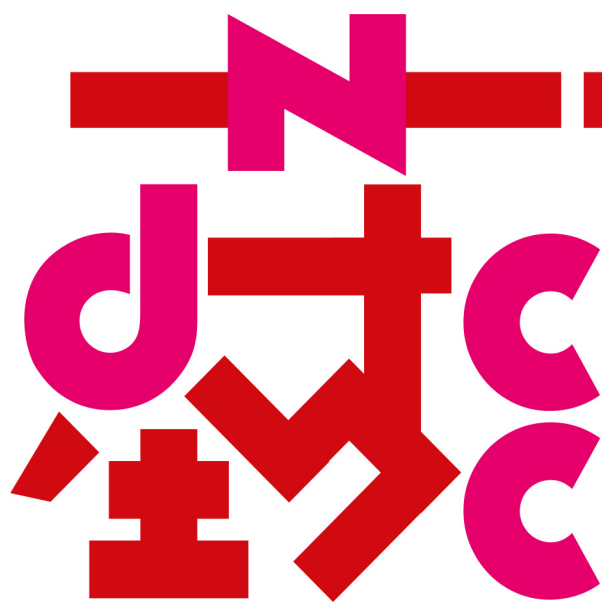


NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCE CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT



Edited by
Birgit Hopfener
Franziska Koch
Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch
Juliane Noth

V&G

Negotiating Difference
Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context

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CONTENTS

Preface <i>Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch</i>	9
Introduction	11
Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context <i>Birgit Hopfener and Franziska Koch</i>	11
Reconfiguring Modernities in China	33
Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art: Main Issues <i>John Clark</i>	33
Landscapes of Exclusion: The No Name Group and the Multiple Modernities in Chinese Art around 1979 <i>Juliane Noth</i>	49
Questioning Representations of Chineseness by Inhabiting Events of Cultural Difference	63
Destroy the Mirror of Representation. Negotiating Installation Art in the 'Third Space' <i>Birgit Hopfener</i>	63
Cai Guo-Qiang's Fireworks: Igniting a Paranational Landscape <i>Brianne Cohen</i>	75

Re-envisioning Chinese Landscape Painting	87
At the Threshold of (In-)Visibility. Qiu Shihua's 'White' Landscape Paintings <i>Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe</i>	87
When Contemporary Art Encounters a National Treasure. Fan Kuan's 'Travellers within Mountains and Streams' <i>Wang Ching-Ling</i>	99
Concepts of Body and Gender	113
Reclaiming the Body: Gender Subjectivities in the Performance Art of He Chengyao <i>Doris Ha-lin Sung</i>	113
Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire. Xiao Lu and the Missing Sex of Post-89 Performance Art in China <i>Adele Tan</i>	127
Strategies of (Dis-)Engagement	141
Alternative Spatial Practices and Provisional Communities in Contemporary China <i>Beatrice Leanza</i>	141
The Pursuit of Publicness <i>Zheng Bo</i>	157
State of the Art: Davide Quadrio in Conversation with Paul Gladston <i>Davide Quadrio and Paul Gladston</i>	171
The Production of Meaning and Market	189
China's Emerging Art Market: Debates on Art, Criticism, and Commodity in the Early 1990s <i>Peggy Wang</i>	189
Contemporary Chinese Art in the International Auction Market: An Insider's Overview and Assessment in Comparative Perspective <i>Joe Martin Hill</i>	199

Neither Here nor There: Notes on a Mediated History of Contemporary Art in China <i>Pauline J. Yao</i>	217
China and the World of Contemporary Art. Repositioning the Art System in China <i>Thomas Berghuis</i>	227
Locating Displacement: Envisioning the Complex 'Diasporization' of Contemporary Chinese Art <i>Paul Gladston</i>	243
Agency in Spaces of Production and Presentation	259
The Third Studio. How Pedagogical Realism Effects Art Production in the Academy and Beyond <i>Lee Ambrozy</i>	259
Lost and Found Dogs: Desiring Production in Qiu Anxiong's 'We Are the World' <i>Wenny Teo</i>	273
The Dawn of Chinese Contemporary Art in the West. A Look Back at the Making of the Exhibition 'China Avantgarde' 1993 <i>Andreas Schmid</i>	283
(Dis-)Playing 'Mahjong'. Uli Sigg and the Power of Private Collectors in the Global Canonization of Chinese Contemporary Art <i>Franziska Koch</i>	299
Afterword	317
Critical Reflections on the New Challenges of East Asian Art History in the Global Context <i>Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch</i>	317
Appendix	323
Glossary of Chinese Terms	323

Index	337
Index of Names	337
Index of Key Terms	342
Index of Exhibitions	353
Index of Art Journals	354
 Short Biographies of the Authors	 355
 Color Plates	 359

Preface

Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch

The idea to create a forum for the discussion of contemporary Chinese art originated in 2007 in the Department of East Asian Art History at the Institute of Art History, Freie Universität Berlin. The latest developments in Chinese art, which are closely linked to its success in the globalized art scene and art market, have led to a growing body of research on this topic. Yet the subject is still curiously underrepresented in academic teaching and publications. It was thus our aim to bring together established scholars and young researchers, as well as critics and curators from Europe, Asia, North America, and Australia to discuss their research and methodological challenges. With this goal in mind, we organized the conference *Negotiating Difference. Chinese Contemporary Art in the Global Context*, the concept of which was mainly developed by Birgit Hopfener and Franziska Koch.

The conference took place in October 2009 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (House of World Cultures, HKW) in cooperation with the department of East Asian Art History at the Freie Universität Berlin. The HKW is renowned as a venue that represents and enables cultural interactions and transcultural dialogues, bringing various artistic scenes from around the globe into contact. It was also the setting for the *China Avantgarde* show in 1993, one of the first large-scale exhibitions to introduced contemporary Chinese art to an international audience. We owe Bernd Scherer, the director of the HKW, and his staff Susanne Stemmler, Cordula Hamschmidt, Irene Hummel, and Annette Hulek, a debt of gratitude for their financial support and help with logistics and organization in the realization of the conference. The conference was further enabled through funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the German Research Foundation (DFG), and the International Office and the Center for International Cooperation of the Freie Universität Berlin. Many thanks also to Ronald Kiwitt who worked tirelessly to organize the practical details of the event, together with Juliane Noth, who handled all related academic matters. Many students in the East Asian Art History Department at the Freie Universität Berlin actively assisted in the technical and logistical support. Shao-lan Hertel and Christian Becking took care of the conference documentation, which proved to be a very helpful tool in the editing of this book. We would also like to thank Waling Boers (Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing) who hosted us in the beautiful Münzsalon in Berlin Mitte for our farewell dinner.

Most of the papers in this volume were first presented at the conference, and benefited from the discussions among speakers and panel respondents. Our special thanks go to Thomas Berghuis, John Clark, Francesca Dal Lago, Dai Liqing, Karin Gludovatz, Uta Rahman-Steinert, and

Pauline Yao, whose thoughtful and constructive comments as distinguished panel respondents also helped and inspired us throughout the editing process.

Warm thanks are especially due to my colleagues Birgit Hopfener, Franziska Koch, and Juliane Noth, who have worked patiently and tirelessly as co-editors of this book for over two years. Monica Juneja provided valuable comments and support in the editing of this volume and helped, together with Andrea Hacker, to secure the generous publication grant from the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in the Global Context. Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows" at Heidelberg University and the German Research Foundation (DFG). The publication would not have been possible without additional financial support from Alexander Ochs Gallery Beijing/Berlin and the German Goethe Institute, Hong Kong directed by Michael Müller-Verweyen. Generous sponsorship for this volume also came from the Baden-Württembergische China-Gesellschaft e.V. (BWCG) enabling additional color plates.

He Jianping and his team at *hesign* created the wonderful conference logo that also serves as the cover image of this book. Angela Roberts was responsible for the professional English copy-editing, while Julika Nehb worked meticulously on the formal editing of the texts. Jennifer Pochodzalla attentively supported the editing of the register, and Ji Yang generously devoted her time to finalizing the glossary. In addition, Bettina Preiß and her staff at VDG Weimar provided careful and patient assistance throughout the publishing process.

We want to express our deepest gratitude to all of them; their continued support and dedication to fostering innovative transcultural research by international junior scholars, practitioners, and experts in the Chinese art world has ensured the successful publication of this volume. Last but not least, our heartfelt thanks go to the invaluable Chinese artists and colleagues whose work and activities continue to inspire us.

Berlin, August 2011

Introduction

Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context

Birgit Hopfener and Franziska Koch

Contemporary Chinese art has become a topic of increased interest and in-depth academic research during the last two decades. The volume at hand looks at contemporary Chinese art in a global context and focuses on questions of methodology stressing a transcultural perspective. This perspective is based on the observation that articulations of contemporary Chinese art instantiate contact zones that always involve aspects of a globally informed locality and a locally affected globality – whether considered from a discursive, institutional, or object-centered point of view.

The book is an exemplary product of what can be described as a double turn that has taken place in the development of art and its historiographies since the second half of the twentieth century: First, the integration of contemporary art practices in the academic field implied that the restricted notion of “art” had to be enlarged. Established lines between “popular visual culture,” “high art” and elaborated works of “craftsmanship” that still prevailed in modern discourses on art, even though they were more often than not contradicted by unruly and mingling artistic practices, have been challenged or even destroyed. Second, there has been a tendency to integrate the current, multi-faceted artistic production from many cultural contexts around the world under the label of a “global contemporary art.”¹ The first shift forced the discipline of art history to incorporate new objects of study such as moving image installations, artistic video clips, computer or internet based visual practices, and interactive as well as multi-media environments that abolished the frame(s) of the “classical artwork.”² It also led to the establishment of partially competing disciplines such as Visual (Culture) Studies³ or Media Studies⁴ and to new academic approaches during the 1990s, for example the German interdisciplinary Bildwissenschaft,⁵ that debated what was called the “pictorial”⁶ and the “iconic turn.”⁷

While the advent of new media and globally wired image-based and image-producing technologies triggered a rapid transformation of visual habits and practices not only in the art world, it also enabled non-Western artists and artworks to circulate more frequently and freely

beyond their local settings and to question the Eurocentric foundations of modernism and its universalist claims. Put simply, if art experts today ignore the prize-winning artworks of the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang at the Venice Biennale in 1999, or miss the latest auction records of the Indian artist Subodh Gupta, or neglect the acclaimed contribution of the Beninese artist Georges Adéagbo to Documenta 11 in Kassel 2002, they risk their professional credibility. Critics, gallery owners, museum directors, and collectors as well as the artists themselves have to frequent art biennials from Senegal's Dakar to South Korea's Gwangju and remain informed on exhibitions in New Delhi and São Paulo, as well as museum openings in Beijing.⁸

Yet, even though the art market, art agents, art institutions, and news media all over the world have by now embraced this global shift, the academic and disciplinary discourse on the phenomenon of an "exploded art history" has just recently gained momentum.⁹ There are good reasons for this: the globalization of art poses serious methodological problems for a discipline that developed its approaches and expertise mostly by addressing Euro-American artifacts in the light of discourses that were based on rationalist beliefs of the enlightenment movement, as well as those cultural-essentialist or even racist concepts of colonialism. Technological and economic globalization after 1989 makes long-standing methodological questions more acute: How can experts of one geographical region or temporal era equipped with a certain language expertise effectively approach artworks produced in very different regions, times, or language and cultural communities? Is it legitimate for an expert on European avant-gardes to explore Japanese as well as African artworks of the twentieth century without being a specialist of either Japanese Studies or a scholar of African Area Studies? Such questions are inevitable and need to be addressed whenever the discipline is forced to explore its methodological limitations and epistemological blind spots, which are challenged by the latest stage of global flows and trans-cultural processes in the field of art.

In order to solve these questions certain postcolonial as well as poststructuralist perspectives have attempted to unpack the colonial heritage of art history as a Eurocentric discipline.¹⁰ In the past fifteen years, these approaches helped to critically 'de-center' its authority, to question its master narratives and canons, uncovering underlying hegemonic presumptions and power relations. However, this endeavor has not (yet) yielded "a re-oriented practice of the global, one that reckons with radical difference, unevenness, and even the untranslatable" as Jill Casid and Aruna D'Souza recently remarked.¹¹ Rather, the mainstream of art historical research that took recent non-Western art production into account tried to expand the field of study without seriously reconfiguring its conventional disciplinary methodology. Yet, increasingly more scholars in the field have come to realize that in order to grasp the new global (power) structures that are also negotiated and reflected upon in art, it is necessary to rethink methodologies and critical research questions.

Academic attempts that aim to establish "world art history," "global art history," or "transcultural approaches" in art history and visual studies are symptomatic of this heightened awareness. While the first is mostly connected with Anglo-American endeavors that try to encyclopedically

map the artistic and visual production of different cultures around the world and throughout history on the basis of an European disciplinary methodology,¹² the second and third have resulted in a new transcultural framing of research.¹³ In German-speaking visual and art historical studies, for example, this led to the institutionalizing of “global art history”¹⁴ and the researchers’ network on “Transkulturelle Verhandlungsräume von Kunst” (Transcultural Negotiations in the Ambits of Art – Comparative Perspectives on Historical Contexts and Contemporary Constellations)¹⁵ as a critical alternative to such all-encompassing approaches. According to the art historian Monica Juneja the new *transcultural* agenda is a challenging, but promising endeavor¹⁶:

“A transcultural history of art goes beyond the principle of additive extension, and looks instead at the transformatory processes that constitute art practice through cultural encounters and relationships, whose traces can be followed back to the beginnings of history. Casting art history in a global/transcultural frame would involve questioning the taxonomies and values that have been built into the discipline since its inception and have been taken as universal. To begin with, this would necessitate a closer and more critical empirical examination of art works labeled ‘Buddhist’ or ‘Islamic’ or ‘Renaissance’ or ‘Modernist,’ and require constituting new units of investigation that are more responsive to the logic of objects and artists on the move. In this and other senses a transcultural history of art rejects a principle of mere inclusion to argue instead for a change of paradigm. Rather than postulate stable units of investigation which exist next to each other and are connected through flows or transfers, the problem of how these units themselves are constituted needs to be systematically addressed. If we proceed on an understanding of culture that is in a condition of being made and remade, historical units and boundaries cannot be taken as given, rather have to be constituted as a subject of investigation, as products of spatial and cultural displacements. Units of investigation are constituted neither mechanically following the territorial-cum-political logic of modern nation states nor according to civilisational categories drawn up by the universal histories of the nineteenth century, but are continually defined as participants in and as contingent upon the historical relationships in which they are implicated. This would further mean approaching time and space as non-linear and non-homogenous, defined through the logic of circulatory practices.”¹⁷

It is at this critical junction that the editors of this volume propose looking closely into artworks from the People’s Republic of China in the global context. Since “Contemporary Chinese Art” as a label of the international art world as well as a recent category of academic discourse seems precisely a product of the ‘global turn’ that haunts art history (as a formerly exclusive discipline), asking for pluralized, performative, and locally as well as globally grounded art histories instead is better adapted to the phenomena in question. The authors of this volume believe that contemporary Chinese art lends itself well to current art historical insights on the boundaries of the discipline, and is an ideal object of critical self-reflection since its practice, presentation, and mar-

keting – phenomena that developed only after the end of the Cultural Revolution – are obviously marked by complex intertwined local and global relations and historical entanglements. Still, approaches are rare that combine an in-depth analysis of Chinese primary sources and the long-standing knowledge of Chinese Area Studies with current art theoretical and methodological debates surrounding the notion of transculturality.

Such approaches are all the more necessary to explain the specific conditions required for Chinese artworks and agents to enter the ‘global era.’ The result is that Chinese art undergoes a process very similar to European or American art: a significant number of Chinese artists nowadays rank among the best-selling artists in the world, the Art District 798 in Beijing attracts foreigners as well as Chinese audiences with its numerous national and international art galleries, and the Chinese government has launched a country-wide initiative to build museums. Often this phenomenon is uncritically used to call current Chinese artworks the results of a ‘belated’ modernism and ‘derivative’ of or ‘epigones’ to previous artistic processes originating in Europe and America. Such a superficial and at times neocolonialist reading ignores not only the historical entanglements and imbalances between modern China and the rest of the world, but also the restrictive premises Western modernism operates within.

Since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China by the communists in 1949, art and its production, presentation, and consumption has been largely formed by political decisions and power shifts. In contrast to the commercial, but independent art market in Europe and America and the broad state as well as privately sponsored institutional infrastructure that generally yields pluralistic museum displays, the ultima ratio of the Chinese art world has long been the Communist Party and its administrative organs. While this ideological regime still sporadically allowed for individual positions to be articulated in some niches of the state system and in private spaces, the Chinese art scene started to blossom more independently only after Mao Zedong’s death and the end of the iconoclastic “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in 1976. Under the political and economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, beginning in 1978/79, the art academies reopened and the first generation of graduates became known as the ‘85 New Wave art movement. These artists deliberately experimented with modern and contemporary Western art styles as well as with previously forbidden Chinese concepts. In the absence of any firmly established art market, largely unnoted by Western audiences, and in contrast to the official Chinese exhibition mainstream, the 1980s became a decade of Chinese ‘avant-garde’ practices and claims. This decade was also formative in the development of Chinese academic approaches to art history, as demonstrated by the recent compendium *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*¹⁸ edited by Wu Hung and Peggy Wang.

An early milestone in these developments was the exhibition *Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan. China/Avant-garde* at the National Art Gallery Beijing (today National Art Museum of China, NAMOC) in February 1989. Many experimental artists from all over the country managed to show their works for the first time to a large audience in a high-ranking official institution, just before the onslaught of the Tiananmen protests in June 1989 brought an end to their newly acquired

enthusiasm. While the economic opening proceeded, the state control of cultural and artistic spheres tightened again. For many experimental artists and critics the heightened Western interest at the beginning of the 1990s was therefore not only a welcome opportunity to sell their works and publish their texts, but it was also the only way to make a living and to reach a broader audience via exhibitions or catalogues.

Analyzing the transcultural routes of artists, artworks and artistic concepts, of curatorial practices, the rise of economic value, and the entangled institutional and political agendas that constitute this complex field of study obviously requires more than the conventional art historical perspective. It calls for interdisciplinary approaches that are informed by self-critical art historical methodologies as well as the linguistic and cultural expertise of Chinese Area Studies. It equally calls for approaches that can account for border-crossing artistic practices in the age of economic globalization and new media technologies, as well as for the nation-bound political restrictions rooted in ideologies of the Cold War Era that still inform institutional settings in Europe and America, as well as in China.

The contributors to *Negotiating Difference* therefore explore the transcultural perspective as an alternative to unilateral positions that either stress the construction of a 'Chinese identity' in essentialist terms or continue to consider contemporary Chinese art as derivative of a modern 'Western' notion of art. The transcultural approach deliberately dismisses the assumption that there exists an essential unity or universal homogeneity among all cultures in the world, a notion that has often been diagnosed as an effect of global market mechanisms. This book equally attempts to avoid approaching Chinese art through categories of cultural diversity that assume basic ontological differences between cultures and that ask for multicultural 'tolerance' when facing presumed differences, thereby affirming rather than deconstructing conceptual dichotomies such as the 'East' versus 'West.'

Instead, the title of the book alludes to Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist neologism of "différance," suggesting the critical questioning of essentialist concepts of (cultural) meaning in favor of a performative understanding of meaning production. This implies that meaning is not static and graspable in the present, but that it is produced in processes of temporalization, within continuous deferrals of meaning that are the necessary condition of meaning production. Hence, the meaning that is ascribed to an artwork is never fixed, but ambivalent because it is continuously generated anew dependent on contexts of production and reception and related to the viewer-subject.¹⁹ From this perspective, the recent artistic production of the People's Republic of China can be understood as articulating negotiated differences that are generated in on-going acts of translation in the "Third Space." According to one prominent protagonist of postcolonial theory, Homi K. Bhabha, who coined the term, it is within the "Third Space" that culture is generated in processes of cultural hybridization and translation²⁰: "In the first place the Third Space is not a [physical] place because it is an instance of production in time – the moment of speech. The Third Space above all is the site of enunciation."²¹

The concern of the editors of this book is to focus on the entangled histories of the (artistic) enunciations, shared practices, and moving art concepts that inform and characterize Chinese artists in exchange with artists elsewhere. Taken as a whole, the contributions explore the question of how these histories evolved, how artistic practices are negotiated and translated in China, and the ways in which artistic concepts change on the move. As a result, the heterogeneous case studies presented in this volume do not add up to one harmonious, or all-encompassing picture of “Contemporary Chinese Art,” but rather show the contested, fractured and imbalanced nature of the ongoing artistic negotiations of difference. The book attempts to recuperate different insights into these complex and conflicting practices in order to re-configure and open up established art historical methodologies and to productively embrace the theoretical and practical challenge of transculturality without foreclosing the many problems it poses.

In an editorial respect, the present collection of essays is a conscious and ambitious attempt to bring together a selection of the most incisive papers from the international conference *Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context* (22–24 October 2009), which aimed at assessing and establishing contemporary Chinese art as a regular subject of academic research and art historical curricula.²² The contributions convey the challenges, tensions and opportunities arising from conflicting nation-bound schools of thought, diverging disciplinary backgrounds, and the various cultural frameworks that inevitably shape the contributors’ research on art carried out between China, Taiwan, Europe, Australia, and America.

Negotiating Difference is the first edited volume to give voice to a new generation of researchers dedicated to extending, pluralizing, and sharpening analysis in this emerging field. Following successful anthologies published by the first generations of scholars, curators, and critics such as *Chinese Contemporary Art at the Cross-Roads. Between Past and Future. Between East and West* (London/Hong Kong 2001) or *Chinese Art at the End of the Millennium. Chinese-art.com 1998–1999* (Hong Kong 2000) this book provides a succinct overview of the latest globalized research decade and its sharpened methodological reflections.

The case studies presented in this volume deliberately pertain to a focused historical scope – Chinese artistic production after 1976 – paired with a strong emphasis on questions of methodology. Ideally, this will prompt a conceptual discussion about *how* we approach and speak about (cultural) differences in contemporary Chinese art on the one hand, and how we can analyze the *conditions* of difference on the other.

Thematically, this volume is divided into seven sections and an afterword. The first section *Reconfiguring Modernities in China* is primarily concerned with the art historical question of modernity in Chinese art explored within specific case studies that show how artist groups and individual artists in the People’s Republic tried to reconfigure modernism in the arts and reconcile it with (invented) tradition. Such tradition was either reinvigorated or came under pressure when Deng Xiaoping’s political reforms prompted a renewal of contact with contemporaneous Euro-American art

concepts and practices. Besides the historical, social, and political dimensions of cultural difference that are explored, the two essays in this section concentrate on the theoretical implications of how cultural difference can be reconsidered, focusing on the historical entanglements of the agents, the works, and their contexts, rather than on abstract theoretical comparison.

John Clark, renowned as the holder of one of the few senior chairs worldwide specializing in the history of modern and contemporary Asian art, opens the first section of the volume with his observations on *Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art: Main Issues*. His contribution traces the discursive construction and contested artistic practices of so-called *guohua* (Chinese art) and *xihua* (Western art) in the 1920s. Focusing on thematic, stylistic, and iconographic aspects, Clark is able to show how Chinese and Western art were interwoven at the beginning of the twentieth century in several respects and layers. His essay thus calls into question essentialist notions of culture and art, and explores a complex panorama of earlier translational artistic processes that elucidate the historical background of the following contributions. Instead of identifying bifurcating exogenous Western and endogenous Chinese influences he suggests an analysis of their entanglements in order to understand discourses of modern Chinese art: "The structural regularities in the way *guohua* endogenously receives or acknowledges or refuses to acknowledge exogenous influences may be more important for understanding the historical process of modern Chinese visual discourses including art, than the fact that they may otherwise be stylistically identified as *guohua*."²³

The contribution by **Juliane Noth**, entitled *Landscapes of Exclusion: The No Name Group and the Multiple Modernities in Chinese Art around 1979*, presents a case study of a Chinese artist group that was active mainly during the 1970s. The No Name Group became famous for their landscape and *en plein air* paintings. The paper discusses how the members of this group positioned themselves in terms of artistic role models and conflicting discourses of modernity. Employing the term "multiple modernities" Juliane Noth describes:

"...[the] array of artistic modernity that were available in China around 1979 and of which the Euro-American model of modernism and contemporary art constituted one amongst others. Special attention shall be drawn to the role pre- and post-WWII modernism played in the Chinese art world of the 1980s as represented by members of the No Name Group. More important, a focus will be laid on the mostly hidden and underground transmissions of Chinese receptions and inventions of modernism through the Maoist period from 1949 to 1979, including Russian and socialist options of modernity."

Noth re-examines the question of "modernity" from a stylistic and compositional point of view by examining landscape paintings and by analyzing the conflicting conceptions of the artistic self among the younger and older members of the No Name Group.

The two contributions in the second section *Questioning Representations of Chineseness by Inhabiting Events of Cultural Difference* explore more recent Chinese artworks and their agents by applying poststructuralist, postcolonial, and recent cultural theories in their examination.

In order to criticize an essentialist and uninvolved understanding of cultural diversity **Birgit Hopfener's** contribution *Destroy the Mirror of Representation. Negotiating Installation Art in the 'Third Space'* examines moving-image installations by four Chinese artists. She shows how they critically examine self-identical systems of meaning in favor of a performative understanding of meaning production. Stressing this performative quality, the paper explores similarities between the abstract concept of the "Third Space" and installation art and demonstrates how installation art immanently reflects on performative qualities in order to problematize the context and subject dependency of the artwork. Keeping this theoretical framework in mind Hopfener introduces moving-image installations by Wang Gongxin, Li Yongbin, Zhang Peili, and Kan Xuan as ambivalent spaces of enunciation instead of representations of cultural-specific issues. It is argued that by placing a particular emphasis on their processual and transformative quality, the artworks in question are critically breaking up the dichotomic relation between the artwork and the spectator: "They question a static, objective and uninvolved representation of reality in favor of situations that can be inhabited by an involved and activated viewer. By addressing the viewer's embodied state all works reflect on modes of inhabitation by asking 'Where do you stand?'" In doing so the paper questions still prevalent Orientalist approaches that tend to 'other-ize' Chinese art as a passive object of research viewed from a distanced and essentializing Eurocentric perspective. Hopfener instead emphasizes living encounters and experiences of cultural difference that implicate and demand a continuous reflection on one's own transcultural embeddings and acts of negotiating difference as part of these cultural identification processes.

Brianne Cohen presents *Cai Guo-Qiang's Fireworks: Igniting a Paranational Landscape* with the aim of exploring the work of this notorious artist beyond the dominant perception of him as a globetrotter who "plays the Chinese card." Cohen focuses on Cai's explosion events, but instead of essentializing his use of fireworks as a 'typical' traditional Chinese material and technique, she reconsiders Cai's work through Gayatri C. Spivak's notion of the "planetary" – the global as a relational network of interactivity:

"If we take seriously the implications of the artist's explosion events from all stages of his career, and his deep underlying concern to produce web-like ecological and social landscapes, one can see that Cai's explosive performances resonate closely with theorist Gayatri Spivak's notion of *planetary*, a model for imagining collectivities in terms of the planet as a whole."

Cohen analyzes several of Cai's seminal works and demonstrates that the artist has a relational understanding of art in the global context. Rather than emphasizing certain culture-related aspects of the material and stylistic expressions he prefers, Cohen stresses that Cai's fireworks are

especially suited to speak to audiences that defy any nation-bound categorization. This observation is all the more important since, during the opening of the Olympic Games in 2008, the Chinese government tried to tie Cai's explosions to a nationalistic agenda.

The question of how artistic tradition is established, negotiated, and reinvented in the field of contemporary artistic production plays a major role in the two contributions that are subsumed under the third section *Re-envisioning Chinese Landscape Painting*. Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe and Wang Ching-Ling are two scholars whose different academic backgrounds – the first trained in European and the latter in East Asian art history – deeply inform their diverging approaches on the shared subject of contemporary methods of landscape paintings.

Silke von Berswordt-Wallrabe offers a case study of the contemporary artist Qiu Shihua and his ephemeral series *White Paintings*. Instead of a comparative approach that focuses on formal-aesthetic similarities between Qiu's *White Landscape Paintings* and Western non-figurative or traditional Chinese ink paintings, the paper suggests focusing on modes of perceptions that Qiu seems to reflect on in his artwork by referring to different Chinese and non-Chinese art historical and philosophical traditions. Von Berswordt-Wallrabe stresses that the spectator of Qiu's *White Paintings* is asked to physically involve him-/herself in the artwork. He/she is not asked to identify motifs or objects but instead to experience him-/herself in the act of perception. Stating that the artist seems to critically reflect on a dualistic relationship between spectator and artwork, von Berswordt-Wallrabe suggests applying phenomenological approaches as formulated by the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty and comparing them with similar concepts of traditional Chinese literati painting:

“Merleau-Ponty freed himself from the rigid corset of dualism that has characterized Western ways of thinking throughout modernity. According to this dualism, an individual viewer is able to control the world of objects with his dominant, all-encompassing view (a concept which finds its expression for example in central perspective). Merleau-Ponty moved beyond the concept of such a sovereign view, of seeing the world from a distant flyover perspective. Stating that through our bodily presence we are already closely connected to the world, and that we are not opposed to but are always right among the things, he came to the conclusion that our perception is not merely a kind of rational registration of given facts, but rather an interactive and physical participation in the world.”

By exploring Qiu's works from both aesthetic perspectives, she stresses the differences and similarities between the conceptualization of art in premodern China and modern Europe.

When Contemporary Art Encounters a National Treasure by **Wang Ching-Ling** discusses contemporary appropriations of Fan Kuan's ancient masterpiece *Travellers Within Mountains and Streams* (early eleventh century) by the artists Zhang Hongtu and Mei Dean-E.

“In the history of Chinese art, this masterpiece has been described as part of the canon of Chinese landscape painting, and became a model that many artists imitated as they learned to paint. However, the role and function of Fan Kuan’s masterpiece as a paradigm has changed in the field of contemporary art, and contemporary artists appropriate it in different ways.”

Wang discusses diverging appropriated versions by identifying iconographic and stylistic references to Fan Kuan’s original work and shows how contemporary artists from mainland China and Taiwan use the canonized masterpiece, conventionally understood as a symbol of the Chinese nation, to pose questions about Chinese identity today.

In the fourth section of this volume two authors explore *Concepts of Body and Gender* in contemporary Chinese art. Their contributions show that negotiating cultural difference also involves processes that construct and effect gendered identities. These processes seem crucial since they leave their marks on the artworks and explain psychological effects and motivations that are connected to certain social roles that the artists assume or are ascribed to.

Doris Ha-lin Sung’s contribution *Reclaiming the Body: Gender Subjectivities in the Performance Art of He Chengyao* introduces and historicizes the context of non-existent and existent discourses of gender subjectivity in contemporary Chinese art. Sung observes: “[In the 1980s] gender issues were once again brushed aside at the expense of ‘larger issues’ such as human rights and freedom. Moreover, discussion of gender subjectivities was (and still is) criticized as being complicit with Western feminism, a political project deemed inappropriate for the Chinese context.” As a case study the author presents a close reading of three performances by the female artist He Chengyao: *99 Needles*, *Broadcast Exercises*, and *Opening the Great Wall*. Although her works are deeply influenced by biographical experiences, Sung’s analysis shows how they equally reflect on traditional Chinese understandings of the body and the self as a relational concept and social construction. The author suggests that these works need to be understood as artistic reflections that go beyond merely individual or private biographical concerns.

Adele Tan’s contribution, *Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire. Xiao Lu and the Missing Sex of Post-89 Performance Art in China* combines a close empirical reading of a range of historical events using a conceptual approach based on a psychoanalytic perspective stressing the concept of desire as coined by Jacques Lacan. Tan proposes a feminist rereading of Xiao Lu’s performance *Pistol Shot Event* that was staged during the exhibition *Zhongguo xiandai yishuzhan. China/Avant-garde* at the National Art Gallery Beijing (today National Art Museum of China, NAMOC) in 1989. Instead of attributing the performance to Xiao Lu and her then boyfriend Tang Song, which is the conventional account of the seminal event, Tan analyzes Xiao Lu’s recent artistic articulations and debunks this narration of the event as a symptom of the male-dominated art historical discourse in China. Tan analyzes how Xiao Lu today reclaims the authorship for pulling out a gun and shooting at the installation by re-enacting the historical event:

“Xiao’s ‘comeback’ via an array of works in response to that epochal event – having been reclusive and relatively ‘unproductive’ after her 1989 outburst – articulate her vested subjectivity but also snatch at and rupture the conventional narrativizing of the 1980s. Xiao’s punctual return at this juncture provides not so much the prism with which to discuss gendered constructions of women (i.e. the socio-political structuration of the female), but overtly troubles the Chinese art fraternity with her frank hints of erotic desires and emotions which are still written out of histories of art. [...] This might be approached from the position of a woman’s rise to visible speech but it would be false to say that in speech she provides the final statements and solutions. What Xiao might have accomplished is to disallow the story from becoming too hastily concluded, ossified and monolithic.”

The fifth section centers on *Strategies of (Dis-)Engagement* in contemporary Chinese art. Its first two contributions explore the urban spaces of Beijing and Shanghai, demonstrating to what extent Chinese artists discuss, reflect, and undermine public discourse and official cultural policy through their works. The third contribution features a conversation between a China-based Italian curator working in the Shanghai art scene, and a British art and cultural theorist, who taught for several years at the University of Ningbo.

Beatrice Leanza’s essay *Alternative Spatial Practices and Provisional Communities in Contemporary China* provides rich reference to non-commercial or at least non-mainstream activities and exhibition spaces in Beijing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. Elaborating on the differences and similarities between these alternative art scenes, Leanza argues that their most recent common characteristic should be seen as “a non-antagonistic contradiction” to official art concepts and spaces in the People’s Republic of China. Her essay strengthens the thesis that the official versus non-official divide is no longer an effective categorization within the Chinese art context. Leanza’s contribution exemplifies the productive broadening of methodological approaches by introducing the “spatial turn” to discussions on the Chinese art world, which bears special relevance given the ongoing, profound, and rapid spatial transformation in China’s urban spaces that (in)form art spaces, their agents, and contents. Leanza concludes that forms of Chinese socially engaged “artistic agency therefore emplace themselves in the guise of adjourned strategies for exiting while cohabiting the socio-economic spatiality of the political present. Their critical task does not advocate marginality as a symbol of dialectical refusal, totalizing synthesis nor of disruptive perpetuation of political antagonism.”

The contribution of **Zheng Bo** entitled *The Pursuit of Publicness*, sidelines Leanza’s assessment by presenting a recent concrete example as a case study of socially engaged art in China: The exhibition *Difference • Gender* that presented artworks produced in Beijing’s queer art community and questioned concepts of gender. Applying Habermas’ understanding of criticality to the Chinese context by revisiting the notion of “public space” as a crucial setting for socially engaged art practice, Zheng contrasts this contemporary project with earlier artistic movements surrounding the Democracy Wall and the first exhibition of the Stars Group in Beijing in 1979.

Zheng explores the Stars' diverging uses of public places and their strategies to engage with a public audience. Arguing with Western critics, who define socially engaged art as a performative, process-based practice that highlights the artist as context provider rather than content provider, Zheng proposes that earlier artistic movements fit this categorization too. His examination of the Stars' practices and debates demonstrates that their socially engaged art practices were instrumental in setting an example for more recent approaches. In retrospect, it seems that they helped to trigger a substantial transformation of the public space, since the "desire to realize publicness was central," even though the discursive notion was not yet established. As the official censorship of some of the exhibits in the recent *Difference • Gender* show demonstrates, the amount of publicness granted to and constituted by contemporary artworks and their makers is still contested and calls for further theoretical exploration.

In their conversation **Davide Quadrio**, the co-founder of the early independent art platform BizArt in Shanghai and curator of many experimental exhibition projects, and **Paul Gladston**, a cultural theorist and scholar of visual studies, discuss recent developments in the field of exhibition making and artistic production within the People's Republic. Both agree that the commercialization of the 1990s and a lack of institutionally established academic art historical research and independent art writing hinder artistic endeavors that are not focused on the trends of the market. Their discussion revisits Quadrio's experiences as a curator who had to balance official cultural policy, individual artistic expressions, and institutional frameworks that were often enabled with foreign money, when translating Chinese artworks to local and international audiences. Both interlocutors do not shy away from posing critical questions regarding the recent increase of Chinese nationalism as well as essentialist notions of culture applied by European observers of Chinese artworks. Their questions and preliminary answers close the section by opening up a new horizon to be mapped out by future transcultural studies.

The sixth section *The Production of Meaning and Market* frames the artistic production in China with regards to the ascription of meaning and economic frameworks.

Peggy Wang's essay *China's Emerging Art Market: Debates on Art, Criticism, and Commodity in the Early 1990s* focuses on the contested relationship between critical evaluations of contemporary Chinese art and the emerging art market in the early 1990s. Wang's contribution enlarges the discussions that preceded those more recent debates examined by Berghuis' contribution at the end of this section. She describes the new demands of the market at the time as causing a crisis for artists and critics alike: "At stake was the power to authoritatively evaluate Chinese art." Yet, the analysis of their discussions yields the discovery that critics persisted in their cultural idealism despite the international economic competition. They continued to believe in their role as authoritative mediators of the opening market, and their articles show how they struggled to find local answers and to codify value in light of the rapid economic entanglements that began to tie Chinese artistic production to the world.

Contemporary Chinese Art in the International Auction Market: An Insider's Overview and Assessment in Comparative Perspective written by **Joe Martin Hill** explores how signs of cultural difference are used today to establish the trademark of "Chineseness" that fueled the boom-bust cycle of Chinese art as a subject of financial investment and economic speculation within the auction market. Hill provides a highly detailed overview of publicly available auction-related data. He argues that the enormous rise in prices compared to the artworks' stylistic, technical, or aesthetic accomplishments and their supposed art historical importance calls into question any naïve assumption about a direct correlation between monetary value and artistic significance. Hill, who worked for the Chinese department of Sotheby's for some years, aptly demonstrates global market mechanisms, which obviously have beneficial consequences for the happy few artists who reach the ranks of selling an artwork for a million dollars at international auctions: A quarter of those born after 1950 and almost half of those born after 1960 are now of Chinese origin. Yet, it is far from clear what kind of consequences the globalization of the art market may have for the many thousands of Chinese artists, who, as recent graduates of China's art academies, continue to struggle to make a living or find a role model for their careers. Hill's contribution provides rich material for further research into the local repercussions of the global commercial paradigm. It raises questions about who is buying contemporary Chinese art in China and elsewhere and for what reasons.

Pauline Yao's contribution *Neither Here nor There: Notes on a Mediated History of Contemporary Art in China* is based on her experience as an independent art critic and curator based in the People's Republic of China and reconsiders the mediated history of contemporary art in China. Yao begins her analysis with a quote from the contemporary art curator Maria Lind, who states: "Today's crisis in the artworld is largely about mediation: what art is chosen and how it is subsequently mediated to a public." Focusing on both aspects of the statement, selection and mediated production, Yao reflects on the difficult task of art historians regarding the Chinese situation, which seems characterized by "the monumental urge towards self-canonization." She suggests that the commercialization of the Chinese art world together with its rather short history and lack of alternative infrastructure, funding systems, and non-profit supporters leaves "art historians or specialists outside of China too reliant upon material that is easily accessible (and therefore already marketable) with fewer opportunities for those who work at the fringe or in the non-commercial sphere." She paints an alarming picture of the Chinese situation, asking whether the market not only subsumes, but substitutes for the art world. Her point of view as an active practitioner and critic from this art world includes insisting on first hand confrontation, continuous critical immersion, and the tedious, but beneficial work of constructing in-depth knowledge based on a thorough regional understanding and lucid criticality of the mediating conditions.

In his contribution *China and the World of Contemporary Art. Repositioning the Art System in China*, **Thomas Berghuis** states:

“At the start of the 21st Century, following the development of a global art scene during the 1990s, there is an urgent need to develop a discursive method that will bring the world of contemporary art somehow together. In many ways this requires a thorough analysis of the contemporary art system, as becomes evident in the structures that are being put in place in countries such as China, which show there is a need to consolidate a long-term value for Chinese contemporary art in relation to the world.”

Berghuis examines how “the bureaucracy in charge of the art system felt the need to re-establish and reaffirm its position as arbiter of national taste and the production of national culture in China – at a time when Chinese experimental art is drawing a new wave of attention from the international art world” around the turn of the millennium. He presents his approach as an alternative to dominant studies that rely too heavily on “the stagnant nature of the Chinese officialdom in charge of the art system.” Instead he reexamines discussions led by Chinese art critics in the leading art journal *Meishu*, in particular the debate on the so-called ‘violent trend’ of experimental art. Arguing from an art historian-cum-sinologist’s perspective that is well informed of historical as well as political science methodology and drawing on an in-depth discursive analysis, Berghuis shows the ways in which notions of “national aesthetics” have influenced the art system in China up to the present day. His essay also sheds light on the continuing role of Marxist aesthetics as one of the pillars establishing Chinese modernity and its subsequent move into what can be framed as an alternative modernity.

Paul Gladston revisits current debates on contemporary art by Chinese critics based on assumptions of Critical Theory. *Locating Displacement: Envisioning the Complex ‘Diasporization’ of Contemporary Chinese Art* sets out to question the use that prominent critics-cum-curators such as Hou Hanru or Gao Minglu make of postcolonial terminology and concepts. Gladston’s critical consideration is based on a close reading of their texts and detects a prevailing opposition between poststructuralist and nationalist-essentialist constructions of contemporary Chinese art. On closer inspection, however, Gladston suggests that this opposition is less clear-cut than often assumed. He discerns another set of interpretative positions “that significantly problematize the perceived distinction between ‘reflectivist’ and ‘(de-)constructivist’ views of contemporary Chinese art by continuing to uphold postcolonialist attitudes that explicitly or implicitly assert a dualistic opposition between Eastern and Western cultural values.” Elaborating on examples of artists that failed to become internationally canonized, even though they were equally part of the now famous ‘85 New Wave art movement or the ambiguous stance of *guohua* (national painting) in Chinese art discourse, Gladston shows the many inconsistencies and moments where the static poststructuralist/nationalist-essentialist duality that dominates critical accounts of contemporary Chinese art is challenged. His essay instead suggests a “more complex ‘diasporic’ view of contemporary Chinese art” that could help to map out the dynamic and far-reaching relationship between Chinese art and cultural identity.

The last section of this volume concentrates on *Agency in Spaces of Production and Presentation*.

Lee Ambrozy takes a close look at artistic education in China. Her primary question is how the still dominant instruction in the painting style of realism effects contemporary artistic production. Ambrozy's essay entitled *The Third Studio. How Pedagogical Realism Effects Art Production in the Academy and Beyond* offers a historical contextualization of the "Third Studio," the painting class in the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing where students have been trained in the realist style since the end of the 1950s. Ambrozy states:

"The pedagogical model that dominates fine arts programs today is based on a system modeled after the Soviet art academies in the early 1950s. Studio-based instruction teaching realist technique still reigns at Chinese art academies, and while there are varying educational frameworks at each academy, foundation in realism prevails. This is a quantifiably unique circumstance distinguishing art production within China today."

The author presents several artists from different generations, such as Zhan Jianjun (born 1931), Liu Xiaodong (born 1963), Peng Yu (born 1974), and Qiu Xiaofei (born 1978), and explores how their education in this studio influenced their approaches, even though they decided to abandon the canvas and experiment with other artistic media such as installation art and taboo-breaking performances. She draws on important institutional histories and individual responses, and uncovers how institutional conventions and official curricula as well as a lineage of prominent senior artists shaped the work of those who consciously tried to go beyond mainstream academic approaches and beliefs.

Wenny Teo's contribution *Lost and Found Dogs: Desiring Production in Qiu Anxiong's 'We are the World'* approaches the complex issue of discursive processes and entangled economic interests by taking Qiu's art project *We Are the World* as a case study. Her analysis explores socio-economic, political, and art historical aspects of the installation that Qiu created using the sculptures abandoned by a Western artist, who eventually stopped the production of parts of his artworks ordered in China. Qiu's conscious appropriation of the discarded artifacts led to an accusation that he violated the copyrights of the original author. Looking beyond these legal issues, Teo discloses the intertwined commercial, political, and artistic claims that evolve around the contested notions of "originality" and "authenticity." Referring to Fredric Jameson's and Andrea Fraser's reflections on the postmodern state of the (art) world, Teo examines how a Chinese contemporary artist consciously positions himself within the global context, using strategies of appropriation and mass production. Her theoretically engaged, poststructuralist reading of Qiu's work suggests viewing his display of artistic (mass) production "as a 'desiring-machine,' one that is less to do with passivity and alienation than with the possibility of 'schizophrenically' productive engagement with (O)thers, as well as the others within ourselves."

The focus on artists as agents of the artistic production is shifted to collectors and curators in the remaining contributions of this section, since these agents strongly determine how

artworks are presented to the public. Their power over presentational matters often solidifies a specific image of contemporary Chinese art.

In his essay, *The Dawn of Chinese Contemporary Art in the West. A Look Back at the Making of the Exhibition 'China Avantgarde' 1993* **Andreas Schmid** introduces and revisits the making of the seminal *China Avantgarde* exhibition in 1993 held at the House of World Cultures, Berlin. His personal account discusses the importance of place and individual agency in the formation of contemporary Chinese art and its Western reception, and commemorates the pivotal role of the late Dutch curator Hans van Dijk in this process. Together with van Dijk, Schmid and Jochen Noth curated this early European group exhibition, which went on to successfully tour Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and England. Schmid emphasizes the logistical, economic, and political challenges that these early curators met with in getting the project off the ground. He also describes the enthusiasm of the participating artists and Chinese experts, many of whom visited Europe for the first time and met with émigré colleagues who had left China around 1989. Schmid points out that the German public seemed especially curious about the show, given the fact that its own recent unification had literally repositioned the House of World Cultures from its peripheral site as former Congress Hall, which was originally instrumental in fostering an American cultural policy in face of the Berlin Wall, into a pivotal recent institution generating multiple new cultural dialogues in the reconfigured center of the town after the end of the Cold War. His account is particularly valuable, because it presents the perspective of an early active practitioner in the field, whose perception and reflections provide a vivid and personal account that supplements the scholarly essays.

Franziska Koch's essay *(Dis-)Playing Mahjong. Uli Sigg and the Power of Private Collectors in the Global Canonization of Chinese Contemporary Art* examines the exhibition as a transformative historic event as well as a specific ordering of things in space, concentrating on the Western reception of what is called contemporary Chinese art in the medium of large group exhibitions. She takes the influential panorama show *Mahjong*, which featured the prominent collection of the Swiss collector Uli Sigg, as a case study. Koch suggests framing modern art exhibitions as a *dispositif*, a term related to Michel Foucault's and Jean-Louis Baudry's French conceptualizations and adopted by German scholars of Media Studies. They define the *dispositif* as an overall arrangement in space that is crucially marked by personal as well as impersonal strategies and relations of power that are "reinforcing types of knowledge and are reinforced by them." Guiding the reader through sections of the *Mahjong* display as it was staged in Bern in 2005, the essay examines the figure of the collector and the (re-)presentation of his collection on multiple levels. His canonizing power as the enabler of the display becomes particularly apparent in a gallery room where he was himself exhibited in the form of numerous portraits and a polyester sculpture by artist Ai Weiwei. Even though the intrinsic entanglement of the individual as well as institutional and object-related power strategies become apparent in this instance, the *dispositif* at the same time limits our knowledge and calls for ongoing critical research on how exhibitions and their agents (in-)form our knowledge of art.

The *Afterword* by **Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch**, professor of East Asian art history at the Freie Universität Berlin, reflects on her perspective as chair of the concluding panel discussion at the conference *Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context*. Together with Francesca Dal Lago, John Clark, Thomas Berghuis, and Dai Liqing, all art historians specializing in East Asian art, she discussed future research perspectives for the discipline. On the one hand, Lee-Kalisch's concerns focus on methodological questions of cultural translation. Instead of unreflectively applying Western terms and concepts when researching art and visual culture created in China, she invites us to look at how Chinese artists translate their works in relation to their contemporary and historical entanglements. On the other hand, she asks in what way the current curricula of the art history of East Asia has to be reconfigured in order to successfully meet the heightened demand and the challenges of researching contemporary art phenomena in China and other East Asian countries: "We should particularly try to uncover which role and function is expected of the historian of East Asian art in a global context today, and whether we need a new transdisciplinary curriculum for the study of contemporary Chinese art at our academic institutions."

As co-editors of the volume, we are convinced that thorough knowledge of historical facts and events, language, and cultural context are very important as a base to start from. But in order to avoid stereotyping and exoticizing Chinese art, we believe research has to go beyond mere regional contextualization as a main discursive strategy. By analyzing Chinese art in a global context and with an emphasis on the modern and contemporary transcultural entanglements that characterize it, significant conjunctions with Western subjects of study as well as with discourses and practices in other parts of the world will become apparent. The integration and exploration of a variety of established academic methods and theories (regardless of whether they are still dominantly from European or American discursive backgrounds) applied to and tested by Chinese case studies and scholars is the precondition for a truly transcultural, that is, a shared as well as a contested, academic discourse of contemporary art beyond either universalist or national-essentialist assumptions. We hope that this volume is a step in this research direction and we thank all the authors, editorial assistants, and our copy-editor for their patience throughout the making of the book and their dedication to this exciting collective endeavor.

1 For a critical analysis of the globalization of the category "contemporary art" after 1989 see Hans Belting: "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in: *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets and Museums*, ed. by Hans Belting/Andrea Buddensieg, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2009, pp. 1–27. Online accessible at: <http://www.globalartmuseum.de/media/file/476716148442.pdf> (last ac-

cessed August 14, 2011). Belting states (p. 2–3): "Twenty years after its first manifestations, the time has come to discuss the nature and purpose of global art that emerged, like a phoenix from the ashes, from modern art at the end of the twentieth century and opposed modernity's cherished ideals of progress and hegemony. Contemporary art a term long used to designate the most re-

cent art, assumed an entirely new meaning when art production, following the turn of world politics and world trade in 1989, expanded across the globe. The results of this unprecedented expansion challenged the continuity of any Eurocentric view of 'art.' Global art is no longer synonymous with modern art. It is by definition contemporary, not just in a chronological but also [...] in a symbolic or even ideological sense. It is both represented and distorted by an art market whose strategies are not just economic mechanisms when crossing cultural borders, but strategies to channel art production in directions for which we still lack sufficient categories. Art on a global scale does not imply an inherent aesthetic quality that could be identified as such, nor a global concept of what has to be regarded as art. Rather than representing a new context, it indicates the loss of context or focus and includes its own contradiction by implying the counter movement of regionalism and tribalization, whether national, cultural or religious. It clearly differs from modernity whose self-appointed universalism was based on a hegemonial notion of art. In short, new art today is global, much the same way the world wide net is also global. The internet is global in the sense that it is used everywhere, but this does not mean that it is universal in content or message. It allows for free access and thus for a personal response to the world. But it is for the same reasons that this creates problems for political regimes that feel a need to control it, precisely because their problems are by definition local and therefore are threatened by a free flow of information and opinion that goes with uncensored creativity. It may be difficult for Western art criticism to accept the novelty (and not just the new geographical reach) of global art. It is, however, wishful thinking to keep it under Western guidance and within the precincts of familiar institutions." In the following, Belting distinguishes his framing of "global art"

from the concept of "world art," which has modernist roots that "global art" overcame and contests. Consequently, he comes to a definition of "global art" that basically excludes artistic production before 1989. Of course this conceptualization is problematic in the view of scholars who try to establish "global art history" as art historical studies of global flows with an emphasis on transcultural processes that date back long before the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, since Belting's restricted definition would imply "global art history" as studies related only with artworks created after 1989.

- 2 The broadening of art history as a discipline with regards to the scope of its research objects and as prefiguration of Bildwissenschaft has a longer history that incorporates famous German and Austrian figures from the beginning of the twentieth century and before World War II, such as Aby Warburg. The reconsideration of his writings among others has triggered part of the re-configuration of the German academic discourse on art since the 1970s.
- 3 See among others *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff, London: Routledge, 1999. *Art History, Aesthetics, Visual Studies*, ed. by Michael Ann Holly/Keith Moxey, Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute and Yale University Press, 2002. Elkins, James: *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2003. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, ed. by Marita Turkmen/Lisa Cartwright, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. In contrast to the scope of Art History, Visual Culture Studies incorporate all sorts of images and visual practices, but have a tendency to focus on the modern era and ask political, social, economic, and cultural questions, rather than historical and aesthetic ones.
- 4 The establishment of Media Studies as a discipline was initially related to Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies, which also broadened their scope after the mid-twentieth

- century in light of the heightened impact of mass media such as television, radio, cinema, and computer-based broadcasting. Often the discipline is divided into the more philosophical tradition of Media Theory and the more applied orientation of Media or Communication Studies, which is based on empirical research on mass media.
- 5 The German Bildwissenschaft integrates diverse disciplines dealing with images in the largest sense ("image" in German translates as "Bild"): Art History, Aesthetical Philosophy, Media Studies, Computer Science, Communication Studies, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, Semiotics, Mathematics, Law, Theatre and Film Studies, Design and Fine Arts Studies etc. For a short English definition see among others: Horst Bredekamp: "A Neglected Tradition? Art History as 'Bildwissenschaft,'" in: *Critical Inquiry*, no. 3, vol. 29, spring 2003, no pagination, online accessible at: <http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v29/v29n3.horst.html> (last accessed August 14, 2011). The attempt to establish and institutionalize Bildwissenschaft as a discipline in its own right resulted in journals for Bildwissenschaft, such as the partly bilingual e-journal *Image. Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre Bildwissenschaft*, online accessible at: <http://www.bildwissenschaft.org/image> (last accessed August 14, 2011). A basic reader of Bildwissenschaft-related approaches is *Bildwissenschaft. Disziplinen. Themen. Methoden*, ed. by Klaus Sachs-Hombach, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2005. Another critical overview and introduction to Bildwissenschaft is given by Martin Schulz: *Ordnungen der Bilder. Eine Einführung in die Bildwissenschaft*, München: Fink, 2009. For a recent partly German, partly English anthology that discusses the overlapping and differences between Bildwissenschaft and Visual Culture Studies see *Bildwissenschaft und Visual Culture Studies in der Diskussion*, ed. by Andrew Hemingway/Norbert Schneider, Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2008.
 - 6 The notion of the "pictorial turn" was coined by the Chicago-based visual scholar W. J. T. Mitchell in 1992, who diagnosed the end of the "linguistic turn" with its poststructuralist debates centering on signs. Instead, Mitchell suggested that dominant discourses nowadays hinge on the importance of the image. He saw these discourses as informed by the dominance of images in everyday life as well as in science, reinforced by the rise of mass media and mass communication in the twentieth century. See among others W. J. T. Mitchell: *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. W.J.T. Mitchell: *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
 - 7 The notion of the "iconic turn" was coined by the Basel-based art historian Gottfried Boehm also at the beginning of the 1990s. *Was ist ein Bild?*, ed. by Gottfried Boehm, München: Fink, 1994. Boehm's coinage equally marked a departure from former semiotic approaches to art, researching how images produce a specific iconic knowledge (in contrast to linguistic signs) and what he calls the "iconic difference." Boehm goes as far as to suggest that the image has its own logos. For a correspondence on the "pictorial/iconic turn" between Boehm and Mitchell see their essays "Iconic Turn. Ein Brief" (Boehm) and "Pictorial Turn. Eine Antwort," in: *Bilderfragen. Bildwissenschaften im Aufbruch*, ed. by Hans Belting, München: Fink, 2007, pp. 27–48.
 - 8 A critical analysis and telling sign of the increasingly networked and expanded art world community and its self-reflexive theoretical activities is the research project "Global Art and the Museum" (GAM) initiated by Hans Belting and Peter Weibel in 2006 and based at the School of New Media Karlsruhe (ZKM), Germany. For its international publications, newsletters, and critical monthly guest editors see the website

- <http://www.globalartmuseum.de> (last accessed August 14, 2011).
- 9 See for example the international Call for Paper "In the Wake of the 'Global Turn': Propositions for an 'Exploded' Art History without Borders" for a conference convened by Jill Casid and Aruna D'Souza, 4th November and 5th November 2011, at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA, USA. Online accessible at: <http://www.clarkart.edu/research/content.cfm?ID=378> (last accessed August 14, 2011).
 - 10 Postcolonial theory was initially developed with regard to literature as demonstrated by introductions and readers such as: *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: a reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams/Laura Chrisman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. *An Introduction to Post-colonial Theory*, ed. by Peter Childs/R. J. Patrick Williams, London: Prentice Hall, 1997. *The post-colonial studies reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, London: Routledge, 1997. *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft et al., London: Routledge, 2000. In relation to art and visual culture scholars such as Kobena Mercer, Geeta Kapur, and Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff prominently explored postcolonial perspectives: Kobena Mercer: *Cosmopolitan modernisms*, Cambridge, MA/London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005. *Discrepant abstraction*, ed. by Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. *Exiles, diasporas, and strangers*, ed. by Kobena Mercer, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. Geeta Kapur: *In quest of identity: art & indigenism in post-colonial culture. With special reference to contemporary Indian painting*, Baroda: University Office Compound, 1971. Geeta Kapur: *When was modernism: essays on contemporary cultural practice in India*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2001. *Weißer Blicke: Geschlechtermythen des Kolonialismus*, ed. by Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Marburg: Jonas-Verlag, 2004. Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff: *Ästhetik der Differenz*, Marburg: Jonas-Verlag, 2010.
 - 11 Jill Casid and Aruna D'Souza 2011.
 - 12 Examples are courses of "World Art Studies and Museology" as offered by the University of East-Anglia in Norwich, UK, and survey books such as *Atlas of World Art. Publications of the Center for World Art*, ed. by John Onians, London: King, 2004. John Onians: *Art, culture and nature: from art history to world art studies*, London: Pindar Press, 2006. A different approach that presents plural and partly disagreeing voices by art and visual scholars from around the world, but does not suggest a collective research perspective is presented by *Is Art History Global?*, ed. by James Elkins, New York/London: Routledge, 2007. *Art and globalization*, ed. by James Elkins, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. Another attempt to comprehensively map the field was initiated at Leiden University, The Netherlands, published as *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. by Kitty Zijlmans/Wilfried Van Damme, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008. An earlier German anthology is *Kunstgeschichte und Weltgegenwartskunst: Konzepte, Methoden, Perspektiven*, ed. by Claus Volkenandt, Berlin: Reimer, 2004.
 - 13 The strengthening of a *transcultural* perspective aims at overcoming former approaches based on notions such as "interculturality" or "multi-culturality," which focused on cultural interactions and contacts, while often implicitly essentializing cultural difference as something fixed and given. In these perspectives, the interacting cultural units were mostly thought of as homogeneous or having a clear identity in the first place.
 - 14 Heidelberg University in Germany founded a chair of Global Art History affiliated with the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context" (funded by the German Science Foundation, DFG) in January 2009. See <http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/home.html> (last accessed August 14, 2011).

- 15 The Freie Universität Berlin in Germany initiated a researchers' network in January 2011 entitled "Transkulturelle Verhandlungsräume von Kunst," funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG). With a similar research perspective, the German Ulmer Verein of Critical Art Historians called for an influential conference focusing on the question "Universalität der Kunstgeschichte?" (Universality of art history?) at the Freie Universität Berlin in October 2010. For a conference report see: Sarah Maupeu/Kerstin Schankweiler: "[Tagungsbericht zu:] Die Universalität der Kunstgeschichte? (Freie Universität Berlin, 12.10.2010)," in: *H-ArtHist*, 20.11.2010, online accessible at: <http://arthist.net/reviews/519> (last accessed August 14, 2011). A critical review of the conference is published also by Jonas Beyer/Leena Crasemann, "Tagungsbericht: Kann es die Lingua franca einer entgrenzten Kunstgeschichte geben?," in: *Kritische Berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, no. 4, 2010, p. 89.
- 16 Monica Juneja, "Global Art History and the 'Burden of Representation'," in: *Global Studies: Mapping the Contemporary*, ed. by Hans Belting/Andrea Buddensieg, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2011, S. 273–297. This article also includes a short summary of different approaches to the question "Can art history be 'globalized,' and if so, how and by whom?" Juneja makes it clear that "while there have been several responses to the call to make art history 'global,' taking stock of these is a slippery exercise for there are as many interpretations of the term global as there are people who use it" and she rightly points out that the epithet 'global' is at times equated with conceptual imperialism, at others with multi-cultural eclecticism," S.278.
- 17 *Ibid.*, S. 281.
- 18 *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. by Wu Hung/Peggy Wang, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010.
- 19 Jacques Derrida: "Grammatologie" (German translation), in: *Kunsttheorie im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Charles Harrison/Paul Wood, vol. 2, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, [1967] 2003, pp. 80–81.
- 20 Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, 1994, London: Routledge, pp. 53–56.
- 21 Robert C. Young: "The Void of Misgiving," in: *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. by Karin Rosa Ikkas/Gerhard Wagner, New York/London: Routledge, 2009, p. 82.
- 22 International Conference *Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context* convened in the House of World Cultures Berlin in cooperation with Freie Universität Berlin, 22nd to 24th October 2009. The twenty speakers of the conference were selected from among more than 55 applicants worldwide with preference given to Ph.D.-candidates and postdoctoral researchers as well as junior art critics and curators. Although the organizers tried to include as many scholars of Asian, particularly Chinese origin and study backgrounds, the final speakers' selection as well as the proportion of the contributors to this volume proves the need for future collaborations to foster the existing mutual academic dialogue. Not all contributors to the volume at hand presented papers during this conference. The editors additionally included the essays of Paul Gladston and Pauline Yao.
- 23 All quotes of and by this volume's contributors made in the remaining part of the introduction refer to their respective contributions in this book. For the according notes/literary sources to these quotes see there.

Reconfiguring Modernities in China

Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art: Main Issues

John Clark

The main issues in the understanding of modern and contemporary Chinese art include: 1. The autonomy of 'Chinese-style' and 'Western-style' art practices and of their interpretive structures in the twentieth century; 2. The kinds of historical time implicit in the development of modern Chinese art if we avoid or defer the bifurcation 'Chinese'/'Western'; 3. The kinds of sense we can make of Chinese modern and contemporary art if we deploy certain international comparisons from other Asian contexts; 4. The way Chinese national participation at international biennials together with the exhibition of Chinese artists alongside international ones at local biennials may be altering or reinforcing patterns of Chinese art discourse, even as the very conditions for calling it 'Chinese' are melting away. In this essay I will confine myself to the first two.¹

The Autonomy of 'Chinese style' and 'Western-style'

How should art history now revisit the questionable autonomy of the Chinese painting tradition as handed down in pictorial practice from late Qing, and as interpretively reconstituted by theoretical and historical work, as well as exhibitions since the 1920s? Does this autonomy really exist in works? One can see crossovers from 'Western-style' painting to *guohua* or national style painting (fig. 1), and many sensibilities, which, despite a lineage of 'Western' artistic forbears, seem to engage or articulate a previously circumvented Chinese visuality (fig. 2). Histories of practice, interpretation, and exhibition are not the same thing and present many different and sometimes conflicting perspectives for their construction. But it should be noted in passing that such a *natural* constructive history has not been valid since the 1950s – except as the function of a special kind of politico-cultural group or ethnic identity. It is a retrospective naturalization of the premodern or aspects of its stylistics and practice into some essentially 'Chinese' art.² What I shall simply call 'essentialism' never had any wider intellectual cogency, given the radical changes in art and the revolutions in the political field, let alone the advent of the forces of recent economic globalization. These historical



(fig. 1) Gao Jianfu (1879– 1951):
Beauty Viewing Herself in a Mirror, 1937,
 ink and colors on silk, 103 × 41 cm,
 Hong Kong Museum of Art.

reconstructions were and are inevitably proleptic.³ They have since the 1920s (figs. 3 and 4), and in many ways arguably since the 1850s (fig. 5), at least anticipated and demanded a new kind of art, and much of the practice of interpretation has been to legitimate what has been a highly motivated construction.⁴ For example, Ren Xiong's work from around 1850 came at the first moment of Western semi-colonialist domination in the 1850s. His famous self-portrait is often characterized as unlike any previous self-portrait in Chinese painting: perhaps he saw a transfer via a print of any number of Western self-portraits and heroic warrior depictions, even Catholic baroque saints. Perhaps he saw an attributed work of Castiglione [Lang Shining] in the Palace Museum, Beijing, showing a beloved concubine sporting Western armor. One imagines that put *tout court*, this position by the 1930s supposes that *guohua* tendencies towards ideologically motivated realism, mimetic shading, even abstractionist privileging of the brush mark, can be seen as endogenous developments without reference to Courbet, Corot, or Pollock, let alone Turner or Monet.⁵ In other words, by the 1930s the tendency to think that almost any 'Western' art style or the practices of its leading exponents could be compared directly with a selectively apportioned aspect of *guohua* practices, rather than seeing the very ability to conceive of such relations as due to the 'Western' practices which had worked out those styles had arrived.

Sometimes one feels that the practice of interpreting what has become known as *guohua* considers itself to be outside this basic condition of historically interpenetrating

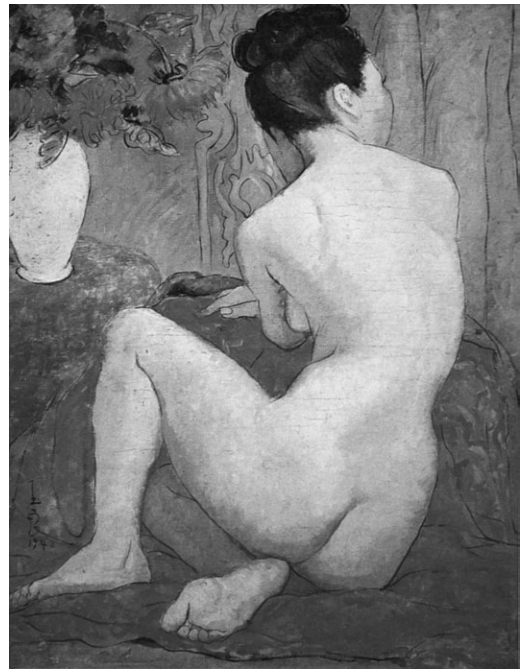
visual discourses, and much of the difficulty in interpreting *guohua* derives from this historical refusal.⁶ This extends to many, often intellectually subtle and developed, attempts to see Chinese art discourses as underpinned by an autonomous set of artistic and more broadly aesthetic discourses which have provenance within the lands and cultures to which the paradigmatically twentieth-century epithet 'Chinese' may be applied.⁷ In fact, what one may call 'national hermeneutics' seems to have been the dominant tendency in the intellectual interpretation of Chinese art in the second half of the twentieth century, from the difference in exhibition categories of the China exhibition in between Shanghai and London in 1936,⁸ through the discovery of 'China' as a kind of spiritual space defined by its aesthetics in Xu Fuguan in 1956,⁹ through the attempts to see if literati theories could envisage modern art in Liu Guosong in 1966,¹⁰ to the notion that aesthetic evolution in Chi-

na carried autonomous notions which had wider application for Li Zehou in 1981,¹¹ to recent derivations of modern expressions articulated through much older intellectual and aesthetic structures in exhibitions, such as that in 2009 by Gao Minglu.¹² It will be noted that I deliberately telescope the Chinese oecumene into one cultural domain even if its political units and identities are varied.

What is interesting about all these hermeneutic articulations is that none of them are independent of other-than-Chinese concepts for their repositioning of the Chinese ones. Whatever their extensive citation of Chinese thinkers, Xu is also dependent on eighteenth-century German philosophers, particularly Schelling; Liu on his contemporary understanding of abstractionism and abstract expressionism; Li for his methodology of significant form to Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Carl Jung;¹³ and Gao on Saussure, Heidegger, and Derrida amongst other 'other-than-Chinese' thinkers. Without assessing the coherence or persuasiveness of any particular articulation, endogenous Chinese artistic and aesthetic categories required this interaction with exogenous intellectual systems in order to make precise what their historical specificities were.¹⁴

The point is subtle but worth arguing, since it defines the modality of Chinese essentialism through its construction of *guohua*. The early twenty-first century has produced empirical studies of specifically modern and contemporary art.¹⁵ Since the 1970s the situation in Chinese society, as such, forced it to have *guohua* mostly treated as a separate discourse, and not one reciprocally defined by contact with non-*guohua*, i.e. 'Western' art discourses. Or, some combination of post-Cultural Revolution historical conditions allowed the treatment of *guohua* as if it had been formed by the very notion of a 'Chinese' modernity, one that had both endogenous and interactively exogenous formations. One can choose almost at random any exemplar of modern *guohua* from Pan Tianshou to Lui Shoukwan, and see these through the spectacles of an autonomous, endogenous development, or see them as the product of an art discourse formed, at least in part, though exogenous visual knowledge of photography, 'Western' art, chiefly painting, and not infrequently by some knowledge of 'Western modern' art.

If only through Chinese magazine illustrations from the late 1920s or the Japanese art encyclopedia of world art, which was surely available in China, *Sekai Bijutsu Zenshū* (1928), there was fre-



(fig. 2) Pan Yuliang (1899–1977): *Crysanthemum and Nude*, 1948, oil on canvas, 90 × 72,5 cm, National Art Museum of China [color plate 1].



(fig. 3) Feng Zikai (1898–1975): *Wearing Daddy's Clothes*, from the collection *Gushi Xinhua*, 1926.



(fig. 4) Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934): *Red Momohiki (Underpants)*, from Takehisa Gashû, *Aki no maki*, 1910.

quent access to at least images of artworks from the 'West.' This is even before we consider the role of overseas training and the movement of artists in constituting a lack of isolation. One could even posit that by the late 1920s most art discourses were not impermeable to outside discourses. One can simply anecdotally list the links of Feng Zikai and – via Lu Xun – the left-wing printmakers with Japan, the modernism of Pang Xunqin and the Juelanshe artists, or the training in 'Western' styles of Li Keran and Shi Lu whose work would become, after 1949, the avatars of a reformulated modern *guohua*.

Whether or not such exogenous interactions can be traced since the mid-nineteenth century in the empirical record of artists' lives – what they saw, who they read in Chinese, or where they went – remains one task for a Chinese history of *guohua*, one that has not been helped by the refusal to admit and then examine such interaction. I find this most puzzling. One can look at more recent *guohua* in China and see all kinds of formal structures cognate with earlier modern art outside China such as the work in the 1950s of Pan Tianshou or in the 1980s and 1990s of Chen Ping. One can see artists who knew translations of 'Western' modern art texts such as Huang Binghong, who not only knew Fou Lei, the translator of Matisse, but also had a one-man exhibition curated by him in 1948.¹⁶ Some artists who later left revolutionary monumental works studied abroad, like Fu Baoshi in Japan.¹⁷ There are copious numbers of more recent artists whose work appears to be a modulation of *guohua* styles with current conceptions of the grand, even grandiose 'modern' artwork (fig. 6). The non-foregrounding or discussion of exogenous interactions in some way parallels the way in which the early art historical work of Sullivan and, most particularly, Cahill, met in noticing how Chinese pictorial discourses changed through contact with 'Western' art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁸

If these interactions are apparently under-examined in art historical discourse, why do they appear to be

important? This may well be because the notion of the artwork as an exhibited object specified by art discourses and aesthetic categories received particular prominence in China through the

system of national art exhibitions after 1929. This was in itself almost certainly based on Japanese precursors,¹⁹ and at the *First National Fine Arts Exhibition* there were several Japanese exhibitors.²⁰

Clearly too such iterative exhibitions by their very existence as a juried, nominating historical series across very different politico-historical situations and art worlds provided and then reinforced the distribution of artworks as monuments, signifying objects whose qualities were indicative of a period and a culture. This was the case whatever political system was in place in China and whatever the particular tendencies of its aesthetic ideology.

A related set of issues concern the historical constructions given to such monuments. From the work of Yu Jianhua in 1937 it has been made very clear that the re-formulation of Chinese art history, specifically that of painting, has not solely depended on other-than-Chinese art historians.²¹ However, it can be argued that Chinese art history has in the end depended on, or has later been very much enriched by, conceptual discourses inherited from modern, chiefly German Western art history. This culture of translation and imported concepts has even mistakenly, but understandably, led other-than-Chinese art historians like Elkins to claim that the very discipline of art history in China is a Western importation.²²

In addition, and perhaps more significantly, the political functions of the avant-garde claims to invent the new seem to have been left out of discussion of *guohua*, although we might see these in the Chinese situation from the 1950s to 1970s as having been subsumed, one may even say occluded, by the political ideology which produced revolutionary realism in both *guohua* and oil painting.

Historical Time in the Development of Modern Chinese Art, Seen as a Whole

What happens if we no longer bifurcate *guohua* from 'Western'-style painting in China and map the topology of transitions for other kinds of historical series that include both?²³ The following discussion will suggest changes in Chinese modern and contemporary art based on considering all art discourse as one, exemplified by thinking of 'painting' as a single discourse with different modalities. This will lead us to question the temporal constructions such as, 'before or after 1949' or 'before or after 1979' which are normally deployed, or more indicatively to see that there are many interstices which link the normally



(fig. 5) Ren Xiong (1823–1857): *Self-Portrait*, circa 1850s, ink and color on paper, 177 × 79 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.