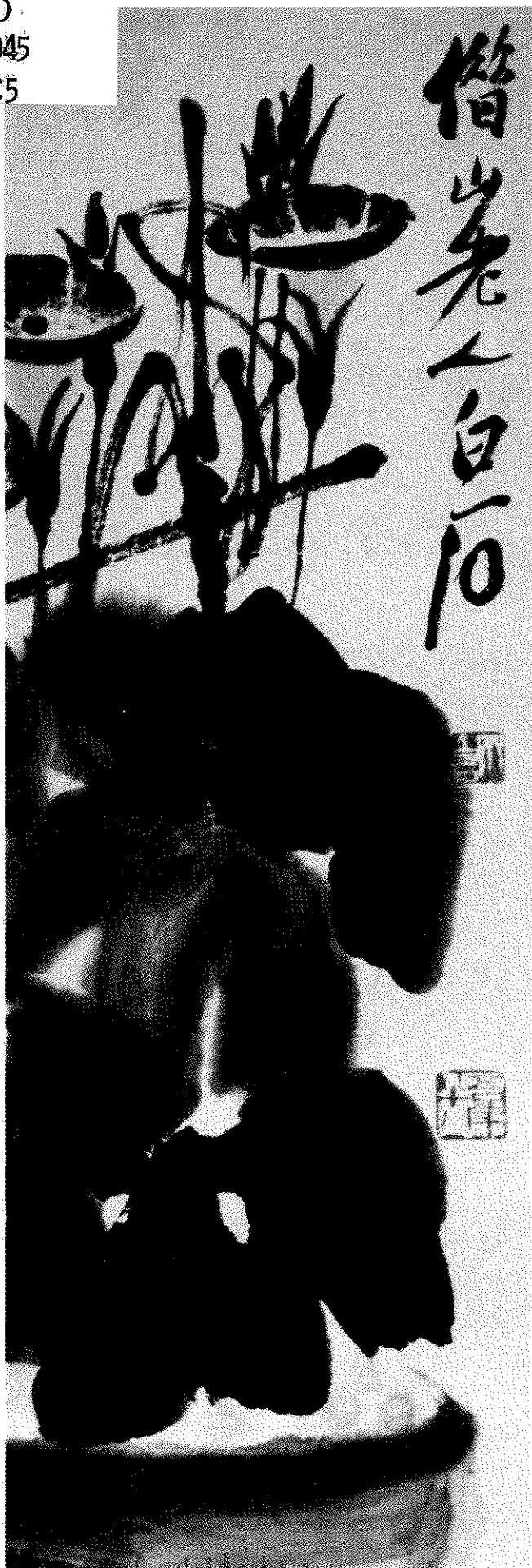


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# CHINESE ART

Gift of Professor and Mrs.  
Amitendranath Tagore



Meadow Brook Art Gallery  
Oakland University



Michigan Council  
for the Arts

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Gift of Professor and Mrs.  
Amitendranath Tagore

October 15-November 19, 1989

Text by  
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Meadow Brook Art Gallery  
Oakland University



Portrait of Amitendrarath Tagore painted by Zhang Heyun in 1948 while Tagore was a student in Beijing.

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## FOREWORD

**Chinese Art:** A gift from the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Amitendranath Tagore

The travels of Indian merchants, and later, scholars and philosophers to China probably began in the first century A.D. when Buddhism was gradually introduced from northwest India into China. One of the foremost of these Indians was the legendary Bodhidharma, a sixth-century A.D. Buddhist missionary said to have founded there the Ch'an School of Buddhism, which later emerged as Zen Buddhism in Japan. Similarly, the travels of Chinese merchants to the eastern shores of India in the first century B.C., and later, the travels of Chinese Buddhist scholars such as Fa Xian and Xuan Zang are well documented. Thus, when in 1947 at the age of 25 Amitendranath (Amit to his friends and colleagues) Tagore traveled to China, he was participating in an established, respected tradition of intellectual exchange between the two countries.

Though he may not have been aware of it at the time, young Amit Tagore was living through two of the most important political revolutions of the 20th century. In India, he was a close observer of—and at times a participant in—the nationalist activities spearheaded by the charismatic Mahatma Gandhi, which resulted in India's gaining freedom from Great Britain in 1947. Studying in China from 1947 until 1950, he also witnessed firsthand the monumental changes that rocked China to its core under the leadership of Mao Zedong. He received his privileged vantage point in part by birth and in part by serendipity.

Throughout India the name Tagore is synonymous with literature, music, the visual arts and progressive religious and political thinking. The Tagore family was brought to the forefront of India's cultural and political life by the visionary Prince Dwarkanath\* Tagore (1794-1846), the fabulously wealthy, politically astute and religiously liberal Bengali entrepreneur, a favorite of Queen Victoria. At the time of his death, the prince was working on a plan to build a railroad from Calais to Calcutta, which, later in its truncated form, was to be called the Orient Express.

One of Dwarkanath's sons, Debendranath (1817-1905), was a prominent writer and a leader of the Brahmo Samaj (Society of God), an eclectic movement that sought to reform Hinduism based on human reason rather than ritual authority. Out of this movement, founded in 1828, the so-called "Bengali Renaissance" emerged during the latter half of the 19th and first half of the present century. The Tagores were not only major financial contributors to this renaissance, but also active creators in it. The family boasted (quietly, to be sure) musicians, painters, philosophers, scientists, actors, actresses, dancers and, of course, writers . . . many writers. It could be said that the Tagores were the Bengali equivalent of the Medici in Renaissance Florence, except that as well as being patrons and appreciators of the arts, many of the Tagores were themselves remarkably accomplished artists.

Of Debendranath's many sons, his youngest, Rabindranath (1861-1941), is most famous outside of India as the winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature. In

\* The suffix *-nath* in Tagore family names translates into English as "lord of," with the preceding term being a place name or quality related to the god Krishna. Hence, "Dwarkanath" translates as an epithet to the God Krishna, "Lord of Dwarka," Dwarka being an important religious center in western India.

India, he is recognized as a literary colossus, the foremost modern poet of Bengal and all of India. He was also a composer of songs, dramas, operas, ballets, a painter, novelist, short-story writer and philosopher. He also has the distinction of writing the words and music for the national anthems of both India and Bangladesh. When coaxed into remembering his world-famous older cousin, Amit would recall—with atypical shyness and reserve—carrying a fly-whisk or a spear as a child in family productions of Rabindranath's plays in Jorashanko, the family palace in Calcutta. The constant stream of international political, intellectual and literary figures visiting Rabindranath failed to impress Amit the child. Rather, it was a visit from one of Britain's foremost cricket players which impressed him most and convinced him of his cousin's importance.

Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), a cousin once removed of Rabindranath and Amit's grandfather, was an important painter and famed illustrator of children's books. Trained in the Western style of art, Abanindranath provided the critical link in bringing his poet-cousin to the attention of the West. It was he who in 1911 introduced the visiting British artist William Rothenstein to Rabindranath. Rothenstein carried Rabindranath's poems to England to the poets William Butler Yeats and Robert Bridges, who, in turn, brought these works to the attention of the Western literary public. The rest is, of course, literary history.

It is not surprising that, raised in a family of illustrious writers and painters, Amit should be drawn to both modern Chinese literature and art. However, in 1942 at the age of 20, he had other ideas. Having just received his Bachelor of Commerce degree from Calcutta University, he was intent on a career in business. Because the war was on and the cramped city of Calcutta was overrun with multitudes of soldiers, administrators, journalists and peasants from the villages in search of employment, he decided, almost as a whim, to take advantage of a miniscule scholarship at Visva-Bharati University, the distinguished educational institution founded in 1921 by Rabindranath located in the Bengali countryside in Shantiniketan, far from Calcutta. The scholarship was for the study of Chinese, which he started in 1943. Pleased with what he had found almost by accident, he decided to make it his life's work.

In 1947, as a Government of India scholar to China, Amit traveled to China for advanced study, receiving a diploma from the Collège of Chinese Studies, Beijing. In 1950 he earned his M.A. in Chinese from the National Beijing University. It was at this time that he gathered material for his Ph.D. dissertation and obtained many of the works of art found in this exhibit.

Returning to India in 1950, he became a lecturer in Chinese at Visva-Bharati University. From 1952 to 1957, he was on loan from his home institution to the Indian National Defence Academy as a lecturer in Chinese. In the meantime, he also received his Ph.D. from Visva-Bharati University.

In 1961-1962 Amit came to the United States as a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer in the Oriental Studies and South Asian Studies departments at the University of Pennsylvania. Returning to India for a year as a Fulbright Alumni Research grantee, he then came back to the United States in 1964 to take up the position of associate professor of Chinese Language and Literature at Oakland University, from which he retired as Professor in 1987.

Amitendranath Tagore's stay in China resulted in major contributions to two separate but related fields: literature and art. The former is manifest in his *Literary Debates in Modern China (1918-1937)* (1967), a magisterial work on the development of realism and socialist realism in modern Chinese literature. The second reflects his lifelong interest in art and is found in two places: first, a splendid volume of translations, *Moments of Rising Mist: A Collection of Sung Landscape Poetry* (1973), which astutely combines his love for literature with his fascination for art. The other, the works found in this exhibit, which, with the patrician generosity typical of the man, he and his wife, Arundhati, share not only with us all today, but with future generations of Americans as well.

Carlo Coppola  
Professor, Center for International Studies



Professor Tagore with Kiichi Usui, Curator, 1989.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Amitendranath Tagore, professor of Chinese and Arundhati Tagore, library technician, enjoyed 25 years of teaching at Oakland and serving at the Kresge Library. They decided to donate their Chinese Art collection to Oakland University before departing to their native India for retirement. The collection contains 29 scroll paintings, 11 calligraphies representing a variety of calligraphic styles and 15 rubbing impressions of old Chinese stone monuments.

Professor Tagore was a student of Chinese literature in Beijing at the time China was politically unstable, immediately after the end of World War II and prior to the establishment of the Communist government. He befriended members of the intellectual and art circles. His experiences of acquiring these art works are modestly chronicled in his essay in this catalog. Some of these art works were shown to students in his classrooms, in order to introduce a hint of the basis of Chinese culture, calligraphy and ink painting. This gift to Oakland University will add another dimension to the university art collection and enlighten many students studying Asian culture and art at Oakland University. It will also give the citizens of Oakland County a rare opportunity to appreciate the delicate beauty of Chinese art.

The presentation of the exhibition and publication of the catalog have been partially funded by Michigan Council for the Arts through the Mini Grant Program of Oakland County Cultural Council, Center for International Programs, Cross-Cultural Programs, departments of Modern Languages and Literatures and Art and Art History of Oakland University.

Kiichi Usui

*Curator, Meadow Brook Art Gallery*

## THE STORY OF THIS COLLECTION

My collection of modern China's painters started in 1947 and ended in 1950, when I completed my studies at the National Beijing University in China.

Back in 1947 when I left Tianjin and arrived in Beijing it was summer. Our train pulled into the Beijing railway station where the university bus met us, a group of eight Indian students. Half the bus's roof was missing. This was a wonderful opportunity for us to look about as we passed the great walls then surrounding the city, the huge gates in the walls and the imperial palaces. It was also an indication of the university's financial stress—it could not even afford to replace the roof of a bus.

We settled in a two-storied modern building in Dongcheng hufeng, which the Japanese military built to house their officers who went berserk. The whole structure had to be cleaned and we did a good job of it within a week. Rooms were small but comfortable during Beijing's dry winter. As I attended my studies, I also regularly visited on foot—or riding an old pedal-brake German cycle—different corners of the city. These were the three most fascinating years of my life. My favorite place to stroll was Liu Li Cheng. This was the market street for buying paintings, brushes, inks, stones for rubbing ink, seals made of jade and ivory.

My collection started very modestly with a pair of calligraphic scrolls. I would attend exhibitions of painters residing in Beijing and painters coming from Shanghai to exhibit in Beijing. Prices quoted in these shows were beyond the means of a student. During the exhibitions and in the College of Arts in Beijing, I met many artists and art lovers. We were a motley crowd of Chinese, Japanese, European, American and two or three Indian students. I easily secured invitations to visit these artists in their studios. I visited my Chinese artist friends often and for hours at a time. Over tepid cups of green tea we would discuss things, not necessarily art. I remember with deep gratitude those moments when artists like Qi Baishi, Qi Gong, Zong Qi, Zong Qi Xiang, Xu Beihong and others would talk to this greenhorn on the basic philosophy behind Chinese art and aesthetics, strengths of expression in Chinese calligraphic lines, the difference between the traditional symbolic approach of Chinese art and the quick, personal innovation of contemporary Chinese art.

My collection grew slowly over the three years. I did away with the middleman's share as I secured paintings directly from the artists. Qi Baishi painted "Frogs" right before my eyes on his long red-lacquered table in about 10 minutes before presenting it to me. I just paid a token sum. This, I am convinced, was a great honor bestowed on me for which I am eternally grateful to the now departed art-genius.

My collection deals with two art schools—those of Beijing and Shanghai. My calligraphy collection is intended to show different types of Chinese script—from the ancient to the personal "grass script." My Ming Dynasty calligraphy, a hanging scroll on silk, is a perfect example of what is called the "crazy grass-script."

The rubbings were easy to collect then, as many personal collections were for sale. I have been told that now these rubbings are not available in Liu Li Cheng and only reproductions are for sale. Perhaps these stone monuments are now under the State Archeological

Authorities. This is the right method to preserve these monuments. Too many rubbings off a stone face is not good for either the surface or the stone.

I am sure our students will enjoy viewing these works—and for a moment, forget politics and the recent massacre on Tianamen Square.

Amitendranath Tagore  
Professor Emeritus  
Oakland University  
July 1989

## THE ART OF THE REPUBLIC (1911-1948): Introduction

In 1947, 25-year-old Amitendranath Tagore left his home in Calcutta, India, to spend three years studying in Beijing. China was then facing one of the most tumultuous moments in the country's turbulent modern history. By the autumn of 1948, the growing forces of Mao Zedong were in full control of Manchuria and Northern China, and were knocking on the door of Jiang Jieshi's capital at Nanjing. They were also threatening to move in on the major industrial and port city of Shanghai. During Tagore's stay in China, the nation changed hands from the Republic established in 1912 to become the People's Republic of China.

Tagore's anecdote of the roofless bus bears witness to the fact that during his stay on the eve of this dramatic historical and political juncture, China had yet to recuperate from the end of the effects of World War II, the undeclared war with the Japanese which lasted from 1937-45. The biographer of Qi Baishi, a major Chinese artist of this century whose works are represented in this collection, describes what conditions were like after the war for this artist:

*"With that ecstasy Ch'i Pai-shih greeted V-J Day in August 1945, when he could stop dodging the Japanese and feel free to step out of his door once again. . . . The National Association for Fine Arts invited him to show his works in Nanking. He brought over 200 pieces with him which were all eagerly grabbed by the end of a short exhibition in October 1946."*

*"The glory of the victory was short-lived. Almost immediately after the Japanese surrender, civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists flared up. Even more upsetting to everybody was the runaway inflation. The bundles of bank notes Ch'i Pai-shih brought back from his Nanking exhibit . . . /dropped overnight /in value/ and a few days later were not enough to buy two or three ordinary meals. The following year, a small wheatcake cost 100,000 yuan, and a wheelbarrow full of such bank notes would be required before one could enter any restaurant."<sup>1</sup>*

Despite any deprivations the foreign students in Beijing were forced to endure, as Tagore recalls in his "Story of This Collection": These were the three most fascinating years of my life." He spent his time roaming the capital freely on his German-made bicycle, visiting art shops, becoming acquainted with artists, visiting them in their studios, and receiving insights into the tradition of Chinese painting directly from the artists.

Tagore's gravitation toward the art circles and the ease with which he mingled with Beijing artists came as a natural extension of his own family heritage. For more

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Woo, *Chinese Aesthetics and Ch'i Pai shih*, p. 40.

than a century, the Tagores have been deeply involved in the arts of India, both as generous patrons and as creative participants. They were active in all areas including painting, music, poetry, criticism and teaching, as noted in Professor Carlo Coppola's foreword to this catalog. Growing up in a family deeply rooted in Indian culture, Tagore brought with him an awakened sensitivity to the meaning of culture and an eye already well-trained in evaluating art. A glance at the group of paintings Tagore collected in China leaves no doubt that his interest was in the traditional arts of ink painting, and calligraphy; he also gathered together rubbings from the walls of ancient tombs and shrines.

It is not surprising that among these works, two paintings reflect his native land, "The Nepalese Women" (no. 2), and "The Dancer" copied from the frescoes on the walls of the Dunhuang Caves (Plate 1). This major Buddhist site, located in western China, was an important oasis south of the Gobi Desert, along the ancient Silk Route. It served as the main conduit for the introduction of Buddhism into China from India and during the first millennium of the Christian era it connected China in trade with areas as far west as India, Persia and the Mediterranean civilization. During his sojourn in China, Professor Tagore spent two weeks at these caves with a Chinese artist and an Indian scholar of Buddhism. Together they discovered for themselves the brilliantly painted cave walls filled with images both from Buddhist teachings and secular lore. Tagore once commented that for him the caves represented the epitome of cross-cultural fertilization. The images he saw, both secular and religious, represented a confluence of styles from India, China and Central Asia. "The Dancer," copied from one of the Dunhuang caves, must have reminded him of the delight he had felt upon seeing the many lively and colorful genre scenes on those walls taken from his native culture. During the 30s, these wall paintings had been rediscovered by Chinese artists then in search of new ideas and styles from within the native tradition to offset the strong currents pouring in from the West.<sup>2</sup> Later, during World War II, Zhang Daqian (Plate 10) spent two years at Dunhuang making copies of the wall paintings. An exhibition of his works at that time reawakened and recharged Chinese interest in this, one of the world's rich cultural legacies.<sup>3</sup> Heyi's "Dancer" expresses the spirit of the renewed focus on this exotic monument of China's past.

Many of the artists Tagore met and whose works he obtained were students like himself. Remarkably, many of these student artists went on to become leading names in Chinese art circles: Zhang Heyun (frontispiece), Qian Tongren (Plate 12), Qi Yuanbai (Plate 13), and Zong Qixiang (Plate 3), Xu Beihong (Plate 4), Qi Baishi (Plates 5, 6, 7), Li Keran (Plate 9), Li Kuchan (Plate 8), Yu Youren (Plate 15) and Zhang Daqian (Plate 10) were already well-established artists by then.

Of these last, all remained in China after the Liberation of 1949—except Zhang Daqian, who migrated to South America in order to continue painting unharrassed in the traditional manner. Each of the other artists were forced to undergo re-education in the new communist philosophy of art and painting. For some this entailed

undergoing a dramatic change of style. The soil had been prepared for stylistic change throughout the first half of the century, as the nation attempted to modernize along Western lines. Each of these artists had been involved to some degree in the debate about how to modernize Chinese art without losing the richness and uniqueness of centuries of cultural evolution. It is the tension grown out of this search which gives modern Chinese art its life and energy. As nearly as possible, Tagore chose paintings which retained as much of the ancient tradition as possible. But, as will be seen, by the beginning of this century The Great Tradition which had been established during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1644; 1644-1912) was being questioned even by conservative artists.

## Tradition vs. Modernization

### The Tradition

The Chinese artist of The Great Tradition belonged to a cultural elite. He was typically born into a family of artists and given a thorough education in the Chinese classics. These mastered, he was then introduced to a well-known artist who would train the youth in the basics of calligraphy and painting. Completing this, the young man would sit for the Imperial Examination as a candidate for an official position within the government. If fortunate enough to receive such a post, he was awarded a stipend and used his leisure time to develop the arts of poetry, painting and calligraphy. Other painters not in the official class perhaps inherited wealth, which allowed them to take up painting full time and to take part in cultural gatherings with others of shared interests, drinking wine and composing verses. All other artists generally fell into the categories of artisans and craftsmen.

Happily, while acquiring this collection of contemporary Chinese art, Tagore included a representative work from The Great Tradition of landscape painting, "Landscape in the Style of Ni Tsan" by Xiao Sun (Plate 2). A classically trained artist, Xiao received an education similar to that prescribed by tradition by becoming the private student of a well-known calligrapher, artist and connoisseur. His teacher, Zhiang Yun (1847-1919), followed the style of the early Qing dynasty master, Wang Hui, and passed the basics of brushwork and style of that orthodox tradition onto Xiao.

A few trees on a rocky outcropping, distant cliffs across a lake, austere landscape patterns worked out with brush strokes of sparse ink, an unvisited hut with no sign of visitors; these are visual references which immediately bring to mind, to anyone trained in The Great Tradition of Chinese landscape painting, the much admired Yuan Dynasty master, Ni Tsan (1301-1374). Ni, a wealthy country gentleman, lived in his later years on a houseboat drifting along the beautiful lakes and streams of Jiangxi Province, stopping here and there to visit monasteries and friends. His life was free from worldly care; his manner of painting was purely for his own pleasure, giving paintings only to those who could appreciate them. And with a radical adherence to his own style, Ni became a model scholar-gentleman for later generations. The strength of his compositions, despite the paucity of detail and characteristic dry ink, has been appreciated by succeeding generations of painters who have produced countless copies or interpretations of Ni's paintings.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Cohen, *The New Chinese Painters*, p. 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> Conversation with Marshall Wu, Curator, University of Michigan Art Museum, August 1989.

One part of every classical artist's training before the 20th century (and revived at times even under the Communists<sup>4</sup>) was to study the masterpieces of the past—to copy them not for line by line imitation, but to grasp the underlying structure and the individuality of the brush techniques used by each master. Eventually the artist would develop his own style. Here, for example, Xiao has suggested the dry-brush technique of Ni Tsan in the rock formations, but has enriched the vegetation with greater variety of ink tones and washes, giving the painting a prettier appearance and hence a wider appeal than would ever have been countenanced by the Yuan master. Xiao's forms seem suspended in space and hug the left corner, where Ni's compositions were firmly based and often squarely centered.

The thatched pavilion tucked away in an imaginary landscape was the symbolic retreat of a literatus far from the turmoil of courtly politics, where he could commune with the harmony of nature and enrich his mind through study and meditation. At the height of The Great Tradition, Chinese painters produced works accessible and understandable only to the elite few who partook of a similar background and education. This formed the classical standard from at least the 17th to the early 20th century.

### The End of the Tradition

Chinese painters in the 20th century can be divided into three broad categories: those who worked in a purely Western style using Western methods and materials, especially oils and watercolors; those who maintained close ties with traditional art styles and methods; and those who attempted to achieve a synthesis between the two. In Tagore's collection, there are none from the first category, but three paintings suggest the third.

The major dilemma facing Chinese artists from the late 19th until well into the 20th century was how to modernize and adapt Western painting styles and techniques without losing Chinese uniqueness. The three works mentioned, "Horse" by Xu Beihong (Plate 4), "Congqing at Dawn" by Zong Qixiang (Plate 3) and the portrait of Tagore by Zhang Heyun (frontispiece) indicate that, through either subject matter, compositional technique or medium, these artists were struggling toward a fusion of the two opposing traditions. The transition is subtle; the use of traditional media such as monochrome ink, the pliant brush which is constructed so as to store a supply of ink in the core of the tufts, the hanging scroll format and the preference for suggesting form rather than describing every minute detail, give these paintings a more Chinese appearance to the Western eye.

Yet, the horse, seen from the rear through radical foreshortening, is totally foreign to the ancient tradition of horse painting in China. After mastering the techniques of naturalistic appearances in the West, Xu returned to China and trained himself in the traditional ink manner. Here, with a few forceful strokes, he has outlined the muscular flanks of the horse. The animal's attention has been caught by something, perhaps a scent, upwind. With a few long brushstrokes of varied texture, Xu has suggested a black tail and mane buffeted in a breeze which has also stirred the leafless willow branches above. Xu's sure handling of foreshortening, his careful observation of

nature and masterful rendering of form are the outcome of years of studying and producing animal and figure paintings in France and Germany.

More traditional handling of scenes with figures and trees may be seen in no. 9, no. 10 and no. 16. (As shall be seen, Xu was a pivotal figure in the revitalization of Chinese art which took place during the Republic.)

The view of "Congqing at Dawn" represents another deft interweaving of East and West, traditional materials and Western technique. The view of distant mountains with valleys drenched in patches of mist immediately bring to mind the classical Chinese landscape format. However, here the traditional scene has been replaced by the smoke stacks, tiled rooftops, telephone wires and narrow steps, in short, intruding reminders of modern industrial times. Crowded urbanized scenes were not to be found in the traditional concept of Chinese landscape painting. Zong has also retained the uniquely Chinese preference for viewing landscape paintings with multiple vantage points in contrast to the single vanishing point perspective characteristic of Western paintings.

The choice of a realistic urbanscape in lieu of the more pleasing subjective and poetic landscape represents a clear departure from the elite tradition. To the contemporary Chinese, those landscapes (such as Plate 2) represented a creative stagnation and artistic bankruptcy being . . . "totally divorced from real-life," and dependent upon . . . "the repetition of 'type-forms' derived from such books as the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual*, in use since the 17th century."<sup>5</sup> (These were illustrated "how-to" manuals for painting various forms in the styles of the old masters.) . . . "Modern Chinese artists believed that the revitalization of Chinese art must come from reinstating nature as the source of artistic inspiration and from exploring the inexhaustible vitality of the real world for a new meaning in art. . . . They chose the new art from the West as a powerful weapon to make China grasp the realities of the modern world, abandon the traditional solutions of escaping into the mountains in times of turmoil and unrest."<sup>6</sup>

Zhang Heyun's portrait of Tagore combines both Eastern and Western techniques to maximum effect. The supple line of the oriental brush not only traces the form, but suggests volume through shaded areas around the neck and collar. The monochrome ink adds appropriately rich highlights to the young Indian's black hair, brows and mustache. The head, shown in three-quarters profile, the downturned pose and inward gaze suggest a seriousness of purpose stated by Yu Youren in the couplets he composed for Tagore in cursive script: (Plate 15) "(Your) ambitious plan is as extensive as the faraway winds and clouds" and "(Your) virtuous ideology is as pure as heaven and earth."

### XU BEIHONG: A Synthesis of the Modern and Traditional

Xu Beihong stands out as perhaps "the single most important figure in modern Chinese art."<sup>7</sup> Through talent, connections and several key teaching positions, Xu remained a leading figure in Chinese art circles from 1919 until his death, in 1953. To follow his career is to respect

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Chang, *Painting in the People's Republic of China*, see p. 7ff regarding the alternation between *p'u-chi* ("popularization") and *t'i kao* ("raising of standards").

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with Marshall Wu, August 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Mayching Kao, *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Chu-Tsing Li, *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting*, p. 91.

the tremendous political skill of the man and the great versatility of the artist. Xu Beihong seems to have been chosen from the early part of the century to direct the modernization of Chinese art. He survived changes throughout the century in governments and politics, adapted to many shifts in the prevailing attitudes about the purposes of art in this tumultuous era of Chinese history and endured until his death—still holding a leading position in art in the Communist government.

Born the son of a farmer in Jiangxi Province, in 1895, Xu's father was also a teacher who painted and provided his son with his earliest instruction. Early on, Xu was drawn to an unusual range of subject-matter, including common objects surrounding him, "even cigarette boxes and . . . other illustrated materials."<sup>8</sup> In 1917 he made his first trip abroad, sponsored by a prominent Shanghai businessman who took an interest in Xu's art. As Europe was then in turmoil, he chose to visit Japan instead, where he spent nine months mainly visiting bookstores and museums. Japan had served as China's first mentor in Western art training in the early years of the Republic, attracting a number of aspiring young Chinese artists. Japan was geographically closer to China than Europe. In addition, Japan presented less of a cultural barrier, fewer problems linguistically and it was cheaper than sending students to Europe. Besides, Japan, the first Asian nation to modernize using the industrialized West as a pattern, had become a model which China sought to emulate.

Upon returning to China, Xu was appointed instructor in the Chinese Painting Research Institute in the National Beijing University by Cai Yuanpei, Ph.D., then leader of culture and art in the new Republic and also president of the university. Cai energetically advanced the idea that art should serve the needs of society. Indeed, it should be considered as "an important molding force in the creation of an ideal society;"<sup>9</sup> seminal ideas which would provide a consistent basis for art philosophy throughout the 20th century.

In 1919, Chinese artists began to study in Europe, thereby getting their first views of the collections of great Western masterpieces. Xu and others received government scholarships, through the influence of Cai, to study in Paris. Not coincidentally, 1919 was the year of the May 4 Movement, a pivotal moment in modern Chinese history for the dissemination of Western thought. Having been humiliated and defeated by Western powers and Japan in the preceding half-century, and facing the possibility of further threats, students returning from Europe or having received a Western-style education in China, began to actively agitate for the modernization and Westernization of China in all areas. This was considered to be the most effective defense against further threats from abroad. Western art was, therefore, to receive greater attention.

In Paris, Xu specialized in drawing and oil painting. He spent eight years in France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, becoming "the first Chinese artist to devote so much time to studying Western painting."<sup>10</sup> He concentrated on developing firm disciplines in the academic painting of anatomy, perspective, drawing and art history, then entered L'Ecole des Beaux Arts to work under Fremont, a painter of historical subjects. He also studied the great

masters in museums and galleries. After he returned home in 1927, Xu continued to receive key appointments placing him in positions to help determine the direction of modern Chinese art. As head of the Western painting section in the newly founded art department of National Central University, he gave the young New Art Movement a fresh momentum in the direction of disciplined technical training while always holding to the notion that art must be an honest reflection of reality, "an important molding force in the creation of an ideal society."

The 1930s were critical years for the nation. The relations between China and Japan were sorely strained by the Japanese Occupation of Manchuria in 1931, and the formation of the puppet state of Manchukuo the following year; in 1937, the Incident at Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing marked the beginning of the undeclared war with Japan which lasted until 1945. This decade was marked by a growing sense of nationalism, which was reflected in the arts by a thorough reassessment of traditional aesthetic values and painting techniques.

Xu began to reflect this trend as early as 1929 when he shed the "long hair, velvet coat and flowing tie and his detached languid mannerism" of the Latin Quarter and clad himself once again in "the long Chinese gown."<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, he took up the traditional brush and ink. What emerged in his art were two distinct styles: a Western academic style barely distinguishable from similar works in Europe and a synthesis between the two. An example of his academic style is a work entitled "The Five Hundred Retainers of Tian Heng" painted between 1930-33. The subject is a heroic figure of the people from the distant Chinese past seen at the moment of departure surrounded by his grieving followers. (Xu included a portrait of himself in the center of the composition.) Though totally European in style and medium, the subject nevertheless reflects the nationalistic pride of the people and a renewed appreciation for tradition. On the other hand, Xu made a number of powerful horse studies solidly based in Chinese tradition but also reflecting the naturalism born of his Western experience.

Between 1937-41, he went on a series of fund-raising and cultural exchange trips to Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and India, where he held exhibitions to raise money for the war effort. In 1940 it was Rabindranath Tagore who extended the invitation to Xu to exhibit in Calcutta. Perhaps Amitendranath met Xu then for the first time. But, short of that, a connection had been made.

Following the war, in 1946, Xu became president of the National Academy of Art in Peiping (as the capital was called between 1927 and 1949). Among those he brought in to join his faculty were Li Keran (Plate 9) and Ye Qianyu (no. 2). In 1948, Xu refused to leave even as the city was besieged with civil strife. He was brought into the Communist government in 1949 and appointed president of the Central Art Academy in Beijing and chairman of the All-China Artists Association, the highest art position under the new government. Despite this harmonious transition, Xu was later forced to join other artists and intellectuals in "struggle sessions," criticism, and re-education by being assigned to rural work cadres. He died in 1953, the most respected modern Chinese artist. "His legacy to China is manifested in the . . . government policy of socialist realism, which can be seen as a

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> Kao, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Li, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Kao, *China's Response to the West in Art*, p. 155.

continuation of the ideas and theories he formulated during his lifetime."<sup>12</sup>

## TRADITION REVIVED: Qi Baishi, Li Kuchan, Li Keran

### Qi's Morning Glories, Crabs and Frogs

Like Xu Beihong, Qi Baishi rose from humble origins. Through a generous combination of genius, pluck, the ability to excel in a number of arts (including calligraphy, poetry, seal-carving) and fortuitous patronage at crucial junctures in his career, Qi not only endured but flourished—despite the many vicissitudes forced upon Chinese artists during this century.

Unlike Xu, Qi never studied abroad. His art was not a synthesis of East and West. However, his first great success was scored with the Japanese public in the 1930s; the public was immediately enamored with Qi's unpretentious farmyard creatures, birds and flowers (Plates 5, 6, 7), and purchased every piece on exhibit. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, Xu was a great supporter of Qi's style as early as the 1920s, and they remained close friends throughout their lives.

Their careers merged at the time that the rush of Western influence in the arts during the first quarter of the century was being tempered by a conservative swing during the 1930s. The appealing and well-formed images which emerged from Qi's disciplined mind and brush, as well as his combination of traditional brush and ink skills with folk-art colors, suited the growing concern that art should serve society and be understood by a broader audience.

He also helped to renew interest in two early Qing period artists: Daoji (1630-1707) and Zhu Da (1626-c.1705). Though both emerged from elite backgrounds, in their paintings they carved new paths away from the stilted conventions of the past and returned to nature as their models. Their free, yet charged ink styles and original yet dynamic forms made them tremendously appealing to 20th-century painters wishing to retain what was worthy from the past. Qi Baishi made a particular study of these two painters and, by absorbing their styles into his own, helped to revive and renew tradition.

As a child, Qi began to draw objects that he observed around him—first the bold patterns found in local folk art such as New Year's decorations and calendars traditionally painted by local craftsmen in bright colors. Gradually he absorbed more objects from his immediate environment—domestic animals, vegetables and farm utensils. Even as his reputation grew and he left his provincial home for the capital, Qi never abandoned his humble roots, which perhaps explains the enduring appeal of his comfortable, down-to-earth style.

Inscriptions from two paintings give an idea of his approach to art and the rather direct and home-grown style of his writing:

*"Behind my studio there was a well against some rocks. Moss covered the area around the well making a modulated green pattern. Once a crab crawled around there. I watched it, noticing that it walked by moving one leg at a time. Even though it had many legs, its movements were very well regulated. People painting this creature don't know about it.*



(Fig. 1): Li Keran. *Landscape After a Poem by Mao Zedong*, 1964. Ink and color on paper. Inscribed: "Spring rain in South China." Two seals of the artist: Keran and another. Formerly collection Dr. Ip Yee, Hong Kong.  
(From Joan Cohen, *The new Chinese Painting*, 1949-1986, fig. 192).

*"When I paint real objects, I don't really aim at close resemblance in their outward form, only when I capture verisimilitude without trying hard to imitate the configurations there is the moving rhythmic spirit in my works."*<sup>13</sup>

What endeared him to an entire nation was that he, a man of peasant stock, embodied the qualities most admired in the scholar-gentleman of the past—knowledge, genius, strength and moral rectitude. All the more can one appreciate the pleasure Tagore took in visiting Qi's studio, as he writes in his "Story," where he watched him paint the "Frogs" (Plate 7).

Besides Qi Baishi's three paintings, Li Kuchan's "Heron" (Plate 8), Li Keran's "Cowboy" (Plate 9), Zhang Daqian's "Bird" (Plate 10), Tien Shiguang's "Night Blooming Cereus" (no. 13), Chen Qi's "Plum Blossoms" (no. 14), Lu Yingshan's "Tao Yuanming" (no. 15), Chen Yushan's "Chrysanthemum" (no. 17) and Wang Yun's "Lotus" (no. 18) are all works which represent the traditional style of painting.

## CHINESE STYLE PAINTING AFTER 1949: Li Kuchan and Li Keran

The post-revolutionary years chronologically fall outside the scope of this collection, but a brief comment is in

<sup>12</sup> Li, *op.cit.* p. 98; Cohen, *op.cit.* p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Woo, *op.cit.* quotes found on p. 56 and 36.

order since four of the major artists represented here continued to paint under the new political order. Of the four, Xu, Qi and the two Li's lived longest and made the greatest adjustments in their styles. The account of Li Kuchan's life (see List of Illustrations, Plate 8) provides an extraordinary example of the degree of flexibility and adaptability required of Chinese artists to maintain a steady career during the past few decades. Li Keran was able to make a more harmonious transition by adapting his landscape style to scenes of rural, industrialized China or illustrating passages from Mao Zedong's poetry (fig. 1).

The direction of post-revolutionary art was established as early as 1942, well before Tagore arrived in Beijing, by Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art." He clearly established that "art expresses a definite political viewpoint and reflects a definite class stand."<sup>14</sup>

From the beginning of the century, art training had been removed from its exclusive domain among the cultural elite. The first art academy opened in 1906, and others followed in the first decades of the century. This broadened the base of art education and widened the subjects to be studied to include both traditional methods and Western techniques. Given Tagore's background, he might well have been received in the elite circles of the older generation, but the art world he entered was one belonging to a different China. Perhaps through his conversations in these early, and in many quarters optimistic, post-revolutionary days, he learned of some artists who were planning their departure. One such was Zhang Daqian (Plate 10), who emigrated to Brazil where he resides today. Considered to be one of the leading expatriot painters, Zhang has continued to paint in the traditional style.

## CALLIGRAPHY

"My collection began very modestly with two scrolls of calligraphy," as Tagore recalled in his "Story." During his three-year sojourn, his collection of calligraphy grew to about one dozen scrolls. His aim was to have examples of the major calligraphic styles. Those represented here are the Seal Script (Plate 11), Official or Clerical Script (Plate 12), the Running Script (Plates 13, 14), Cursive (or Grass) Script (Plate 15) and the "Wild" or "Crazy" Cursive script (Plate 16).

Where in the West calligraphy is counted among the crafts, in China it is considered the basis of all the other arts. Before an artist can master the forms of painting, or the poet can effectively present his words in writing, he must have achieved a polished calligraphic hand. In the past, an outstanding candidate sitting for the official examinations who was unable to execute his carefully composed essays in a competent hand would not be accepted into the privileged class of government officials. So highly did the ancient Chinese value the written word that "in every district of a Chinese city, and even in the smallest village, there is a little pagoda built for the burning of waste paper bearing writing—the Pagoda of Compassionating the Characters."<sup>15</sup>

In Chinese, the same character *hua* is used to denote

both writing and drawing. Both make use of the same materials reverently called the Four Treasures: the brush with pointed tuft made of natural hairs from deer, sheep, weasel, rabbit or wolf; the ink stick made of soot and animal glue; the ink stone polished, smooth and flat to ensure a rich, black ink when the stick is rubbed with water over its surface; and the paper, usually made of mulberry bark, hemp fiber or bamboo pulp to create a variety of textures ranging from smooth and ink resistant to coarse and absorbent. The final appearance of the work depends upon a careful selection of each of these.

For a Chinese connoisseur understanding the meaning of the written characters may enhance his enjoyment of the work by observing the style the calligrapher has chosen to reflect the mood of the content. More than meaning, he looks for the quality of the brushline; the formal structure of each character; the way groups of characters are formed; the way lines and dots interplay with each other; the continuity of movement within one character and carried through a vertical line of several; the tones and appearance of the ink—from light to dark, wet to dry; and finally, the total appearance of the work.<sup>16</sup> Always, the mind of the calligrapher must be composed and focused before he sets his brush to paper as the indelible ink allows for no erasure nor correction.

Of the styles represented, the Seal Script is the most ancient. Since it was often used to inscribe the insides of bronze vessels, the lines appear stiff, as though etched into the paper with a stylus. The characters were yet to be standardized and retain much of the pictorial quality of the earliest inscriptions, the oracles incised into the shoulder bones of oxen. Today, the style is frequently practiced as an art, and the calligrapher of Plate 11 has combined the arcane with his own running style. The Clerical Script was created for the purpose of keeping official documents. Each character is clearly formed and occupies an imaginary square. Supple lines vary in thickness and thinness being written on paper or silk with a brush rather than being incised into a resistant surface. The Running Script emerged as a more rapid writing system which also allowed for greater movement and flexibility of brushwork. The stroke order is clearly determined as in the Clerical Script, but lines and dots flow together making this a more rapid and fluid manner of writing. The Cursive style is the most individual and difficult for the untrained eye to read. Originally thought to have been a form of shorthand, it most easily yields to personal idiosyncrasies and pure abstract forms.

<sup>14</sup> Chang, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Barnhart, "Chinese Calligraphy: The Inner World of the Brush," p. 237.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Frontispiece

no. 1: Zhang Heyun (1918- ), "Portrait of Mr. Tagore"

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 13¾" x 9½"

Inscription: "Mr. Tagore, whose goal is to study; sketch by Heyun, June 18, 1948."

Zhang Heyun is from Fengyun, Hubei Province. In addition to his talent for painting, he is a well-known art critic. He has been teaching at Shandong Normal College in China for more than 30 years.

In this portrait, Zhang used Chinese traditional media such as ink, rice paper and brush to execute the sketch. Shading was created through wet washes. Nevertheless, it has the same kind of effects as found in Western charcoal drawings. The sitter, Mr. Tagore, was a student in Beijing studying Chinese literature in the late 1940s. There he met many budding Chinese artists who later became famous. Zhang must have been a friend of Tagore. They might even have been schoolmates. In his portrait, Tagore appears to be a serious person who concentrated on his Chinese studies, which corresponds to the artist's inscription. (M.Wu)

no. 2: Ye Qianyu (1907-83), "Nepalese Women"

Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 21" x 13½"

Inscription: Third month, 37th year (1948), Ye Qianyu, followed by the seal of the artist."

Ye Qianyu is from Tung lu, Zhejiang. His father was the owner of a dry goods shop. For several generations before his father's, the Ye family was wealthy and powerful. When young, his relatives could still afford to invite painters to their homes. Under such exposure, Ye learned to paint at a young age. Later, he became the most popular cartoon artist in Shanghai. During World War II, he dedicated his talent to producing propaganda cartoons against the Japanese. At the end of the war, he was stationed at the border between China and the southeast Asian countries.

In this picture, Ye painted two women from Nepal seated on the ground, evidently the result of his direct experiences and observations in the Himalayan countries. (M. Wu)

Plate 1: He Yi, "Dancing Girl" copied from the Dunhuang Caves

Hanging scroll, color on paper, 26" x 19"

Inscription: Artist's signature and seal.

The dancing figure in richly colored costume, jewelled ornaments and long, sinuous scarves, is among the thousands of motifs to be found on the painted walls and ceilings of the Dunhuang Caves in Gansu Province. The dried desert atmosphere, the isolation of the location and, in some cases, the sealing off of caves by falling debris have combined to preserve the freshness of the colors for more than a millenium. The caves were an important landmark in the introduction of Buddhism into China from India, and a pilgrimage site for Buddhist believers for centuries. Chinese artists rediscovered the caves during the 1930s and 1940s while they searched for new and fresh motifs from within China's ancient painting tradition. Exhibitions of their copies of the murals brought them once again to the attention of the Chinese.



Plate 1 no. 3: He Yi, "Dancing Girl"



**Plate 2:** Xiao Sun (1883-1944), "Landscape After Ni Tsan" (1301-74)

Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 49" x 13"  
 Inscription: Artist's signature and seal. Dated: Gui wei, (1943), second month.

Xiao was among the traditionalist painters working in Beijing in the early 20th century. He was influenced by the "orthodox" style of Wang Hui (1632-1717) of the Qing Dynasty. Xiao was born in Anhui, which during the Qing Dynasty was the home of two schools of art: the Huangshan school which emphasized painting of Mt. Huang, as had the Qing painter from Anhui, Mei Qing (1623-97), and the much loved "individualist" painter, Daoji (1630-1707), and the Xinan School which followed the style of Ni Tsan, an example of which is shown here. In 1927, Xiao was made professor of Chinese painting at the National Academy of Art in Beijing, where he remained until the beginning of the Sino-Japanese conflict. (See *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting*, p. 18-22).

Plate 2 no. 4: Xiao Sun, "Landscape After Ni Tsan"

**Plate 4:** Xu Beihong (1895-1953), "Horse"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 33" x 12½"  
Inscription: Artist's signature and seal.

"From an overview of the development of modern Chinese painting, Xu stands out as the single most important figure in the introduction of Western ideas, ideas which still play a strong role in the contemporary situation."<sup>1</sup> Xu began early as a rural portrait painter, but by age 17 his talent was such that he began teaching at local schools in his native territory of I-xing, Jiangxi province.

In 1917, again between 1919-27 and during the 1930s, Xu traveled abroad. While in Paris during the 1920s, he enrolled as a private student of the realist painter, Dagnan-Bouveret. There, Xu was able to master the demanding skills required for realistic depiction. He also studied at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts, the Academy Julien and in Berlin under Kampf, who turned him to animal studies at the zoo.

An important voice in art circles in the capitals of Nanking and Peiping during the 1930s, Xu was critical of traditional painting for its dependency on ancient masters, and urged in its place a solid education in techniques of naturalistic representation. He strongly encouraged his students to paint highly realistic scenes often of mural size taken from heroic moments in China's past.

After 1929, he returned to traditional methods of painting and began to search for a synthesis between Eastern and Western styles. The subjects he chose were often animals such as horses, oxen, donkeys and sheep. Building on his background in the Chinese literati style and in Western techniques, he was able to depict anatomically correct figures, using the fluid lines of the traditional brush.

1. *Trends in Modern Chinese Paintings*, p. 91-94.



Plate 4 no. 6: Xu Beihong, "Horse"



Plate 3 no. 5: Zong Qixiang, "Congqing at Dawn"

Plate 3: Zong Qixiang, (1917- ), "Congqing at Dawn"  
Hanging Scroll, ink on paper, 15¼" x 22"

Inscription: "Memento for Mr. Tagore, 1948, Qixian."

Zong Qixian is from Jiangsu Province. Little is known about his life and activities. He excelled in Chinese painting, and after the revolution in 1949, began to teach at the Beijing Central Art Academy, the leading school in China. He was still living in 1980.

This painting was done just before the Communist Revolution. After the second World War, many painters who followed Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist government to Sichuan stayed. They continued to produce works in a style that was popular during the second World War. This style was initiated by a group of Chinese artists who studied in Paris, but later denounced Western painting and began to paint in the Chinese style. Nevertheless, their Western training could not be totally extricated from their work, which reflects Western perspective and chiaroscuro. Zong's work, though in the ink medium, is more Western in style. His is a faithful depiction of the city in early morning, when people begin their daily activity. (M. Wu)

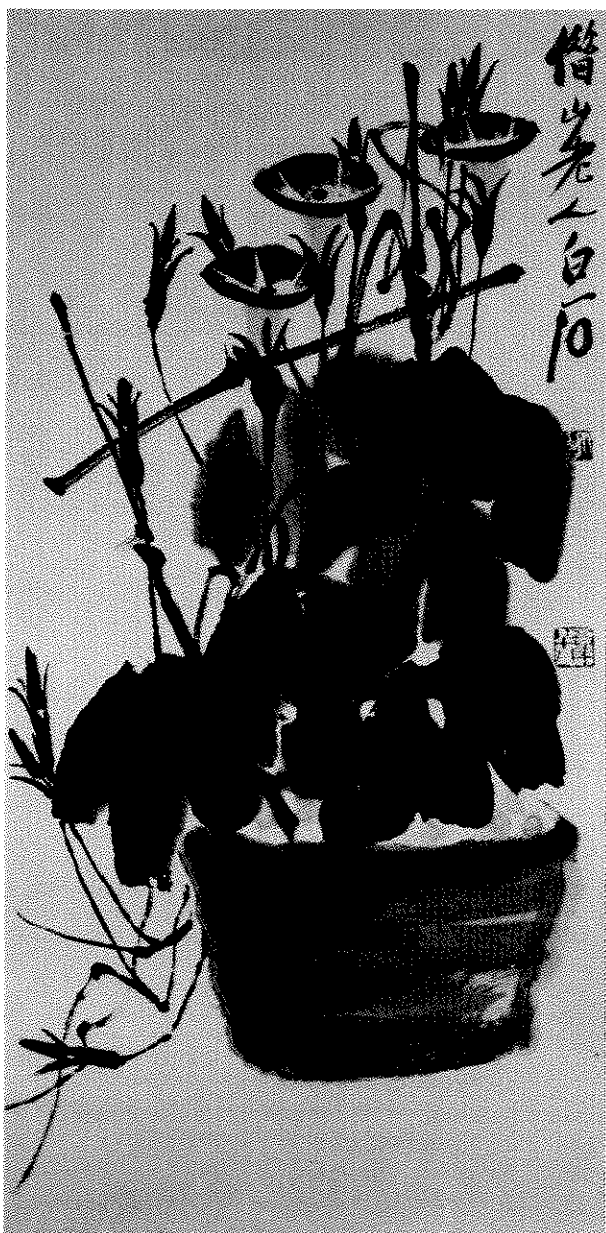


Plate 5 no. 7: Qi Baishi, "Morning Glories"

Plate 5: Qi Baishi (1863-1957), "Morning Glories"  
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 27" x 12½"

Inscription: Artist's signature and seals.

Qi's contribution to modern Chinese painting is his unique blend of the folk tradition with strong brushwork. Qi began as a folk artist; while still young he apprenticed to a cabinet maker whose specialty was decorating the furniture he constructed with figures. Qi soon tired of repeating the same ones over and over again, and began to elaborate his designs with fruits and flowers, or changing the expressions on the faces of characters from folk tales to fit the scene being illustrated. Besides carving and painting, Qi also became interested in seal carving and calligraphy, and along the way received instruction in the classics. He studied poetry, and accrued the knowledge and background that allowed him to comfortably participate in the Beijing literati circles. (See *Chinese Aesthetics and Qi Baishi*).

**Plate 6: Qi Baishi (1863-1957), "Crabs"**

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 26½" x 13¼"

Inscription: Artist's signature, seal and dated 1950.

Qi's favorite subject matter from an early age consisted of such things as beetles, bees, dragonflies, mantises, crickets, flies, even mosquitoes. He filled his paintings with the most common objects of daily life using a broad, almost rustic type of brushwork and rich, opaque colors. Despite his international reputation, he never abandoned his homespun style of painting, poetry and calligraphy.

**Plate 7: Qi Baishi (1863-1957), "Frogs"**

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 40½" x 13¼"

Inscription: "Dedicated to Tagore, from the artist, with his seal, dated 1948."

The first three Chinese characters in the inscription are Tagore's name in Chinese, given to him when he was a student. Tagore mentions in his "Story" being present and watching as the venerable master painted these frogs under sheltering leaves.



Plate 6 no. 8: Qi Baishi, "Crabs"



Plate 7 no. 9: Qi Baishi, "Frogs"



Plate 8 no. 10: Li Kuchan, "The Heron"

**Plate 8: Li Kuchan (1898-1983), "The Heron"**

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 50" x 18 1/4"

Inscription: Not dated, but apparently painted for someone else with the comment, "one lonely heron looks down from the branch of a willow tree without dense foliage," signed and sealed by the artist.

Li was a favorite student of Qi Baishi. Despite his close relationship with Qi, and having been a classmate in earlier years of Mao Zedong, Li's later career suffered the vicissitudes of many artists who were subjected to re-education under the new regime.

"In 1945, at the end of World War II, Li Kuchan was asked to join the faculty of the Beiping Art College as a professor. After Liberation in 1949 he, like most other professors, stayed on at what would come to be called the Central Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied Marxism-Leninism and underwent ideological transformation. Li Kuchan became a classic victim of the regime when bird and flower painting was condemned as bourgeois in the early 1950s. Li was demoted to a position as a gatekeeper and suffered a year of humiliation. Then he regained his teaching position, but his salary was reduced from 30 yuan (approximately \$20) to 6 yuan (approximately \$4) a month. This placed Li and his family in an impossible situation; they could not even eat on such a small salary. Finally, after selling his furniture and art collection, he appealed to his former classmate, Chairman Mao, who helped a little.

"My art was often interrupted before and after Liberation," Li said. During the Cultural Revolution, at age 73, he was sent to the countryside to do physical labor and study Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. After he was recalled in late 1971 by Zhou Enlai, he painted *Lotus Pool* for the new wing of the Beijing Hotel. But in 1974 that painting was seized and exhibited in the Black Painting exhibition. Because there were eight lotus flowers in the painting, the Gang of Four claimed it was an attack on the eight model revolutionary operas."<sup>1</sup>

More than simply surviving, Li achieved a high place within the art world by the end of his life and was able to enjoy "the perquisites of a high cadre, with a good apartment and even a private telephone."<sup>2</sup>

This painting is typical of his very free brush style in the *xieyihua* "Impressionistic traditional ink technique" and of his preference for subject matter taken directly from nature. Blots of wet, diluted ink form the body; the shape of the tail feathers are sketched with a few dry strokes. A secondary branch of an old willow extends beyond the edge of the painting and reappears above the heron to form a sheltering frame; sprays of long, slightly leafed willows curtain the bird on his perch. The sight of the long-billed, stilt-legged heron on the weathered old branch leaves a refreshing impression of whimsy and lighthearted humor.<sup>1, 2</sup>

**Plate 9: Li Keran, "Cowboy" (1907- )**

Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 27½" x 13½"  
Inscription: "I picked up this short flute which has no mouth of its own," dated Wuzi (1948), artist's signature and seal.

"Li is probably the best known and most revered older artist living in China today . . . Li was born into a poor family and grew up in the countryside. Neither of his parents were literate."<sup>1</sup> This subject of the water buffalo and herd boy is typical of his early subject matter and reminiscent of his early years.

In 1949 he was asked by Xu Beihong, then president of the Peiping Art College, to assume a position in the newly formed Central Academy of Fine Arts. There he met Qi Baishi and others who readily accepted him into their circles.

After liberation in 1949, Li developed his own style of landscape painting by absorbing certain Western techniques into the traditional ink style and often filled his scenes with revolutionary and historical sites, or had figures waving red flags. He also illustrated lines from Mao Zedong's poetry. Even so, he was included among the Black Painters in 1974, his characteristically deep black ink interpreted as a "revolutionary flaw." In the post-Mao era Li more or less rejected these politically oriented works as artistically unimportant.

The "Cowboy" is a child who has ridden the water buffalo into a stream or pond with a flute in his knapsack. Securing the lead rope with his bare feet, he blows whatever tune comes to mind ("the flute has no mouth of its own"). The strains soothe his half-submerged mount. The scene is one of complete harmony between boy, the animal and the music. Applying diluted ink in layers, Li has created the buffalo's neck, and back; with a thin brush line he has outlined the child. A play of pure black ink in jagged strokes suggests the craggy stump of an old tree still bearing foliage. For the inscription, Li chose an archaic style of calligraphy, which blends well with the ragged spikes of the tree.



Plate 9 no. 11: Li Keran, "Cowboy"



Plate 10 no. 12: Zhang Daqian, "The Bird"

**Plate 10: Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), "The Bird"**

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Inscription: Artist's name and date, Wuzi (1948), and seals.

Zhang was among those artists who chose to emigrate from China in 1949, but remained active in the traditional style. "He was almost an institution in himself" having appeared often in articles published in Hong Kong or Taiwan, and remaining in close contact with the Chinese cultural elite in the West.

Zhang belonged to a prominent family from Sichuan Province. One day he was kidnapped by a group of bandits on his way home from school, but fast-talked them into keeping him as their secretary, waiting for the moment to escape. After this adventure, his family sent him to study in Japan where he took up textile manufacturing and design in Kyoto. He returned to Shanghai after four years where he began a serious study of calligraphy and painting. Many early paintings were inspired by the old masters. Among his vast collection of art were many works by the two great Individualist painters of the early Qing Dynasty, Zhu Da and Daoji. One of Zhang's major contributions was to help revive the styles of these two artists in the 20th century. This simple rendering in monochrome ink of "The Bird" is typical of the abbreviated compositions and richly varied ink tones found in works by Zhu Da and Daoji.

(See *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting*, pp. 99-104)

no. 13: Tian Shiguang (1916- ), "Night Blooming Cereus"

Hanging Scroll, ink and color on paper

Inscription: "On a mid-summer night in 1948, my night blooming cereus flowered into full bloom. Therefore, I painted this after the natural plant in front of the rainy window in my Wen Ying (Listening to the Oriole) Studio, Liu Lang (Willow and Wave) Village."

Signed: Painted and Recorded by Tian Shiguang, with two seals of the artist on the left side of the signature. A second inscription was added later: "On a long summer day in 1949, I happened to be at the East Hall and met Mr. Tagore. He asked me to inscribe my old work. I (presented it to him) and waited for his comments."

Tian Shiguang was from Beijing. Renowned for his Chinese painting, he taught at the Central Art Academy, the leading art college in Beijing for many years. He was still living in 1980.

In this painting, Tian painted two full blooming cereus which lasted only for a very brief period of time in the evening. In China cereus has been compared symbolically with fleeting glory which appears and then quickly disappears. To create an evening atmosphere for his work, Tian had the whole background washed into a grayish color. White powders were used to depict the petals. It is a realistic painting. It seems that in painting these plants the artist adapted watercolor techniques from the West. (M. Wu)

no. 14: Chen Ji, "Plum Blossoms"

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 38" x 12½"

Inscription: "Outside in the village there is still snow on the ground but in my yard the plum blossom already shows signs of early spring. Given to Jian Qiu, to an honorable elder from your humble friend; beginning of winter, Xinsi (1941).

Over the centuries, plum blossoms have ranked among the favored subjects for Chinese painters. For the literati, the plum was considered one of the three gentlemen along with the pine and bamboo. The pine represented longevity; the bamboo, resilience. The plum blossom came to symbolize courage and fortitude. The gentle pink flowers appear on ice-covered branches while the wintry blasts of winter still blow. Coming before all the others, the flowering plum bears its welcome message of the coming of spring. Perhaps this was presented by the artist to a friend as a sign of good things to come. For Tagore, a painting of one of the three gentlemen for his collection was a natural choice.

no. 15: Lu Yingshan, "Tao Yuanming"

Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 51½" x 26½".

Inscription: "Tao Yuanming appreciating the flowers along the east fence."

Tao Yuanming was a poet from the Period of Division (220-581) whose "Peach Blossom Spring" became a classic quoted often by later writers and frequently illustrated by artists. In this short prose poem Tao Yuanming seems to express his desire for an earthly utopia. The figure of the gentleman scholar in Lu's painting resembles the models found in such painting manuals as *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual*. Lu has used sharp angular brush lines to

suggest the volume and folds of the long robes. Tagore's study of Chinese literature in Beijing undoubtedly drew him to the subject of this painting.

no. 16: Liu Kuiyao, "Horse Under Willow Tree"

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper

Inscription: Artist's signature and seal.

Liu's birth date and place of birth are unknown. He was active during the late 1940s and his painting career lasted at least into the 1950s. He participated in two national exhibitions. The first one was in 1953, the second in 1959. It seems his activity was focused on the northern part of China. Since the two shows were all sponsored by the Central Art Academy in Beijing, it is quite possible that he was a professor of that institute.

In this painting, the horse is standing by the water under a slanting willow tree. The animal is shown from the hindquarter with its back turned towards the viewer. Subdued colors in this piece create a soft, pleasant spring scene. The realistic depiction reflects the modern training of the artist. (M. Wu)

no. 17: Chen Yushan, "Chrysanthemums"

Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 21½" x 7⅞"

Inscription: "For Tagore to appreciate, 39th year of the Republic (1950)."

The chrysanthemum is an autumn flower and a frequent subject in Chinese painting. What is unusual is that the artist dated the painting using the year of the Republic rather than according to the post-revolutionary system.

no. 18 Wang Yun, "Lotus"

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 38½" x 12½"

Inscription: "Autumn in the capital while visiting a guest house" autumn 1914 (?)."

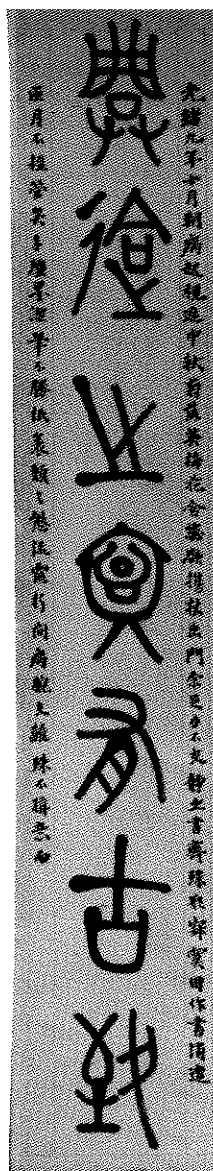


Plate 11 no. 19: Wu Dazhen, "Calligraphy in the Seal Style"

**Plate 11:** Calligraphy in the Seal Style by Wu Dazhen  
**Inscription:** Wu indicates that he wrote this in the 10th month of Kuaishi, c. 1905. At the first of this month, Wu was recovering from an illness and went into the courtyard to look at the moon during the moon-viewing festival. He was too ill to write well, but to accommodate Yi Yun, and to quiet his earnest requests, Wu wrote this reluctantly not having full command of his hands and fingers.

The Seal Style is that which was used in the inscriptions in bronze vessels made during the Shang (c. 1750-1027 B.C.) and the Zhou (c. 1027-220 B.C.). Shang bronzes were generally designed and cast for ritualistic uses; the inscriptions were usually short. In the later Zhou period, bronze vessels often made for more secular and political uses contained lengthy inscriptions describing the conditions under which a vessel was commissioned to be made. This ancient style is practiced even today by experienced calligraphers as an art form. Often brush lines are narrow and rigid appearing in imitation of the lines incised into the hard bronze surface with sharp carving tools. Here, Mr. Wu's own inscription along the margin of the scroll provides a striking contrast between the harder Seal Script and his own hand.

**Plate 12: Calligraphy in the Clerical Style by Qian Tongren**

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Signed: Calligraphy by Qian Tongren, followed by two seals of the artist."

Inscription:

"We met on a beautiful terrace under the moonlight.  
By the (tall) grasses, we opened jar after jar of wine  
that night.  
Perhaps we will feel groggy tomorrow when we recover  
from drunkenness.  
(No one feeds) my hungry crane, it could only peck at  
the mosses.  
Clad in white with plain silk-shawl, (this person) is  
from the family near the Jade River.  
His pure sincerity is stoic but without any  
malevolence.  
(An ordinary person who likes) the colorful prune  
blossoms of springtime can distinguish his  
uniqueness,  
Because he encourages people on a snowy day to look  
for plum flowers."

(Lines from a verse by Su Shi (1036-1101))

Qian was from Shanghai. His sobriquet was Tongren.  
Being the son of a famous scholar-artist, Qian Daxin  
(1728-1804), he passed the provincial civil service  
examination and became a *zhuren* in 1810. Later, he was  
appointed a district magistrate. In addition to his talent in  
executing calligraphy and carving seals, he excelled also in  
mathematics and astronomy.

This calligraphic scroll, written in clerical script, can be  
considered a representative piece of Qian's achievements  
in studying ancient calligraphy. Each character has been  
carefully balanced. The strokes are clear-cut and firm, a  
sign of high attainment in brushmanship. (M. Wu)

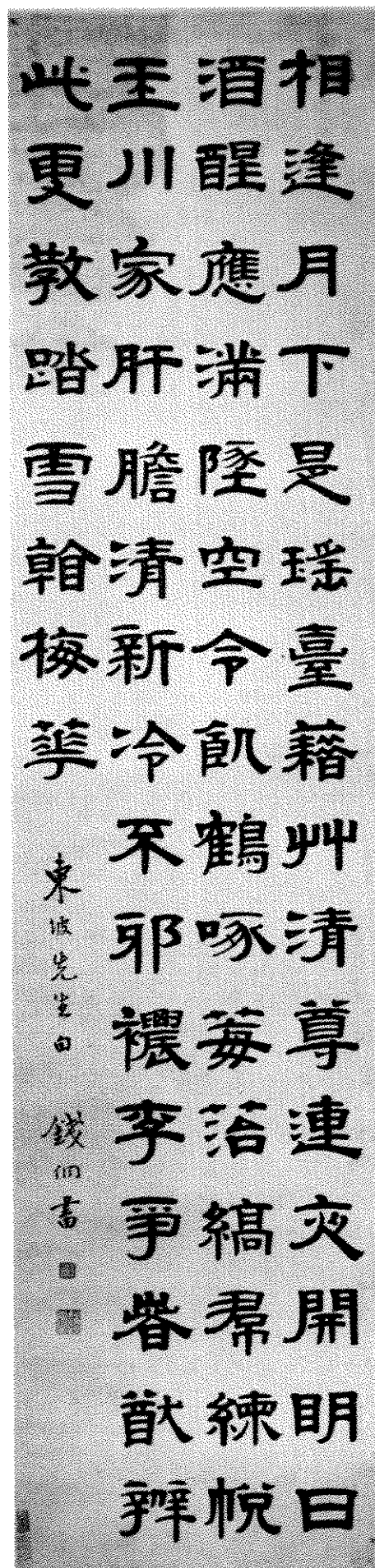


Plate 12 no. 20: Qian Tongren, "Calligraphy in the Clerical Style"

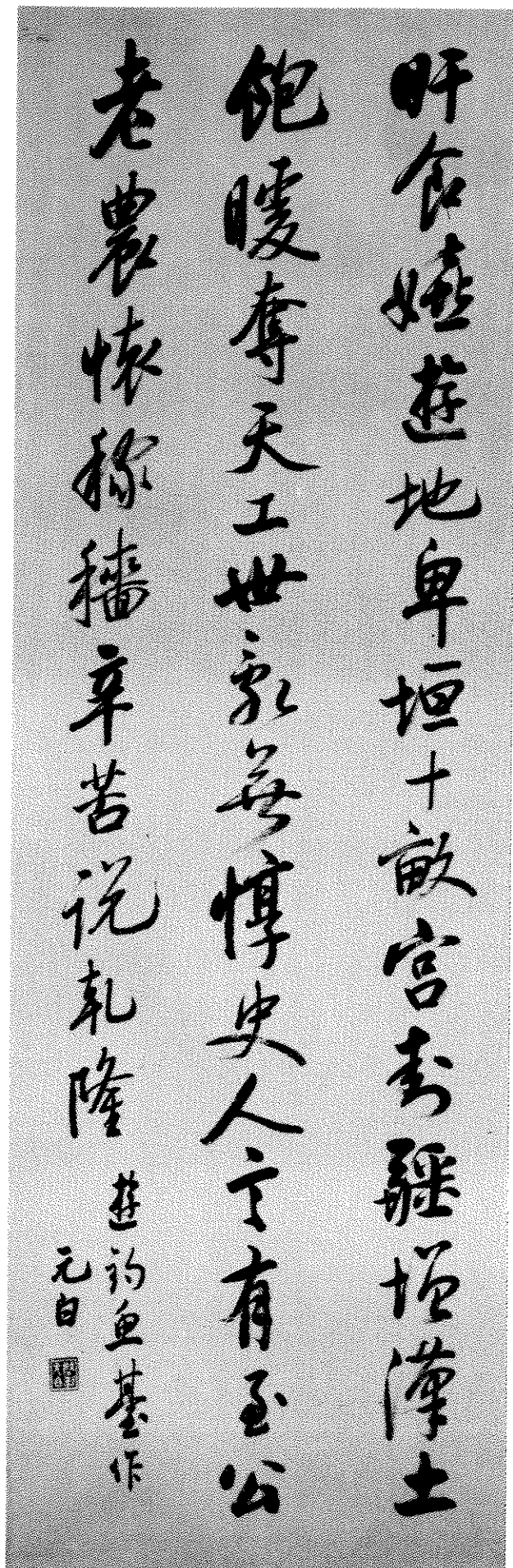


Plate 13: Calligraphy in the Running Style by Qi Yuanbai  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Signed: Yuanbai (Qi gung's style name), followed by one seal of the artist.

Inscription: "This was the place where (the emperors) used to have their picnic excursions. On the 10-acre flat land, many places once stood. The (activities may have) changed Chinese territory and dominion. The luxurious life (of the imperial family) rivaled that of god's. (Nevertheless,) at times of disorder, few officials remained patriotic and loyal to the throne. The public opinion perhaps best reflects justice and fairness. A garrulous, old farmer working on this (deserted) land indignantly talked (to me) about the old days during the Qian lung reign (1736-1796).

I composed the verses after I visited the Tiao Yudai (The Fishing Terrace)."

Qi is from Beijing. From his unusual family name, one can tell that he is a Manchu. He received a traditional Chinese education, but later entered modern school and graduated from the distinguished Beijing University. He has a good knowledge of Chinese painting. For 40 years, he has been teaching at the Beijing Normal University. Today, he is one of the few respected experts in China who could authenticate old Chinese paintings.

This work of calligraphy was composed and written by Qi. The Fishing terrace is located inside of the city of Beijing near the old palace. It used to be part of the imperial garden where the emperors went fishing and boating. Many historical events happened there during the Qing Dynasty. In the early 1950s, Chairman Mao Zedong stayed there. Today, it is the location of luxurious guest houses for entertaining foreign dignitaries. (M. Wu)

**Plate 14:** Calligraphy in the Running Style by He Xiao Zhi (1799-1873)

Pair of narrow hanging scrolls, ink on paper

Signed: He Xiao-zhi, followed by two seals of the artist

Inscription: "The cold and lonely thoughts of snow and moon followed my steps.

Supporting my chin with my hand, the delightful scenery of mountain and stream came into my imagination."

He was from Henan Province. He passed the civil service examination and became a *jinsbi* in 1836. He later served as an official editor at the Manchu court. He was an expert on inscriptions found on ancient stone stelae and bronze vessels. Although he used ancient calligraphic examples as models, his expressive work has a unique individuality. This is especially true for his calligraphy written in clerical script which is treasured by collectors. This couplet represents his accomplished calligraphy done in running script. (Mu. Wu)

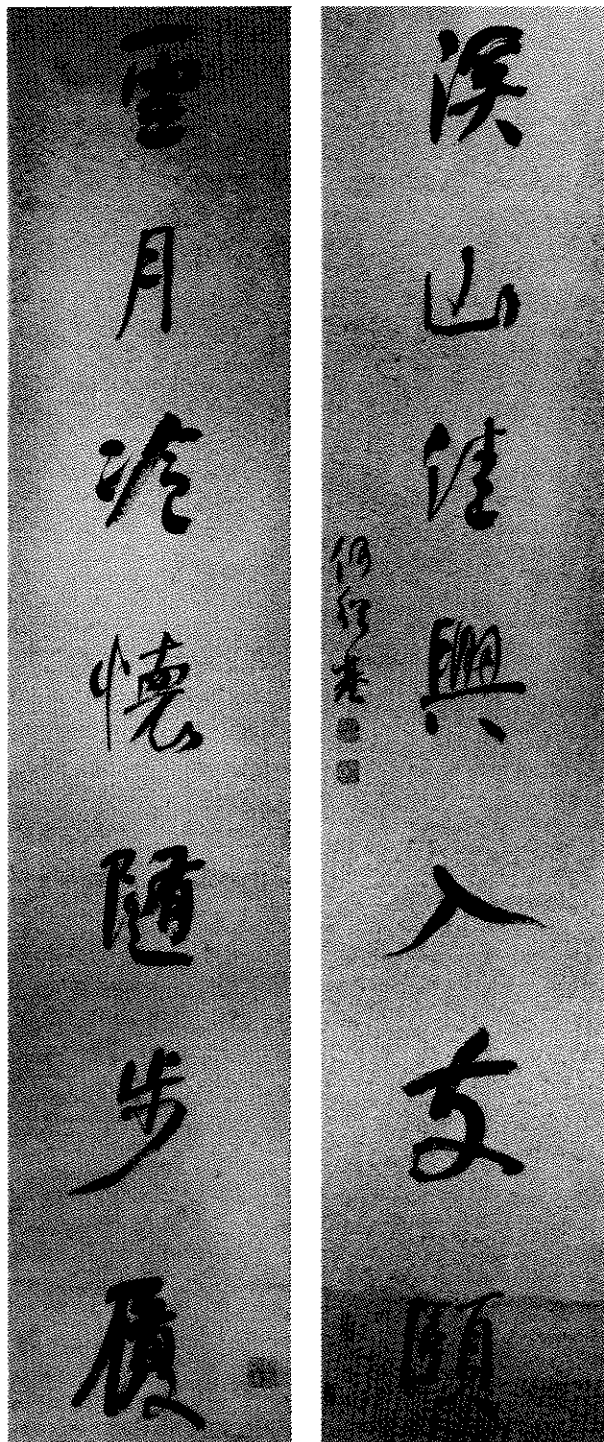


Plate 14 no. 22: He Xiao Zhi, "Calligraphy in the Running Style"

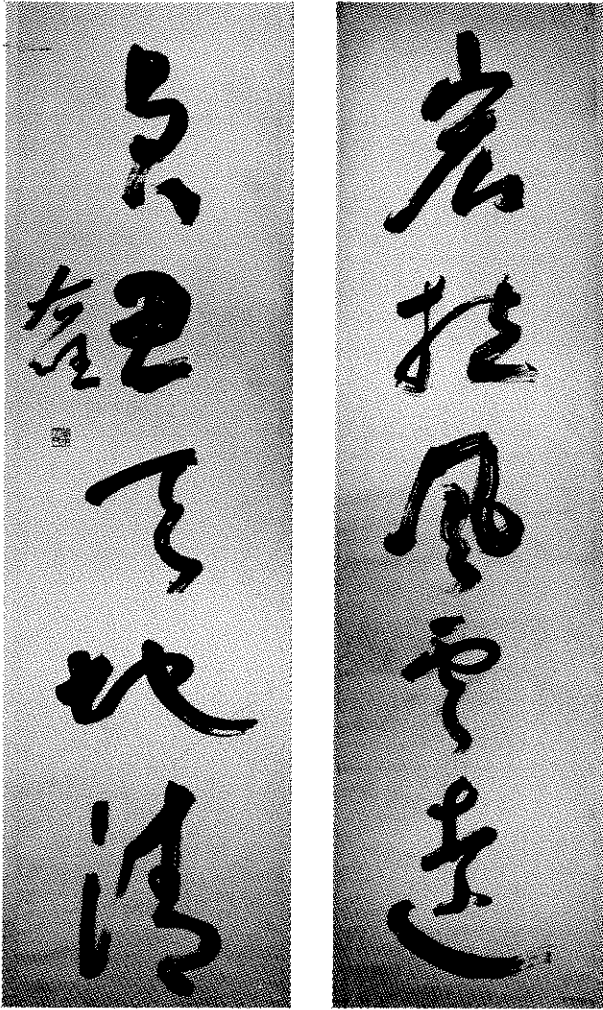


Plate 15 no. 23: Yu Youren, "Calligraphy in the Cursive Style"

**Plate 15:** Calligraphy in the Cursive Style by Yu Youren (1879-1957)

A pair of narrow hanging scrolls, ink on paper

Signed: Yu Youren, followed by one seal of the artist.

Inscription: "(Your) ambitious plan is as extensive as the faraway winds and clouds.

(Your) virtuous ideology is as pure as heaven and earth."

Yu was from Sanyuan, Shaanxi. Born into the cultural background of a family of educated landowners, he received a sound calligraphic training at an early age. As a young man, Yu engaged in the revolution against the Manchu court and later held high positions in the Nationalist government.

Being a famous calligrapher, he was known for his works done in cursive script. He also did extensive research on the history of cursive script. Thus, his calligraphy although free and spontaneous, reflects the intellectual nature of Chinese characters. This couplet represents his early work done in the 1940s. (M. Wu)

**Plate 16:** Calligraphy in the Wild Cursive Style, by Zhang Shuitu

Hanging Scroll, ink on paper

no. 25, 26, 27: "Lord of the Ghosts," "Tortoise and the Pythos" and "Guanyin," rubbings of stone carvings attributed to Wu Daozi (?-792)

no. 25: "Lord of the Ghosts" rubbing from a stone stele  
Inscription: (incised on the upper right corner)  
"Drawn by Wu Daozi; District Magistrate, Zhao Dai, from the east part of Shandong, had (this picture) incised.

The spirit of the Heng mountain,  
Embodied as the Lord of the Ghosts.  
Holding his shining lance,  
Moving as swiftly as wind and thunder.  
He pacifies the monsters and exterminates the  
malicious ones.  
He proclaims the severity of heaven's wrath.  
He protects the land of the country and provides  
eternal peace to the people."

Incised on the upper left corner:

"On the rock of Mount Heng, work of a famous, early master has been incised. Is there anyone who dares not submit to the majestic spirit of the Lord of the Ghosts? District Magistrate of Chu yang" (the name and seal after this title are illegible).

Wu Daozi was the most celebrated painter during the eighth century. Recorded in old books dealing with Chinese painting, there are many legendary episodes concerning his painting career. Due to his illustrious fame he was usually referred to as the Painting Sage. Based on the record, Wu used a kind of linear work which was compared with the long leaves of the *chun* plant, an edible water plant. Today there are no extant ancient works by Wu. A few incised figures found on ancient stone stelae attributed to Wu perhaps can provide an example of his work.

In this rubbing, the figure is composed of flexible and modulated lines which resemble the leaves of the *chun* plant. All the lines are well-organized and clearly defined. The floating drapery and muscularity of the figure creates a powerful sense of motion. With gaping mouth and sweeping hair, the dynamic figure resembles a vigorous, roaring lion. Although it is almost impossible to confirm that this figure is indeed from the hand of Wu Daozi, the superb quality does justify the attribution.

Due to the popularity of the painter, excessive rubbings were made from this picture and resulted in the obscured areas on the lower section and minor damages on the surface of the stone. This rubbing, with the figure's face, is still considered to be rare and valuable. It has been published in many books as an example of Wu Daozi's style. (M. Wu)

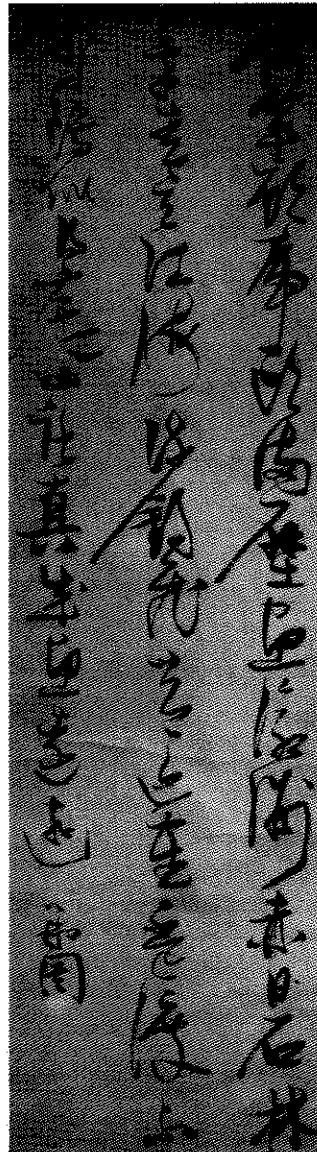


Plate 16 no. 24: Zhang Shuitu, "Calligraphy in the Wild Cursive Style"

no. 28, 29: Wu-clan ancestral shrine stone-relief, Later Han Dynasty (1st century a.d.).

"Architecture designed to house the rites of ancestry worship existed in a variety of forms in ancient China. This Wu-clan ancestral shrine was an above-ground stone structure at the site of the clan tomb in Jiaxiang, Shandong Province. According to a stele inscription, five shrines to the Wu dead had been built in succession from the year 147. Archeological research has by now been able to reconstruct three of the five, beginning with the shrine of Wu Liang. . . . As a whole, the stone carvings of the Wu-clan ancestral shrine site represent tales from myth, legend and history, with themes consisting mainly of filial piety, feminine propriety and other moral dictates. A didactic tone dominates throughout. The tablets were carved by a method of negative relief whereby the positive images were left at the level of the brilliantly water-polished stone surface while the surrounding spaces were chiseled away. The carving is extremely shallow, and the background is uniformly worked in minute parallel lines."<sup>1</sup>

1. *A History of the Art of China: Chinese Painting*, pp. 155-56)

no. 30: "Bodhidharma" rubbing of a stone carving, 44" x 21"

## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS EFFECTING MODERN CHINESE ART

- 1906 First art department established in the Nanking High Normal High School
- 1911 End of Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Chinese Republic
- 1912 Beginning of the New National Painting Movement
- 1913 Li Hsun's "Draft for Opinions on the Propagation of Art," which began to recognize the social function of art
- 1917 "Colloquial Language Movement" in literature; First Chinese students sent to Japan to study Western art styles
- 1919 First Chinese art students leave for Europe
- 1920 The New Culture Movement
- 1925 Opening of the Palace Museum
- 1926 New Art Movement proposed by Lin Feng-mien
- 1927 First art students sent to Europe to study, including Xu Beihong
- 1929 National Academy of Art established; First National Exhibition of Fine Arts held in which half the entries were traditional-style and half Western-style; Xu Beihong returns from Europe
- 1931 Manchurian Incident; Chinese Painting Association established
- 1935 International Exhibition of Chinese Art in London, which elevated appreciation of Chinese art to level of Western art
- 1937-45 Sino-Japanese War
- 1942 Mao Zedong's "Talks on Art in the Yennan Forum"
- 1946 Xu directs Beijing Art Academy
- 1949 Founding of the People's Republic of China

## AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The catalog entries were written by Bonnie Abiko, Oakland University assistant professor of art and art history, and Marshall Wu, curator, University of Michigan Art Museum. I wish to express my appreciation to Marshall Wu for researching the biographies of several of these modern Chinese painters. Many of these artists were young contemporaries of Amitendranath Tagore, and had not yet made a name for themselves. Even though many have achieved high positions within the art academies, their careers can only be pieced together by referring to several different sources.

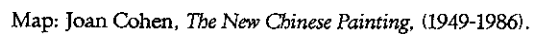
I am also indebted to Margaret Fine, Chinese language instructor at Oakland University, for translating several inscriptions on paintings and guiding me through the intricate field of the Pinyin transliteration system. Any such errors are my own.

B.A.

# EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. Zhang Heyun (1918- ) "Portrait of Mr. Tagore"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 13¼" x 9½"
2. Ye Qianyu (1907-83), "Nepalese Women"  
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper,  
21" x 13½"
3. **Plate 1**, He Yi, "Dancing Girl" copied from the  
Dunhuang Caves  
Hanging scroll, color on paper, 26" x 19"
4. **Plate 2**, Xiao Sun (1883-1944),  
"Landscape After Ni Tsan" (1301-74)  
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper,  
49" x 13"
5. **Plate 3**, Zong Qixiang, (1917- ),  
"Congqing at Dawn"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 15¾" x 22"
6. **Plate 4**, Xu Beihong (1895-1953), "Horse"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 33" x 12½"
7. **Plate 5**, Qi Baishi (1863-1957),  
"Morning Glories"  
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper,  
27" x 12½"
8. **Plate 6**, Qi Baishi (1863-1957), "Crabs"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 26½" x 13¼"
9. **Plate 7**, Qi Baishi (1863-1957), "Frogs"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 40½" x 13¼"
10. **Plate 8**, Li Kuchan (1898-1983), "The Heron"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 50" x 18¼"
11. **Plate 9**, Li Keran (1907- ), "Cowboy"  
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper,  
27½" x 13½"
12. **Plate 10**, Zhang Daqian, (1899-1983),  
"The Bird"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper
13. Tian Shiguang (1916- ),  
"Night Blooming Cereus"  
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
14. Chen Ji, "Plum Blossoms"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 38" x 12½"
15. Lu Yingshan, "Tao Yuanming"  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 51½" x 26½"
16. Liu Kuiyao, "Horse Under Willow Tree"  
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
17. Chen Yushan, "Chrysanthemums"  
Hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper,  
21½" x 77/8"
18. Wang Yun, "Lotus"  
Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper,  
38½" x 12½"
19. **Plate 11**, Calligraphy in the Seal Style  
by Wu Dazhen  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 47" x 7¾"
20. **Plate 22**, Calligraphy in the Clerical Style  
by Qian Tongren  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 53½" x 13"
21. Calligraphy in the Running Style by Qi Quanbai  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 30" x 12¾"
22. **Plate 14**, Calligraphy in the Running Style  
by He Xiao Zhi (1799-1873)  
Pair of narrow hanging scrolls, ink on paper,  
62" x 12¼"
23. **Plate 15**, Calligraphy in the Cursive Style  
by Yu Youren (1879-1957)  
Pair of narrow hanging scrolls, ink on paper,  
75" x 21½"
24. **Plate 16**, Calligraphy in the Wild Cursive Style  
by Zhang Shuitu  
Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 59¼" x 67/8"
25. Rubbing of a stone carving attributed  
to Wu Daozi,  
"Lord of the Ghosts," 38" x 43½"
26. Rubbing of stone carving attributed  
to Wu Daozi,  
"Tortoise and the Pythos," 40" x 21"
27. Rubbing of stone carving attributed  
to Wu Daozi,  
"Guanyin," 68" x 33¼"
- 28., 29. Wu-clan ancestral shrine stone-relief,  
Later Han Dynasty (1st Century a.d.),  
13½" x 61", 21½" x 69"
30. Rubbing of a stone carving, "Bodhidharma,"  
44" x 21"

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