and national relevance. Abstraction as an imported concept now acquired an unmistakably Chinese and contemporary meaning, yet it still, in its varied appearances, remained legible internationally. The subtle, minimalist Punto works by expatriate Chinese artists residing in Italy anchored its pursuit of the contemplative quality of Chinese painting and of the harmonious energy in the Chan cosmology. If Hsiao and Li's Punto paintings contained subject matter, it lay in the dynamism of the marks on the

[128] "Introduction to Modern Artists" (*xiandai zuojia jieshao*), *Wenxing* 66 (1 April 1963): 39–42.

painting's surface, the expansive void surrounding it, and in the artist's mind wrestling with the instinctual and emotional impulses that lay in these possibilities.

The paintings by Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che, on the other hand, were a psychological reminder of the recent history of displacement, proof of abstraction's renewability and versatility as an artistic language, and its symbolism of the enduring power of a national, cultural heritage. These connotations firmly planted the abstract landscapes by Fifth Moon artists in the Taiwanese cultural realm and garnered the trust of the arts establishment. The fact that the eighth Fifth Moon annual exhibition in 1964 was held at the Taiwan Provincial Museum testifies to the success of this direction. However, while institutional endorsement could spur incredible artistic productivity, as it did for all the Fifth Moon artists in the 1964 exhibition, it would also muffle the individual, artistic voices that resisted or contradicted the public and critical perception of their work. Moreover, any changes in the larger social and political order could greatly impact the interpretation of the artwork and render their artistic intentions irrelevant. The allegiance to and longing for the mainland culture depicted in the abstract landscapes by Fifth Moon artists thus rests on a foundation of a plural mix of cultural influences and modernist aspirations, with a tenuous order that could reshuffle when any social or political agitation erupted. Lurking behind the rise of their reputation is the fact that the mainland heritage simply did not apply to the experiences of the majority of the Taiwanese population. Moreover, with time, the homeland could appear distant and unattainable—the signifiers of landscape hallow and superficial. Modernism, then, would be seen as too local and thus "un-international." But for this study, I consider how the paintings brought a new generation of artists from a marginalized community into the larger conversations

taking place around twentieth-century painting. Such will be the focus of the next two chapters.



Figure 3.1 Li Yuan-chia, *As in Art*, 1957,
dimensions unknown, oil on paper.
National History Museum Archives, Taipei.

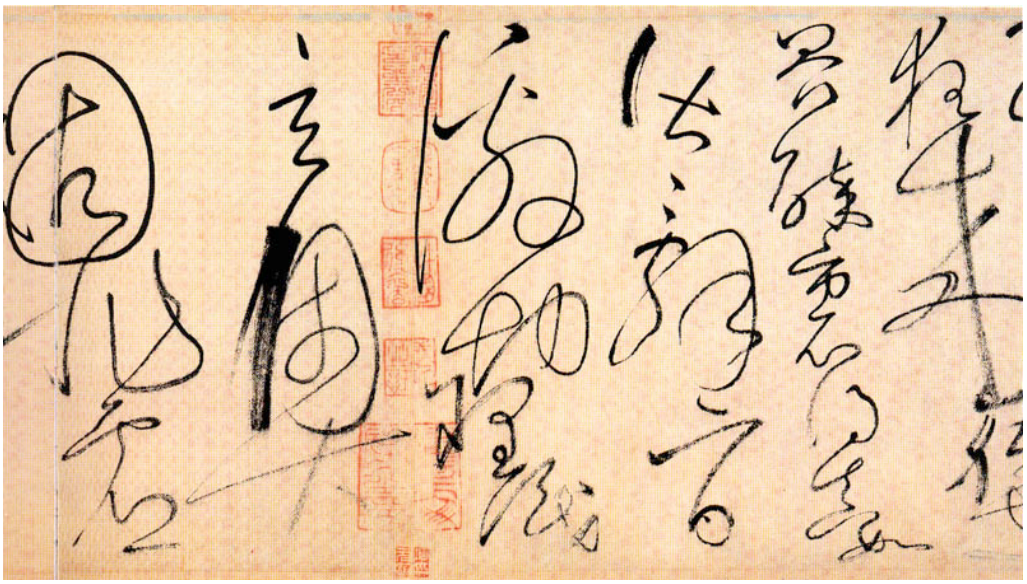


Figure 3.2 Huaisu, *Autobiography* (detail), 772,
28.3 x 755 cm, hand scroll, ink on paper.
The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 3.3 Jackson Pollock, *Number 18*, 1950,
oil and enamel on Masonite, 56.0 x 56.7 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Gift, Janet C. Hauck, in loving memory of Alicia Guggenheim and Fred Hauck, 1991. © 2016 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Figure 3.4 Qin Song, *Spring Lantern*, 1960, oil on paper, 53.5 x 78.5 cm.
Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



Figure 3.5 "Selection from the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition,"
Wenxing 43 (1 May 1961): 22–23.
From top right: Chuang Che, Fong Chung-ray Hu Chi-chung,
Kuo Tong-yung, Han Hsiang-ning, Ku Fu-sheng; center: Liu Kuo-sung.



Figure 3.6 Hsiao Chin, *Huen-Tuen (Opening of Chaos)*, 1962,
ink on paper, 89.6 x 70 cm. M+, Hong Kong.



Figure 3.7 Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, 1962–66,
ink and paint mounted on fabric mounted on card, 140 x 819 mm.
Collection of LYC Foundation.

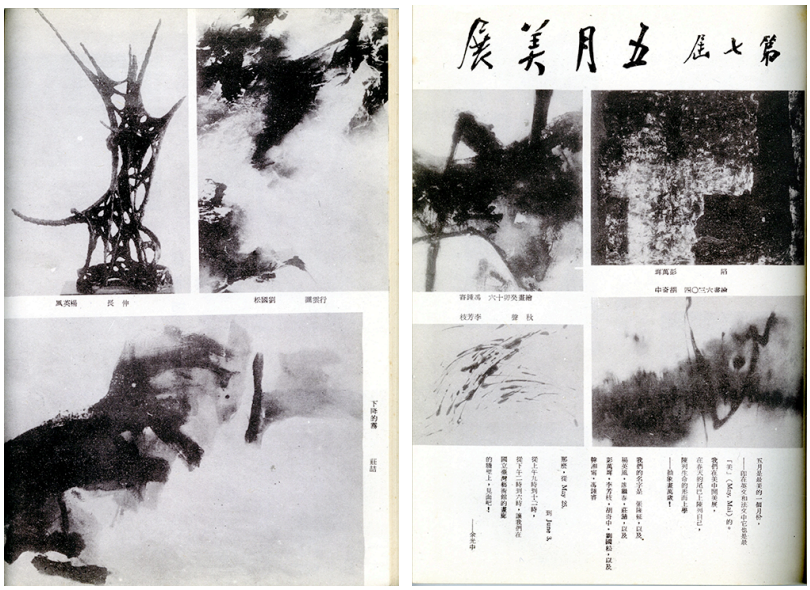


Figure 3.8
"Seventh Fifth Moon Society Painting Exhibition," *Wenxing* 68 (1 June 1963): 39, 42.
Right page, from top right: Peng Wan-chi, Hu Chi-cung, Li Fangzhi, Fong Chung-ray.
Left page, from top right: Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, Yuyu Yang.
Poetry by Yu Kwang-chung.



Figure 3.9 Fan Kuan, *Sitting Alone by a Stream*, 11th century, hanging scroll, light color on silk, 156.1 x 106.3 cm. The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Figure 3.10 Zao Wou-ki, *Vent*, 1954, oil on canvas, 195 x 96.5 cm. Collection Centre Pompidou.



Figure 3.11 Lo Fu, *Death of a Stone Cell*, 1965.
Cover painting: Chuang Che



Figure 3.12 Ya Xian and Zhang Mo, eds.,
Selected Poetry of the Sixties.
Kaohsiung: Daye, 1961.
Cover design: Fong Chung-ray.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GRAND GESTURE:
LIU KUO-SUNG'S VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

In 1964, the newly established City Hall Museum of Hong Kong—the first fine art institution in the British colony—purchased Taiwanese artist Liu Kuo-sung's ink painting, *Dialogue between Cloud and Rain* (*yun shen bu zhi chu*) (Figure 4.1), for its permanent collection.[1] Nine of his paintings, all created between 1963 and 1965, were selected by art historian Li Chu-tsing as part of "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists" to tour the U.S. between 1966 and 1968. Clearly, something about the thirty-two-year-old's work captivated curators across the Pacific. Works of this period are composed of voluminous ink blotches or jagged strokes that amount to abstract forms set against blank areas of paper creating an exhilarating dynamic. The artist's method included peeling the fiber off of the rough cotton paper (which had been created especially for him) before using a pipe brush to stain irregular and thick ink marks. The absence of surface fiber in the inked areas resulted in remarkable texture and tiny white streaks punctuating the black. The overall effect confronts the viewer with a pseudo-calligraphic utterance, yet without any actual characters or strokes. While the abstract ink paintings do not explicitly depict any traditional forms like mountains, rocks, or rivers, the titles such as "Dialogue between Cloud and Rain" and "Silence in Movement" invoke feelings related to natural phenomena. Mounted in the scroll format, the paintings became visually connected to

[1] The painting's English title was "Lost in Mist" in Liu's monograph published in 1969. See *Lu Kuo-sung* (Taipei: National Gallery of Art and Museum of History, 1969), 33.

classical landscape painting and its associated philosophical meanings. They proposed a new look for landscape painting that gatekeepers of art in Hong Kong and America were eager to endorse and publicize.

Perhaps the very absence of identifiable landscape forms contributed to the allure of the abstraction. Liu said in an interview in 1987: "I am not painting landscape, but there is a feeling of landscape in my painting."[2] Li Chu-tsing, impressed by what he saw, explained in the catalogue for "The New Chinese Landscape": "Like water and clouds, the forms in his paintings seem to be constantly in motion. Even such shapes as rocks and mountains—symbol of stability and permanency—take on a fleeting effect, appearing and disappearing in mist and clouds."[3] In *Dialogue between Cloud and Rain*, a series of dark ink pools resembles interconnected lakes in aerial maps. The amorphous pools give no clues as to how or in what order they may have been applied; neither is any structure of landscape painting detectable. By titling the painting a renowned verse from a Tang dynasty poem "*yun shen bu zhi chu*"—the depth of the clouds makes knowing one's whereabouts futile—Liu directs viewers to the representational and cognitive associations of the imageless painting. The willing abandon in nature implied in the poem points to an utmost admiration for the sublime, which is the philosophical core of Chinese landscape paintings. The abstract painting thus takes on traditional characteristics without using any classic techniques or tropes, but it acquires the literary references through language.

In Liu's paintings of the mid-1960s, Daoist metaphysics is often presented with literary references to suggest the artist's strong awareness of his tradition and of viewer

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[2] Wai-lim Yip, *Dialogues with Contemporary Artist: Growth of Modern Chinese Painting* (*yu dangdai yishujia de duihua—zhongguo xiandai hua de shengcheng)* (Taipei: Dongda, 1987), 258.
[3] Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1966), 9–10.

expectations. In *Silence in Movement* (Figure 4.2), a work included in the American tour, the majority of the ink marks—thick, blunt, and applied with force and speed—roughly form a fan on the left side of the painting. One jagged line is propelled to the right along the bottom edge. The line lacks a fluid path and is deliberately un-calligraphic; each stop-and-go of the line left traces of the artist's hand, a physical reference which indicates the passage of time. The eye is as much motivated by the agitation in the black marks as it is liberated by the composure of the untouched space. This tension is supported by the title of the painting, which recalls the Daoist ideal of equilibrium, "motion in stillness; stillness in motion." The ink marks, as if fleeing from the paper, approximate calligraphic movements and visualize a tenet of Chinese philosophy.

The popularity of Liu Kuo-sung's paintings in the mid-1960s signaled a critical moment in the discourse of Chinese painting. The practice of abstract painting in Taiwan began as a strategy taken from Western modern art to rebel against traditional Chinese art in the late 1950s. Liu's choice of exclusively employing the Chinese medium of ink and paper, however, reopened the question of ink's potential for the modern era. By reinforcing the East-West divide in medium, Liu undertook the challenge of exploring the material, technique, and visual effects of ink and paper in order to achieve a new—specifically Chinese—kind of modernist abstraction. He saw the conventions of ink painting—the monochromatic scheme, the instrumental effect of water, and the compositional contrast—as assets in retaking the discussion of modernity from Western standards. By developing existing assets into a new vocabulary, Liu invented a type of vernacular landscape painting that possesses the apprehensible visual cues to remain connected to tradition while speaking in the language of modern abstraction to a wide

audience. His strategy echoed that of his close ally, the poet Yu Kwang-chung, who advocated for a style that would be approachable for a broader audience. The term "vernacular landscape" draws analogy to *baihuawen*, the written vernacular form of Chinese proliferated after the May Fourth movement. Modernism in postwar Taiwan is understood as a continuation of the early-twentieth century modernization movement. Connecting Liu's abstract ink landscape painting to the literary movement committed to making the Chinese language more suitable for the demands of modern life helps to illuminate the aesthetic, social, and political considerations of its development.

Marking the Parameters of Chinese Painting

Well before Liu dedicated his painting practice to glorifying the modernity of traditional Chinese media, he was first deeply invested in a campaign to purify Chinese painting from the contamination of Japanese-style art. As a student in the art department of the National Normal University in 1954, Liu broke onto the art scene with his criticism of several established artists working in the Japanese style.[4] Liu developed a strict nationalist stance by arguing that *nihonga* embodied neither Western nor Chinese painting characteristics—that *yoga* were mere copies of outdated European styles—and by critiquing as preposterous and offensive the official exhibition categorizations of *nihonga* as "Chinese painting."

Liu's actions were steeped in the rising consciousness of identity building prevalent in many nations and communities going through postwar recovery and

[4] Lu Ting [Liu Kuo-sung], "Why Push Japanese Painting into the Boundaries of National Painting?" (*weisheme ba ribenhua wang guohua li ji*), *United Daily News* Supplement, 23 November 1954, p. 6. Lu Ting is one of Liu's pen names.

postcolonial awakening. In early 1955, a few months after Liu's public debut, the *United Daily News* organized a forum on the future of "modern national painting" (*xiandai guohua*). The paper invited eight senior artists of mainland and Taiwanese origin to share their insights on, among other topics, whether to absorb qualities of Western paintings and to discard the legacy of Japanese painting.[5] Lurking in the background of the discussion were charged questions regarding the sustainability and utility of Japanese-style painting in a Chinese territory and, ultimately, the adaptability of classical Chinese painting. Such a forum revealed the paralysis within the art world: neither side wanted to concede, but they did not know how to break through the deadlock imposed by the systems of training and the deeply rooted barriers separating Chinese painting from Western painting. In fact, forty years earlier, Chinese artists had already begun debating the sensible direction for painting in the modern era.[6] After the intervening wars, it was only once the political situation settled down in Taiwan that the art gentry rekindled the existential query, this time complicated by the categories of medium and genre established by Japanese colonial rule.

Liu publicly defended the parameters of Chinese painting, yet in his practice he chose to follow the trajectory of twentieth century Western paintings. He would later reflect that, as early as 1953, he made Chinese paintings only to satisfy school requirements and then spent the rest of his time exploring various styles of European

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[5] The *United Daily News* reported on the forum and published articles by the participating artists in five days. *United Daily News*, 17–19, 21–22 January 1955. Details in Hsiao Chong-ray, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan: The Development of the Modernization of Chinese Art in Postwar Taiwan (1945–1970*) (*wuyue yu dongfang: zhongguo meishu xiandaihua yundong zai zhanhou taiwan zhi fazhan, 1945–1970*) (Taipei: Dongda, 1991), 160–63.

[6] See Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 47–113. For other related bibliography, see note 45 in Chapter One.

modern art.[7] Like many of his peers, including Chuang Che, his resistance to tradition was more directed at the conservatism raging in the ranks of the establishment rather than at the legacy of Chinese culture itself. As Liu wrote in "Not a Manifesto," the first public announcement of the intentions of the Fifth Moon Society, he sought to rejuvenate Chinese art by working through a wide range of European modernist styles.[8] Liu effectively used the distinctions between Chinese and Western painting to create room for his experiments. His interest in Western styles dissociated him from the academy's conservatism and from colonial vestiges. The curriculum of self-education included Fauvist, Cubist, and Surrealist styles, which roughly followed the sequence of the *Bihui* introductions to modern European art that Liu orchestrated.

A watercolor from 1954, *Naked Women*, shows a blend of Fauvist flatness, blunt outlines resembling charcoal sketches, and a color palette recalling Gauguin's Tahiti period. It seems to be an exercise of light and shade, central concerns in Western painting. *Still Life* from 1956 (Figure 4.3), a work made post-graduation, has a strong Cubist bent.[9] The objects on the tabletop, viewed from side and aerial perspectives, are flattened and have taken on geometric shapes in an almost childlike naïveté. With hints of influences from Picasso and Klee, the paintings hardly reference the cultural original of its maker beyond signatures. A watercolor from 1956, *Landscape near Keelong* shows how Liu tried to incorporate Western watercolor techniques and colors into Chinese

[7] Liu Kuo-sung, interview by author, Taoyuan, 5 December 2012.
[8] Liu Kuo-sung, "Not A Manifesto—Written before the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*bushi xuanyan—xiezai wuyue huazhan zhiqian*), *Bihui* 1, no. 1 (4 May 1959): 28.
[9] All graduates of the fine art program at the National Normal University must take one year of internship after the coursework and graduation exhibition have completed. This work was made during Liu's internship year in 1956. Lin Lee, e-mail correspondence with author, 2 November 2016.

landscape compositions. The series of experimentations shows Liu's extraordinary mobility in moving across and absorbing styles quickly.

War, an oil painting from 1958 (Figure 4.4), marks Liu's first non-representational painting. A lattice of white-and-black dripped lines covered the entire surface of a modest 38 by 45 centimeter canvas. Liu seemed more interested in the properties of oil and composition than in scale. The eye is automatically drawn to the white-on-black effect. This stark visual sensation would become the precursor to Liu's breakthrough of employing white lines in his later signature style. The white lines in *War* recall Mark Tobey's white writing, and the overall composition and dripped paint refer to Jackson Pollock's paintings, both of which Liu had knowledge through reading *Wenxing* and American magazines.[10] Although careful to distinguish between his formalist goals and those of the Abstract Expressionists, Liu seemed inspired by Pollock's unorthodox technique, by the willful abandon with which he made art. Liu more than once praised Pollock's highly trained mind and controlled methodology.[11] He valued Pollock's confidence in employing a seemingly juvenile method of dripping while creating a stunning effect on canvas. Another influencing factor in Liu's new development may have included Léon Chang's articles in *Wenxing*, which discussed the concept of abstraction in Euro-American abstract art.[12] Furthermore, the young scholar Gu Xianliang had just returned from the U.S. at the end of 1958 and lectured widely about American

[10] "Twentieth-Century American Painting" (*er'shi shiji meiguo huihua zhi yiban*), *Wenxing* 35 (1 September 1960): 20–21.
[11] Liu Kuo-sung, "On Brush and Ink" (*tan bimo*), *Wenxing* 92 (1 June 1965): 47. Liu mentioned that he had read the feature of Pollock in *Life* in *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 28.
[12] Léon Chang, "Cursive Script and Abstract Painting" (*caoshu yu chouxianghua*), *Wenxing* 24 (1 October 1959): 28–31.

abstract art.[13] It was also very likely that Liu got inspirations serving in the military in Kaohsiung in 1957, where he interacted with naval officer-artists Hu Chi-chung and Fong Chung-ray, who had been fervently exploring non-figurative oil painting.

Liu applied a Western technique to local and personal subjects. The harried lines in *War* elicit a vision of agitation and chaos; the emptiness and anxiety reflected in the minds of people who had experienced the turmoil of war. More immediately, the chaotic tone responds to the Quemoy bombardment in 1958, wherein the P.R.C. launched an intense artillery attack at the island that amplified the imminent threat felt by the Taiwanese.[14] On the one hand, the absence of image in the painting conveys an inability to make coherent utterance about the destruction of war; on the other hand, Liu grounded the abstract painting in the context of his and his contemporaries' states of mind. While making non-representational work, Liu created avenues of association for the viewer. At the risk of being seen as trying every relevant Western style just to prove that he had studied it, Liu gleaned solid knowledge of composition, texture, and material that fueled his later stylistic breakthrough. Liu's strategy of acquaintance with Westerns styles seem to echo what Yu Kwang-chung had believed and practiced: namely, that modern poets should fully understand both Western and Chinese traditions before making informed decisions about what they were rebelling against.[15]

In Liu's next phase of development, he experimented with the qualities of media in his art to achieve novel effects. In *Paradise Lost* from 1959 (Figure 4.5), shown at the

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[13] Hsiao Chong-ray, *The Majestic Soul of Ink: The Biography of Liu Kuo-sung* (*shuimo juling: liu guosong zhuan*) (New Taipei City: Yuanjing, 2011), 60.
[14] Hsiao Chong-ray held similar view. Hsiao, *Majestic Soul*, 52.
[15] For a summary of Yu Kwang-chung's argument, see Yi-li Kao, "Chinese Poetry and Painting in Postwar Taiwan: Angst and Transformation in the Negotiation between Tradition and Modernity" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 2005), 44.

third Fifth Moon exhibition, he applied a layer of plaster onto the canvas before dripping oil on top. The delayed absorption and flow was a new sensation, different from the interaction between ink and paper. Linda Graves, an American artist from Oberlin College studying in Taiwan, credited the plaster, oil, and watercolor technique as one of Liu's major contributions to painting in Taiwan.[16] In their individual practices, Liu and other young artists experimented with mixing media and creating varied textures on the painting's surface. Chuang Che, Hu Chi-chung, and Fong Chung-ray all tried altering one medium to imitate another during the early 1960s. Hu's mixing sand in oil was perhaps closest to Liu's making a raised surface and delaying drying time (Figures 4.6, 4.7). What piqued their interest in material was the distinct surface quality of oil and ink paintings. This suggests that, as the artists tried to distance from ink, they also proposed the possibility of breaking down the cultural barriers between materials by making other materials behave like ink, or vice versa.

Although *Paradise Lost* won high regards at the First Paris Youth Biennial, the Taiwanese art community seemed unsure.[17] One reviewer was bothered by the "depressive emotions" and the "rotten" complexion.[18] Another discouraged the practice of titling an abstract painting after a literary masterpiece.[19] The painting's physical resemblance to a dilapidated wall seemed too realistic or too challenging. Yet Liu's interest in the wall motif—repeated in another painting, *Peeling Mural II* from 1958—

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[16] Linda Margaret Graves, "Contemporary Chinese Artists in Taiwan," (M.A. thesis, Oberlin College, 1965), 145.
[17] Xie Aizhi, "The First Paris International Youth Exhibition" (*bali shoujie guoji qingnian yihan*), *United Daily News*, 12 November 1960, p. 6.
[18] Bai Danfu, "Thoughts on the Fifth Moon Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan guangan*), *United Daily News*, 31 May 1959, p. 6.
[19] Shi Di cautioned Liu about the painting's title directly borrowed from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Shi Di, "Be Careful with the Title of Paintings" (*xiaoxin yishupin de biaoti*), *Bihui* 1, no. 2 (10 June 1959): 34.

had historical grounding. In a later article, Liu referenced a tendency among Chinese literati artists of finding inspiration from imperfections in the environment. Song dynasty painter Zhang Su discovered landscapes in naturally rotten wall surfaces; Guo Xi artfully added ink to a haphazardly molded wall surface to make landscapes.[20] Liu's excavation of precedents from Chinese art history strategically validated his unusual process and material. While exploring the intersection of painting and object on the level of spontaneity, Liu argued for historically contextualizing unorthodox ways of creating landscape paintings. His desire to form East-West hybrids through both material selection and juxtaposing the historical and the contemporary is evident through these examples.

A Return to Chinese Art

The years 1960 and 1961 marked Liu's crucial transformation. Inspired by what he saw at the preview of the first postwar American tour of the National Palace Museum's collection in 1960, he began to make abstract ink paintings that emulate the form, composition, and *yijing* of the masterpieces. Like many artists of his generation who had studied traditional painting without ever seeing the originals, the encounter had a seismic effect on Liu. It triggered a reconciliation with tradition through subject and form: a plaster and ink painting from 1961 *Red Cliff* (also as *Ch'e Bii, from Here to Hell*) was most likely inspired by twelfth-century painter Wu Yuanzhi's scroll painting of the storied historical site; *Lofty Mountain Lu* of the same year paid direct homage to Ming

[20] Liu Kuo-sung, "On the Techniques of Painting" (*tan huihua de jifa*), *Wenxing* 92 (1 June 1965): 48.

painter Shen Zhou's masterpiece of the same title.[21] By borrowing only the structure and compositional principles of the masterpieces and using alternative materials to replace the technical details of the classics, Liu gave new meaning to "copy." His newfound direction suggests a determination to rejoin the discourse of Chinese art and to dialogue directly with the classics. It also demonstrates the immense power of cultural objects and materials to conjure nationalistic sentiment and identity.

Liu's return to Chinese art had as much to do with personal epiphany as with forming a bullet-proof defense against the hostility and doubt toward new art in the immediate environment. The political pressure that overshadowed the failure to launch the Chinese Modern Art Center in 1960 had darkened the outlook of the young avant-garde artists. The drawn-out debate in the late summer of 1961 between Liu Kuo-sung and the preeminent scholar on Chinese philosophy and aesthetics Hsu Fu-kwan on the political incorrectness of abstraction is indicative of the social unease toward foreign concepts. To the detractors of Western art, rejecting foreign influences was more a matter of principle than an objection to the artistic ideas.[22] Artists keen on Western-inspired abstract painting were characterized as enablers of "artistic colonialism."[23] But Liu and his ally, Yu Kwang-chung, justified their knowledge of Western art as a rite of passage in

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[21] Li Chu-tsing made compelling arguments for the likeness between Liu's paintings and the classical ones in Li, "The Growth of a Modern Chinese Artist," *Liu Kuo-sung* (Taipei: National Gallery of Art and Museum of History, 1969), 27–28.

[22] Based on Liu Kuo-sung's response to Fang Qi, the latter's argument is that the new style of painting had deviated from the essence of Chinese art, threatening the core of artistic loyalty. Liu Kuo-sung, "The Essence of Modern Painting—and to Answer Mr. Fang Qi (*xiandai huihua de benzhi wenti—jian da fangqi xiansheng*), *Bihui* 1, no. 12 (27 April 1960): 18. Hsiao Chong-ray summarizes an especially exhausting debate between the abstract painters and their detractors in his book, *Fifth Moon and Ton Fan*, 339–46.

[23] In Yu Kwang-chung's "Greet the Renaissance of China" (*ying zhongguo de wenyifuxing*), he mentions the most feasible progression is to not let Chinese arts and culture become the colony of the West. *Wenxing* 58 (1 August 1962): 4. Some opponents had reasoned that abstraction had already become a passé style in the West, which was why it was exported to Asia. Liu Kuo-sung, "From a Lecture by American Mr. Hache" (*cong meiren haique xiansheng yanjiang shuoqi*), *Wenxing* 83 (1 September 1964): 67.

carrying on Chinese heritage (*chengxian qihou*).[24] To facilitate the understanding of new art, Liu devised a new narrative—accompanied by new paintings—to prove the compatibility of Chinese traditional painting aesthetics and Western modern art technique and to ultimately pledge his loyalty to Chinese art.

The campaign for new painting that incorporated materials and methods of Western abstraction and an illusion of landscape imagery had as its deliberate objective to quiet the opposition within Taiwanese art circles and to reclaim the features of Chinese art while keeping in tune with international trends. Liu continued to excavate materials from classical painting to fortify his argument. In addition to "copying" recognizable classical paintings, he often cited examples of unusual techniques in Chinese painting history to demonstrate their worthiness by contemporary standards. For instance, he often referenced the Tang dynasty painter Wang Qia's unorthodox painting habit and technique *pomo* (splashing ink)—"flailing or sweeping," "kicking at it with his feet or rubbing it with hands" while under the influence of alcohol— to illustrate the artist's spontaneity and ease with material.[25] The parallel to Pollock's arm-flailing dripping actions when inebriated is convincing and deliberate on Liu's part. Paradoxically, while Liu argued for the translatability of Chinese art techniques into the modern art lexicon through historical coincidence, he also reinforced the distinction between Chinese and Western art. He wrote defiantly in 1960 about the superiority of Chinese art:

> Instead of claiming that Chinese culture has been torn into pieces by abstract art, the Chinese spirit has actually been promoted. Because the

[24] Yu's personal journey followed this trajectory: he received advance degrees in America. After his return to Taiwan, he called for a return to Chinese traditions in poetry.
[25] Original phrases by ninth-century art historian Zhu Jingxuan quoted in Liu, "Mr. Fang Qi," 18. First phrase, translated by author; the second one by Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 65, in Kao, 132.

> whole world's abstract painting has more or less accepted the Oriental thought and favored the East. Some even had directly taken the forms and inspirations from Chinese painting, oracle and bronze symbols, cursive calligraphy, and steles, to a point that the Western logic and rational tradition is on the brink of collapse. Shouldn't we be proud?[26]

Liu's aggrandizing view of cultural importance dismissed accusations from conservatives. But the remarks also spoke to the insecurity and anxiety among the cultural class in Taiwan as it faced the threat of strong Western cultural currents. Liu seemed less worried about being colonized by Western ideas than about the elements of Chinese art being claimed by Western modernist practice while being shamefully neglected by the Chinese.[27] Facing the resistance from a conservative, insecure, and insular environment, Liu played the East-West difference to his advantage. On the one hand, through his active involvement in magazines such as *Bihui* and *Wenxing*, he championed the modern quality of Western art and promoted a wider understanding of it. He took on a liberal stance as a young artist and leader of the enlightened class. To this effect, he legitimized the introduction of new technique and visual effect in painting and familiarized the public with key developments in Western art. On the other hand, he repeatedly emphasized the Chinese roots of abstraction and underscored his loyalty to Chinese culture. He faulted his opponents for being speed bumps to the modernization of Chinese art. He invoked the Daoist belief of "constant change" to justify his proposed

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[26] Translated by author. Liu, "Mr. Fang Qi," 18.
[27] Liu Kuo-sung, "On Abstract Painting" (*tan chouxiang huihua*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 31; Liu Kuo-sung, "Past, Modern, and Tradition" (*guoqu, xiandai, chuantong*) *Wenxing* 59 (1 September 1962): 20.

direction for painting reform: the only way to revere tradition, he argued, is to instigate change.[28]

During this period, the size of Liu's paintings grew with his ambition, averaging around 187.96 by 92.08 centimeters. The works are taller than the artist, imitating the towering impact of monumental hanging scrolls (Figure 4.8). The scale suggests that Liu's process of making paintings was physically demanding. A cascade of dripping ink, with a trajectory complicated by a rough, powdery surface, creates a sense of decadent grandeur that Yu Kwang-chung described as "flowing with great eloquence and power" (*linli zhixia*).[29] The marks were less the result of artistic control than the summary of incidental encounters between materials. Léon Chang praised the effect of Liu's new technique but raised the question of control during the production process.[30] Chuang Che, whose opinion mattered to Liu the most among their peer group, was ambivalent toward Liu's reinterpretation of traditions through material manipulation. He recognized Liu's allusion to classical paintings, but commented that paper would have been a better material to achieve such effects.[31]

Liu pushed the question of ink painting's relationship to abstraction through a material challenge in a way that would resonate with several of his cohorts of the Fifth Moon Society. For example, Han Hsiang-ning, the latest addition to the group, worked with oil on canvas to honor the monumentality of Fan Kuan's *Travelers among*

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[28] Liu Kuo-sung, "Areas Unmarked Could Reach a Marvelous State—Written before the Fifth Moon Art Exhibition" (*wuhuachu jie cheng miaojing—xiezai wuyue meizhan qianxi*), *Wenxing* 68 (1 June 1963): 43.
[29] Yu Kwang-chung, "The Plain Fifth Moon—Review of the Preview Exhibition of Modern Painting in the United States" (*pusu de wuyue—xiandai huihua fumei yuzhan guanhougan*), *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 71.
[30] Lei Weng [Léon Chang], "A Prelude to the Fifth Moon Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan xiaoyin*), *Wenxing* 43 (1 May 1961): 23.
[31] Chuang Che, "The Judging of the São Paulo International Art Exhibition" (*shengbaoluo guoji meizhan de pingxuan gongzuo*), *Wenxing* 42 (1 April 1961): 27.

Mountains and Streams, the most iconic work in the history of Chinese painting. The structure and compositional principles of Fan's painting became the basis for all his paintings thereafter, an act that would attest to its unmistakable, enduring spirit.[32] In the center of Han's *Worship* from 1961 (Figure 4.9) stands a block of impenetrable black, saluting the daunting effect of the mountain peaks central to Fan's vertical landscape paintings. The solemnity and austerity of the mass—a proxy of a proxy of the mountain formation—represent several rounds of formal simplification and act as a conceptual metaphor for the impact of history. Honoring the spirit of the monumental landscapes of China's past is a tall order, but also an ultimate display of national pride, one that the artists believed must be achieved through alternative techniques and visual representation, not through brush and ink alone.

Reassertion of Chinese Modern Painting

At the end of 1961, Liu made a decisive return to ink and paper. This was the most definitive step of reconciliation with tradition and a dramatic overturning of his earlier strategy of "total Westernization." According to Liu, his reclamation of ink and paper was inspired by architect Wang Da-hong's lecture on the modernist tenet of staying true to material properties.[33] But Chuang Che's criticism, along with others comments on artistic control of his plaster paintings, must have mattered greatly to Liu. His renewed commitment to ink and paper took advantage of the distinction between Chinese and

[32] Han Hsiang-ning, interview by author, Hong Kong, 23 May 2016.
[33] Wang Da-hong (b. 1917), born in China and hold degrees in architecture from Cambridge University and Harvard University, is the first architect working in Taiwan who received Western modernist, especially Bauhaus, training. In an interview with Lang Shaojun, Liu mentioned how Wang inspired him. See Hsiao Chong-ray and Lin Po-shin, "Theoretical Development," *Liu Kuo-sung* (Taipei: Yishujia, 1999), 27, note 9.

Western materials, which gave his paintings a nationalist reading that became the best defense against the conservatism rampant in the painting world.[34] Liu became the first artist of his generation to exclusively explore the modernist potential of ink painting.

In Liu's re-adoption of the traditional Chinese material, he first tried to restore faith to the brush by tasking himself to make expressionist, abstract patterns on paper. In *I Hear Your Voice, My Country* from 1961 (Figure 4.10), the ink marks whirled across the paper, as if propelled by forces beyond the edges. The diagonal ink patterns, from upper right across to the left, then right again and downward, forces the eye to keep up with the visually indistinct strokes and washes. An ink storm in motion had been caught, leaving its indelible traces on paper. The composition still preserves the structure of a Northern Song-style landscape, where the top half of the painting is much more heavily marked than the bottom. But Liu dispensed with the plaster for texture, making the painting based on spontaneity and the effects of ink, water, and paper. *I Hear Your Voice, My Country* fulfilled a "crowd-pleasing" duty through its evocative title.[35] Here Liu called upon the nostalgia and longing shared by émigrés of mainland China and added emotional weight to the work. Still, Yu Kwang-chung did not consider the painting successful. He commented that "the brushwork was too soft and weak, the rhythm indecisive and the power dispersed; the leaf-like lines on the bottom right seems

[34] Liu expressed that Chinese artists had exclusive knowledge of and history with ink and paper and thus they must take ownership. Liu Kuo-sung, "Preface to The Road of Chinese Modern Painting" (*zhongguo xiandaihua de lu zixu*), *Wenxing* 90 (1 April 1965): 68.
[35] Yu Kwang-chung called the painting "crowd-pleasing" (*quyue guanzhong*) in Yu, "Plain Fifth Moon," *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 71.

excessive."[36] Curiously, this exposes Liu's—and Chuang's as well—most immediate problem: with only ink and paper, the picture lacked substance.

Liu followed *I Hear Your Voice, My Country* by complicating the process of mark making and experimenting with surface texture and visual effect. On top of the bold, sweeping brush strokes that anchor the composition, he used wrinkled paper dipped in ink to make imprints. The layering of various shades of black adds shadows, patterns, and contrasts and brought Liu back to the all-over composition he once used. He translated the white lines that first appeared in his abstract oil painting (*War*, Figure 4.4) to the negative spaces formed by the creases of the crumbled paper. Transfer print was not a new technique. Liu had appropriated the method of rubbing from Han dynasty steles and brick paintings into his new repertoire of techniques after seeing an exhibition of the subject in the summer of 1961 at Taipei's National History Museum.[37] While other artists of Liu's generation turned to rubbings and reliefs for inspirations of form, Liu resourcefully adopted the idiosyncrasies added to the picture during the process of the transferring and printing.[38]

The act of veiling the broad brushstrokes with wrinkled paper patterns lessened the prominence of the brush, enhanced the layering effect with the wet and dry marks, and infused the work with romantic emotions. It suggests that Liu wanted to deviate from the predictable look of brushwork in traditional ink paintings. Two of the works in this

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Liu Kuo-sung had a consistent interest in printmaking, as he reviewed the annual exhibition of the Modern Printmaking Exhibition in January 1962. Liu, "The Review and Introduction of the Modern Printmaking Exhibition" (*xiandai banhuazhan pingjie*), *United Daily News*, 1 January 1962, p. 8.
[38] In his review, Liu notes the effect of the spontaneous marks that appeared on stele rubbings which stroke affinity with that of automatism in modern Western painting. Liu Kuo-sung, "An Overview of the Special Exhibition of Han Paintings" (*hanhua tezhan jianjie*), *United Daily News*, 1–3 August 1961, p. 8.

technique won the top prize of the painting salon organized by the Modern Literature and Art Association in Hong Kong in 1961. The organizers were impressed by the "accidental patterns" that resulted from the imprints of the material.[39] But Yu Kwang-chung still found the works unsatisfactory.[40] Li Chu-tsing also called the paintings "mechanical" and said that they lacked "depth, mystery, and transformation."[41] In other words, to the critics, the new effect ran the risk of becoming too candid of its process. The purity of medium, though a virtue in principle, exposed a weakness of an expressionist style ink painting: that without the support of certain organizational structures, the final effect may be too simplistic.

Liu enlisted the format of hanging scrolls to boost the painting's traditionalist credentials. *I Hear Your Voice, My Country* and four other works mounted on hanging scrolls were shown in the 1962 exhibition of modern paintings at the National History Museum (Figure 4.11). The format of classical landscape paintings placed the works in a familiar viewing condition. Hanging the works in a national venue also added to its persuasiveness. Moderately sized—the height of the image range between 121 and 138 centimeters after mounting—the paintings would allow the eye to land at the bottom and follow the drama of ink marks upward beyond one's height. The viewer would either step back to take in the whole length of the painting in totality, or stand close to study the complexity of the abstract ink marks. Each painting formed a discrete, contained world, with references to the homeland or to the idyllic, joyful state of the natural world.

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[39] Wai-lim Yip, "Dances in the Empyrean & Eye-Excursion through the Eight Limits: Liu Guosong's Tensional Dialogues with the Modernists in the West," in *A Man of East, West, South and North: Liu Kuo-sung 80th Birthday Retrospective Exhibition* (Taichung: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2012), 37.
[40] Yu, "Plain Fifth Moon," 71.
[41] Li, *Liu Kuo-sung*, 30.

(Among the titles are "Cool upon Awakening in Spring" and "The Season of Cicadas"). Presented together, they formed a coherent series. The hopeful tone may have given Liu's work an advantage within the establishment and in the public realm because it departed from the pervasive feeling of emptiness and desolation predominant in modern poetry and the paintings produced by his colleagues. Accentuating the neutrality of abstract paintings makes them politically unthreatening in an extremely sensitive environment and vernacularizes the work for popular consumption. Liu's intentions are perhaps clearer when seen in relation to other works in the Fifth Moon Group. The June 1962 issue of *Wenxing* dedicated a two-page spread to a selection of paintings in the annual exhibition at the National History Museum.[42] All of the works, objectless and monochromatic, have a poetic, melancholy, and enigmatic air, with titles such as "Lost" (by Chuang Che), "The Abstruse Void" (by Wucius Wong), "Slaughter" (by Peng Wan-chi). Liu's painting *The Season of Cicadas* appeared to be the most reassuring and polished, uplifting and bright in its visual qualities.

Worthy of note is the evolution of Liu's signature during this experimental period. At the beginning of the "total Westernization" phase soon after the Fifth Moon Society was established, Liu often signed in white against a dark ground, with only his given name *guosong* and the dates written vertically in Chinese. In the signature is a conscious insertion of Chinese identity within a Western painting context. The signature style is consistent with his traditional ink paintings of the same period, save for dropping the seal in place of the Western dates. In 1959, after he had adopted the all-over composition in

[42] "Selection from the Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition" (*wuyue huazhan xuancui*), *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 53–54.

Pollock-inspired style, he signed his name in English, following the Chinese word order for names, "Liu Kuo-sung." The date was also changed to Roman numerals. In *Paradise Lost* from 1959, an additional signature in English on the lower right signals the artist's awareness of the translatability of his authorship in an international context (this work was selected to show in Paris). But once Liu returned to ink and paper in 1961, his signature in Chinese and seal reappeared. In the 1962 painting *Cool upon the Awakening in Spring* (Figure 4.12), Liu's signature and year of the work in regular script appear on the middle right edge of the work, followed by a seal. Since then, Liu integrated his signature into the composition. Affixing the vermillion seal—an unmistakable symbol of Chinese authorship—places Liu's work firmly in the canon of tradition. His choice of the regular script and the rigid formality of his Chinese handwriting insert an authoritative (not expressionist) reading of the paintings. In accordance with his return to Chinese roots in theory and practice, his signature underscores his desire to have his works considered in the Chinese art tradition, and, when in a Western context, to emphasize his cultural origin. Liu would adopt this format of signature for the rest of his career.

The Role of Paper in Chinese Modernity

At the beginning of 1963, Liu took advantage of the properties of the cotton (*mian*) paper and invented a new technique. He peeled off threads of fiber on the paper and painted directly over that surface. Resistant to ink, the remaining stringy fibers would become white lines amidst the black ink. Liu would pull more fiber off to increase the density of the white lines. The patterns are products of a process of revelation, not of deliberate arrangement, because they were naturally embedded in the paper. This new

technique reinterprets the classical technique of *cun*, the stylized brushstrokes that mimic the texture on the surface of rocks, trees, and mountains. It also replaces the required years of training and a thorough understanding of the repertoire of *cun* with an unsophisticated, handmade effect. A labor-intensive yet low-skill step that relies on the properties of paper and the artist's precision makes the brush redundant and upends the symbiosis between paper, brush, and ink that previously defined Chinese painting. It also demonstrates the dexterity of the artist. Yet the labor itself remains understated as the white lines are sprinkled across the painting, barely visible unless they appear against an inked background. What mattered to the artist was the collective sum, rather than any individual white line. Liu employed a delicate and almost destructive method to reinvent the appearance and the production of the textured stroke, one of the most technical aspects of Chinese literati painting. By producing a new version of the hallmark of Chinese landscape painting, Liu made suggestive forms of mountains and rocks.

In Liu's writings of this period, however, he never called his paintings "landscape;" he referred to them only as "abstract painting" or "Chinese modern painting." Liu's careful refusal to label his work "landscape" and the conscious decision of titling his work with association to that very genre show two strategic motivations often in conflict. On the one hand, he was keen on the primacy of abstraction and rejected any overt linguistic or formal associations to representational forms. On the other hand, he wanted to recreate the aesthetics and philosophy of Chinese landscape painting through new composition, cognitive associations, and technique. In the 1980s Liu admitted that the previous training in Chinese landscape paintings inevitably and unconsciously seeped into his creative process, including traces of the Chinese

compositional perspective (the aerial view) and the empty and expansive (*kongmang*) style of Mu Xi or Yu Jian.[43] In his younger years, as a strategy, he let these tendencies show in his work just enough as powerful hints without stating them outright.

Liu engages with paper through both the material and the compositional aspects. He "based the composition on the paper fibers," so his painting routine "is just like playing chess with the fiber, with the brushwork, with the space (the blank)."[44] While the process appeared to be dictated by chance, it was actually a calculated effort—like a game of chess. The emphasis on the interaction between mark (positive and negative) and space (also positive and negative) reveals Liu's loyalty to the ink painter's conventional ways of understanding painting. Even though he changed his relationship to paper—by not merely working *on* it but working *with* it—he prioritized the overall visual effect over the paper's independent value. Not many colleagues or reviewers paid attention to the meaning of the fiber-peeling technique; most focused on the overall effect of the composition.[45] Even in Liu's essay on painting techniques in 1965, where he surveyed the unorthodox techniques and materials throughout painting's history, it did not mention his own invention. The article only implies that no matter the technique and instrument—as long as it is not the conventional—the final effect is the end goal.[46]

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[43] Yip, *Dialogues,* 266.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Several reviews offered opinions on Liu's new paintings but without specific comments on the fiber-peeling action. These include: Yu Kwang-chung, "On From Clairvoyancism," *Wenxing* 80 (1 June 1964): 48–52; Chuang Che, "This Generation and the Last—On Liu Kuo-sung and His Background" (*zheyidai yu shangyidai—lun liu guosong, he tade beijing*), *Wenxing* 90 (1 April 1965): 50–51. Li Chu-tsing introduction in the "The New Chinese Landscape" catalogue only notes in one sentence, "The result is an intricate texture that lends considerable depth to his expression." Li and Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape*, 9.
[46] Liu, "Techniques," 49.

The collective oversight of the specifics of Liu's technique does not hinder the fact that by stripping paper to its inner layer, Liu showcased the least recognized aspect of paper, which is its main contribution to his new paintings: to supply the white lines. The lines also affirmed the materiality of the negative spaces. Liu was aware that the new technique fulfilled the modernist pursuit of being honest with the material properties, as preached by his contemporaries. He repackaged a cultural inheritance of textured strokes through new modes of art making—by creating actual texture on paper—which was a modern exercise by definition. Most importantly to Liu, his invented technique is not associated with established strategies of Euro-American works and is thus Chinese.

Daoist Philosophy in Painting

The whiteness in Liu's painting, whether in the form of thin strips of negative space vacated by the paper's fiber, or even of large surfaces that are left bare, prompts a deeper analysis of blank space. Performing like incisions or cavities on the paper, the white lines are marked by their lack of color and matter. They are agents that counterbalance the pervasiveness of the ink and the passiveness of the white in the pictorial field. They function like a kind of "punctum" engaging the eye across the painting and highlighting the rhythm and surface dynamics.[47] Wai-lim Yip called attention to the way the whites seeped into the black, as if the whites were dotted on the black paper, a reversal of the conventional effect.[48] The white lines are thus subversion of

[47] I borrow this term from Roland Barthes' concept in *Camera Lucida* in analyzing the ways of looking at a photograph. A "punctum" describes a moment when a detail in a photograph suddenly engages the viewer's gaze. I use it to describe how the clusters of white lines in Liu's paintings attract the viewer's eye across the surface, giving them anchor points to linger and to derive meaning. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 26–27.
[48] Yip, *Dialogues*, 243–44.

the black and continuation of the white from the untouched area in the painting, achieving the balance celebrated in Daoist philosophy.

In an important essay introducing the 1963 Fifth Moon exhibition, Liu grounds the unpainted space of his paintings in Daoist philosophy and in the history of Chinese painting. Qing painter Da Chongguang's painting theory, which Liu quotes as the title, summarizes his viewpoint: "The void and the solid sustain each other. Areas unmarked could reach a marvelous state."[49] Liu explained that the concept of activating the void with sparse markings is a well-documented strategy in Chinese poetry, calligraphy, and painting, and it has strong philosophical basis in Daoist metaphysics.[50] The unmarked spaces, framed by the marked ones, and the interaction between them, are an indispensable visual and theoretical component in his new painting. The void, in Liu's view, is a keystone of the Chinese painting practice and major contribution of Chinese painters to world art.[51]

Why did Liu invoke Daoist philosophy in the theoretical formulations of his new paintings? From one of Liu's examples, a verse from Tang poet Bai Juyi's *Pi Pa Xing*, "At this moment, silence trumps all sounds" (*cishi wusheng sheng yousheng*), one senses that the blank, the silence, and the abstract offer a sense of freedom.[52] Metaphorically, the Daoist approach to matter serves as foil to the Confucian philosophy that governs the hierarchy and conventions within the art field.[53] The blank space, as it accompanies Daoist metaphysics in Liu's formulations, is a formal, aesthetic, and ideological choice.

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[49] Translated by author. Liu, "Areas Unmarked," 43.
[50] Ibid., 44–45.
[51] Ibid., 45.
[52] Translated by author. Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 44.

By drawing a parallel to poetry, Liu brought the concept of abstract art closer to the well-circulated ideas in literature and philosophy. This was a clear strategy of finding affinities and allies outside of the discipline of art, especially among the intellectual class. Liu tried to subsume the art of all of his Fifth Moon cohorts under the rubric of Daoist aesthetics, citing their shared concern for the empty spaces in paintings.[54] However, Chuang Che rejected the group-speak and was disapproving of slotting one's art into existing philosophical ideas.[55] He criticizes Liu's ideas and proclamations:

> His ideas, such as talking about the basic spirit of modern painting of China, alter its nature. For me, it is ridiculous. How is he different from those conservatives? . . . if besides ink nothing is Chinese, besides abstraction nothing is Chinese, besides Daoist mysticism nothing is modern, [it] would hinder the growth of individuality. He rejects originality altogether and supplements it entirely by technique.[56]

Painter Lin Xingyue, a few years younger than Liu, was also suspicious of the underlying motivation behind the use of Daoist philosophy as the theoretical support for paintings. He accused Liu of self-exoticism for the sake of self-promotion.[57] Yet it seems reasonable that Daoist ideas would be used in the context of abstraction—as both reject narrative structure—and that together they form a feasible lexicon for Chinese painting to coexist with Western visual vocabulary and production. Daoist philosophy of detachment and withdrawal in the literati culture also seem befitting to the aftermath of a turbulent recent past in the Taiwanese context. Abstract art supported by Daoist philosophy ultimately reflects the worldview and the aesthetics of a postwar Chinese population.

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[54] Ibid., 45.
[55] Zhang Mo, *Letters of Modern Poets* (*xiandai shiren shujian*), (Taichung: Putian, 1969), 350.
[56] Translated by author. Chuang Che to Wai-lim Yip, 19 June 1966, Wai-lim Yip's archive, Del Mar, CA.
[57] Lin Xingyue, "Where it the Eastern Spirit?—On Liu Kuo-sung's Theories of Painting and Others" (*dongfang jingshen zai nali—ping liu guosong de huihua sixiang ji qita*), *Wenxing* 93 (1 July 1965): 39.

Liu's deft management of blank space, white fibers, and various shades of ink in exploring traditional imagery and spirit is well reflected in *Wintry Mountain Covered with Snow* from 1964 (Figure 4.13).[58] From the bottom to the top, the inked sections roughly follow the "z" structure Liu frequently uses. The interplay of the black and white creates a strong chiaroscuro effect and makes the illusion of distant mountain ranges covered in snow. Overall, the marked and unmarked areas each occupy half of the composition; the top and bottom fifths of the painting are left blank and give depth and distance to the scene. The "snowy mountains in the background and dark trees in the foreground" dialogue with each other as observed by Li Chu-tsing. To Li, "the agitation and strife below has finally been resolved in the high peak, a symbol of eternal harmony and unity."[59] He saw in the painting that Liu "attempts to continue the feeling for landscape in the Chinese tradition while pursuing the idea of form itself."[60] On close inspection, the filaments add a vein-like texture to the space.[61] The "flying white" (*feibai*) strokes, which suggest calligraphic roots, are the result of a dry, ill-purposed brush meeting a coarse, fibrous surface. Liu investigated how dryness, coarseness, and the limited rate of absorption would emphasize the moment of material encounter.

A comparison between the known strategies of American modernist painting that activates blank spaces and Liu's treatment of such is needed in order to see the larger implications of the Daoist narrative. While Liu continued to promote the universal value

[58] Liu Kuo-sung gifted the painting to Li Chu-tsing after their first meeting and shortly after the painting's completion. The work is now in the Harvard Art Museums collection as a bequest from the Li family after his passing in 2014. The work also is the cover image of the catalogue for the 2007 exhibition dedicated to the Chu-tsing Li Collection, "A Tradition Redefined: Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Paintings from the Chu-Tsing Li Collection, 1950–2000."
[59] Li, *Liu Kuo-sung* 35.
[60] Ibid., 37.
[61] The filaments have turned slightly yellowish brown. Author's observation of the painting at the Harvard Art Museums storage, 16 October 2012, Cambridge.

in the dialectical relationship between positive and negative space, he operated from a Chinese perspective. Liu's leaving untouched areas in painting constitute an antithesis to the all-over composition in Pollock's overtly expressive, agitated canvas with which he experimented in his earlier experimental phase. He had since shifted his interest to more reserved compositions in line with the black-on-white abstractions of Franz Kline (Figure 4.14).[62] But the affinity stops there. Kline's gestural abstractions consisted of stiff, black lines executed with speed, rushing off the edge of the canvas. The configuration of the black and white does not yield any signs or meanings and are deliberate reproductions of drawings of a smaller scale.[63] Kline, though utilizing certain Asian ideas in painting, adamantly rejected the Asian reading to protect his painting's cultural independence and the purely American qualities.[64] Liu, by contrast, saw the American painters' borrowing of Eastern culture as proof of the worthiness of Chinese aesthetic values in an international context.[65] To boost the support of his own art from his compatriots, Liu remarked: "By greatly absorbing Eastern culture and philosophical thought, Western painting has shifted away from its realist tradition . . . . Chinese *xieyi* spirit has blossomed in the history of Western painting."[66] In Liu's view, the Western paintings provided

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[62] Liu reflected that he was largely influenced by these New York school painters. Yip, *Dialogues*, 240. I chose Kline's *Chief* from 1950 as an example because it was reproduced as an illustration for Yu Kwang-chung's essay "On From Clairvoyancism" (*cong lingshi zhuyi chufa*), *Wenxing* 80 (1 June 1964): 50.

[63] Kline's black paintings are derived from copying the projection of pocket-sized drawings onto the wall, making his gestures premeditated rather than spontaneous. See John Elderfield ed., *De Kooning: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011), 325.

[64] See Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Mark Tobey, White Writing for a Janus-Faced America," *Word * Image* 13, no. 1 (January–March 1997): 89.

[65] Robert Motherwell's series, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic*, had an impact on Liu Kuo-sung, which he elaborates in "The Necessary Path for a Chinese Artist Based on the History of Chinese and Western Painting Development" (*you zhongxi huihuashi de fazhan laikan zhongguo huajia ying zou de fangxing*), *New Asia Art* 9 & 10 (July 1972): 18–19. Liu maintains that Motherwell's *Elegy* series paintings are repetitive depictions of the Chinese character *zhou*. Liu, interview by author, Hong Kong, 8 August 2013 and 25 March 2016.

[66] Translated by author. Liu Kuo-sung, "Past, Modern, and Tradition," 19.

further proof that the unmarked space and its function within the pictorial frame constitute a modernist expression used by painters from both East and West.

This line of thinking recalls Léon Chang's view on the distinction between the compositional strategies of Chinese and Western painting. Liu's essay echoes Chang's observations on the sophisticated treatment of space and composition in Chinese painting, which he concluded predated the pursuits of similar goals in Western modernism.[67] Yu Kwang-chung was more judicious in the East-West comparison. To him, Kline's abstraction is "action" (*youwei de*) and Liu's "inaction" (*wuwei de*). The negative spaces carved out by heavy lines of Kline, Soulage, or Hartung "cannot reflect the sublime" or contribute enough weight to counteract the marked areas. Yu believed Liu's methodology to be superior in the philosophical depths and spiritual vitality (*lingqi*) it could reach without much maneuvering.[68] Considering that Kline actually painted the white areas of his paintings, unbeknownst to Yu, he was correct in his assessment.[69]

The dynamic between the black-and-white spaces is especially vital in Liu's calligraphic abstraction, another signature style that began with *Silence in Movement* from 1963. In *Windy Solitude* from 1964 (Figure 4.15), the gestural strokes burst with motion, gaining buoyancy from the large areas of untouched space. The broad strokes stack, overlap, and form loops and sharp angles, but never crisscross or form grids. The thickness of the strokes suggests that the brush is disproportionate to the size of the paper, breaking a primary principle in calligraphy and painting. Liu had deployed the strokes without the intention of giving any semantic values. The starting point of the strokes is

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[67] Léon Chang, "Art Appreciation 10—Conquer the Space" (*yishu xinshang zhi shi—zhengfu taikong*), *Wenxing* 10 (1 August 1958), 13–16.
[68] Yu, "On From Clairvoyancism," 49.
[69] Kline stated that "the white is just as important" as the black. See Elderfield, 325.

obscured; none of the strokes retains their usual shape, orientation, or script-making function, which would lead a Chinese-trained eye to keep searching in vain. The strokes, freed from the linguistic function, are thus dedicated to activating the pictorial space. The stroke on the top right strikes across the paper beyond the edge, and in its wake leaves loops and flying whites that underscore its swiftness and force. The movement in the painting is so compelling that Liu puts his signature on the departing stroke, riding on its energy as it exits the painting from the upper right border. Curiously, the loop resembles a cursive of a Western alphabet, rather than of Chinese script. A Western-trained eye would perhaps recognize its oddly familiar shape but would fail to retrieve any linguistic significance, and the ink would ultimately remain only a forceful mark.

Clear Conclusion of Clearness from 1965 (Figure 4.16) harbors an exuberant energy, which is driven by the zigzagging stack of strokes pouncing from the left to the right half, with a brief break in between. The eye would follow each turn and return in search for meaning, yet in the end would see nothing beyond what appears on the paper. Both this and *Windy Solitude* prove how Liu did away with the necessity of sign- or figure-making with the strokes and accentuate the trajectory and spatial function of the lines alone. The marks were inspired by the Five Dynasties eccentric Shi Ke (mid-tenth century) who built figures around improvised splashed ink and wild cursive strokes (Figure 4.17).[70] Liu's interest in Shi Ke's Chan-influenced paintings hinged on the form, which resulted from the mix of spontaneity and control in the process and from the way cursive brushwork entered the painting. Though Liu did not seem interested in the anarchic politics of the Chan painters, the connection he forged between their work and

[70] Yip, *Dialogues,* 242.

his own art on the visual level seemed appropriate. Unlike the unbridled look of the tenth-century piece, Liu had plotted the trajectory of his strokes to construct such dynamics. The deep blue-green tint on the densest areas of the strokes creates three-dimensionality, calling attention to the deliberate actions of the artist. The zigzagging gestures contain the energy within the painting's frame until the last stroke, which again distinguishes Liu's work from Kline's black paintings of the 1950s.

The works in this definitive period, including ones in the "New Chinese Landscape" exhibition, measure about 55.8 by 86.4 centimeters, a modest size. Liu had commissioned a bulk of custom-made, fibrous paper, which standardized the size of his painting. Compared to his previous body of work on plaster, which stood taller than the artist, the ink and paper works engage the viewer in a more intimate relationship. Scale matters less when the strategic uses of ink and paper are sufficient to achieve the desired drama and harmony. With a normalized pictorial framework, the thick black lines, the thin white streaks, and the dynamic of the resulting positive-negative spaces rise to center stage. At the "New Chinese Landscape" exhibition at Cleveland Museum of Art, five modest-sized paintings hung in a row inside a traditional display case (Figure 1.8). Each forms a discrete, internal dynamic. The energy level of each work is controlled and compact, yet together they seem monotone. This uniformed tonality seemed curtailed by size and by format, which perhaps prompted Chuang to challenge Liu to make bigger, less reserved paintings. Chuang was keen on seeing a more passionate display of

expressions that would be on par with the monumentality and moral aspirations of Song paintings and with the large paintings of contemporary West.[71]

The Grand Gesture of Abstract Landscape

In 1965, Liu created *Image of Fleeting Time*, a hand-scroll painting measuring 55 by 600 centimeters (added frontispiece and colophon increase the full length to 926 centimeters). The work was an outlier in size in the "New Chinese Landscape" exhibition, and it is crucial to understanding Liu's artistic strategy during this period.[72] Instead of investing in scale through verticality, Liu opted for the hand scroll and confronted the subject of time—in the sense of both the visualization of time in painting and the duration of viewing. At Cleveland the work was installed on the flat surface in the display case below the hanging scrolls. The viewer's gaze would thus hover over the painting, a position that simulated a bird's-eye view of the abstraction on paper. The scroll tackles the issue of time and space at the same time by superimposing one reality (physical) over another (painted).

The scroll began with a nod to calligraphy: five ink dots greet the viewer at the painting's start, like a fully-charged brush tapping before the launch of a grand gesture. The dots lead to the first cluster of short, saturated strokes that take over only the top half

[71] Chuang Che, "This Generation and the Last," 51.
[72] The work is in the collection of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Avery Brundage, an accomplished American athlete and businessman who had amassed a precious trove of Chinese art and antiquities, saw the work in 1966 but agreed to postpone the purchase until after "The New Chinese Landscape" tour was concluded. Lee Nordness Gallery, New York sold the work to Brundage in 1968. His collection was first donated to San Francisco's M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in 1967. It was subsequently placed in the Asian Art Museum. For a biography of Brundage, see Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *The Chinese Collectors—America's Century-Long Hunt for Asian Art Treasures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 222–332; for the acquisition details, see Ivon d'Argence, director of the Avery Brundage Foundation to the Lee Nordness Gallery, 5 August 1968, Asian Art Museum archives.

of the paper, indicating distance. Then diluted ink washes enter the scene, cascading down to the foreground, sprinkled with a web of white, negative lines that structure its flow. Immediately following is an opposite visual effect where black ligatures emerge through a stretch of inky grey fog. The drama then unfolds into a crescendo of combined techniques—washes, patches, streaks, all overlapping and twirling into one another. At closing, faint grey stains float along the mid-line before being enveloped by the vast, empty space. The epic scroll of various textures is a culmination of all the single-sheet paintings, which, on their own, act like frozen frames extracted from the panorama.

There are manifold meanings of the hand scroll. Time and space are at the core of Daoist metaphysics, and Liu's direct address on the matter again shows his intentions. Liu welcomed a distinctly Chinese viewing habit and placed his abstract art in the lineage of Chinese landscape paintings. The format captures the essence of Liu's abstract landscapes: the short height frames the view in the middle of the mists and clouds and prompts the imagination of the full scene. The "open-close-open-close" composition, as Li Chu-tsing observed, follows the progression of a classical scroll and incorporates Western strategies of abstraction.[73] Léon Chang's praises for Liu's *Image of Fleeting Time* adorns the head of the scroll: "Let the imagination forge the relationship. Guosung creates cloud and peaks for one to dream of traveling."[74] To Chang, Liu's scroll wondrously simulates the visual experience of traversing the clouds and mountains. Perhaps to Chang, Liu's conceptual and lyrical portrayal of time is a convincing counterargument to Western modern art, such as Italian Futurist Giacomo Balla's literal

[73] Li, *Liu Kuo-sung*, 38.
[74] Translated by author. The original inscription of the frontispiece reads: "*shexiang cheng yuan. guosong zao yunluan ke woyou ye*."

depiction of movement and time in *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* from 1912 that Chang criticized in *Wenxing* in 1958.[75] The eminent calligrapher Wang Zhuangwei endorsed Liu in the colophon for making landscape with "new ideas and new technique" that "transcends form" and "match[es] the theory of calligraphy."[76] Wang understood Liu's abstraction through the rubric of calligraphy, the basis of formless painting. This was perhaps the most significant endorsement for Liu, because it recognized his effort in fusing calligraphy and painting. Liu's place within the ranks of the cultural elites was thus confirmed. The words of the senior cultural figures explain Liu's success plainly: he honored the tradition of calligraphy and landscape without writing one standard stroke or painting one mountain, and his intentions were highly visible, readable, and enjoyable.

Collage and Cosmic Paintings

Liu started to use paper collage at the end of 1965, perhaps after seeing how Chuang Che used pasted paper to diversify the composition and texture in his mixed-media paintings in 1963. Like Chuang, Liu employed collage to explore the properties of planes, a step further from his experiments with broad lines.[77] What fortified Liu's desire to jump from abstract ink paintings to collage was his twenty-month journey in the U.S. and Europe starting in January 1966. *Loftiness* from 1966 (Figure 4.19) is the first among a series of paintings within a painting. The yellowish rectangle in the top two-thirds of the painting contains ink abstraction in a top-heavy composition. Immediately

[75] Léon Chang, "Conquer the Space," 16.
[76] Excerpt from colophon translated by author. Wang Zhuangwei (1909–98) was a renowned calligrapher and seal carver who held important positions within the arts and education establishment in the Kuomintang government of postwar Taiwan.
[77] Yip, *Dialogues* 267.

recognizable is its formal tribute to Fan Kuan's monumental landscape, albeit on a modest scale (Liu's painting measures only 89 by 53 centimeters). The upper edge of the pasted paper, with slightly rounded corners, leaves a noticeable sliver from the top of the canvas, detaching the inner image physically and logically from the rest. The lower section reprises dark ink patches and white streaks, crushed by the behemoth above. It seems that Liu sought to explore the tension between competing pictorial realities: inside and outside the frame;[78] pasted and calligraphic abstraction.[79] That the artist's signature appears within the boundaries of the pasted rectangle confirms the separation of identity.[80] The juxtaposition of different realities reveals an attempt to "compress and stack" different moments of time and space, as the window view suggests what poet Wai-lim Yip observed was a portal "to see one space at one time through a different moment of time and space."[81]

Liu's homage to Fan Kuan strongly expresses his Chinese identity, a predictable development during his first time in a foreign environment. However, a collage that contains multiple images and realities reflects a style much more common in American art, particularly after the rise of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns in the late 1950s and the multi-screened video art sculptures of Nam Jun Paik in the 1960s. Through his encounter with a multi-screened film *In the Labyrinth* by the National Film Board of Canada at the Montreal Expo of 1967, Liu realized that separate narratives

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[78] Richard Vinograd, "Liu Kuo-sung: Inside and Outside Abstraction," Conference paper, The International Symposium in conjunction with "Echo of the Universe—Ink Art of Liu Kuo-sung," China Art Museum, Shanghai, 24 April 2016.
[79] Yip, *Dialogues*, 267–8.
[80] Vinograd.
[81] Yip, *Dialogues,* 266.

could be on view concurrently and that images could be reinforced by repetition.[82] His recognition of the potential of the multi-channeled moving image seems to alert him to challenges facing painters in international art. His experiences in Montreal may thus have prompted him to conjoin multiple narratives and viewpoints within a single painting.[83] Deeply loyal to the medium of painting, Liu's interest in collage is an amalgamation of his previous practice where he played to his advantage the malleable distinction between pictorial space, physical surface, and his new experiences abroad. He devised a solution to update the medium of painting with the knowledge of contemporary art in the West and of the space-time relations in Chinese painting. At the same time, he kept the Chinese identity he desired for his work. Liu was acutely attuned to the trends and circulations of ideas and was well-adapted to ensure the readability of his art.

A series of paintings made after Liu returned to Taiwan titled *Which is Outside?* and *Who is Outside?* (Figure 4.20) further shows his vernacularization of paintings by incorporating contemporary visual culture. Unlike his previous titles that directly pinpoint a mood or a scene, here he leaves an open question. The question in the title underscores Liu's play on visual cohesion in the paintings and suggests the ambiguity of a dominant perspective. The paintings in this series follow a compositional formula: a square (or rectangle) pasted on the top half of the vertical composition resembles a window. Abstract ink marks of Liu's signature style, bound by the enclosure,

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[82] Liu likened the multi-channeled film to Andy Warhol's silkscreen paintings of the Mona Lisa, categorizing both as part of the forward-looking Western visual culture. Liu Kuo-sung, "The Way I See the Trends of Western Contemporary Art" (*wokan xiyang xiandai yitan de qushi*), *Young Lion* 27, no. 5 (1 November 1967), 171.

[83] The multi-channeled format of *In the Labyrinth*, which has five screens in a cross formation, three in each axis, was directly adopted by Liu in a series of five-panel paintings arranged in the same cross configuration, titled *A Moon for All Seasons*, in 1970. Hsiao Chong-ray shares a similar observation. Hsiao, *Majestic Soul*, 123.

forms its own reality separate from the ink marks below, validated by the painter's signature inside the frame.[84] The top-bottom dynamic—identified by several art historians as "Rothkoesque"—allows the artist to select from his repertoire of abstract ink formations and to create new meanings through various combinations.[85] In fact, he often cut a square or circle from less successful paintings to reuse.[86] The compositional form and structure are reminiscent of the multi-screens he saw abroad, but because the contents are made by the artist's hand and never identical, they serve as a rebuke to the mechanical quality of the moving-image works.

The method of conjoining different visual narratives paved the way for an even more anachronistic, postmodern juxtaposition. The moon landing of the Apollo Mission literally brought the cosmos to a reachable distance for humankind. The Moon Landing mission challenged the inherited understanding of the human relationship to the celestial beings and the universe. In 1969, Liu's painting series titled *Which is Earth?* (Figure 4.21) and *Moon's Metamorphosis* (Figure 4.22) directly reflects the biggest obsession of the international community. This seismic shift in worldview is reflected in the painting's affirmed structure. The moon/circle floats atop an area of textured earth separated by a curved line near the mid-section that represents the horizon. The eye now sees the textured ink surface on the bottom half as an aerial view of the earth's surface. The liberated moon hanging over the earth inspires awe, mimicking the subliminal sensation between the monumental mountain and the travelers along the path in Fan Kuan's

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[84] Vinograd.
[85] For example, James Cahill had called the compositional structure "Rothkoesque." James Cahill, "Introduction," *Liu, Kuosung Exhibition of Paintings* (Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art and Trisolini Gallery of Ohio University, 1980), unpaginated.
[86] Lin Lee, e-mail correspondence with author, 2 November 2016.

classical painting. In *Which is Earth?*, abstract ink marks cover the entire circle, creating light and dark areas of the surface. It posits an alternative view of looking back at the Earth from the surface of the Moon. This vantage also suggests that the viewer could be placed in mid-air above the Earth looking straight at the orbiting moon. The mobility empowers and immerses the viewer within the natural environment and cosmos. As art historian Julia Andrews observed, "without sharing a single motif or a technical detail with classical art," Liu reaches the philosophical harmony that Fan Kuan tried to achieve.[87] Between 1969 and 1972, Liu made approximately three hundred cosmic paintings.[88] While people have criticized the series as a "trick" of an "up-to-the-minute" painter, art historian Michael Sullivan had argued that the works are "natural, inevitable, product of his development."[89] His work in the 1960s revolved around his immediate environment and is a summary of his various visual experiences: ink, landscape tradition, calligraphic marks, collage, image within image, and cosmic paintings, all grounded firmly in the medium of painting.

Consumption and Reception

Liu's artistic strategy is anchored in his strong awareness of his audience and his projection of their pre-existing knowledge of abstraction and Chinese painting. In one of his early articles on abstraction, he noted that a good painting should be independent of

[87] Julia Andrews, "Liu Kuo-sung's Cosmic Painting and Song Landscape," conference paper, The International Symposium in conjunction with "Echo of the Universe—Ink Art of Liu Kuo-sung," China Art Museum, Shanghai, 24 April 2016.
[88] Yip, *Dialogue,* 271.
[89] Michael Sullivan, "Liu Kuo-sung—An Appreciation," April 1970, Box 17A, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

populist tastes and should seek communication through the spiritual dimension.[90] This belief challenged him to create a visual product and experience without being either too eager or alienating. Liu's abstract paintings, evoking the likeness of calligraphic forms and alluding to landscapes. Liu thus ensured that his Chinese audience would recognize the connections to Chinese painting and could not denounce it as Western. The theoretical backing of his paintings further distinguished his work from Western abstract paintings, while at the same time, Liu was conscious of the way the painting would be perceived internationally. A foreign audience, whether or not familiar with the traditions of Chinese painting, should be perceptive of the formlessness and visual associations with classical Chinese painting. This kind of thinking heavily informed Liu's artistic decisions as he navigated an international viewership of his art. Linda Graves, a fair observer of the Taiwanese art scene, had duly noted Liu's "extreme self-consciousness" to marry two cultures in his art.[91] Li Chu-tsing called Liu "the least imitative of the West" among the young artists he had met in Taiwan and Hong Kong in 1964.[92] Li later elaborated on their first meeting in Taipei by describing what Liu's work represented: "I looked at the painting and gradually realized that the fruits of my travels in Europe and of my months of looking at Chinese paintings in Taichung were coming together in an aesthetic vision that was traditionally Chinese on the one hand but innovative and European-influenced on the other."[93]

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[90] Liu Kuo-sung, "On the Appreciation of Abstract Painting" (*lun chouxiang huihua de xinshang*), *Wenxing* 34 (1 August 1960): 23–24.
[91] Graves, 49–50.
[92] Li Chu-tsing to Porter McCray, 27 June 1964, Folder B-6625, Box 98, Exh-China, AFA, JDR 3rd records, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[93] Robert Mowry ed., *A Tradition Redefined: Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Paintings from the Chu-Tsing Li Collection, 1950–2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 65.

Domestically, Liu and his work were embraced from the early 1960s by a few important figures in the establishment including Léon Chang, Wang Zhuangwei, and Yu Junzhi. They saw Liu's abstract landscape paintings as the legitimate and innovative heir to a glorious tradition, a star in the Cultural Renaissance project. This view indicated that Liu's work, though breaking from tradition in certain ways, was poised to become the new establishment. The political correctness was not a top-down order; rather, it was achieved by the artist's own design. Liu, a savvy self-promoter, thrived in an art eco-system that was not yet professionalized nor commercialized. Among the artists of his generation, he best took advantage of modern media to promote his art and ideas. And as a frequent contributor to important cultural magazines, Liu had become the self-appointed leader and spokesperson of the Fifth Moon Society.[94] At the pinnacle of his career around 1964 and 1965, he wrote articles on "brush and ink" (*bimo*) and "technique" (*jifa*), essentially covering the useful highlights of the history of Chinese art. The timing of these articles was telling of his goal to court approval from the senior cultural figures and to promote the laymen's understanding of his work. The endorsements from foreign-based specialists like Li Chu-tsing, and his status as the first artist from Taiwan to receive the prestigious JDR 3rd grant, boosted Liu's legitimacy.

These impressive credentials were fed by American expatriates in Taiwan, many of whom were academics and Sinologists, and led to an increased consumption of his works abroad. This patronage is evident in the catalogue of "The New Chinese Painting" as well as in his first monograph, published in 1969, where most of his works are listed as

[94] Many of the Fifth Moon members did not agree with his generalizing comments about their art, but they remained silent out of courtesy. They seemed grateful for Liu fighting for exhibition opportunities for the group. Chuang Che was the only one who publicly debated Liu, and he eventually ended their friendship.

being in private collections in America. Among the American collectors are Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Mrs. Maurice Moore (Elizabeth Luce), the Metropolitan Museum curator Aschwin Lippe, the American collector of Chinese antiquities Avery Brundage, and Li Chu-tsing, all active interlocutors between the United States and Taiwan in the 1960s. Some remarked that the synthesis of Chinese aesthetic and modern spirit in Liu's work prompted their purchases.[95] One could say that Liu's popularity among Chinese—and American—educated elites attests to the work's ability to visually connect the classical tradition to the contemporary trend of abstraction, and to satisfy a certain appetite for hybrids. It captured a China in transition, nostalgic and proud for her past yet eager to join the international community in the present.

In Hong Kong, Liu's work appealed to a Chinese population negotiating their own definition of hybridity in the British colony. For the newly established City Hall Museum to purchase Liu's work so soon after its production suggests its priority in collecting and showcasing new art that would help build the identity of a new institution with the aspiration to be both Chinese and Western.[96] Hong Kong's community of young Chinese artists laboring to define new, modern Chinese painting on their own terms also found an encouraging parallel in Liu's abstract ink landscape. His Eastern approach to painting, his use of the black-and-white palette to create a dynamic between emptiness and physicality—the essence of Chinese painting—and his deftness in achieving such

[95] Bernard Gallin, interview by author, East Lansing, MI, 12 October 2012.
[96] Liu's paintings were exhibited at the Chatham Gallery in 1964, a commercial gallery in Kowloon, Hong Kong. James Watt, the deputy director of the City Hall Museum, purchased *Dialogue between Cloud and Rain* from that exhibition for the museum's permanent collection. Liu Kuo-sung, interview by author, Hong Kong, 8 August 2013. Transcript published on the Asia Art Archive website, http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/CollectionOnline/SpecialCollectionItem/6709; accessed 20 October 2016.

effect without filling the painting with brushwork, especially impressed the colleagues in the Hong Kong Modern Literature and Art Association.[97] For Hong Kong, the most Westernized Sinophone community, his work satisfied an urgent need to connect with Chinese culture and provided a perfect melding of the core of Chinese visual art, philosophy, and the language of abstraction; it is both classic and contemporary.[98]

On American soil, following the tour of "New Chinese Painting" and a subsequent one-man show, Liu's works were reviewed in many mid-sized city newspapers. Most writers gave generic comments on the successful blending of the East and West in Liu's work and the novelty of having contemporary Chinese art in their city. Not much history of Chinese art or reportage on the artistic context in Taiwan was reported, so Liu's work was viewed essentially in the context of American imaginings of Chinese art. A local paper in Detroit reported on Liu's one-man exhibition: "The show is expected to be a sell-out . . . .This is partly because people find it easy to respond to the Chinese brush technique, partly because, decoratively, it is easy to live with and partly because the Nordness Gallery, a New York art status symbol, has scheduled a Liu show, which attracts the capital gains—art-for-profit collectors."[99] Amateur comments and financial speculations aside, the response reveals that the American public in the mid-1960s preferred artists making culturally hybrid art that showcased certain indigenous assets, as opposed to those making purely Western-style or traditionally Chinese art.

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[97] "Introduction to Young Chinese Artist Liu Kuo-sung" (*zhongguo qingnian huajia jieshao liu guosong*), *Haowangjiao* 9, 5 July 1963, p. 7. The article, with no byline, was most likely written by Wai-lim Yip, who is from Hong Kong and was based in Taipei at the time and a member of the Association.

[98] The City Hall Museum (today's Hong Kong Museum of Art) was the first institution to purchase Liu's work for its collection. It would become the Asian institution with the highest number of Liu Kuo-sung holdings outside of China, with thirteen works in its permanent collection.

[99] Joyce Covey, "Gallery Gazing," *The Cherry Creek News*, 23 November 1966, p. 14, Box 17A, Liu Kuo-Sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Liu's work sold well in the U.S. and the Nordness Gallery signed exclusive representation with Liu in 1967.[100] During his time in New York, between September 1966 and May 1967, Liu spent considerable time making art to supply his one-man shows around the country.[101] He took advantage of the popularity of his art among Westerners, though he might have mistaken the response as validation of his innovations in Chinese art.

At moments of cultural exchange during the early postwar decades, the key to success was to be bilingual in art: to claim one's cultural specificity while making new versions of traditional art and to adopt a certain mode of internationally recognizable expression. Liu once defended his Chinese essentialist bias toward art by arguing that to qualify being worldly (*shijiexing*), one must first become ethnic (*mingzuxing*).[102] As contradictory and limiting as it sounds, this approach served as the mantra of his career, and was an accurate match for international expectations. Ironically, in Liu's case, to break down the barrier between cultures, one had to reify the difference between the East and West.

Conclusion

Liu Kuo-sung's reconfigured landscape in the 1960s maintains its readability and accessibility by radically breaking with the standard forms of the genre. He changed what

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[100] It is unclear when Liu signed the contract. Letter of arrangement, Lee Nordness to Liu Kuo-sung, 25 May 1967. Folder B6612/B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[101] Comments from the reviewer, Institute of International Education, Report of JDR 3rd Fund Grant, Liu Kuo-sung, 19 September 1967, p. 4, B-6612, B-6723, Box 108, Liu, Kuo-sung, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

[102] Liu, "Past, Modern, and Tradition," 20.

constituted landscape in pictorial language and in technique. The paintings lack the representational forms of classical mountains, river, or natural figurative elements, and they display a simulated effect of texture stroke without brushwork. They discarded classical composition and adopted a composite perspective—aerial and close-up views. It is fair to argue that Liu made the reinvention of the Chinese landscape painting his sole intention even though he denied that as the subject matter of his work.[103] The denial was a strategy to mystify his work. The content of the work was not strictly about the harmony in nature; it added the painter's internal expressions; landscape was only a vehicle. To the conditioned viewer, the paintings are appealing because they are vernacular and participatory, and they certainly are not cliché. They resonated with a wide range of viewers; they are modern.

The development of Liu's reconfigured landscape from 1961 onwards represents a vernacularization of Chinese painting with the help of the publication and circulation of modern media. During this important decade, that innovation put him firmly on the map of Chinese painting history and in the trajectory of Asian Modernism. He made the landscape genre and the concept of abstraction more *baihua* in its visual representation. He also honored and alluded to the heritage of calligraphy in the pictorial frame. To achieve such effect, he did not use any motif, technique, or instrument of the past but rather visualized the key elements of transcendence. His work is not demanding—the poetic title and the interplay between the ink and paper usher the viewer into the perceived realm of landscape painting—but it still captivates with the precision

[103] Liu Kuo-sung, "Chuang Che and I" (*zhuangzhe yu wo*), in *To Copy, Sketch, and Create* (*linmo xiesheng chuangzao*) (Taipei: Wenxing, 1966), 192.

and rigor of its compositional structure, energy, and execution. As a result, the work is celebrated by laymen and intellectuals, foreigners and connoisseurs alike. He constructed a new visual vernacular in tune with the moment when Chinese art world have just launched its first step into the contemporary art world.



Figure 4.1 Liu Kuo-sung, *Dialogue between Cloud and Rain*, 1963,
ink and color on paper, 53.6 x 85.8 cm.
Hong Kong Museum of Art Collection.



Figure 4.2 Liu Kuo-sung, *Silence in Movement*, 1963,
ink and color on paper, 56.5 x 119.4 cm.



Figure 4.3 Liu Kuo-sung, *Still Life*, 1956,
oil on canvas, 52 x 71.5 cm.

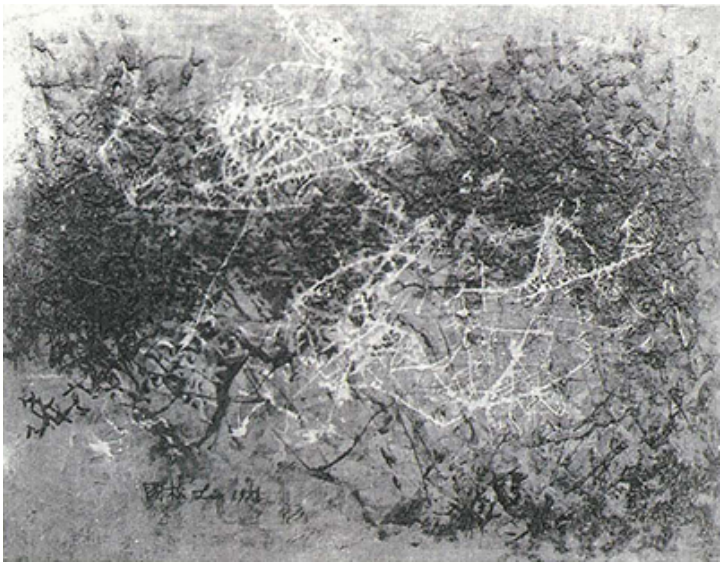


Figure 4.4 Liu Kuo-sung, *War*, 1958,
oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm.



Figure 4.5 Liu Kuo-sung, *Paradise Lost*, 1959,
oil and plaster on canvas, 122 x 60 cm.



Figure 4.6 Hu Chi-chung, *Painting 6009*, 1960,
oil and sand on canvas, 87.6 x 140.3 cm.
M+, Hong Kong.



Figure 4.7 Hu Chi-chung in his studio, ca. 1960.

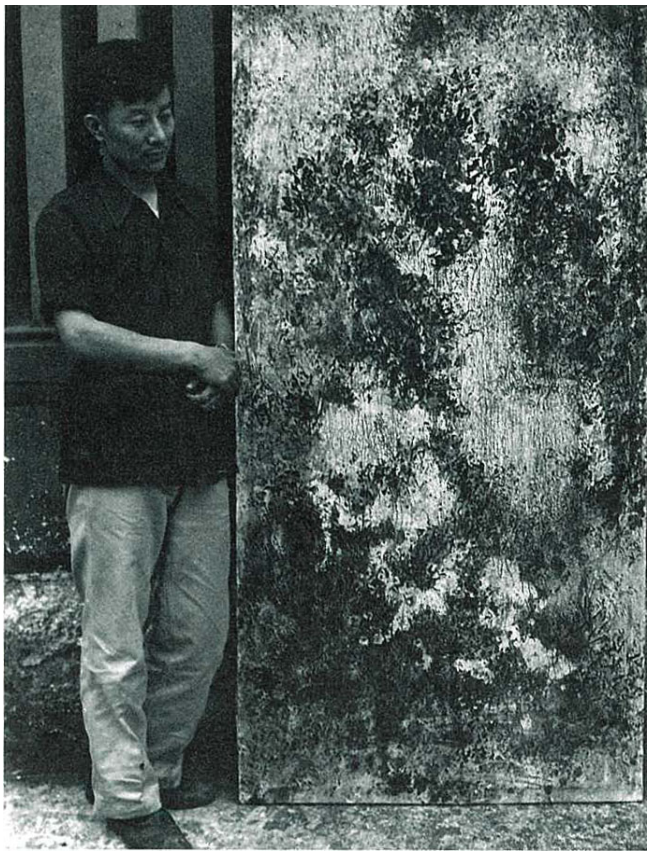


Figure 4.8 Liu Kuo-sung and *Hanlinyaji*, 1960, ink on plaster.



Figure 4.9 Han Hsiang-ning, *Worship*, 1961,
oil on canvas, 155 x 99 cm.



Figure 4.10 Liu Kuo-sung, *I Hear Your Voice, My Country*, 1961,
ink on paper, 134 x 68 cm



Figure 4.11 Liu Kuo-sung and his works at the Fifth Moon annual exhibition, 1962,
National History Museum, Taipei.



Figure 4.12 Liu Kuo-sung, *Cool upon the Awakening in Spring*, 1962,
ink on paper, 111.5 x 56 cm.



Figure 4.13 Liu Kuo-sung, *Wintry Mountain Covered with Snow*, 1964,
hanging scroll, ink on fibrous paper; painting proper: 85.4 x 55.8 cm; silk mounting only:
197 x 66 cm; mounting, including cord and roller ends: 198.5 x 75 cm.
Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, The Chu-tsing Li Collection, Gift of
B U.K. Li in honor of Chu-tsing Li and in memory of Yao-wen Kwang Li and Teri Ho Li



Figure 4.14 Franz Kline, *Chief*, 1950, oil on canvas, 148.3 x 186.7 cm.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Solinger, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 4.15 Liu Kuo-sung, *Windy Solitude*, 1964,
ink and color on paper, 58.5 x 87.5 cm.



Figure 4.16 Liu Kuo-sung, *Clear Conclusion of Clearness*, 1965,
ink and color on paper, 62.1 x 91.8 cm.
M+, Hong Kong



Figure 4.17 Attributed to Shi Ke, *The Second Zen Patriarch in Contemplation*
(one of two), Five Dynasties,
hanging scroll, ink on paper, image size 35.35 x 64.4 cm.
Collection of Tokyo National Museum.



Figure 4.18 Liu Kuo-sung, *Image of Fleeting Time*, 1965,
ink and color on paper, 55 x 600 cm.
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum purchase, B68D17.



Figure 4.18 (continued) Liu Kuo-sung, *Image of Fleeting Time*, 1965,
ink and color on paper, 55 x 600 cm.
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Museum purchase, B68D17.



Figure 4.19 Liu Kuo-sung, *Loftiness*, 1966,
ink and color with collage on paper,
89 x 57 cm.

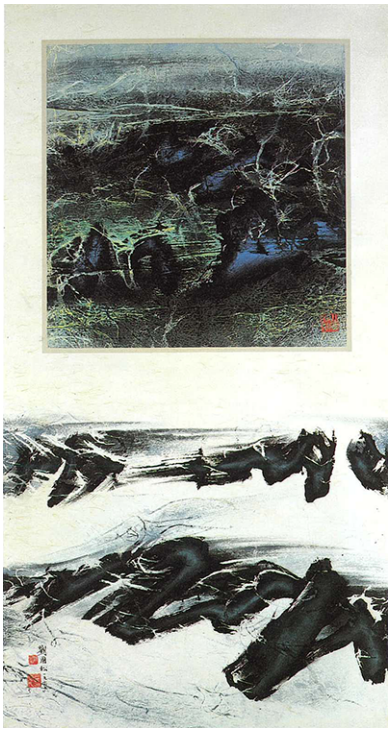


Figure 4.20 Liu Kuo-sung, *Who is Outside?,* 1967
ink and color with collage on paper,
140.6 x 74.5 cm.



Figure 4.21 Liu Kuo-sung, *Which is Earth?*, 1969,
ink and color with collage on paper, 150.5 x 78.5 cm.

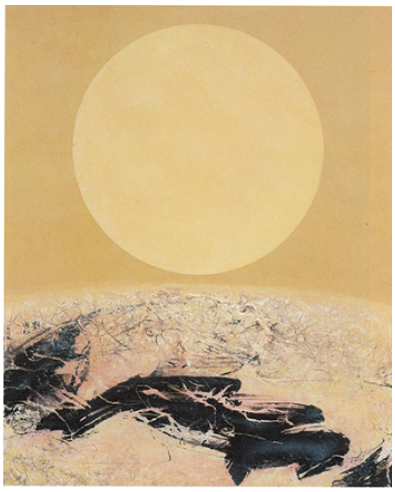


Figure 4.22 Liu Kuo-sung, *Moon's Metamorphosis*, 1969,
ink and acrylic on paper, 107 x 89 cm.

CHAPTER FIVE

BROKEN GROUND:
CHUANG CHE'S RECONFIGURED LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

On April 22, 1965, thirty-one-year-old Chuang Che exhibited his first one-man show at the National Arts Hall in Taipei (today's National Taiwan Arts Education Center), in which he presented some thirty mixed-media paintings made with oil, ink, and paper on canvas. This milestone exhibition showed an evolution of Chuang's work since 1963, from oil paintings using simple strokes and collages of paper fragments to works that added Chinese characters. The collage paper was mostly the strong, ready-made kind, including cotton paper made in Puli, Taiwan for use in Japanese *shoji* screens, and paper traditionally used for money and Chinese New Year couplets. On these functional types of paper, Chuang painted ink lines or wrote poetry, then cut, trimmed, and tore them; while they were still damp, he affixed them with cowhide glue to the surface of yellow-hued canvases, which were repurposed from used flour sacks originally provided by American aid to Taiwan. On top of the patched surface, Chuang then added more lines, sputters, or poetry verses in black.

One painting titled *In Praise of Du Fu* (1965) (Figure 5.1) borrows from a renowned Tang dynasty poem reading, "The country has fallen; only the mountains and rivers remain."[1] The painting expresses a mixture of melancholy, romanticism, anxiety, and patriotism, which defined Chuang's output in this crucial breakthrough period. This

[1] Li Chu-tsing used this translation of Du Fu's poem in the exhibition catalogue of the "New Chinese Landscape," from Robert Payne ed., *The White Pony* (New York: The John Day Co., 1947). Later in this chapter I use another translation, by Wai-lim Yip, to demonstrate another point. Other translations of Du Fu's poem in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, are from Payne's version.

new kind of painting, together with its stark messages, showcases Chuang's use of brokenness as an aesthetic to confront the predicament of displacement throughout the 1960s. As the works poignantly captured the unstable location of national identity and the weakened sense of belonging felt by the Taiwanese population, the metaphor and the visual quality of brokenness—conveyed through the language of abstraction and poetry—connected to a shared past and present between the artist and his viewers, and as a result, defined the artist's place in the history of Chinese art and in the genre of painting.

The aesthetic of brokenness seemed to have resonated both domestically and internationally. Chuang's one-man exhibition was roundly praised in Taiwanese newspaper and magazine articles, indicating the degree to which his new style was accepted. Ten paintings in the exhibition, including *In Praise of Du Fu*, were selected by Professor Li Chu-tsing for the exhibit "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists." Seven of the landscapes were collected by Americans before the opening of the exhibition. Their popularity testifies to the appeal of the paintings and their fulfillment of a particular narrative in both the Taiwanese and the American consciousness.

In July 1966, shortly prior to his departure for the U.S. on a two-year grant awarded by the JDR 3rd Fund, Chuang's second solo exhibition opened at Taipei's Hai-Tian Gallery. Riding on the success of the first show, the scale of his paintings became larger, the collage shapes simpler, the colors bolder, and the Chinese characters less inhibited, all signs of entering a mature phase. Chuang presented a few more paintings inscribed with the same verse by Du Fu, which indicated an obsession with the symbolism and the power of the poem. His mixed-media paintings, and their unique

textures, compositions, visual qualities, and aesthetics, offered an entirely new resolution for a controversy that had been raging in Taiwan since the 1950s—the irreconcilable division between Eastern and Western media of painting. This new perspective confirmed that Chuang would travel a creative path different from that of the other Fifth Moon members.

For Chuang Che—a son of Chuang Yan (1899–1980), the prestigious connoisseur, calligrapher, and chief custodian of the imperial art collection since the eruption of the Sino-Japanese war, who in 1965 became the first deputy director of the National Palace Museum in Taipei—the consequences of displacement is especially poignant. Chuang's migratory childhood and adolescence alongside the imperial collection, the symbol of the orthodox Chinese culture, provided him invaluable firsthand knowledge of classical Chinese painting and calligraphy that was unrivaled by his peers.[2] The constant uprooting to guard the safety of national treasure also shaped his understanding of the power of the site of culture. Displacement became a permanent reality after 1948 when the family moved and settled in Wufeng, in Taichung, Taiwan, and resided in close proximity to the national treasures. The civic duty that the family shared toward the cultural heritage shifted from its physical preservation to its dissemination.[3] The period of solid immersion in Chinese art later supplied both the essential nutrients for Chuang's artistic exploration and a self-awareness of the responsibility of a Chinese artist.

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[2] Chuang recalled witnessing the keepers of the imperial collection periodically unrolling paintings to lessen the humidity in the Southwestern region of China during the war period. In Wufeng, Taichung, where the imperial collection resided after the relocation to Taiwan, the custodians kept the practice of unrolling the paintings periodically as humidity was still an issue. Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 11 October 2011.

[3] Chuang Che has three brothers: Chuang Shen (1933–2000) was a renowned art historian and professor; Chuang Yin (b. 1933) is a writer; and Chuang Ling (b. 1938) is a photographer and photojournalist. All of them have devoted their career and talent to the proliferation of Chinese culture and heritage in a field of their own.

Early Development in Abstract Painting

Chuang first joined the Fifth Moon Group exhibition in 1959, a year after he graduated from the art department of the National Normal University. At school he could not bear the mediocrity and complacency of the ink painting teachers, many of whom were his father's close colleagues and peers. With his solid background in traditional Chinese art, turning to the Western medium is both a rebellious and a liberating choice. Though, according to him, such choice was not driven by a desire to make any statement, but to demonstrate his versatility as a contemporary artist.[4] His graduation piece, *Under the Moonlight* (Figure 5.2), an oil painting from 1958, is the earliest clue of a young artist's struggle to find a satisfying intersection of his cultural and generational identity. Two boats, apparently unmanned, float side by side and seem to indicate a loss of direction. The layered brushwork making up the water and shore shows an exploration of the properties of oil paint. Another oil painting in 1959, *Sunset* (Figure 5.3), was included in that year's International Youth Biennial in Paris. The painting of two semi-abstract cows is romantic and pensive, depicting one cow with a cubist-style head and reducing the other to a contour of a body and horns. In both paintings, the artist creates distance by using a compositional arrangement typical in Western art: a horizon line and a round moon or sun in mid-sky. The sparseness of the two paintings brought a surreal, spiritual dimension in the landscape. Employing only the Western medium, Chuang effectively contemplates a possible convergence of Chinese and Western landscape paintings beginning with the quietude and sublime in the overall effect of the picture.

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[4] Wai-lim Yip, *Dialogues with Contemporary Artist: Growth of Modern Chinese Painting* (*yu dangdai yishujia de duihua—zhongguo xiandai hua de shengcheng),* (Taipei: Dongda, 1987), 185.

Like Liu Kuo-sung, as an emerging voice in the art scene, Chuang published his analysis of art in literary and arts magazines. He focused on introducing Western theories and movements, rather than on criticizing the current establishment. His debut article, in 1959, appeared in *Bihui*, is a translation of the American art historian and curator Sam Hunter's essay on the state of contemporary art in France and America. The article is fitting for *Bihui*'s modern art agenda. Hunter was an expert on French artists featured in the magazine, such as Raoul Dufy, and also on the American Abstract Expressionists.[5] Chuang's translation is awkward at times, which shows his struggle to understand Western art through primary sources. But the effort proves productive and telling of his focus. In describing the shared characteristic of French artists associated with Tachisme like George Mathieu and Pierre Soulages, and Americans like Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Adolph Gottlieb, Chuang used the term "*caoshu*" (cursive script) to translate Hunter's reference to the cursive draftsmanship in their lines. In describing a call for a more humanistic painting, Chuang seems to have gleaned the idea of "*shiyi*," which means poetic and lyrical.[6] The point is not to trace the original terms in Hunter's essay, but to see how certain keywords, and the artistic tendencies they represented, commanded Chuang's attention and shaped his understanding of recent trends in contemporary Western art and criticism, which germinated ideas for his later work. The article also indicated the artistic lighthouses of Chuang's generation: Paris and

[5] Sam Hunter (1929–2014) worked as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York and organized exhibitions of Jackson Pollock and David Smith in 1956 and 1957. Roberta Smith, "Sam Hunter, Curator and Museum Founder, Dies at 91," *New York Times*, 25 August 2014.
[6] Chuang Che, "The State of Contemporary Painting" (*huihua de xianshi*), *Bihui* 1, no. 3 (15 July 1959): 16–17.

New York. It pinpointed two of Chuang's most prominent interests in painting: poeticism and calligraphy.

Chuang's interest in the poetic and calligraphic aspects of art suggests that his resistance to traditional art was more directed at the dogmatic parochialism rather than at the specific tradition itself. His criticism of the state of Chinese arts was fair: calligraphy and painting had reached a point of overdevelopment, and the rigidity of the canon debilitated later generations.[7] It also became detached from the demands of contemporary time. To revitalize Chinese art, Liu tried numerous styles in Western modern art while Chuang focused on abstraction and expressionism. Chuang's decision—or, challenge—was also a result of his desire to soften the reified division between Chinese and Western art. His admiration for Zao Wou-ki illustrates this point. Zao, whose success in Paris was well publicized in Taiwan in the mid to late 1950s, was proof that a Chinese painter was capable of overriding the national and cultural boundaries. After reading a short memoir by Zao (translated from the Japanese and published in *Bihui* in 1959) Chuang was tremendously moved by Zao's deep connection to and affection for Chinese traditional arts.[8] In Zao's oil paintings Chuang saw a refreshingly modern and distinctly Chinese perspective on the practice and medium. To Chuang, this perspective showed how the Chinese painting heritage could properly continue in modern times. Chuang observed later that Zao "completely followed the path of landscape [painting]. He goes deep into the painting. It does not dwell on the surface. It is not flat."[9] Chuang made it his task for

[7] Chuang Che. "Poetic, Un-Poetic, and Modern Art" (*shi de fei shi de yu xiandai yishu)*, *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (14 October 1960), 13.
[8] For more on Zao's article in *Bihui*, see Chapter Two, 155–58.
[9] Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 15 February 2013.

the next decade to make productive use of the tension between pictorial space and the physical surface, a key distinction between Chinese and Western painting.

Chuang's ambition first led him to explore the materiality of oil. He explained, "If we could handle the characteristics of oil and push it to a level that the Westerners could not achieve, wouldn't that be more meaningful?"[10] His paintings from 1960 to 1963 show curiosity about whether the opaque and unctuous material could be made as watery and transparent as ink. Because paper absorbs ink instantly, one can only add but never subtract, which means there is little leeway for thinking while making an ink painting. This intractability is the quintessential experience of a Chinese ink painter, and Chuang asked if oils could be used in the same way. Chuang first moistened cheap canvas (often not made for painting use) and painted sections of the surface in black paint. This particular step imitates the traditional technique for creating ink washes. He then quickly rinsed the thinly painted surface under running water, and while the water did not dissolve the oil, it left marbling patterns and traces on the canvas where it bubbled. In short, he used the grace period given by the viscosity of oil paint and directly diluted it on the surface of the canvas. The sticky and opaque oil paint mimics the effect of ink on paper: dry, wet, dense, light (*gan*, *shi*, *nong*, *dan*). The momentum crucial in the painter's handling of ink is now embedded in Chuang's manipulation of oil.

Chuang's method of reducing the paint's thickness and stickiness in favor of the translucency generally associated with ink is a process of undoing or of destruction. The term for Chuang's method of running water over paint—"*chong*"—is homophonic to the character for "rush," "being impulsive," or "in conflict," which aptly describes the

[10] Yip, 185.

interaction of the substances. The invented technique neatly (or in actuality, messily) unites the action, the confrontation between non-soluble materials and a young artist's internally harnessed restlessness. This risky production process raises the question of the method's sustainability, but it also exposes the artist's eagerness to break from the canon. In the process of exploring the essence of oil as a medium, Chuang managed a delicate balance between randomness and control in using running water. He was in effect transferring the aesthetic of ink to the materiality of oil.

In the 1961 edition of the Fifth Moon Group exhibition, Chuang presented four works that used running water on paint. *Epitaph* (1961) (Figure 5.4) is a vertical, imageless oil painting featuring two long strips of negative space straight down the central axis with dark washes of paint on each side. In the center a burst of radiating lines is encased in a loose grid. The explosive, abstract painting earned Chuang the categorization of "abstract expressionist." The poet Yu Kwang-chung, who regularly reviewed works by artist peers in the 1960s, noted the internal struggle and awakening in Chuang's paintings. He deduced from titles including "The Fall of the Faith," "Confession," "Epitaph," and "Revival" that the artist was in the process of an intense soul search, on the brink of a breakthrough.[11]

Why were evaluations of abstract art in postwar Taiwan often based on readings of its emotional dimension? Visual art at that moment developed in parallel to poetry, and young painters, like their poet friends, strived to make art both reflect their interior lives and matter to their surrounding times. The linkage between the literary and the visual suggests a synchronized development that could be interpreted as a continuation of

[11] Yu Kwang-chung, "The Fifth Moon Painting Exhibition"(*wuyue huazhan*), *Wenxing* 44 (1 June 1961): 25.

Chinese literati culture, while its trans-media relevance attests to the difficulty of containing abstract painting and its discourse within its own genre. The significance and acceptance of abstract art in Taiwanese society was contingent on its emotive qualities, which fostered friendships across generic categories. Chuang was especially close to poets Lo Fu, Wai-lim Yip, and Chu Ko (Chu Ge), as his frequent letter exchanges of artistic ideas reveal.[12] A deep sense of uncertainty and accumulated angst boil within Chuang's painting from the time he graduated from the university until the early 1960s, and these emotions show through his chaotic, confrontational canvases. The "bitter suffocation" (*kumen*) that overcasts his work in 1961 and which was endemic to his generation of artists seemed to lessen in the paintings in the following year. Yu Kwang-chung welcomed the lightened mood, which he attributed to the artist's newlywed life.[13] He saw Chuang's new paintings as forceful counterarguments to the type of modernism steeped in a bitter, depressive mood and promoted by his rivals in the poetry field.[14]

1962-2 (1962) (Figure 5.5) is composed of a black mass occupying approximately half of the painting from the middle-left to the lower-right corner along a horizontal axis. While running water over the canvas, Chuang cautiously left the other half blank by stopping the paint from flowing over the entire surface. The contrast of black and white, the damp and dry surfaces, reveal the gradations and textures of the black paint and the conspicuous tension created by the positive and negative space. The title of the painting

[12] Chuang's letters to Lo Fu and Chu Ko (Yuan Dexing, 1931–2011) between 1964 and 1965 are published in an anthology: Zhang Mo ed., *Letters of Modern Poets* (*xiandai shiren shujian*), (Taichung : Pu Tian, 1969), 348–55. Letters between Chuang Che and Wai-lim Yip in Yip's personal archive are provided to author.

[13] Yu attributed Chuang's lightened painting to his recent marriage to fellow artist (and classmate) Ma Hao. Yu Kwang-chung, "The Plain Fifth Moon" (*pusu de wuyue*), *Wenxing* 56 (1 June 1962): 72. Chuang also felt that a more settled family life contributed to the tonal change. Yip, 218.

[14] For more details on the debate and rivalry among the modernist poets, see Chapter Three, 219–23.

references only the year and sequence number of production, a model quite frequently used by artists making non-figurative painting in this period, and it points to no immediate associations or meanings.

But Chuang's painting is not completely imageless. The large areas of diluted oil paint of varying texture in *1962-2*, and in most of Chuang's paintings from this period, evoke a misty cloudiness that alludes to landscape. The meaning beyond the painting's surface, as Chuang understood from Chinese painting philosophy, is "a depiction of the beings of the universe" conveyed through "visual symbols." According to Chuang, visual symbols transcend reality to art and reside in a space of freedom where viewers can imagine and make associations.[15] Not unlike Chinese poetry—where characters and their meanings retain an uncommitted relationship that allows multiple interpretations and perspectives—viewers can constantly re-modify visual symbols and their extended spatial, temporal, and metaphysical significances.[16] To Chuang, developing alternative visual symbols to replace the lifeless, exhausted ones in use since the Ming or Qing dynasty is an obvious direction for landscape painting. He states, "The landscape painting of the future will go on the path of symbolism beyond referential matter. I don't call it the path to pure abstraction because abstraction has a tendency to completely detach from reality."[17] He essentially proposes a visual language that would allow painting to forge a genuine, unrestricted, non-literal interaction between humans and the environment. Traces of landscape in the form of the mountain silhouettes have thus begun to appear in

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[15] Chuang Che, "Visual Symbols and Chinese Painting" (*shijue xiangzheng yu zhongguo huihua*), *Wenxing* 73 (1 November 1963): 52.
[16] Wai-lim Yip, *Pound and the Eight Views of Xiao Xiang* (*pangde yu xiaoxiang bajing*) (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2008), 162.
[17] Translated by author. Chuang, "Visual Symbols," 52.

Chuang's paintings. This development put him at odds with fellow painter Liu Kuo-sung, who at the time advocated for total abstraction.

Chuang's intention aptly aligned with what he thought was Zao Wou-ki's best feature: to simultaneously create texture with oil on canvas and convey depth and meaning beyond the surface of the painting. To Chuang, visual symbols would represent the artist's feelings (*xieyi*) and "the images and forms it ultimately carry all have been transformed, resulting in the difficulty in capturing its wondrousness at first sight."[18] The means to reach such levels is through the expressive nature of abstract art and through the independent values of lines and planes developed in the Western abstract art of Cézanne and Kandinsky.[19] The role of visual symbols in paintings formulated in Chuang's theories shares certain sensibilities with Yu Kwang-chung's theory of "Clairvoyancism," published in the 1964 catalogue of the Fifth Moon group, yet Chuang relies much less on the blend of Daoist metaphysics and mysticism than Yu had advocated. Understanding or making visible the hidden wondrousness would rely on the act of clairvoyance, or seeing beyond the signifier and beyond the limits of nature. While Chuang sought expressive dynamism to achieve such effect, Yu favored "inaction" (*wuwei*), which represented an alternative to the dichotomy of geometric abstraction and abstract expressionism.[20] Despite their different opinions toward the expressive quality of abstraction, both Chuang's and Yu's theories were rooted in classical Chinese aesthetics, and both

[18] Chuang Che, *Holistic View and Microscopic Vision* (*tonglan, weiguan*), (Taipei: Asia Art Center, 2012), 3–4.
[19] Yip, *Dialogues*, 193.
[20] Yu Kwang-chung, "On From Clairvoyancism" (*cong lingshi zhuyi chufa*), *Wenxing* 80 (1 June 1964): 50–51.

provided a counter-viewpoint to the Western visual art language developed in industrialized societies that is entrenched in realist artistic traditions.

Paper Collage and Action Painting

Around the time Chuang Che articulated the idea of visual symbol in painting in late 1963, he returned to Taichung to teach art at the architectural department of Tunghai University. Chaired by modernist architect Chen Chi-kwan, a Harvard-trained architect who worked under Walter Gropius at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the early 1950s, the department established the first European modernist architecture curriculum in Taiwan. This academic environment offered financial stability and intellectual insularity much needed for a young artist. Chuang regularly presented new work in the annual Fifth Moon exhibition, but he also seemed to have kept a distance from the Taipei art community. Li Chu-tsing described Chuang's isolated situation like the hermetic, classical literati painters or the self-alienating, studio-based Western artists.[21] Though distant from Taipei's politics and art, Chuang cultivated an acute sense of the place of Chinese culture in an international context. He did so through contact with a consistent flow of European and American historians of Chinese art and Sinologists and famed Chinese scholars and connoisseurs who visited the imperial collection managed by his father.[22] Being on the periphery of the periphery seemed to privilege Chuang in his interactions with the international intellectuals. Chuang's artistic pursuit of recuperating

[21] Li Chu-tsing, "The Paintings of Chuang Che: Voices of an Intense Inner Life," in *Chuang Che Painting Exhibition 1965–1966* (Taipei: Hai-Tian Gallery, 1966), unpaginated.
[22] Michael Sullivan, Li Chu-tsing, James Cahill, Aschwin Lippe, Laurence Sickman, and Richard Edwards were among the historians of Chinese art who had visited the Palace Museum collection in Taichung during the postwar decades. Li Chu-Tsing to Porter McCray, 20 November 1964, B-6625, AFA Exhibition, Exhibition-China, JDR 3rd Fund records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the enduring value of classical Chinese culture was further augmented by his encounters with specialists of Chinese art from around the world, which contributed to his desire to make Chinese art relevant to the contemporary world and for a wider, culturally heterogeneous audience. The self-imposed isolation afforded him undisturbed concentration but most importantly created an environment blending the glorious literati legacy, modernist progressiveness, and cultural internationalism that fueled his explorations.

While in the university setting, paper collage began to appear in Chuang's work, marking the beginning of a period of important development. Paper, a staple in Eastern art, was bound to be taken in new directions due to twentieth century advancements in production. Chuang wrote to the poet Chu Ko, "I want to give paper new life, but must contrast it with canvas. I use paper, ink, canvas, oils, ink brushes, paintbrushes, and anything else that I can find. (Though it may be impossible for me), this is what our time has given us."[23] The statement marks the arrival of a new formal language of mixed media. By then, Chuang had already begun to feel that the "rinsed oil and water" technique did not create enough volume.[24] To paste paper marked by ink lines and smudges onto the canvas surface was an expedient solution for the rinsing method's high failure rate. The integration of representative tools and materials from the Chinese and Western traditions is indicative of Chuang's determination to make Chinese materials non-culturally-exclusive, all while accentuating its Eastern materiality. In other words, his mixed-media paintings brought Chinese painting into modern times. His nondiscriminatory attitude toward paper made for writing couplets or sealing windows, or

[23] Chuang to Chu Ko, 2 April 1964, in Zhang, 348–49.
[24] Chuang Che, letter to author, 23 July 2013.

toward recycled canvas sacks, kept him and his painting attached to everyday reality. The layers of locally produced paper customary in Chinese and Japanese traditions and the make-shift canvas that testified to the country's economic deprivation and its dependence on the United States exposes the blatant questions about national and cultural identity with which Chuang's generation the post-1949 diaspora struggled. The juxtaposition of material also designates the specificity of time and place in this kind of mixed-media collage. Chuang's commitment to paper elevated its status as substrate to diversify colors and texture, and disrupted the painting's unity. Paper becomes part of a painting's content.

Paper and painted marks together provide a fortified pictorial structure and make the reference to landscape stronger: the shapes of the paper suggest abstracted mountain and rock forms, and the marks themselves function like the textured strokes in landscape paintings. The marks are also a reminder of the presence of the artist's hand. The combined effect is what poet and critic Wai-lim Yip referred to as the relation of "separation and reunion" (*lihe*), which points to the simultaneity of a bird's-eye view on a distant landscape and an intimate experience of the dynamics between paper and brushwork.[25] The refusal to settle on only one viewing perspective is a trademark of Chinese landscape painting. This traditional refusal suggests that Chuang's artistic output is guided by the framework of landscape, whether he was trying to enrich or rebel against it. The artist writes,

> I have always insisted on using abstract forms to substitute and complete the condition of equal weight of lines and planes in classical landscape painting. Song dynasty paintings are especially representative of the integrated effect. Abstraction from calligraphy only conveys the concept of abstraction; I am not satisfied with it. Yet the concept of calligraphy

[25] Yip, *Dialogues*, 217.

> reminded me of Western abstract painting of the 1940s and 1950s. So I added paper and gradually started to use cut, torn, broken pieces of paper to supplement [the composition].[26]

Chuang's manipulation of paper through tearing, cutting, gluing, and sometimes peeling is unusual in the Chinese painting practice, but it echoes Liu Kuo-sung's elevation of paper's role in painting by pulling fiber off of the paper's surface. The types of paper used by each artist are locally made and with strong fibers capable of withstanding the maneuvers. The two artists also shared a penchant for chance and improvisation in their methods, though Chuang's is based on addition and Liu's on subtraction. The results of Chuang's actions complicate the tactile and visual presence of the paper, so that it impacts the visual experience, and the paper no longer serves as a passive carrier. Although playing with paper seemed casual and spontaneous, the handling of its wetness and of its irregular edges, as well as the process of determining their placement, demanded the artist's utter control.

One more notable dimension of Chuang's collage paintings is the artist's physical relation to the painting. In traditional painting or calligraphy practice, the artist would sit at a desk, or depending on the scale, stand. Though most of Chuang's paintings of this period are around 92 by 60 centimeters (the largest is approximately 122 by 206 centimeters, but split into a diptych), which is within arm's reach, he adopted the method of Western modernists who would lay the substrate and materials on the floor. Chuang's decision to make paintings in this physically demanding way is informed by a self-conscious rebellion against both the Chinese scholar painting and Western easel painting routines. Squatting and hunched over the ground, Chuang played with a stack of stained,

[26] Translated by author. Chuang, letter to author, 23 July 2013.

drawn, cut, and torn paper to choose appropriate pieces. To physically interact with the painting and to leave traces of the process that became part of a painting's overall effect, are in fact defining conditions of twentieth-century modern art. So the paper collage on canvas would constitute Chuang's unique foray into action painting. His set up and movements are reminiscent of the American Abstract Expressionists, of whom he was aware through information on American art circulating in Taiwan.[27] Interestingly, to Jean Paul Slusser, a critic and art professor in Ann Arbor, who reviewed Chuang's one-man exhibition there in 1967, Chuang's work "overstates itself," and he suspected that the "megalomania" prevalent in the Western art scene had informed this effect.[28] Judging from the painting dimensions, Chuang in fact was not exerting himself as much as the American artists in their monumental works—he could not afford such grand sizes of canvas. But his decision against using the traditional scroll format effectively de-orientalized his paintings.[29] He radically changed the image of a painter in the Chinese consciousness: from a scholar at his desk in proper posture using the right instruments, to a painter crouched over a messy floor amidst an array of scattered, unrefined materials.

With a wall-painting brush or a bamboo splinter, Chuang exercised his arm in a movement reminiscent of *xuanwan* (a practice of lifting one's wrist off of the writing surface) to execute the marks. This practice facilitates a conscious de-skilling—combating the muscle memories of calligraphic training—so that he could explore

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[27] Chuang Che visited the USIS Library to find information about Western art and also read Hsiao Chin's articles for *United Daily News*. Chuang, interview by author, New York, 19 September 2011 and 7 August 2014.
[28] Jean Paul Slusser, "Local Oriental Conquest Continues," *The Ann Arbor News*, date unknown, p.10.
[29] Linda Graves also discusses the format of Chuang's work. She concludes that he did not need the format of horizontal scrolls to give a sense of movement to his paintings. See Graves, "Contemporary Chinese Painting in Taiwan," (M.A. thesis, Oberlin College, 1965), 153.

instinctual responses to painting instruments and the fundamental functions of line. In close analysis, Chuang's brush never lingers as it travels; paint and ink only accumulate at the ends of the lines and strokes, where the high percentage of water would bleed and generate a gray halo effect. This implies that the force of Chuang's hand stopped short of surpassing the boundaries of the painting in order to limit the viewers' attention to the logic within the frame. Respecting the border indicates that the tension and meaning within the painting are independent of the viewer's space. This distinguishes Chuang's starting point for painting from that of Kline and Pollock. Although the Americans' paintings also inhabit a self-contained pictorial logic and structure, the lines and the color planes actively provoke the borders, extending beyond the frame and intentionally making direct contact with the viewer's physical territory.

Calligraphy, Painting, and Abstraction

In the 1964 booklet of five Fifth Moon Society painters—Chuang, Liu, Fong Chung-ray, Hu Chi-chung, and Han Hsiang-ning—Chuang's pages feature mainly abstract works. Some are purely oil paintings, other mix oil, ink, and paper on canvas.[30] The surface texture of each work is somewhat lost in the poor black-and-white reproductions, but they nonetheless accentuates the artist's emphasis on composition, structure, the potentials of monochrome, and the tension between the marked and unmarked spaces. This "pure abstraction" was once criticized by the American historian

[30] *Five Chinese Painters—Fifth Moon Exhibition* (*wuyue huaji*) (Taipei: Wenxing, 1964), unpaginated.

of Chinese art Thomas Lawton and by Liu as having "no Chinese spirit."[31] The demand for markers of Chinese identity in abstract painting suggests a dilemma for the artists: one must produce abstract art that has international legibility but that should also possess an unmistakable Chinese quality. The criticism did not hinder Chuang's painting experiments, but it rather prompted a pivotal development in his practice. Later in 1964, he started adding Chinese characters to his paintings, sometimes excerpted from ancient poetry, sometimes his own words and prose, and sometimes simply a single character.

In *Homage* (1964) (Figure 5.6), three pieces of paper stand vertically in the center of the primed canvas, one above the other two. Each piece has a mixture of fine horizontal strokes and splattered ink before being torn and pasted. The monochromatic marks, applied without apparent logic serve as a visual reminder of Chuang's distance from the standard composition of Chinese painting. The relatively neat edges of the paper fragments suggest the careful and calculated manner of the tear-and-paste process.[32] Chuang introduced the element of improvisation during the drying process: a sliver of the canvas in between the bottom two pieces of paper is where the artist peeled away the paper with a knife before the glue dried.[33] As if to fortify the paper's structure, three bold, parallel, vertical strokes and a horizontal one follow the paper's orientation. These lines roughly form the Chinese character for mountain (*shan*) in the lower half of the painting. One could easily miss the semantic function of the thick strokes. But once the pictograph

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[31] See Liu Kuo-sung, "Chuang Che and I" (*zhuangzhe yu wo*) in *To Copy, Sketch, and Create* (*linmo, xiesheng, chuangzao)*,(Taipei: Wenxing, 1966), 190. Originally published in *Jiangzuo* no. 5, May 1965. It is, however, unclear to which works Lawton referred.

[32] The artist explained his method: he would select an area of inked marks he needed on a piece of paper and cut (or tear) and paste according to the composition on the canvas. Chuang, letter to author, 23 July 2013.

[33] Ibid.

is recognized, its meaning and the formal relationship to the collage paper underneath cannot be ignored. The linguistic meaning of the character informs the viewer of the subject of the homage, which triggers visual associations with the mountain-like forms of the paper. Chuang brought to his painting the literal form and function of pictograms as signifiers and visual symbols of nature.

Autumn from 1964 (Figure 5.7) is another painting where the inscriptions provided both compositional function and poetic meanings. The work, included in his first one-man exhibition in 1965 and now in the Taipei Fine Arts Museum collection, contains a vertical, rectangular-shaped paper in its lower left quadrant, which holds the weight of the picture. It is met by a smaller piece of paper horizontally across its top. Above that floats another piece, like a cloud, amidst a halo of thin grey-black mist at the upper right corner. In compositional analysis, the diagonal arrangement of the marked areas is a strategy Chuang often used in the 1960s. It gives a rhythm and dynamic to the picture. Together the paper forms create a sense of height and depth. The marks on the paper are varied: dark, sweeping strokes on the lower left and the sporadic spots around them indicate the speed of the hand; a quick slash departing from the lower left activates the lower right corner and counterbalances the weight directly above. On the upper right across the cloud-mist complex, several lines of faint inscription are superimposed onto the paper, and one of the characters, “autumn” (*qiu*), supplements the tone of the painting. Suddenly the floating pieces of paper in earthly, orangey tones look like foliage. The composition recalls the format of a traditional landscape painting. It also brings attention to the poetic, emotional dimension of the work.

The two examples show that Chuang's paintings contain two types of marks with calligraphic lineage: singular strokes and the written text. In Chuang's own conception, the lines, the splatters, the large areas of saturations, and the pieces of paper are all equal on the surface. The sweeping strokes unify the discrete materials and anchor the otherwise slight, pliant paper and enhance the overall volume. They seem to mend the paper wounds and the ruptures between the paper and the canvas.[34] His action suggests reconciliation between the indigenous and imported techniques: freehand strokes and ink washes amend the disrupted patchwork beneath. Metaphorically, it symbolizes peacemaking between Chinese and Western traditions, bridging the material divide. It implies that while Chuang borrowed the ready-made planes from a Western technique, he relied on a Chinese element—most visibly the large strokes—to lessen the sharpness of paper's edges. The dynamism between the brushwork and paper further proves that Chuang preferred a more poetic, expressive abstraction than a geometric, static one. It also shows his overt self-awareness in giving his work a visible Chinese quality. Chuang's work explores how the conversation between two-dimensional elements—ink, paper, paint, and canvas—could offer a wealth of expression and three-dimensionality, through references to nature that reflect the artist's immediate experiences, emotions, and environment.

Chuang's incorporation of written text into the painting calls for an examination of his position on calligraphy in painting. In Chuang's theorization, artistic universalism lies in the quality of poeticism—the genuine expression of feelings on which Chinese ethnic identity could thrive. Poeticism, along with calligraphy, the irreplaceable cultural

[34] Linda Graves also notes that the strokes ease the transition between the materials. Graves, 156.

and visual form of China, was what Chuang sought to activate in his painting. Chuang leaned toward a more open-ended view toward the East-West rivalry: "Non-representational art can no longer be possessed by Europe . . . and by the same token, the East can no longer be solely possessed by the East."[35] His attitude of opening up a cross-cultural dialogue and joining an international trend diverges from Liu Kuo-sung's staunch ethnic exceptionalism. But Chuang did share with Liu a belief that national identity cannot be dissolved (or eliminated) in universalism; it could only be accentuated.

Chuang expressed utter disappointment that the Euro-American art world credited Japan for the contribution of calligraphy.[36] Chuang's firm belief in the potential of calligraphy in modern painting speaks partly to the desire to correct this major misconception and missed opportunity. But his ambition surpassed merely integrating the two disciplines. He sought to start from clarifying the origin of calligraphy. The way Japanese calligraphers had impressed the West with boldness and passion in isolated strokes was in fact a misrepresentation of the value of calligraphy in the Chinese understanding. He wrote, "Calligraphy is the construction of small units . . . that consist of the pressured pauses, delays, relays, and momentum of the lines, all abstract ideas. But it contains no infiltration of emotions, and this precisely marks its independence from painting."[37] Chuang's view underscores the beauty of calligraphy in the structure of and the finesse in handling the lines, which translates to the potential of line and space in paintings. Personal feelings should be conveyed through the structure of, not singular,

[35] Chuang, "Poetic, Un-Poetic," 14.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

strokes. Calligraphy, in Chuang's view, is different from and only a part of a composition of painting, not the content or methodology.

He summarizes his experimentation with the use of calligraphy in his painting in his application to the JDR 3rd Fund in 1965:

> I am more and more convinced of the necessity of using calligraphy to express, in yet another dimension, what I am attempting to say with paper, canvas, and ink. Chinese artists have done this for centuries. However, by contrast to the traditional use of Chinese calligraphy, which is usually given a position of its own on the pictorial surface, I often use the characters as so many abstract forms and integrate them into the total composition.[38]

Chuang's approaches to calligraphy—both as an art and as a cultural practice—differed from Liu's. Liu adhered to the concept that calligraphy and painting share the same source (*shuhua tongyuan*), and that calligraphy generally serves the purpose of painting, whether as inspiration or component. Liu wrote, "It is not that Chinese painters did not have the impulse to express abstract thoughts, but they channeled this impulse through another artistic form—calligraphy. That is how and where emotions were released."[39] Later on, Liu opted for a less expressionist use of calligraphy and focused on spiritual transcendence and absolute abstraction. He wrote, "calligraphy. . .is the incarnation of Chinese painting's anti-likeness, anti-realistic, anti-naturalistic traits, and of its progression toward the reduction of marks and the spiritual embodiment of abstraction."[40] Chuang criticized Liu's use of calligraphy solely as a representation of abstraction, negating the value of expressions and detaching the presence of the artist

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[38] Chuang Che to Porter McCray, 4 April 1965, B-6651, DF-6804, Box 107, Chuang, Che, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.
[39] Liu Kuo-sung, "On Abstract Painting" (*lun chouxiang huihua*), *Bihui* 2, no. 3 (1 October 1960): 26.
[40] Liu Kuo-sung, "On Brush and Ink" (*tan bimo*), *Wenxing* 90 (1 April 1965): 53.

from the painting.[41] While Chuang and Liu both devised ways to repurpose and reframe calligraphy in the context of abstract art, they differed in their understanding of the relationship between calligraphy and painting and the role of calligraphy in new art.

Comparative Studies: Calligraphy in the Japanese Avant-Garde

Inspired by examples of Western abstraction, Chuang and Liu both saw the potential of Chinese calligraphy in the modern painting context. It is useful to look at how other postwar art communities in Asia treated the subject in their own context. The permeable distinction between painting and calligraphy as well as their utility in modern art were heavily debated subjects in the Japanese avant-garde calligraphy community in the postwar years. During the American military occupation of Japan, many artists and calligraphers feared the eradication of Japanese traditions and decidedly plunged into traditional arts as a way of self-strengthening. Morita Shiryū (1912–98), a classically-trained calligrapher and a founder of the *Bokujinkai* (Group of People of Ink) that led a radical movement in reinventing the discipline, was deeply encouraged by the universal potential of calligraphy after seeing Franz Kline's paintings.[42] *Bokubi*, the monthly journal of calligraphic art, reported enthusiastically on the paintings of Kline, Pierre Soulages, and Zao Wou-ki.[43] Inspired by the Western embrace of calligraphic influences, Morita insisted that calligraphy needed to be universalized through a process of abstraction to make its aesthetic accessible to non-readers of Japanese. His argument is

[41] Chuang Che, "This Generation and the Last—On Liu Kuo-sung and His Background" (*zheyidai yu shangyidai—lun liu guosong, he tade beijing*), *Wenxing* 90 (1 April 1965): 51.
[42] Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 78.
[43] See *Bokubi*, 1 May 1958.

deeply entrenched in the discourse of calligraphy and its future, as he believed that abstraction could rescue calligraphy from the threat of obscurity. [44]

In Morita's analysis, the illiteracy of Americans of *kanji* characters presents both a disadvantage and an opportunity for Japanese calligraphers. The non-Japanese were unencumbered by the meaning of the characters, so they were more perceptive to the beauty of the brushwork and lines. But the illiteracy also gave Japanese calligraphers a new dimension for cultivating their practice. Morita detached the character from any textual or syntactical construction—hence only writing one or two isolated characters in a work—and subjected the character to deformation to the point of illegibility without the aid of a printed title, even for a native speaker.[45] The 1963 work *Manaita* is an example (Figure 5.8). The individual strokes are barely distinguishable, forming pools of ink that depict the character for "chopping board"—a clue supplied by the title.[46] The result is what historian of Japanese art Bert Winther-Tamaki described as a work that "hovered back and forth along the border between abstraction and calligraphy" but that categorically remains in the realm of calligraphy because it retains the correct brush orthography.[47]

Chuang held similar views upon seeing the advantage of Kline's illiteracy. He wrote, "Kline's abstraction still relies on the organization of the black and white, but because he could use the space of the painting freely, he carried no preconceived

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[44] Winther-Tamaki, 76–77.
[45] Ibid., 79.
[46] Morita made a number of works of this character, which refers to the Japanese proverb, "carp on a chopping board," implying one's fate is in the hand of others. Morita linked this character and its meaning to the challenge of being an artist, constantly judged by others, and used it to keep his faith and independence. Morita Shiryū, "Formation of Modern Art: Sit on the Chopping Board", *Mainichi Shimbun*, 21 March 1953. I thank the Kyoto gallery Shibunkaku for providing this information.
[47] Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Mark Tobey, White Writing for a Janus-Faced America," *Word * Image* 13, no. 1 (January–March 1997), 89.

restrictions such as 'this should be a character' or 'the lines should be organized this way.'[48] To Chuang, though the art of Soulages, Pollock, Kline, and Hans Hartung elevated the role of the line in abstract art, Chinese painters were more qualified and resourceful in their usage due to their heritage. He identified the value of reducing calligraphy to its basic unit of points and strokes and reassembled them to exercise compositional, evocative, or sign-making functions. He let non-intellectual arrangements of lines into painting. He also changed the relationship between calligraphic marks and paper. The rigidity of the calligraphic practice and its relation to language are thus loosened, which increases the formal variability, spatial use, and emotional capacity of the marks, lines and strokes. The transformation of calligraphy from the art of writing into an integrated component of painting became Chuang's mission and one of his most important breakthroughs.

The Chinese artists considered the Western usage of calligraphic elements as proof of the potential of calligraphy in modern art, rather than that calligraphy needed abstraction in order to be redeemed. Liu emphasized the advances of Chinese art in abstraction to prove the universality of a national identity. He also stressed the gestural power of the stroke in order to highlight the subjectivity of the artist. Chuang did not rely on the virtuosity of the strokes, but he rather reconfigured them to bear new meanings. Their views, though subtly different, reflected a self-positioning that vacillates between being the bearer of the legacy of Chinese civilization and being on the periphery of world political and cultural power. Despite their differences in practice and philosophy, the Japanese and the Chinese artists' agenda to preserve their respective heritages from the

[48] Chuang, "Poetic, Un-Poetic," 14.

Western hegemony during the 1950s and early 1960s—through the process of abstraction and an attitude of universalism with local specificity—are strikingly similar.

Text, Calligraphy, and Painting

The written text in Chuang's work connects his paintings to traditional art and practices more assertively. Adding inscriptions in the margins of ink paintings is a common practice in traditional art even though the writing—describing one's feelings, giving commentary, or simply recording dates—usually contributes little to the pictorial composition. For Chuang, the writings gained centrality in his compositions. To lessen the script's linguistic and calligraphic associations, Chuang often used a wooden stick instead of a brush to write, which resulted in an uneven size and proportion of the characters. The characters often appear smudged, fragmented, abstracted and barely legible; the brokenness echoes the torn state of the paper. Chuang proved that he, like his American counterparts, could partially disregard the canon of calligraphy and utilize the traditional script for compositional and structural support. When he writes phrases or poetry, his characters follow the right-to-left directionality of Chinese writing, applying a kind of unspoken structure for the viewing experience. For some who are illiterate, his use of brush-drawn characters was a "design scheme" that functions as "mere embellishments, albeit extremely effective ones."[49] They conjure the expected "look" of Chinese art, and are thus useful in pinpointing the background of the maker. The full meaning of the paintings, however, could only be properly understood through the

[49] The Ann Arbor reviewer's comments. Slusser, "Local Oriental Conquest."

written texts, and only available to those who understand Chinese—unless a translation is available.[50]

Chuang's text paintings run on two parallel yet interdependent systems. One is a text made up of characters (linguistic signs) that contain historical, cultural, or personal significance and provide the central narrative and mood of the painting. To avoid using the cliché calligraphic standards, Chuang played with proportions and placement and also produced a messier, more expressionist version of his handwriting, which was occasionally obscured by smudged paint. To the Chinese literate viewer, the characters are still legible. For others, the Chinese script still emotes in conjunction with the English translation. The characters can be seen as part of the abstract marks congruent with the rest of the picture.

The other system at play in Chuang's paintings is the language of abstraction. This consists of the basic units of the script—dots and lines—and also collage. By borrowing the Western modernist technique of collage, Chuang freed the strokes and paper from their known functions. As a modernist painter he created new meanings—including allusions to landscape forms—through the arrangements of strokes, planes, and poems. By placing the two systems—the written Chinese scripts and the dismembered lines, strokes, and planes—side by side, Chuang emphasized the origin of the Chinese script as an abstracted form of nature. His texts never overtake the collage abstraction, signaling their equal status. In addition to employing the devices from European and American modernist painting for the purpose of transforming the hereditary elements of

[50] Chuang Che to Wai-lim Yip, 15 November 1965, Wai-lim Yip's archive, Del Mar, CA. After the New York dealer Lee Nordness purchased four of Chuang's paintings, two of which the artist did not think were exemplary, Chuang asked Yip, who lived in Princeton, NJ, to help explain the meaning of the works the dealer in English. This shows that viewers and buyers were not deterred by the Chinese text.

Chinese painting, Chuang used the function of language itself to enrich his own visual language. Rather than writing for writing's sake, he used text as a self-conscious cultural marker and an ultimate reclamation of the essential forms of Chinese signs.

The reactions from fellow artists and art historians show that Chuang's new technique questioned the primacy of Chineseness in the context of abstraction. Li Chu-tsing considered Chuang's scripts a welcomed strategy in "playing up the abstract character of the composition" and in "helping us better to understand the abstract forms" in the painting. Li argued that the characters are bearers of arbitrary meanings themselves. He saw them as "guides" or triggers for the imagination, and as reminders of the old master works in poetry and painting.[51] Cleary, Li, an art historian of classical paintings, framed Chuang's painting through that lineage and saw the success of Chuang's literati approach to modern art. The poet Yu Kwang-chung was especially enamored of Chuang's forceful lines, calling them "bold brushwork, wild and vigorous, permeated with *qi* like a forceful spring."[52] Liu saw Chuang's retrograde act of adding inscriptions to painting as anti-modern and anti-international.[53] Chu Ko, a poet and painter who also incorporated calligraphic lines into abstract painting saw Chuang's inscriptions as meaningful ideologically and pictorially, though he criticized Chuang's "deliberate arrangement" and worries they risk falling into blind worship of abstraction. He writes, "when the script becomes legible, the weakness of his painting is exposed."[54] Chu Ko,

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[51] Li, "Paintings of Chuang Che."
[52] Yu Kwang-chung, "On the Eve of Greatness: The Eighth Fifth Moon Exhibition (II)" (*weida de qianxi: ji dibajie wuyue huazhan, xia*), *United Daily News*, 18 June 1964, New Art Section, p. 8.
[53] Liu, "Chuang Che and I," 190.
[54] Chu Ko, "The new stage of calligraphy—a review of Chuang Che's painting" (*shufa de xin lingyu—jiantan zhuangzhe de hua*), source unknown. I obtained this new clipping from Chuang Che's archive, New York.

while supportive of Chuang's use of calligraphy, found the use of written scripts decorative. Still, Chuang felt that developing a totality in his work among the scripts, poetic content, and pictorial composition was a worthwhile direction. His ultimate defense: "A character is a character; without content it is no better than a corpse."[55]

Country Broken Mountain River Be

At the heart of Tang poet Du Fu's classic line "Country broken mountain river be" (*guo po shan he zai*), from *Spring View*, lies the issue of place and belonging.[56] Du Fu's poem was a personal, pained response to the An Lushan Rebellion that tore apart and weakened the Tang dynasty in the mid-eighth century. The fact that Chuang borrowed the poem's most gripping and visually distinct verse—one that is not only part of the lexicon of the average Chinese, but one that captures the collective malaise over the loss of the mainland after the Civil War—exemplifies his ambition to define the art of his specific time and place. The repeated citation of the verse, a self-historicizing act to say the least, began in 1965 and continued in 1966. The usage of only the opening verse of the poem suggests that the painter knew it was well-known enough that he did not need to cite more to achieve his desired effect. Its use also brings an unusual political bent to the paintings. Although Chuang's use acknowledged the government's pledge to "counterattack the mainland" (*fangong dalu*)—a surprising admission to touching on politics in his abstract painting—his use actually highlights the darker side of the pledge,

[55] Chuang Che, "Appendix: My Words" (*fulu: zibianshu*), in *To Copy, Sketch, and Create* (*linmo, xiesheng, chuangzao*), ed. Liu Kuo-sung (Taipei: Wenxing, 1966), 193–94.
[56] Translated by Wai-lim Yip, *Eight Views of Xiao Xiang*, 45.

an unfulfilled promise to return.[57] While military attempts to retake the mainland were still underway in 1965, in everyday reality society had begun to settle into routine life in Taiwan, and the pledge had become merely a patriotic slogan.[58] The opening of the National Palace Museum in Taipei signified the orthodoxy of Chinese culture taking root in Taiwan. This had an enormous impact on Chuang, whose family life for the past thirty years had centered around the migratory collection and its fate. Chuang's quotation of the classic poem is not just an intuitive description of the pathos of defeat and displacement, rather it underscores the permanence of such brokenness and the sadness it triggered within an obsessed and debilitated populace.

Chuang was the first of his generation to use the predicament of exile as the subject matter of painting. In 1964 he wrote "I think our artistic expression should take its lessons from the epic poetry of the turmoil of the War of Resistance [against the Japanese]."[59] His honest confrontation contrasts with the older generation of ink painters—like Pu Xinyu and Huang Junbi—who retained their pre-war styles as a coping mechanism and to maintain their status in the cultural establishment. It also marks a different approach from poets like Lo Fu, who used a surrealist strategy to capture experience. Among the artists of his generation, Chuang and Ku Fu-sheng (whose father was the KMT general Gu Zhutong) were the fortunate ones who moved to Taiwan with their entire families. The tales of their migration have a distinct trajectory from those who were separated from their families abruptly and permanently—like Lo Fu—before and

[57] Chuang, letter to author, 23 July 2013.
[58] In 1965, the U.S. government terminated the economic aid to Taiwan, which also prompted the KMT government to recognize the impossibility to return to the Mainland and to invest more in domestic, Taiwan projects.
[59] Chuang Che to Chu Ko, 2 April 1964, in Zhang, 349.

after the 1949 Divide. Chuang's sense of loss was thus milder than that of other artists in his generation. Nevertheless, Chuang noted that he felt compelled to convey the loss and deprivation felt by his parents and their friends.[60] Among them was the literary historian, poet, fiction writer and calligrapher Tai Jingnong (1902–90), whose life was an endless cycle of ironies and intellectual suffering as a consequence of war, politics and displacement.[61] For Li Chu-tsing, who showed special affinity to Chuang's work, Du Fu's poem seemed to capture his grief at not being able to return to China.[62]

The *Homage to Du Fu* series (see another example, Figure 5.9) thus serves three major purposes: it is an aesthetic proposal that hinges on the interplay between written text and abstraction; a visual metaphor for the multi-generational, varied diasporic experiences and for the cultural legacy of the mainland; and a therapeutic confrontation with the longing, anxiety, and repression experienced by those in exile and their waning faith in reunification. In 1964, he justified his newly developed aesthetic of brokenness in an article in *Wenxing*. He argued that from the perspective of art, the state of brokenness—in a nation, an object, or even a body—means beauty, despite the reality points to frustration, desolation, or even death.[63] His painting's provocation focused on the shattered state of the country at the risk of being illustrative, yet he added an unfamiliar element to the language of modern abstraction. The series confirms the shared experiences for the Chinese viewers. The disjunctive, fragmented, and broken state of his

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[60] Chuang, interview by author, New York, 25 October 2012.
[61] For details on Tai Jingnong's life and work and the relations to the exile condition, see David Der-wei Wang, "And History Took a Calligraphic Turn: Tai Jingnong and the Art of Writing," *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 311–52.
[62] Li, "Paintings of Chuang Che."
[63] Chuang Che, "Destruction and Beauty—Notes on Painting I" (*po yu mei—huayu sanlun zhiyi*), *Wenxing* 86 (1 November 1964): 52.

painting's surface underscores how the landscape of one's dreams is in fact unattainable and broken. At the same time, through the visual symbol of an abstracted landscape, the painting offered transcendence. Unlike Liu's abstract paintings, which channel nostalgia with an unconditional admiration for the majesty of the landscape, Chuang's *Du Fu* series are a harsh reminder of the unavailability of that landscape because of his loud, messy, unrefined strokes and erratic splatters on fragmented paper.

It is imperative to evaluate Chuang's aesthetics of brokenness from a globalist view. Chuang's strategy of destroying, gluing, patching, and altering the line is in tacit conversation with European, American, and Japanese abstract art. Painters of these postwar societies, haunted by a loss of idealism following the unprecedented destruction of the environment, economy, and the minds and bodies of individuals, responded by rejecting past painting methods. Among their new strategies, Lucio Fontana perforated and slashed his paintings and Alberto Burri used as canvas the burlap bags that had carried U.S. foreign aid supplies; they also employed intense gestures or salvaged materials to express interior emotions.[64] Postwar artists in Taiwan endured similar conditions, as they lived through multiple wars, refugee existence, and then faced unresolved issues related to the cultural authenticity and coherence in the face of foreign cultural incursions. Chuang cited the use of burning, nail holes, knife cuts, tearing, and splashing in European and American modern art as proof of the aesthetics of destruction already in practice in international painting.[65] However, he carried out his destruction

[64] Paul Schimmel, "Painting the Void," in Schimmel ed., *Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void 1949–1962*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010), 190–91, 193.
[65] Chuang, "Destruction and Beauty," 52.

more cautiously than his predecessors. His use of broad strokes to "patch" paper fragments feels more like mending or healing than a simple expressive response.

The Du Fu paintings, though different in size and orientation, follow the same organizational principles. There are no identifiable landscape forms, and the emotional impact and the visual significance of painted marks are contingent on the inscribed poetry. In the 1965 *In Praise of Du Fu* (Figures 5.1, 1.9), which was featured prominently in "The New Chinese Landscape," the characters line up vertically along the right edges of the canvas, each occupying a discrete piece of paper. To the left of the poetry, in the middle of the canvas, are noisy abstract marks on another piece of paper. The rest of the canvas was left empty. Li observed that "the brokenness of the shape evokes the brokenness of the country."[66] The historical, linguistic symbols on the right and the newly improvised symbols on the left express the devastation of a nation.

The diptych *Painting with a Poem* (Figures 5.10, 5.11, 5.12), made in December 1965 and now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Art, includes the opening and two subsequent verses in Du Fu's poem:

> In spring the streets are green with grass and trees
> Sorrowing over the times, the flowers are weeping.[67]

The artist stopped at the third verse because of the lack of room.[68] The fifteen characters legibly written and in proportion occasionally bleed from excess moisture. The largest of the Du Fu paintings known to date, the work is organized by four sheets of paper placed neatly at diagonal corners of the canvases, which creates alternating empty

[66] Li, "Paintings of Chuang Che."
[67] Ibid.
[68] Chuang, interview by author, New York, 25 October 2012.

areas. Each sheet hosts a suite of intense splashed and flung ink, which one Chinese critic understood as illustrative of the last three characters in the quoted poetry, "flower spurt tears."[69] The additional verses seem to afford the artist more abstract imagery to enrich the piece. The diptych was the most colorful of the Du Fu paintings, reflecting the season of spring depicted in the poem. In the middle section, yellow tints jump out from a pool of dominant black. A piece of sky-blue paper gives both a splash of color and wrinkled texture on the left panel. At center right is a deep black, moon-like circle—pasted, in fact—hanging above the cluster of flying ink strokes and dots. The unexpected bright colors and shapes give a visual lift to the work and sustain the surface drama throughout the large painting.

Chuang's poetry paintings—in a way, abstract illustrations—join a long line of artistic expressions that react to political, cultural, and existential crises and forced migration. Most representative of this trend in Chinese art history are the paintings and poetry of the loyalists of the Southern Song dynasty.[70] The Southern Song intellectuals saw the country's political and cultural legitimacy on the brink of collapse after the invasion of northerly barbarians. They sought solace in nature and generated new expressions surrounding Daoist philosophy that dictated the future course of literati painting. Chuang's own family, who originated from Beijing, moved to the Southwest during the war against the Japanese and then moved again to Taiwan. Though Chuang did not actively cite this lineage—the Southern Song style is arguably too passive for his

[69] Hui Xing, "Seeing Chuang Che's Second Solo Exhibition" (*kan zhuangzhe er'ci gezhan*), source unknown. This news clipping was from Chuang Che's archive. Du's verse translated by Wai-lim Yip.
[70] There are numerous scholarly publications on the literati painting of the Southern Song dynasty. One comprehensive survey on the subject is Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)*, 2d ed. (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2012).

taste, his artistic output during the 1960s speaks to the historical narrative of the "Southern Migration."

Homesick from 1964 (Figure 5.13), a key work in the "New Chinese Landscape," is an outspoken "modern" take on the state of being exiled. On the lower right corner, written on an opening between two collaged pieces, a poem by Chuang reads:

> How much do we hope
> To return to the land where our lives grew up!
> One day suddenly I recalled.
> It was so beautiful,
> Yet so desolate.[71]

Homesick draws on tropes familiar to the frustrated Chinese literati: the powerful yet restrained sense of longing, romanticism, and hope tied together by irony. Li saw in the rounded forms and watery marks a milder feeling compared to the intensity of the Du Fu paintings.[72] The work's composition is almost identical to *Autumn* (Figure 5.7) produced in the same year: a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right of paper collage, with an additional strip from the middle to the bottom right. Like the cottage that captures the eye in a meandering forest path in a classical landscape, a hut-like image on a darker-toned rectangular paper sits slightly off-kilter atop an open square emerging from the heavily stained middle section of *Homesick*. The image is an abstraction of his family house in Beigou, Taiwan where the family had lived for twenty years.[73] The bamboo structure and the tiled roof resonate with the clearly drawn patterns and earthy tone.[74]

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[71] Translated by Li Chu-tsing. Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, *The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists* (New York: The American Federation of Arts), 17.
[72] Li, "Paintings of Chuang Che."
[73] Beigou is a township in Wufeng, Taichung. Chuang, interview by author, New York, 25 October 2012.
[74] A photograph by Chuang Che's younger brother, Chuang Ling, shows the family's old house with tiled roof and bamboo wall structure, which is exactly like its abstracted version in the painting. See Chuang Ling, *Ling Shi* (Taipei: Lion Art, 2008), 34–35. The symbol of the house appeared again in another painting

This striking resemblance shows that even though Chuang was against realism, the image of his house had nonetheless become iconic and ingrained in his vision. Surprisingly, in Chuang's poetry, he did not use the word "home"; instead, he used the generic term "place" (*difang*).[75] The sense of ambiguity and uncertainty is deliberate—was he referring to the physical or the spiritual place that one calls home? Did he mean the home in Beigou or in mainland China? Chuang became the voice of his father's generation by shaping the general theme of homesickness through text and image, while the ambiguity of home's location indicates the perennial question of belonging that haunted his generation. He once exclaimed to Chu Ko, "Perhaps our generation will be homesick for a very long time!"[76]

The Southern Mountain and the Re-imagination of the Literati Spirit

The longing and nostalgia in Chuang's poetry paintings is reiterated in the quintessential representation of the literati idyll, the Southern Mountain (*nan shan*).[77] The place that symbolizes the state of bucolic pleasure of an intellectual in exile originated from a poem by the Six Dynasties poet Tao Qian (365–427). Tao, who led a reclusive, agrarian life after he refused to compromise his principles for the corrupt Jin court, has been the moral compass and spiritual guidepost for self-respecting Chinese intellectuals

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in Chuang Che's first solo exhibition in 1965. On that occasion, both Chuang's parents and Tai Jingnong were in attendance. A photograph taken by Chuang Ling of Chuang Yan and Tai with Chuang Che in front of the second painting featuring the abstracted house is telling of the artist's motivation behind the work and his relationship with the elders. The latter photograph provided by Chuang Ling to author.

[75] In the "New Chinese Landscape" and in "Paintings of Chuang Che," Li Chu-tsing translated *difang* to "land," which suggests his interpretation was based on his personal diasporic experience of the longing to return to the homeland.

[76] Chuang to Chu, 2 April 1964, in Zhang, 349.

[77] The Southern Mountain refers to Lu Mountain, a landmark that historically hosts famous inhabitants of high morals or intellect in Jiangxi Province.

for centuries. Chuang's work has focused on the iconic mountain and its representational value since 1963, before his paper collage period. He explored this theme in *A Glimpse of Southern Mountain* (Figure 5.14), an oil painting with a diagonal composition of deconstructed strokes and washes. By evoking Tao and his model vision of inner peace and harmony with nature, Chuang consciously inserts his own work into the canon of Chinese intellectual history, though not without twists and subversions.

Two paintings made in 1966, *Southern Mountain at the Collision of Time and Space* (also known as *Southern Mountain*, Figure 5.15) and *The Angry South Mountain* (Figure 5.16), depict the iconic mountain as a passionate recharge and formal reconfiguration of traditional imagery. Neither painting contains texts, but their descriptive titles pre-condition the viewer to anticipate a stormy disposition. The former painting contains a tight cluster of paper in varied textures and hues that suggest a solid mountain form. Chuang seemed to be preoccupied with impressing the volume and height of the mountain form and made it confrontational to the viewer. This painting demonstrates the maturation of the artist's skill in maneuvering a variety of materials and in achieving sophisticated effects. The top half of the painting features a peak made up of a piece of angular cotton paper saturated in diluted ink, which imparts a degree of translucency and exposes the paper's fibrous constitution. Chuang tore away a small wedge in the middle, leaving strings of inked pulp forming organic lines. In the bottom half of the painting stands three pieces of paper side by side, with the middle and right sheets in stone-blue colors, which secure the weight of the formation. Chuang placed thick ink strokes and occasional dabs at the seams and corners where the paper blocks meet, a method for merging and substantiating materials that is by now familiar strategy.

He created three-dimensionality by leaving the bottom areas of the canvas uncovered—which forms triangular shapes—and by poking two holes near the lower center, revealing the canvas underneath and lifting the weight of the mass. The triangles find their echo in the upper right where two thinly drawn lines suggest the contours of a short hill in a distance. Above the fray, in the upper left, Chuang merged wet paint with paper still wet with glue and added horizontal ink strokes on top. The explosive, vaporous effect recorded the momentary interaction between the four wet media. By using moisture as agent, the painting explores the tension and transition within the medium and in the development of the composition. The carefully orchestrated contrasts create a compelling sense of space and dimension. It is also a dramatic rendering of the moment of "collision" between the past and the present.[78] *The Angry South Mountain* has a more solemn nature but is no less confrontational. A vertical formation of stacked, layered, and dark masses suggests an impenetrable situation. Top heavy, the structure seems unstable but remains imposing. The formless work suggests the mountain's value for the artist's vocabulary. The title highlights the unobtainability of the serenity the Southern Mountain is supposed to represent.

In retrospect, Chuang's isolation in Taichung had brought his first career peak. Taipei had become more developed as an urban center, which made Taichung's serenity and simplicity more appealing to the artist. He wrote, "I believe standing in the chaotic streets of Taipei would not inspire one of the unprompted appreciation of the Southern

[78] Contrary to what may seem obvious because of the production date of the work, the artist asserts that he was not reacting to the imploding Cultural Revolution on the mainland. Chuang, letter to author, 23 July 2013.

Mountain, unless he is completely blind to his surroundings."[79] The joyful prospect of living in the periphery and maintaining a low-profile teaching life at Tunghai may have activated the subject matter of the Southern Mountain and had a positive impact on his creative life. Starting in late 1963, Chuang published a series of critical writings on painting in *Wenxing*, a popular literature and arts magazine, solidifying his role as a leading artist of his generation. He found and perfected the new method of mixed-media collage painting that would define his place in modern Chinese art, as the *Southern Mountain* and the *Homage to Du Fu* series demonstrate. The large body of work he produced during this period had brought him more confidence and financial stability. By 1964, the Fifth Moon Society had been exhibiting in venues on the national level, indicating the mainstream acceptance and the burgeoning success of the group's modern art movement. Chuang had aptly achieved his goal to immerse himself and his practice in nature after the manner of Tao Qian.

Although Chuang had deliberately stayed away from the controversies of the Taipei art world by immersing himself in nature and only participating in the annual Fifth Moon group exhibitions, he was not immune to criticism. Between 1964 and 1965 he and Liu debated publicly on their art theories and practices. Liu criticized Chuang's text and character paintings as a regression from total abstraction and detrimental to the internationalization of painting. Liu also disapproved of Chuang's overtly expressionist works, citing the shallow instant gratification and lack of transcendence toward a higher truth.[80] Chuang defended his expressionist content as a way to infuse the literati spirit with contemporary, personal relevance, and he returned fire on Liu's prejudice against art

[79] Chuang, "This Generation and the Last," 50.
[80] Liu, "Chuang Che and I," 189–90.

styles different from his own.[81] To Chuang, Liu's superficial adhesion to traditional theories and to Daoist metaphysics was intolerable. He also began to loathe compromising his own principles for the sake of the group.[82] More troubling was Li Chu-tsing's framework for evaluating his art. Speaking of the upcoming exhibition in the U.S., Chuang wondered:

> Now I start to suspect that the impetus for Mr. Li to make this exhibition was completely limited by a vision based on history and tradition. Otherwise why name it the new landscape tradition?[83]

As a young artist, Chuang could not afford to miss the opportunity of exhibiting even if he disagreed with the organizer's theme or philosophy.[84] His dilemma is amplified by the fact that until then exhibitions in Taiwan had been organized by medium, group, or status as new or traditional, or simply through juried competitions. An exhibition organized by theme was new to Chuang, though "New Chinese Landscape" was framed by both ethnicity and culturally-specific subject matter for a foreign audience. Chuang's anxiety about being misunderstood or mislabeled is symptomatic of being part of a modern art infrastructure, especially in the context of international exhibition conventions. The question of how Chinese painting could be considered modern in the eyes of the public, including foreigners, especially threatens the artist's agency and control of work and reception. In light of these challenges, Tao Qian's brand of peaceful non-engagement and self-fulfilled contentment is perhaps insufficient for an emerging artist like Chuang trying to control the narrative of his own art. Chuang's visualization of

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[81] Chuang, "My Words," 194.
[82] Chuang Che to Lo Fu, 1953, in Zhang, 350.
[83] Translated by author. Chuang to Yip, 19 June 1966, Wai-lim Yip's archive, Del Mar, CA.
[84] When asked about his feeling toward Mr. Li's curatorial framework, Chuang said what he did was necessary. Chuang Che, interview by author, New York, 7 August 2014.

Southern Mountain, the celebrated symbol of literati culture, thus represents a pointed questioning of the place of a modern Chinese artist on the world stage. Using this traditional symbol also exposes Chuang's inability to completely discard the framework of tradition as he tried to restore the legacy of Chinese culture. As a result of this fear of losing control, Chuang's painting and vocabulary took on an outpouring of anxiety, melancholy, and defiance toward the development and interpretation of his art.

To articulate his ideas more effectively and publicly, Chuang's turned his painting into manifestos. In *Where There's True Feeling, There's Form; Where There's a True Brush, There's Expression* (Figure 5.17) from November 1965, the artist emphasizes the central place of the self in the art-making process. The statement illustrates what he wrote earlier that year: "to express in abstract ways is to validate the truth in the brush and in the material. The truth in the brush means all the life's force is upon it. A canvas means battle to an artist."[85] The statement is a direct critique of Liu's undermining of the significance of a true mark (*zhen bi*) by peeling off the fiber after executing it.[86] In Chuang's *Where There's a True Feeling*, there are no obvious landscape forms, only the suggestion of pictorial dynamics from three paper clusters. The white paint on the rectangular sheet across the upper right and on the jagged edge of the floating piece puts an unusual spin on the artist's thoughts about white or empty space. He added the marks to increase the depth of field of the painting and soften the stiff shapes of the paper.[87] The sixteen characters (including his signature) in the lower right corner are integrated into the one of the paper clusters and written in a measured, calm manner. Chuang arranged

[85] Translated by author. Chuang, "On Liu Kuo-sung," 51.
[86] Chuang, interview by author, New York, 13 February 2013.
[87] Chuang, interview by author, New York, 5 October 2016.

characters according to the needs of composition rather than natural punctuation, a sign that his composition was unbound by preconceived placements.

In a 1965 painting included in that year's Fifth Moon exhibition, Chuang declares that "Neither Laozi, Zhuangzi, nor Buddhist Chan, my landscape reflects my own mind."[88] The triple negative in the sentence expresses the artist's staunch protest against the following of Lao-Zhuang or Chan philosophy as ways to modernist painting, which was the central creed of Liu Kuo-sung and Yu Kwang-chung's theories. The public disagreement with fellow artists shows that by its ninth year, the Fifth Moon Society members had started to diverge in their development. The declaration style in the painting was an attempt to avoid misunderstanding and to actively communicate a painter's pride and individuality. Chuang had expressed frustration about the lack of appropriate spaces for him to publish his theories—he pronounced the increasingly politically provocative *Wenxing* unsuitable to his taste.[89] So he instead turned his paintings into an alternative platform for artistic declarations and musings. This choice also made abstraction in the painting secondary to the text. In these two examples, Chuang's use of vernacular poetry and literary verses also shows his fondness for modern poetry, which was developing rapidly and in parallel to modernist painting. The marriage between modern poetry and abstract composition radically updates the classic components of painting and the visuality of Chinese art.

The Place for Chinese Art in American Art Markets

[88] Chuang to Chu Ko, 2 April 1964, in Zhang, 348.
[89] Chuang to Lo Fu, 1964, in Zhang, 351.

In mid-1960s Taiwan, an environment that lacked professional art criticism and art historical training, artists depended on sales as the most honest feedback. One of the major arguments between Chuang and Liu concerned the foreign consumption of their work. The two artists were not in competition for patronage—most collectors, who were American expatriates, acquired both of their work. The lingering question was whether they made paintings catering to Western taste. It is possible that authenticity mattered so much because many foreign consumers were *not* specialists in art. The artists had to navigate the fine line between what their peers would consider satisfying only the Western imagination and maintaining expected elements of tradition in their work. Chuang had criticized Liu for making his work "look Chinese," and he asserted that Liu's work relies on technical tricks and rests on poor theoretical foundations;[90] but Liu's popularity among experts seems to justify his reliance on visual associations. Chuang also suffered similar criticisms from Liu for incorporating Chinese characters in his work, yet those influential in the art field, Chinese or American, seemed unfazed by these traditional elements.[91]

The artists' worries about authenticity were perhaps unfounded. In addition to the art historians from the U.S. who collected Chuang's works, there were patrons—like Mrs. Maurice Moore, a sister of the publisher Henry Luce—who had life-long commitments to Chinese affairs as philanthropists, and who collected works by living Chinese artists with the same attitude they had for other objects of Asian art they had accumulated over the

[90] Linda Graves notes that Chuang criticized Liu for "getting caught up" by "indulging the foreigner." Graves, 94.
[91] According to Liu Kuo-sung, Léon Chang thought Chuang's addition of Chinese characters in his paintings compromised the universality. He also reported that Chuang believed Thomas Lawton thought the characters did not harm such goals. Liu, "Chuang Che and I," 190. Most of the modernist poets embraced Chuang's poetry-paintings.

years.[92] One expatriate collector considered the works of the Fifth Moon group representations of China in transition.[93] Another American collector, anthropologist Bernard Gallin, saw in Chuang's work a strong individual voice speaking against established values in art and authoritarian society; the muted color tone reflects and reacts against the repressive conditions of his immediate society.[94] There is certainly a dose of stereotypical "souvenir buying" or tourist behavior in art collecting, in which paintings serve as mementos of an era. Yet due to the collectors' long-lasting friendship with the artists, and due to their strong understanding of the local political situations and cultural dilemmas that concerned the artists, collectors were largely thoughtful and sympathetic, not exoticizing or profit speculating.

In contrast to collectors who understood the cultural contexts and nuances of Chinese modern art, most English art reviewers predictably and uniformly characterized Chuang's and Liu Kuo-sung's art as a successful synthesis of Chinese traditions and Western abstraction, making little distinction between the two artists.[95] Some American art critics adopted the derivative rhetoric in evaluating Chuang's collage work. For example, Jean Paul Slusser, the Ann Arbor-based critic, applauded the drama and balance that Chuang managed in his collage paintings, but then expressed his preference for more

[92] Mrs. Maurice Moore bought two works from him in 1965. Chuang to Wai-lim Yip, 15 November 1965, Wai-lim Yip's archive, Del Mar, CA. Moore was an American trustee of the Tunghai University. She served on the boards of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, which was the majority funding body of Tunghai University and of Asia Foundation. She donated funds to build an extension to Chuang's studio on the Tunghai campus in 1968. Chuang, interview by author, New York, 13 February 2013.

[93] Jan Prichard Cohen, e-mail correspondence with author, 1 May 2012. Cohen was former wife of Dr. Warren Cohen, who was a visiting faculty at the National Taiwan University in the 1960s.

[94] Bernard Gallin, interview by author, East Lansing, MI, 12 October 2012.

[95] See Jan Roberts, "Chinese Artist Breaks East-West Line," *The Daily Iowan*, 17 November 1966, Folder B-6651, DF 6804, Box 107, Chuang, Che, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center; Larry Adelson, "Chuang Che: Study of Oriental Abstract," *Michigan Daily*, Tuesday 21 September 1971, p. 2; and Eleanor Freed, "Two Views of Space—Bursts of Energy vs. Rising Mists," *The Houston Post*, Sunday 6 February 1972, p. 12. From Chuang Che's archive, New York.

subdued emotions, like those in Chinese classical paintings. He was dismissive of Chuang's work for incorporating American Abstract Expressionist styles when he writes, "Can this be another case of the convert who turns out to be more Catholic than the Pope, for it seems also to be shared by many of the modern Japanese painters."[96] The critic was apparently familiar with postwar Japanese abstract art favored by U.S. institutions, but his view on new Chinese art was hardly accurate, insightful, or inventive. The English reviews expose how the cultural and historical references in Chuang's paintings were mostly lost to Western audiences, a loss the artist accepted as a compromise for becoming "international," though not without chagrin.

The commercial activities surrounding the new Chinese art in the mid-1960s provide another view on the circulation and acceptance of these works in the American society. One New York dealer of American arts and crafts, Lee Nordness, quickly seized the opportunity to purchase Chuang's and Liu's works ahead of the "New Chinese Landscape" show and granted them one-man exhibitions soon after the tour began. His speedy adoption suggests that he sensed the potential of abstract expressionists from Free China. Chuang was represented by the Nordness Gallery and by the Forsythe Gallery in Ann Arbor in 1967, both of which periodically organized exhibitions and provided generous incomes.[97] Most of the works went into private hands, except for some works, sold by Forsythe, which entered public collections like University of Michigan Art Museum (UMMA) and the Detroit Institute of Art. While the galleries and regional art

[96] Slusser, *Ann Arbor News.*
[97] According to the letter from Li Chu-tsing to Alan Campbell, associate director of the JDR 3rd Fund, the Chuangs were making plans to settle down in Paris, apparently subsisting on the income from sales through Nordness and Forsythe. Li to Campbell, 23 June 1968, Folder B-6651, DF-6804, Box 107, Chuang, Che, Painting/Sculpture-China, ACC collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

institutions embraced Chuang's work, the fact that his work has circulated among American galleries that worked with second- or third-tiered New York school abstract painters demonstrates the problem with the so-called "internationalist" view of art: namely, in the New York art market, works that straddle between two cultures often fall into a niche market.[98] The internationalist view fails to account for the failure of Chuang's art to reach mainstream museums or blue chip galleries. This failure, along with the fact that his work lay dormant in the collections of several regional museums and of powerful patrons today, is partly due to Chuang's ethnicity, and to his arrival on the scene after the prime time of expressionist abstraction in the primary market. The belatedness is not a criticism of Chuang's art but an observation of the art world realities at the time. But more importantly, abstract art by Asian makers carried a stigma and did not always trigger market reaction. The rejections by important art institutions in New York and lukewarm responses from the co-organizers of "The New Chinese Landscape" exhibition seem to have predicted this development.[99] The realities and tastes in New York, Ann Arbor, and Taipei were simply incomparable in 1967.

A deeper investigation would conclude that the very characteristics that Chuang strived for in his art—the international legibility, the expressionist constitution, and the quintessential traits of Chinese lyricism and calligraphic heritage—are precisely the reasons it was embraced by middle-class, educated American audiences in Midwestern cities in the 1960s, yet those were the same reasons that it was overlooked by the

[98] Today, Chuang is represented by Findlay Galleries in New York, which specializes in mid-twentieth-century American art. He is the only Asian artist on the gallery's roster. Far from the big-name American galleries that thrive in today's competitive market, Findlay's clients are mostly recreational collectors. It certainly does not help advance the scholarship or appreciation of Chuang's work in the American context.
[99] For details on the responses from several American institutions that Li Chu-tsing approached to host "The New Chinese Landscape," see Chapter One, 48–52.

mainstream museums in major Western centers of contemporary art. The different interests of institutions and audiences and the lack of appropriate contexts to exhibit Chuang's works are factors that also contributed to the limited exposure and response in America. In recent decades, as a globalist view in art history and contemporary art began to gain momentum in academia and in museums, Chuang's work resurfaced in several American-organized exhibitions. The UMMA exhibited *Southern Mountain at the Collision of Time and Space* in 2002, the first and only time after acquiring the work in 1967, in "The New York School: Abstract Expressionism and Beyond."[100] In this context, Chuang's painting was placed among the canonical works of the American Abstract Expressionism to show the cross-cultural transmission of artistic ideas. A touring exhibition in 1997, "Asian Traditions/Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945–1970," organized by the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum of Rutgers University, New Jersey, included Chuang's collage paintings from the 1960s amongst other Asian-American artists whose work incorporates the languages of abstraction and Asian traditions and highlighted the scholarship that helped contextualize the work. As these "revisionist" exhibitions still took place in university settings, the strategy that Li Chu-tsing first devised for artists like Chuang—to target university museums—seems to have remained effective. It suggests that the mainstream American market perhaps have not changed much in its opinion toward Chinese art and artists from the immediate postwar decades since the 1960s.

[100] The work was first exhibited at the Forsythe Gallery, Ann Arbor, Michigan, from August 13 through September 1967. The gallery sold it to the UMMA in fall 1967. The UMMA exhibition "The New York School" was on view from July 20, 2002 to January 19, 2003. University of Michigan Museum of Art Archives, Exhibition Record, accession number 1967/2.37.

Conclusion

Aside from the perils of commercial and museum realities, one of the most significant proclamations of Chuang's paintings is that the tidy, clean, and polite literati painting was no longer suitable to representing the era and environment in which he lived. His paintings in the 1960s did not shy away from defilement, running water, excess moisture, and destruction. This revelation thoroughly reflected his belief that modern painting and its production must respond to the times. By disrupting the linear structure of process and the smooth surface of his paintings, Chuang injected a necessary dose of dynamism into the painting process. His exploration of the material and visual affinities between oil and ink attests to the framework of Chinese art that had dominated his thinking. His use of paper manufactured locally in Taiwan broke through the stagnant debate in Taiwan regarding Westernization and cultural preservation by giving space to local materials while activating them through Western-inspired techniques. With more sophisticated maneuver, Chuang reconfigured landscape paintings through a dynamic arrangement of materials. Additionally, his work from the 1960s orchestrated a symbiosis between the fields of poetry and painting in postwar Taiwanese modernism, which is both a reiteration of an ancient practice of literati art and a conceptual reinvention in contemporary art. He gave "text paintings" a new look. In an era flooded with nihilism and confusion within intelligentsia circles, the collages with words signified a nascent ambition for rising from postwar recovery.

Among modern Chinese painters working in the 1960s across the Sinophone regions, Chuang Che is by far the most adventurous in exploring the properties of material not only in the interest of experimentation but also in incorporating materiality

into the development of composition. As such, his work made room for younger artists to explore mixed media. A conceptual and material subversion manifested in "complex art" emerged around 1965 in circles in Taipei.[101] Artists Huang Huacheng (Chuang's classmate at National Normal University), Chuang Ling, (Chuang's younger brother), Huang Yongsong, and Chang Chao-Tang went a step further to undo painting's dominance in artistic expressions as they began making installation, photography, film, modern poetry, mixed-media, and conceptual work. Chuang's painting that utilized the aesthetics of brokenness in turn ushered in new possibilities for Chinese art in Taiwan.

Chapter Five is expanded and modified from the presentation: Ma, Lesley, "An Interplay of Abstraction, Calligraphy, and Landscape: Chuang Che's Collage Paintings, 1964–1966," in "Decoding and Contextualizing Postwar Abstract Painting in Asia" at the Asian Studies Conference Japan, Tokyo, June 29–30, 2013; and from two published articles: Ma, Lesley, "Broken Ground: Chuang Che's Modernist Paintings of the 1960s," in *Chuang Che Retrospective Exhibition* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2015), 28–35 (in Chinese and English), and Ma, Lesley, "Broken Ground: Chuang Che's Modernist Paintings of the 1960s," *Yishu* 15, no. 1 (January/February 2016): 19–31. The dissertation author was the sole author of the presentation and articles.

[101] Taiwanese art historian Lai Yingying coined the term "complex art" (*fuhe yishu*) to classify mixed-media art emerged in postwar Taiwan. See Lai Yingying, *Taiwanese Avant-Garde: Complex Art in the 1960s* (*taiwan qianwei: liushi niandai fuhe yishu*), (Taipei: Yuanliu, 2003).



Figure 5.1 Chuang Che, *In Praise of Du Fu*, 1965,
oil and paper on canvas, 118 x 88 cm.



Figure 5.2 Chuang Che, *Under the Moonlight*, 1958,
oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.

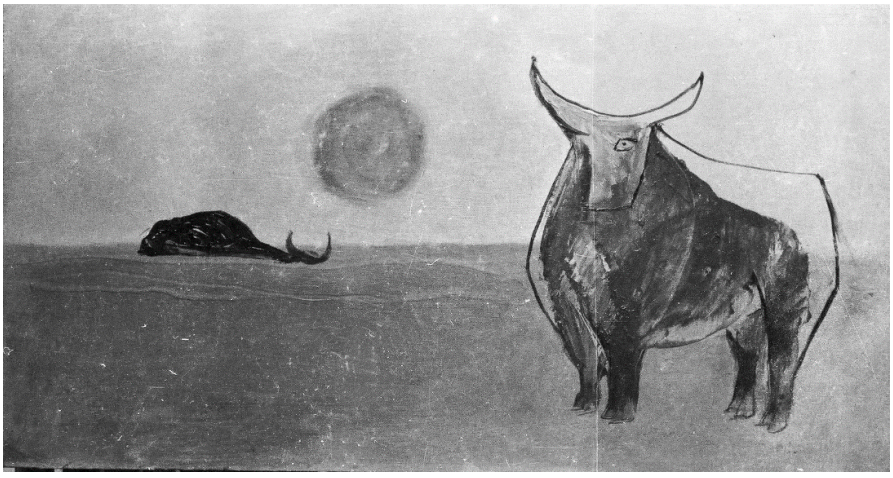


Figure 5.3 Chuang Che, *Sunset,* 1959,
oil on canvas, 74 x 110 cm.

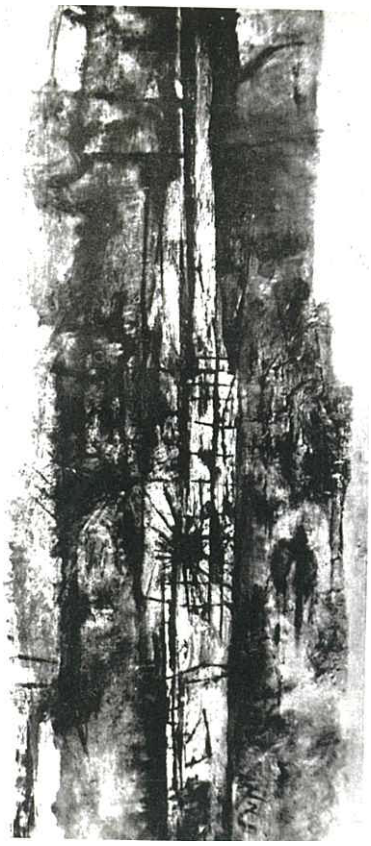


Figure 5.4 Chuang Che, *Epitaph*, 1961,
oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.



Figure 5.5 Chuang Che, *1962-2*, 1962,
oil on canvas, 89 x 118 cm.



Figure 5.6 Chuang Che, *Homage*, 1964.
oil, ink, paper on canvas, 83 x 60.5 cm.
University of Michigan Museum of Art, Gift from the Collection of Patricia O'Connor, 2010/2.32



Figure 5.7 Chuang Che, *Autumn*, 1964,
paper, ink and paint on fabric, 86 x 59.5 cm.
Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



Figure 5.8 Morita Shiryū, *Manaita*, 1963,
ink on paper, 49 x 60 cm.
M+, Hong Kong.



Figure 5.9 Chuang Che, *Homage to Du Fu*, 1966,
oil and paper on canvas, 152 x 112 cm.

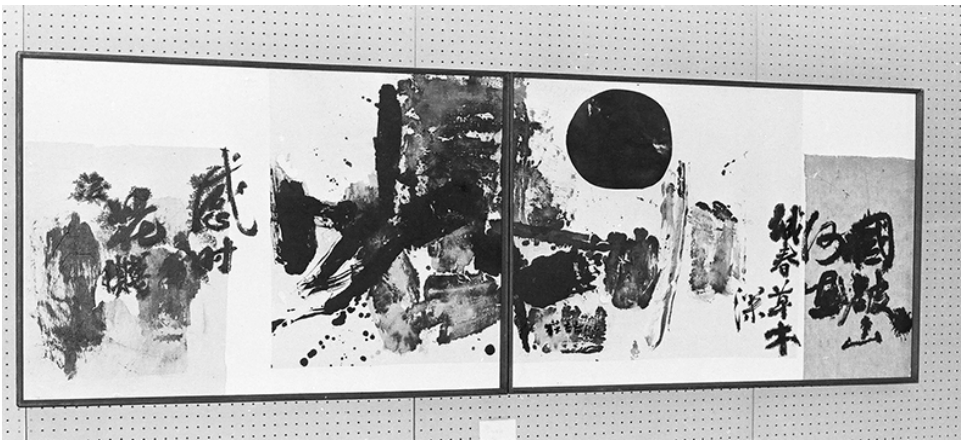


Figure 5.10 Chuang Che, *Painting with a Poem* (1965), installation view, Hai-Tian Gallery, Taipei, 1966. Courtesy Chuang Ling.



Figure 5.11 Chuang Che, *Painting with a Poem* (detail, right panel), 1965, oil, ink, paper on canvas, 112 x 206 cm (total).
Detroit Institute of Art. Founders Society Purchase, Director's Discretionary Fund.



Figure 5.12 Chuang Che, *Painting with a Poem* (detail, left panel), 1965, oil, ink, paper on canvas, 112 x 206 cm (total).
Detroit Institute of Art. Founders Society Purchase, Director's Discretionary Fund.



Figure 5.13 Chuang Che, *Homesick*, 1964,
oil, ink, paper on canvas, 111 x 76 cm.
Collection of Bernard and Rita Gallin, East Lansing, MI.



Figure 5.14 Chuang Che, *A Glimpse of Southern Mountain*, 1963,
oil on canvas, 92 x 60 cm.



Figure 5.15 Chuang Che, *Southern Mountain at the Collision of Time and Space*, 1966,
oil, ink, paper on canvas, 120.97 x 87.63 cm.
University of Michigan Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, 1967/2.37



Figure 5.16. Chuang Che, *The Angry South Mountain*, 1966,
oil on canvas, 88 x 141 cm.



Figure 5.17. Chuang Che, *Where There's True Feeling, There's Form; Where There's a True Brush, There's Expression,* 1965,
oil and collage on canvas, 75 x 112 cm.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation shows how on this insular, economically challenged and highly politicized island without proper arts infrastructure in the stringent postwar years, multiple internal and external factors contributed to the making of modern abstraction in Chinese art. The analysis of "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists" demonstrates the involvement of American institutions in raising the international profile of abstract art from Taiwan and the power of exhibitions in creating a new art-historical narrative and making careers in contemporary art. The magazines *Wenxing* and *Bihui* are a microcosm of the postwar Taiwanese cultural sphere and crucial to understanding the legacy of May Fourth; the influences of European, American, and Japanese literature and visual art; the tight bond between the poetry and visual art circles; as well as the connection between Taiwan and the Sinophone communities in Hong Kong and abroad. The study proves the power of modern media in shaping discourses, advancing theoretical formulations and popular receptions of a movement, and raising the profile of artists. The new, modern Chinese visuality—best represented by the abstract, reconfigured landscape by Liu Kuo-sung and Chuang Che—prevailed as the major output of Taiwan Modernism throughout the 1960s. Abstract painting in 1960s Taiwan thus serves as an important link between pre-war Chinese art; the first generation of Chinese diaspora artists such as Zao Wou-ki, Chang Dai-chien, Walasse Ting, and Tseng Yuho; postwar modernist ink art in Hong Kong; and later, the booming development of abstract painting in 1980s mainland China.

To acknowledge the diversity of artists' pursuits within the modern art movement in Taiwan, this dissertation provides a spectrum of individual concerns and approaches to painting material and concepts. While the study primarily considers the development of abstraction and modernist tendencies within the Taiwanese and Chinese art narratives, it also compares the ideas and practices of artists in Taiwan to their counterparts in Europe, America, and Japan working in abstraction. This approach aims to show the connections, parallels, and differences between abstraction in various locations and time periods to offer a nuanced reading of varied artistic goals. Most importantly, the study underlines the important role of ink and calligraphic aesthetics in the discourse of postwar abstraction, which enriches the existing scholarly dialogue on the subject.

The intense burst of modernist forces in 1960s Taiwan was followed by another period of collective soul-searching in the 1970s, when the national identity of Taiwan was again challenged and its international status destabilized due to the shift of American and international diplomatic allegiance to the P.R.C. By the mid-1970s, most of the artists of Fifth Moon and Ton Fan artists chose to leave —Liu Kuo-sung to Hong Kong in 1971 and Chuang Che to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1973—therefore diminishing the presence of modernist art on the island. The next generation of visual artists in Taiwan broke away from abstract painting and its symbolic connection to mainland China and sought new expressions from a variety of media—photography, installation, theater, film, and performance—to reflect their distinctive cultural identity and individual experiences and interiority. Though abstract painting lost its appeal in the 1970s Taiwanese society, the modernist movement as a whole paved way for future conceptual and interdisciplinary practices, especially between poetry and the visual arts. Most

importantly, it foregrounded cultural resilience and artistic subjectivity at moments of cultural crisis.

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