1

Chinese Art in the Age of Imperialism

The Opium War to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, 1842–1895

INTRODUCTION

When did China, with its long history of artistic, cultural, economic, and political development, enter the modern era? When and how did its art become modern? There are many different answers to this question, depending on which of the various definitions of the term "modern" one chooses. Some factors considered harbingers of modernity, such as the dissemination of printing and literacy, the development of a highly commercialized society, or participation in intercontinental maritime trade, may already be found in Ming dynasty China (1368–1644). In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, a series of international and domestic events brought China face-to-face with the entire modernizing world on foreign terms, rather than its own. The opening of treaty ports served to catalyze China's natural cultural and economic evolution, yielding rapid and dramatic development in commerce in these cities.

In 1842 the Treaty of Nanking concluded the three-year Opium War between Britain and the declining Qing dynasty and forced open five Chinese ports—Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen (Amoy), and Guangzhou (Canton)—to both international trade and foreign residence. Over the subsequent half century, colonial powers, which came to include not only Britain but also France, the United States, and Japan, acquired trading rights in almost one hundred Chinese cities and towns. At the same time, the foreign powers won by force monetary reparations from the Qing dynasty government. Beyond free trade, they extracted from the court privileges to govern the treaty port territories by the laws and customs of their native countries.

On September 24, 1846, the British established the first of what would be called the foreign concessions to provide a special residential area for foreigners. In a few years they

were joined by French traders who settled in concessions to the south of the Yangjing Canal (now Yan'an East Road) and the Americans to the north of Suzhou Creek (also called the Wusong River). An extraterritorial administration called the Shanghai Municipal Council was established in 1854. Such semicolonial status was maintained in the nineteenth century through impressive military hardware and in the face of the extreme weakness of China's national government. These infringements to China's national sovereignty led thoughtful officials and intellectuals to examine alternatives to the unsuccessful political, economic, and educational policies then in effect. Although they were unable to save the last dynasty from its own corruption and incompetence, they laid the intellectual groundwork for China's modernization in the twentieth century. The treaty port period, which lasted from 1842 to 1946, brought a great expansion of trade with the West and also within Asia. Japan, opened to commerce by Admiral Matthew C. Perry's expedition in 1853, soon became one of China's most active trading partners. With trade came elements of foreign technology, thought, religion, and culture. The rapid commercial and cultural rise of one of the five original treaty ports, Shanghai, which grew from small city to modern metropolis, was a key factor in the creation of China's modern art world.

Perhaps even more significant than the lure of foreign trade was a domestic war, the thirteen-year Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), which particularly terrorized the citizens of China's prosperous Yangzi River delta. The troops of the Qing imperial government repeatedly failed to subdue the murderous depredations of the anti-Manchu Taiping army, led by Hong Xiuquan, the self-proclaimed younger brother of Jesus Christ and ruler of the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace. Hong Xiuquan, after learning something about Christianity from missionary tracts, sought to create a new regime based on his eccentric interpretation of Old Testament Protestantism. He located his new government at Nanjing in 1853, the year in which his army took the old southern capital and decimated the beautiful city of Suzhou, China's Venice. His attempt to conquer China took his troops north to the Manchu capital at Beijing and west to Jiangxi. Loss of life and property in the middle and lower Yangzi River valley was enormous.

As battles were fought to take and retake territory in China's heartland, cities and towns were repeatedly put under siege and plundered by the contending armies. Needless to say, the constant warfare disrupted most normal economic activity and trade. Destruction and looting dispersed art collections and private libraries. Refugees, including many of China's wealthiest and most cultured families, poured into the foreign concessions of Shanghai for safety. A rebel group, the Small Sword Society, took advantage of the disorder to seize sections of the Chinese city of Shanghai in September of 1853. In 1860, Taiping depredations throughout the prosperous provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang brought a new wave of officials, rich merchants, and even lower middle-class citizens to Shanghai. Only in 1864 did the Chinese general Zeng Guofan, with assistance from Anglo-French troops, suppress the rebellion.

It has been estimated that the population of China fell from about 410 million in 1850 to about 350 million in 1873. Many formerly important trade centers, which relied on inland transportation networks disrupted by the war, suffered severely. The flight of so many people and so much wealth to treaty port Shanghai yielded a major economic and cultural shift. By the end of the nineteenth century, the city, which enjoyed easy access by water to both China's inland cities and the Pacific Ocean, emerged as China's new mercantile hub. By the turn of the twentieth century, Shanghai's population, which numbered about 230,000 at the end of the Opium War, had grown to a million, mainly Chinese, residents. With this concentration of population and money, it soon became China's artistic center as well.

Such massive shifts in cultural geography, while not frequent, had occurred repeatedly during the course of China's long history. Throughout the previous Ming dynasty, for example, the canal city of Suzhou, a center of silk and cotton production, had served as China's artistic, cultural, and economic center. The art and culture of Suzhou, at the heart of the Jiangnan ("south of the [Yangzi] river") region, served as a cultural foil to the political dominance of the two successive capitals to the north, first Nanjing and subsequently Beijing. Later critics wrote of the contrast between literati painting of Suzhou and court painting of the capitals.

The political center moved decisively north in 1644, with the overthrow of the Ming emperors and the establishment of the Manchu Qing dynasty. The Manchus, who were not ethnically Chinese, incorporated not only the northeastern Manchu homeland of the imperial house into the Chinese empire but also the northern and western lands of other non-Chinese peoples and nations, such as Tibetans and Uighurs. Changes the Qing made in administration of the salt monopoly produced transformations in the south as well. The transportation node for shipping and taxation, the Yangzi River city of Yangzhou, enjoyed an economic boom based on the imperial salt monopoly, and with wealth came culture to the burgeoning city. Salt merchants constructed extravagant garden estates and spent fortunes on art and other cultural pursuits. By the eighteenth century, Yangzhou had rivaled or surpassed Suzhou, Nanjing, and Beijing as an artistic center.

THE SHANGHAI SCHOOL

Each economic or cultural center had its own foundations—Suzhou's agricultural wealth, Yangzhou's state salt monopoly, Nanjing and Beijing the power and resources of the court. What was new about Shanghai was its unique situation as a treaty port, or its semicolonial status. Ideally located for both domestic Chinese commerce and international trade, with convenient access to both the Grand Canal and the Pacific Ocean, not far from still-prosperous Suzhou, Shanghai became the primary node for mercantile exchange both within China and between Chinese merchants and those in foreign countries. The extraterritorial rights extracted by the foreign powers from the Qing regime yielded a hybrid city, governed according to the laws of Western countries but inhabited mainly by Chinese.

Foreign merchants dramatically expanded ocean and river shipping, and by the 1850s foreign ships crowded the Huangpu river port to unload imports of opium, fabric, and cotton thread for the Chinese market, and take on such exports as silver, silk, and tea. Despite the vast fortunes that were made in China, foreign traders never realized their most optimistic dreams of marketing the products of Europe's modern industries to every Chinese citizen. Nevertheless, European material culture, brought by traders and missionaries, became increasingly familiar to urban Chinese.

By 1876 more than two hundred foreign companies operated in Shanghai. Foreign and domestic capital poured into the city. After the first British bank, the Oriental Banking Corporation, set up an office in Shanghai in 1848, many others followed. British merchants opened five additional banks from the 1850s through 1870s; the French two in 1860 and 1899; American and German investors joined the British to open the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (now HSBC) in 1865; and four Japanese banks were opened between 1880 and 1895. The early twentieth century saw the first American bank, International Banking Corporation (later acquired by National City Bank of New York), open in 1902, followed by American Express in 1918. Belgian and Netherlandish financial institutions appeared in the early years of the century. Chinese bankers, both those who ran the traditional *qianzhuang*, or money shops, and those in the modern banking sector, also flocked to the city. By rapidly gathering capital from all parts of the country and the world, Shanghai soon became the biggest financial center in China and East Asia.

The influx of capital and entrepreneurial spirit in the second half of the nineteenth century began to transform Shanghai into an industrial metropolis, offering a hybrid of Chinese and foreign business practices, an array of goods for purchase by domestic and international markets, and the possibility of untold riches to be won. Magnificent bank buildings in the Renaissance manner, like the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, built in 1874, transformed the waterfront. The Chinese customs house, built with traditional frame construction, upturned eaves, and tile roofs in 1857, was soon dwarfed, and in 1891 was demolished and replaced by a red brick structure in the European manner.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, artists flocked to Shanghai as refugees and to seek the patronage of wealthy entrepreneurs with an interest in art. They hailed from all over China, and like their patrons were most often natives of the towns and cities of the adjacent provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui. They brought with them local styles and conventions, and sometimes continued to find particular favor in the new metropolis with collectors from their own native places. By the twentieth century, however, it was recognized that Shanghai had developed its own school of painting, one that combined the traditional skills of local areas with novel elements that aimed to please the new collectors in Shanghai.

Artists who flourished in the formative period of Shanghai painting, the 1840s and 1850s, were mainly bird-and-flower painters who worked in a manner clearly related to major schools of Ming and early Qing painting, but they often used stronger, brighter colors and more naturalistic images. Zhang Xiong (1803–1886), for example, established his fame in his native city of Jiaxing, Zhejiang, before moving to the city in 1862. He painted in an elegant manner that appealed to literati taste [fig. 1.1].[1]

1.1 Zhang Xiong (1803–1886), *Narcissus and Rock*, 1851, one leaf from an eight-leaf album, *Flowers*, ink and color on gold-flecked paper, 27.8 × 32.8 cm, Osaka Municipal Museum

1.2 Zhu Cheng (1826–1899/1900), *Bird in Flight and Flowering Branch*, 1881, album leaf, ink and colors on silk, Hashimoto collection, Shoto Museum

The literati aesthetic in painting, which developed most vigorously among scholar-painters of Jiangnan between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, was codified in early seventeenth-century criticism by Dong Qichang (1555–1636) and other scholar-painters. Although the history of *wenrenhua* (literati painting) extends from the eleventh century to the twentieth, and its practice was diverse, in the ideal it favored self-expressive brushwork over form-likeness, exploited the subtle qualities of ink rather than superficially appealing color or compositions, rejected narrative in favor of suggestion, and maintained the principle that the act of painting was for private enjoyment or self-cultivation, not sale. Essential, as well, was the assumption that a painter was a scholar who was also talented in calligraphy and poetry, and whose best work would excel in all three areas. Subtle references to the revered attainments of previous masters of poetry, painting, and calligraphy continually enriched the shared vocabulary of literati painting.

Zhang Xiong was an excellent exemplar of this way of life and art. An enthusiast of lyric poetry, he was well educated in music and particularly in the refined southern *kunqu* opera. His elegant studio in Jiaxing was filled with antique bronzes and paintings, and his reputation was such that aspiring artists sought his instruction. His slightly older Jiaxing compatriot Zhu Xiong (1801–1864) was his pupil, and the brilliant native of nearby Xiaoshan Ren Xiong (1823–1857) also sought his acquaintance. These three Zhejiang painters, who shared the same given name, were later lauded as the great painting talents of their age—the Three Xiong. They, along with Wang Li (1813–1879), laid the foundations for Shanghai school painting.

Zhang Xiong moved to Shanghai during the Taiping Rebellion, where he soon became known as one of the two most important painters in the city. Not only was his fame known far and wide, but he taught a large number of students who became well known in Shanghai, the core of whom, like Zhu Xiong and his much younger brother Zhu Cheng (1826–1899/1900), were fellow sojourners from Jiaxing. He produced an instruction manual for painting, *Zhang Zixiang ketu huagao*, and also encouraged his student Chao Xun (1852–1917) to republish the first volume of the illustrious seventeenth-century *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (1888) using newly imported lithographic methods. Both texts became extremely popular as models for aspiring painters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Opening of China's ports in 1843 and soon after those of Japan led to a rapid increase in inter-Asian cultural exchange. According to an account dated 1857, Zhang Xiong's fame had "gone beyond the ocean." His work was avidly sought by Japanese collectors, some of whom visited him in Shanghai, and his painting manual was published in Japan during his lifetime. Zhang Xiong is pictured in late Qing writings as a conservative, seeking to preserve the classical heritage, working in a style developed from those of earlier masters such as Zhou Zhimian (active circa 1580–1610) of the Ming dynasty and Yun Shouping (1633–1690) or Jiang Tingxi (1669–1732) of earlier in his own Qing dynasty. Indeed, his work, which is restrained and well ordered while still possessing an air of gentle relaxation, satisfies the highest standards of literati painting in all but one way—he used dazzling color that had an immediate appeal to his patrons. Thus, at its very start, Shanghai painting began to subtly deviate from the literati-painting aesthetic.

Zhang Xiong's many disciples responded more directly to the new environment in which they worked. Zhu Cheng learned from both Zhang Xiong and the more flamboyant Wang Li, developing an appealing, and sometimes rather sweet, personal style that became all the rage among Shanghai merchants. His bird-and-flower painting was typical of the new art: clear, sharp compositions, bright colors, and auspicious themes, as in this work of 1881, with its crisp ink contrasting with the bright, opaque color applied thickly to the surface of the highly sized silk [fig. 1.2].[2]

Ren Xiong and His Legacy

One of the most innovative Chinese artists of the nineteenth century was the short-lived Ren Xiong.[3] Although his artistic career spanned little more than a decade, the legacy of his unconventional personality and artistic brilliance, so evident in both his surviving paintings and his woodblock prints, were powerful influences on the formation of the new figure-painting style of the Shanghai school. Born in modest circumstances in the Zhejiang city of Xiaoshan, Ren Xiong studied a mixture of elite literary arts and practical skills, including poetry and the classics, along with portrait painting, archery, wrestling, and horseback riding. He was befriended by men of higher social and economic status, some of whom served in his early career as his patrons, and at their introduction married the daughter of a prominent Suzhou literatus. Friends wrote that he was straightforward, curious, and principled; he was a connoisseur of tea, could chant and compose poetry, and knew ancient philosophy. He was so passionate about music that he could not only play but also carve a seven-stringed zither (*qin*) from paulownia wood and cast a flute from iron. In those troubled times, he was recruited into the Qing military by friends who served as officials in the anti-Taiping effort. Although records are incomplete, there are suggestions that he served for a time as a military draftsman, making maps and charts, during efforts to retake the city of Nanjing from the Taipings in about 1854.

1.3 Ren Xiong (1823–1857), *Self-portrait*, undated, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 177.4 × 78.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Over the course of his brief career, Ren Xiong painted a number of striking and unusual compositions, but the most powerful of all is an undated self-portrait probably executed during the final year or two of his life [fig. 1.3]. While using the technical vocabulary he had inherited as a painter of portraits and figures, he renders his own life-size image in an arrestingly confrontational way. The artist's intent gaze,

staring out from an emaciated face, meets ours with deadly seriousness. His shoulders and folded hands are at rest but suggest latent energy, his entire body poised with the vigor of a martial artist. Yet his long fingernails, a fashion favored by artists and literati, speak to a higher social status than that of the workman or farmer.

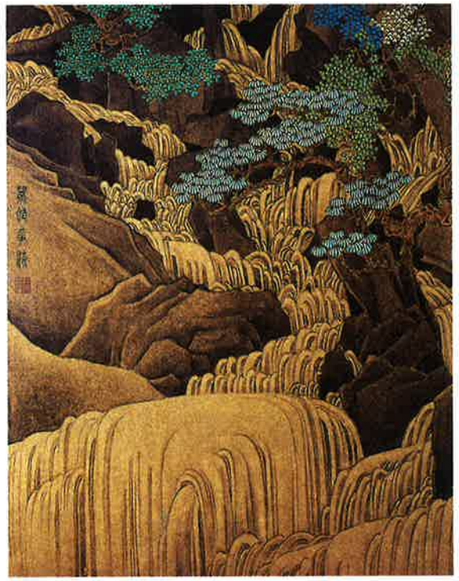
Like the flower paintings by Zhang Xiong, Ren Xiong's self-portrait is painted with ink and water-based pigments on the soft absorbent paper favored by artists of his period. His exposed shoulder, neck, and face are carefully outlined with thick and thin strokes of ink, shaded with very dry, diluted ink, and then tinted with flesh tones in the most naturalistic manner known to artists of his time. The blue stubble of his shaven forehead and hollow recession of his sunken cheeks are slightly darkened; his protruding clavicle, cheekbones, and shoulder are left pale, creating an effect of reflected light. The powerful three-dimensionality of his face and upper torso are quite intentionally juxtaposed with an extremely bold but strongly abstracted depiction of his white pants, blue tunic, and soft shoes. The highly artificial manner in which Ren Xiong painted the fabric of his garments is an art historical reference to the painting of the eccentric seventeenth-century figure painter Chen Hongshou, whose great originality had revitalized China's figure-painting tradition two centuries earlier, and who was a native of the neighboring town of Zhuji. The bold, angular outline strokes, each accompanied by a schematic band of gray shading, further energize the already highly charged image. In purely formal terms, the painting is a powerful statement of self. Although Ren Xiong's self-portrait identifies with Chen Hongshou, the immediacy of the figure's naturalistic features and facial expression speak to the present.

Ren Xiong's talent at calligraphy and literature are demonstrated in the long poetic lament he inscribed on the painting. The text speaks of disappointment and disillusionment, a man of ambitious temperament looking back at his failures rather than his successes. The intensity of his personality, so evident in the constantly changing paintings that came from his brush, emerges in a howl of frustration from this painted figure. Despite the passion behind his words, however, he remains vague, or perhaps discreet, about the specific causes of his angst. The undated text does not reveal its purpose: Did Ren Xiong paint this picture in a moment of anger, to purge his soul of an unstated worldly pain? Or, suffering from acute tuberculosis, did he write for the future, recording the despair and self-awareness of one dying much too young?

The very modern sense of alienation that one senses in the portrait itself is echoed in the inscription, where Ren Xiong laments not only his sense of failure in pursuit of reputation and success but, even more poignantly, his disillusionment with the very standards of virtue that were his birthright.

> In the vast world—what lies before my eyes?
> I smile and bow and go around flattering people to extend connections,
> but aware of what affairs?
> In the great confusion, what is there to hold on to and rely on?
> [. . .] What is more pitiful is that even though the mirror [shows] my black eyebrows
> exchanged [for white] and worldly dust covering my white head,
> I am still like a racing steed without plans.
> What is even more of a pitiable impediment is that the historians have not recorded even a single, light word about me [. . .]
> When I calculate back to my youth, I did not start out thinking this way.
> I relied on depicting the ancients to display examples [for emulation].
> [But] who is the ignorant one?
> Who is the virtuous sage?[4]

Ren Xiong was best known for figure painting and for the remarkable ways in which he synthesized themes from history, mythology, folk religion, and literature as well as his truly extraordinary reinterpretations of old themes. In the hierarchy of Chinese painting criticism of Ren Xiong's day, portrait painting was regarded as a low-class functional skill. Landscapes and flowers in a less representational style were considered to be more self-expressive and thus comprised art of a higher aesthetic level. Ren Xiong's early training was essentially that of a folk painter, but he brilliantly combined the conventions of that tradition with the more elevated arts that he learned in the company and collections of his elite friends and patrons. Although landscapes comprise a comparatively small part of Ren Xiong's body of work, his surviving paintings in that genre are remarkable. One of the most brilliant is *The Ten Myriads*, which Ren Xiong painted with vivid blue and green mineral pigments on a ground of gold leaf. The landscape imagery glows like gemstones in a golden setting, but despite its highly decorative quality achieves a breathtaking pictorial power. The tumbling waterfalls in the leaf illustrated here, rendered in a closely cropped view [fig. 1.4], cascade into the viewer's space in a surprising way. At the same time, the fine, even outlines, the carefully delineated and filled-in foliage, and the schematic shading of the rocks would be immediately recognizable to an art lover as referring to the style of Ren Xiong's seventeenth-century idol, Chen Hongshou. The emotional and decorative power of the work is thus mediated by a more intellectual response, as one marvels at both the subtle similarities and the dramatic differences between this work and that of its stylistic antecedent. The boldness of these landscapes makes this one of the most original albums of the period.



1.4 Ren Xiong (1823–1857), *Myriad Valleys with Contending Streams*, undated, one leaf from the ten-leaf album *The Ten Myriads*, ink and mineral color on gold paper, 26.3 × 20.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

A line of calligraphy on each of the ten leaves begins with the word "ten thousand" or "myriad"—for example, *Myriad Valleys with Contending Streams*, *Myriad Bamboo in Misty Rain*, and *Myriad Scepters Worshiping Heaven,* which gives the album its title. It was painted for a Suzhou collector and bears inscriptions dated 1856 by close friends of the artist, including the painter Zhou Xian. Zhou Xian refers not to its style, however, but to the early origins of the theme. In his account the Yuan literatus Ni Zan (1306–1374), famous for his calm, monochromatic images, painted a work by this title, as did the Qing dynasty orthodox artist Wang Hui (1632–1717), who was a master at building a landscape from minute, even fussy, details. Ren Xiong's bright and immediate composition was a distinctly new conception. At the same time, the luxuriousness of its materials attested to the affluence of its patron.

Gold-covered paper was used for fan paintings in the wealthy commercial city of Suzhou during the sixteenth century, but gold leaf as a ground for painting was not very common until two centuries later, after the opening of the treaty ports. Use of gold leaf was not rare in nineteenth-century Japanese art, particularly among artists of the Rimpa school. Active trade within Asia facilitated by the opening of ports to international trade expanded the range of artistic models and decorative objects an artistically ambitious artist such as Ren Xiong might have seen, likely bringing some knowledge of Japanese and European imagery.

Probably the most important surviving commission of Ren Xiong's career was his 120-leaf album painted a few years earlier in collaboration with his friend and patron Yao Xie (1805–1864), at whose home in Ningbo he lived while completing the work. Ren Xiong designed and rendered the illustrations in the album over a two-month period in the winter of 1850 and 1851. The images are based on phrases or couplets from Yao Xie's poetry. Today the paintings are mounted as ten twelve-leaf albums and are organized by general theme. The extraordinary variety of subject matter and approach suggests a familiarity with classical Chinese painting and modern folk art, as well as with Japanese and Western art, although no documents survive that enable us to know precisely what objects he may have studied. One of the loveliest paintings in the album depicts a hummingbird seen through a bamboo curtain on a late summer day [fig. 1.5]. This view, which would have been surprising to Chinese viewers accustomed to the standard conventions of Chinese bird-and-flower painting, seems to emphasize

1.5 Ren Xiong (1823–1857), *Flying Bird Seen Through a Bamboo Screen*, from *Album after the Poems of Yao Xie*, 1850–1851, one leaf from an album of 120 leaves, ink and color on silk, 27.5 × 32.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

unexpected images from the world as actually glimpsed. This leaf is perhaps one of the most poetic in the entire album—an evocative phrase suggesting a much longer text. Ren Xiong shared with contemporary Japanese artists an interest in capturing the empirical world in visual terms. One of the most effective conceits to appear in Japanese prints of the period was that of the figure viewed in silhouette through a paper screen. Ren Xiong's use of the bamboo blind as a translucent layer through which to see his transitory subject brilliantly conveys the same pleasure of hidden viewing. It was emulated by many later artists in Shanghai.

Ren Xiong's figure paintings in this album are based on a rich repertory of mythological, folk, and religious images found in temples, in book illustrations, and in the *huagao,* or hand-rendered image-catalogs passed down, often secretly, within the workshops of professional artists. Aspects of his dynamic figure style are frequently seen in the nineteenth-century popular traditions of China and Japan, including woodblock-printed pictures and temple murals. Indeed, one of Ren Xiong's major contributions to later Chinese painting was to expand the range of styles and subjects to encompass those associated with the folk tradition. His relationship with popular art was rich—he not only brought its imagery into the fine arts; he contributed to print culture through his design of woodblock illustrations. The prints have had wider circulation than his paintings and have thus been extremely important in making Ren Xiong's compositions known to later artists. This bright star of mid-nineteenth-century painting fell ill with tuberculosis in the spring of 1857 and died later in the year, leaving his final print series incomplete.[5]

Ren Xiong's unfulfilled artistic legacy was transmitted to his much younger brother, Ren Xun (1835–1893), who outlived Ren Xiong by thirty-five years. If Ren Xiong experimented with a dazzlingly wide range of styles and subjects, Ren Xun successfully followed what may be the most distinctive aspect of his style, the archaistic fine-outline manner. This style may be traced back to an early date in the history of Chinese painting, the time of the legendary figure painter Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 401), whose lines were said to resemble the strands of newly spun silk.[6] Gu's manner, and his archaic imagery, were revived in the seventeenth century by the brilliant Chen Hongshou, who protested the disorders of his own day by transforming his painted world into a golden age of distant antiquity. Chen Hongshou came from the same region of Zhejiang province as their own hometown of Xiaoshan, and both Ren Xiong and Ren Xun saw him as an artistic model. Ren Xun's undated album (inscribed later, in 1890) illustrating scenes from *The*

1.6 Ren Xun (1835–1893), *The Romance of the Western Chamber,* undated, one leaf from an album of twelve, ink and color on paper, 34 × 35.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

Romance of the Western Chamber is typical of his approach, both in its faithfulness to the Chen Hongshou style and in the subtle changes he made to accommodate his own nineteenth-century taste. The subject matter, taken from a Yuan period drama, remained popular in this era when marriages were arranged by family elders and personal choice in romance forbidden.

This story of the love at first sight between a talented young man, scholar Zhang, and the beautiful daughter of an official, Cui Yingying, was produced in local dramas and published in many different versions. Chen Hongshou designed a beautiful and psychologically powerful woodblock version of the story in the seventeenth century. The challenge of presenting *The Romance of the Western Chamber* in a new way was not easy, but Ren Xun's images have a compelling intensity. In this leaf the lovesick scholar Zhang, bent weakly over his study table, raises his writing brush over the letter he is composing [fig. 1.6]. Hongniang, the maidservant of his beloved, who was a faithful messenger for their illicit communications, looks on with sympathy. The work is painted in the particularly fine, fluid outline strokes that were used to extraordinary effect by both Chen Hongshou and Ren Xiong. Although the delicate lines are roughly the same width throughout the painting, each object is rendered in a slightly different way, the hard-edged furniture with a careful even stroke, the folds of scholar Zhang and Hongniang's robes much more softly and fluidly, and even the banana leaves in the summer courtyard with sharp black lines.

The architectural structure of the table is rendered in reverse perspective, the lines of the front and back diverging as they recede in space. This opens the surface of the desk, leaving a place for Ren Xun to display the letter paper, books, antiques, and other objects in fine detail, creating a sense of truth based on what we today might consider an alternative visual system. As in the earliest Chinese painting, and in the work of Chen Hongshou, the background is largely blank, the ground plane sharply tilted, and the environment left largely to the imagination. The contrast of this emptiness with the careful details of the young man's tasteful possessions seems to emphasize his loneliness as he writes to his beloved. The elongation of the figures, and particularly of their heads, is characteristic of Chen Hongshou's work and gives the characters their psychological intensity.

Ren Yi

Ren Xun carried forth elements of his brother's style but in general did not break new ground. It was the brilliance and originality of his student Ren Yi (1840–1895), who equaled the elder Ren Xiong in artistic accomplishment and carried the style of the deeply admired elder master forward to the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, one can argue that Ren Yi transformed the manner he inherited from Ren Xiong into one so often emulated by his contemporaries and students that it came to be thought of as the Shanghai style. Ren Yi mastered the most virtuoso techniques of the two elder Rens, but his personal style resulted from an unprecedented synthesis of the rich artistic traditions that met in Shanghai—the beautiful ink-wash painting of the literati, the appeal of Chinese folk art, the realism and bright color of Western art, the psychological intensity of Japanese prints, and the powerful techniques of rendering line in ink that he had inherited from the older Ren brothers.

Commonly called by his style name, Bonian, Ren Yi was a native of Shanyin, modern Shaoxing, Zhejiang province. He was the son of a rice merchant who also liked to paint, and Ren Yi learned the art of portrait painting from his father. Many anecdotes, but fewer facts, describe an almost miraculous talent for verisimilitude in figure painting. As a child, he was said to have shown his father a painted sketch of a visitor who came while he was away from home. The painting was so accurate that his father instantly recognized the man. Ren Bonian's father died during the Taiping troubles, in about 1861, and Ren Yi thereafter devoted himself to establishing a career as a painter.

A second commonly repeated but apparently apocryphal tale refers to his youthful brilliance and amazing skill in simulation. In this story Ren Yi found that the fastest way to make money in Shanghai was to sell fake Ren Xiong fans on the street. Ren Xiong happened to pass by and see him in the act, whereupon he quizzed the younger artist about the source of his wares. First claiming to be selling fans made by his uncle, Ren Yi found himself confronted by the real Ren Xiong, who instead of anger showed appreciation for his counterfeit nephew and accepted him as a student. Ren Xiong, who died in 1857, was said to have traveled repeatedly to Shanghai for the purpose of selling paintings, but at the time of his death Ren Yi was only seventeen and had not, according to current evidence, left home. Although many of Ren Yi's close friends from the last years of his life believed the fan story to be true, they may reflect more a recognition of the true brilliance of his talent and his mastery of Ren Xiong's style than biographical fact.

It was from Ren Xiong's younger brother and faithful follower, Ren Xun, that Ren Yi learned the outline techniques passed from older to younger brother. One of the earliest dated works on which Ren Yi's signature appears is a collective fan painting made by Ren Yi and his teacher Ren Xun, along with Zhu Xiong and others in Suzhou, before Zhu Xiong's death in 1864.[7] Ren Yi's son later recalled that Ren Yi moved to Suzhou and Ningbo in those years. Ren Yi's early work reflects quite clearly the training in fine-line painting that he received under Ren Xun's tutelage, but when Ren Yi moved to Shanghai in 1868, he rapidly began absorbing many other techniques and concepts, including those introduced by Jesuit missionaries.

The reminiscences of Catholic sculptor and watercolorist Zhang Chongren, who as a teenager studied at the Tushanwan (T'ou-sè-wé) Printing Workshop, suggests a relationship between Ren Yi and the director of this Western painting workshop at the Xujiahui (Zikawei) Catholic church. Catholicism, despite persecutions in the late Qing period, retained influence in the western suburbs of Shanghai, where the family lands of a prominent late Ming official and convert, Xu Guangqi, were located, and the area once again became an active religious center after the treaty port was opened. A Spanish Jesuit artist named Joannes Ferrer (Fan Tingzhuo; d. 1856) arrived in Shanghai on October 24, 1847, to take responsibility for designing church buildings, altars, sculpture, and paintings as well as for training Chinese assistants in drawing and painting to meet liturgical needs.[8] Ferrer was the son of a distinguished sculptor and had been sent to complete his artistic training in Rome when he entered the Jesuit order.[9] He was sent to China from Naples in 1847.

His Neapolitan colleague Nicolas Massa (Ma Yigu; 1815–

1.7 Ren Yi (Ren Bonian; 1840–1895) and Hu Yuan (Hu Gongshou; 1823–1886), *Portrait of Gao Yong*, 1877, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 139 × 48.5 cm, Shanghai Museum

1876), who had arrived the year before, taught oil painting and Latin to Chinese Christians. When Ferrer designed the splendid new churches at Dongjiadu, near the waterfront by the Chinese city, and Xujiahui, on the old Xu family lands to the west of the city, he asked Massa to paint the icons.[10] Ferrer also had the idea of establishing a school to train religious painters and sculptors, and after he began to accept apprentices at the Xujiahui workshop in 1852, he recruited Massa to teach oil painting. Their primary goal was to produce objects for religious life. Ferrer died in 1856, and the following year, Massa assumed responsibility for the Xujiahui painting and sculpture workshops. He asked their Chinese student, Lu Bodu (1836–1880), to assist him. In 1864 they established an orphanage at Xujiahui and three years later, in 1867, a school under Lu Bodu's direction, the Tushanwan Painting Atelier, was founded. The workshop trained carpenters, leather workers, tailors, sculptors, gilders, painters, weavers, and block carvers. Lu subsequently fell ill with tuberculosis and turned over daily duties to a young priest named Liu Dezhai (active circa 1869–1912), who became director after Lu's death in 1880. The Tushanwan atelier was thus administered by Liu Dezhai from about 1869 until 1912. In 1876 it also began training lithographers.

Liu Dezhai came from the Suzhou area to Shanghai as a refugee during the Taiping Rebellion. After studying with Nicolas Massa and Lu Bodu, he became a priest and joined them at the new Tushanwan atelier. During his most active period, in the 1870s and 1880s, Liu Dezhai was involved in many projects to produce Bible illustrations and religious images for churches. The oral tradition of Tushanwan artists preserves tales of an artistic friendship between Liu Dezhai and Ren Yi. That Ren Yi followed the Western practice of carrying a sketchbook to make pencil drawings provides further evidence of his interest in Western artistic practices.[11] Although such oral accounts can never be firmly verified, a portrait Ren Yi painted 1877 demonstrates a startling new realism [fig. 1.7], in a very traditional context. Ren Yi, in collaboration with his friend Hu Yuan, depicted their friend, the calligrapher Gao Yong (1850–1921), at the age of twenty-seven.

Gao Yong, in this portrait, sits on a large rock under a pine tree that has been rendered in the soft, loose brushwork typical of literati painting. In contrast to this rather abstract setting, Gao Yong's distinctive profile and facial features have been carefully outlined and modeled by Ren Yi with light color and ink to create vivid, highly naturalistic effects of volume and chiaroscuro. Even the stubble of the sitter's beard and shaven forehead, as well as the swell of his Adam's apple, are clearly visible. The single braid, or queue—required of all Chinese men as a sign of loyalty by the Manchu government—is tucked discreetly behind his

shoulder. Such a work could, and did, compete successfully with the photographic portraits then becoming popular in the city. Yet, as distinctive as Ren Yi's rendering of his friend's face might be, the figure's plain white robe completely follows the archaistic conventions of Ren Xiong and Chen Hongshou. This contrast between linear outline and coloristic modeling is further accentuated by Hu Yuan's addition of the powerfully composed old pine tree, rendered largely in strokes of thick gray ink, that dominates the central part of the picture. While towering overhead, the soft textures also provide a formal contrast to the crispness of the figural image. All elements of the collaboration work together to emphasize the thoughtful and highly naturalistic mien of the young artist, seated under a symbol of longevity, the pine, and clasping his hands elegantly over the knee of his mannered robe. Painter, calligrapher, and patron, Gao Yong was a frequent portrait subject for Ren Yi, but no other paintings are so filled with tension and life as this work from the first decade of his Shanghai period. Hu Yuan wrote the elegant inscription at right, and Gao Yong was so pleased with the work that, a year or two later, he showed it to another artist friend, Yang Borun (1837–1911), who added the inscription at left.

A second painting of 1877, *Five Successful Sons*, demonstrates Ren Yi's interest in Western effects of foreshortening and perspective as well as a newly naturalistic focus on the eyes of his six figures [fig. 1.8]. The subject itself, literally entitled *The Five Fragrant Branches of the Cassia Tree*, is highly auspicious, of a kind that might appear in folk new year's prints. In this more elegant painted form, it would have been a suitable gift to congratulate a man on the birth of a son. The painting depicts the tenth-century scholar Dou Yujun, a model of benevolence and virtue, whose five sons all passed the most difficult imperial examinations and became high officials. Depicting the wise father with his bright, diligent, and cooperative boys, such a work would appeal to the aspirations for high social status and wealth of the Shanghai merchants, but it is also typical of the uplifting themes found in much of premodern Chinese figure painting.

Figural conventions in the first part of the nineteenth century reflected a canon of beauty in which the human form was slender and almost weightless, with long faces characterized by narrow and frequently downcast eyes. Even Ren Xiong's glaring self-portrait [see fig. 1.3], striking for its challenging gaze, depicts a young man with wide epicanthal folds and narrow eyes. Ren Yi's attention in *Five Successful Sons* to the wide-eyed gazes of the boys, the bulging flesh around the eyes of the old father, the plump cheeks of his eager youngest son, and the three-dimensional qualities of

1.8 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *Five Successful Sons*, 1877, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 181.5 × 95.1 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

the figures in space—combined with his masterful outline rendering of the mannered garments and naturalistic furniture—are strikingly novel. Whether the new elements result from the artist's exploration of Western conventions or of art forms outside painting, such as popular opera, they contribute to a slightly exotic sense of hybridity in this work. The overall execution of the figures, furnishings, and vegetation, in the linear vocabulary of Ren Xun, includes oddly abstract shading of folds in the draperies and creates an antique feeling reminiscent of the classical figure painting of Gu Kaizhi. The subject of Ren Yi's painting is found in one of the best-known plebian morality texts, the *Three Character Classic*, and is thus very traditional, even conventional, but the painting's execution brings new European

1.9 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *Three Knights Errant*, 1882, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 182.1 × 48.2 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

elements into the styles of Ren Xun and Ren Xiong in a highly innovative way.

As his fame in artistic circles grew, Ren Yi had greater opportunity to study old paintings. By the 1880s he had become interested in another seventeenth-century style, that of Zhu Da (Bada Shanren, 1626–1705), that was essentially the polar opposite of his previous manner. Zhu Da's iconoclastic bird-and-flower painting in the "boneless" or ink-wash manner conveys form and volume without the use of outlines. Rather than leaving behind his previous style, Ren Yi began to bring elements executed in the boneless manner into his outline paintings. One notable example is his *Three Knights Errant* of 1882, in which the bandit's donkey is brilliantly depicted with the loose, boneless wash that Bada most frequently employed for flowers, birds, and even fish, rather than with the outline technique usually employed for painting horses [fig. 1.9].

Like *Five Successful Sons*, this is a quasi-historical narrative that had long made its way into the popular tradition, appearing commonly in performances of local opera and storytelling as well as in marvel tales of the *chuanqi* genre. Ren Yi painted this romantic story in more than one version, possibly at the request of different patrons. The historical Li Jing (571–649) was a military official of the Sui dynasty who joined the rebellion that brought down his declining dynasty. In fictional versions of Li Jing's life, Hongfunü, a woman of the Sui imperial harem, recognized his heroic talent and ran away with him. They later recruited a tough character called Curly Beard to assist in their martial mission. For his exploits on behalf of the future Tang dynasty, which became one of China's greatest epochs, Li Jing's heroism was legendary. His fictional persona, that of a colorful and virtuous bandit, had the popular appeal of Robin Hood. This painting by Ren Yi is particularly effective for its combination of previously discrete painting techniques—boneless wash for the animal, outline for the trees and figures, and rich appealing color.

Even more powerful, however, in this strikingly odd composition, is the psychological effect of the novel placement of the figures. The bold Curly Beard, astride a donkey at front left, twists his body vigorously in space to meet the gaze of the half-hidden hero, Li Jing, who peers out through a screen of branches. This theatrical placement of figures uses one of Ren Yi's most effective narrative devices—the psychological connection between characters made visible in the meeting of their gazes. Contemporary viewers might have imagined the ballads of local opera ringing in their ears as they enjoyed the painting. Ren Yi explored a wide range of subjects from the popular tradition, and in almost all cases transformed their conventional rendering.

1.10 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *Bird on a Branch*, 1882, from the twelve-leaf *Album of Figures, Flowers, and Birds*, ink and color on paper, 31.5 × 36 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing

A theme for which Ren Yi was equally well known was birds and flowers [fig. 1.10]. Like many of his figures, the white-bellied bird surrounded by blue blossoms fixes our eyes with its own penetrating gaze. Adopting a view from below, Ren Yi creates the bird's body from blank paper left in reserve against a gray ink background, one that suggests a hazy tree or rock in the background. The surface-covering composition, and the complete absence of outlines, strongly suggests Ren Yi's familiarity with Western watercolor painting, but the abbreviated, close-up composition possesses the power of poetic suggestion typical of the best Chinese painting. Despite his great technical skill, Ren Yi is unfettered by convention, and he textures the creature's plumage with variegated strokes of his own invention. Ren Yi's skillful hand and keen eye are evident throughout: in the posture of the bird, in its claws as they grasp the branch, and in the pale but crisp strokes of bamboo that cross the composition. Once again, Ren Yi transforms convention in a surprising way.

Ren Yi developed similarly novel techniques for painting in other genres, including deploying the techniques generally used in flower painting for rendering the images of animals or people. A work of 1888, *Portrait of the Shabby Official* (also called *The Cold and Sour Official*) [fig. 1.11], is a good-humored satire of the unfulfilling administrative career of the artist's friend, Wu Changshi. An aspiring Confucian official whose family had been wiped out when the Taiping Rebellion swept through his hometown of Anji, Zhejiang, Wu Changshi made his living as a teacher and

1.11 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *Portrait of the Shabby Official* (Portrait of Wu Changshi), 1888, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 164.2 × 74.6 cm, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou

low-ranking functionary during the years when he came to know Ren Yi. In this painting, Ren Yi depicted Wu Changshi in an official uniform, a long yellow gown, a black mandarin jacket, and high-soled boots. The conical Manchu hat, with its rows of red tassels, is in disarray, however, and his awkward posture is one of trepidation. The sitter himself wrote about the painting: "I asked Ren Bonian to paint a portrait for me. It is titled *Portrait of the Shabby Official*

(Suanhanwei), and [I appear] wearing a uniform and standing very properly, with hands joined in obsequious respect. The awkward appearance of the figure really makes people laugh. People who know me all immediately say, 'This must be Wu [Changshi]!' I inscribe this to make fun of myself."[12] In a poem published soon after, he described his ridiculous state, a lowly clerk sweating in the midsummer heat, tongue-tied and absurdly apprehensive before the high official: "I hemmed and hawed . . . my back bent and my arms hanging submissively. I hadn't had enough breakfast, but it was already lunchtime. Only middle-aged, I looked like an old man, my back sore and legs in pain."[13]

This portrait makes unprecedented use of puddled or boneless ink and color wash, a convention most commonly employed for depicting flowers and leaves, but here used to render the human figure. Photographic portraits of Wu Changshi attest to the uncanny likeness achieved in the face of this portrait, all the more startling because of the wet and far more abstract treatment of the garments and shoes. In the last decade of his career, Ren Yi's technical mastery made possible bold imagery and expressive execution that seems completely effortless.

Ren Yi's success, both commercially and artistically, was so influential that scores of Shanghai painters in the ensuing decades emulated or even forged his style. He brought Western conventions of foreshortening, shading, and coloration into his works in the Chinese media. At the same time, he innovated within the Chinese tradition that he had so brilliantly mastered—using color for techniques previous artists had developed in ink, combining fine line and wash in unexpected ways, violating the norms of Chinese painting technique. He created images that had a compelling psychological power, immediately readable but rewarding of thoughtful contemplation. Ren Yi's new style resonated with the unsettled society of nineteenth-century Shanghai, and, by breaking down so many traditional boundaries, opened the door to twentieth-century modernity.

ART SHOPS

One of the most important changes that occurred in the art world of treaty port Shanghai was the development of a new class of art buyers and new ways of selling art. In premodern times, acquisition of a piece of contemporary art from an artist one did not know might be a complicated transaction, requiring introductions through a mutual friend or go-between.[14] The most potentially rewarding way of collecting, for a patron with means and connections, was to invite an artist and his family to live as house guests in his garden estate for long periods of time. Unlike the modern "artist-in-residence," which such an arrangement resembles in some ways, this form of hospitality presumed friendship as its primary motivation and thus involved many social and psychological obligations on both sides. The patron would receive paintings from the artist and might enjoy the daily opportunity to discuss art and culture with a man of great talent. The visit of his guest might serve as the occasion for memorable scholarly or artistic gatherings that brought together the elite of contemporary society, fellow lovers of art and culture. For the artist, the relationship similarly extended far beyond simple monetary reward, for it might offer not just friendship but also the opportunity to study major collections of paintings, calligraphy, or antiquities; to learn from the erudition of his host; and to benefit professionally through his introduction into the highest ranks of contemporary society and patronage. In the best of circumstances the wealth and position of the host and the talent of the guest placed them on a social footing based on cultural collaboration that transcended class boundaries. Ren Xiong's career may have exemplified this ideal. As a professional artist, his social status was far beneath that of his literati patrons. All parties clearly enjoyed and benefited from his stays as a guest in the homes of Yao Xie and Zhou Xian, but his upper-class friends sealed a permanent change in his social status by arranging his marriage to the daughter of a prominent scholar.

With the relocation of so many artists to the treaty ports at midcentury, however, the old social relationships were supplemented and then gradually replaced by new modes of marketing, most notably art and antique shops. The most important of these establishments are usually referred to as fan-and-stationery shops (*shanjianzhuang*), although the scope of their business was so broad that we prefer to call them art shops. China did not develop a Western-style gallery system in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, but the art shop served many of the functions of the Western gallery. By 1909 there were more than one hundred art shops in the city of Shanghai.[15]

The shops served as the nonexclusive agents for many artists trying to make a living in the city, accepting orders for fans, scrolls, and decorative paintings, and delivering the finished work to the shop's customers. They served to maintain a standard price list for the artist, one usually based on the size, format, and materials used for the work, as well as to promote his or her celebrity. Zhu Cheng's circular painting of 1881 may have been intended for mounting as a round fan [see fig. 1.2]. Most art shops offered scroll-mounting services and some also did picture framing, as this Western custom came into fashion in the last decades of the nineteenth century. An anonymous art lover might thus have the opportunity to see examples of readymade work by various artists at an art shop as well as commissioned examples that might be awaiting delivery. It was possible to commission a specific subject by a specific artist and even to stipulate that the inscription should be dedicated to a particular individual. The social obligations required in the past were eliminated by an efficient commercial transaction. Even foreigners, most of whom lacked ties within the normal operations of Chinese society, could, and did, buy paintings at art shops. The works of Shanghai artists were taken home by visitors from Europe, Japan, Korea, and the United States, among other places.

Most art shops sold supplies for calligraphy and painting, such as paper, silk, ink, brushes, and pigment, as well as writing supplies for ordinary consumers, such as stationery and account books. The owners thus had ample opportunity to interact with both the patrons and the producers of art. The most refined of the shops purveyed their own brands of elegantly decorated letter papers, calligraphy paper ornamented with pale background images, printed xylographically in color, sometimes in a multiblock polychromatic technique. One of the earliest of the Shanghai shops, the Manyunge (Silken cloud pavilion), sold stationery decorated with designs believed to be by Zhong Huizhu, Zhang Xiong's talented wife.

By 1876 there were more than a dozen popular art shops in the Chinese city and the foreign concessions. Among the earliest in the Chinese city were the Deyuelou (Moon-catching hall), in the Yu Garden, and in the foreign concessions were the Manyunge and Guxiangshi (Fragrance of antiquity). Another famous shop, the Jiuhuatang (Hall of nine spendors), was founded in the late 1870s or early 1880s by Zhu Jintang, an art-loving businessman. Examples of elegant letter paper designed by the monk painter Xugu (1823–1896) for him survive, and in 1884, Ren Yi painted a group portrait, *Three Friends,* apparently at Zhu Jintang's request. All three figures in the work are depicted wearing plain, almost monastic robes, and seated on the floor; behind them are piled scrolls, albums, and books, the objects of their common enjoyment. Zhu is seated at left, his friend Zeng Fengji at center, and at right an affable image of Ren Yi himself, one of the artist's very few self-portraits [fig. 1.12]. Although Japanese paintings of the nineteenth century depict gatherings of scholars seated on the floor, this was not so in China, where chairs were customary. The setting of this portrait thus suggests a stylish exoticism, possibly commemoration of a meeting that took place in a Japanese-style interior space, such as one of the Japanese restaurants popular in late-nineteenth-century Shanghai. If not so intended, it evokes customs of a distant golden age, more than a millennium earlier, when the great philosophers, poets, and artists of China, too, sat on mats on the floor.

1.12 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *Three Friends* (Portrait of Zhu Jintang, Zeng Fengji, and Ren Yi), 1884, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, Palace Museum, Beijing

Artists who, like Ren Yi, arrived in the city as refugees or sojourners had urgent need for lodging and food as they sought to establish reputations and careers in the city. The art shops provided for these basic needs, often inviting a promising painter to live in one of the second-story rooms above the shop. The landscape painter Pu Hua (1830–1911) lived for a time at the Xihongtang (Hall of playing geese). In 1868, when he moved to Shanghai, Ren Yi was introduced by his older friend Hu Yuan (1823–1886) to the Guxiangshi, which provided lodging and assistance in selling his paintings. The proprietor of Guxiangshi introduced Ren Yi to many wealthy patrons from southern China, particularly Cantonese bankers and Fujianese businessmen, who would otherwise have been outside Ren Yi's more regionally based social orbit. He became the most famous artist in Shanghai by the end of his life, but as a sign of his gratitude he continued to return every year to paint for the Guxiangshi.

The three-character names of the art shops, which may sound rather ornate in translation, are frequently clever references to literary passages with which patrons possessing a classical education would have been familiar. For example, the name Hall of Nine Splendors (Jiuhuatang) refers to the preface of a poem by Cao Cao (155–220), "Ode on the Nine-Splendored Fan," and would be recognizable as

that of a fanshop. Cloud Studio (Duoyunxuan) refers to a sentence in the *New Tang History*: "[Wei Zhi] often used five-colored stationery to write letters, and they looked like five clouds (*wu duo yun*)." Its core business is thus identified as the elegantly decorated letter paper the shop produced and sold. The only early art shop to survive in Shanghai today, Duoyunxuan was established in 1900. Duoyunxuan absorbed Jiuhuatang during the socialist economic restructuring of 1956. A similar company, Rongbaozhai, still remains in Beijing. Both continue to produce and sell decorated stationery and fans, despite expanding into more lucrative new businesses, such as auctions and art magazines, in the twenty-first century.

Following nineteenth-century patterns, the staff of Duoyunxuan helped the young Sichuanese painter Zhang Daqian (Chang Dai-chien; 1899–1983) find a calligraphy tutor when he first sojourned in the city in 1919. His relationship with this prominent teacher, Zeng Xi (1861–1931), was important for him artistically but also because it opened doors into the Shanghai art world. One of the many documents of their relationship survives in the form of a collaborative memorial to the Leifeng pagoda in Hangzhou, which had recently collapsed. Zhang Daqian created a tiny image of the pagoda from memory to accompany a piece of calligraphy by his mentor, Zeng Xi. Conceived in the framework of premodern collecting practices rather than those of modern archaeology, the two works were then mounted as a miniature handscroll with a woodblock-printed Buddhist image that had been found inside a brick from the pagoda.[16]

ART AND THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

The development of a modern publishing industry in Shanghai has had important ramifications for Chinese society and for the art world. When European printing methods overtook the native Chinese woodblock technology, it was not letterpress printing but lithography that emerged dominant.[17] The ease and economy with which lithography could reproduce calligraphy and painting to create a publication that looked like a woodblock made it particularly appealing to Chinese publishers. The Xujiahui Catholic orphanage was one of the first places in Shanghai to teach lithography, beginning in 1876. The following year, at the suggestion of his Chinese comprador, the British owner of Shanghai's major Chinese newspaper, *Shenbao,* opened a lithographic printing house that became very profitable by republishing the woodblock-printed texts necessary for imperial examination candidates. The new technology, which was soon copied by many other firms, also made possible reproduction of painting manuals and guidebooks that raised the reputations of artists mentioned within.

In 1884, *Shenbao* began publishing China's first illustrated periodical, the *Dianshizhai Pictorial*, which was issued every ten days as a supplement to the newspaper. Printed lithographically on relatively soft Chinese paper, the result was materially very similar to the publications with which readers were familiar. Some issues included a bonus—a single, large, folded reproduction of a figure painting by one of *Dianshizhai*'s talented staff artists or even by a famous artist such as Ren Yi. Some of these pullouts were hand-colored with Chinese painting pigments and were suitable for framing, mounting as scrolls, or pasting on the wall.

The success of *Dianshizhai Pictorial* may be attributed to the talented contributions and supervision of its chief illustrator, a Suzhou native named Wu Jiayou (Wu Youru; d. 1893), who had worked as a painter in a local art shop until his home city was overrun by the Taiping rebels and he took refuge in Shanghai. In 1864, after the Qing court commissioned Wu Jiayou to celebrate in pictorial form the heroic deeds of the war of Taiping suppression, his national fame was established. In the new periodical Wu and the *Dianshizhai* artists painted full-page illustrations in highly detailed black outlines, compositions that combined Chinese figural concepts with the Western perspective and imagery they learned from such models as the *London Illustrated News*. The *Dianshizhai* stories were, however, uniquely tailored to their audiences, as each illustration was explained in a sometimes lengthy inscription in classical Chinese.

The magazine published images of domestic and international news, including China's military battles and foreign science and technology, along with tabloid-style scandals, freaks of nature, and science fiction. The eyes of readers were thus opened to the Seven Wonders of the World, views of European capitals, the customs of Japanese and Europeans, goings-on in Shanghai's brothels, and vignettes of Chinese and foreign residents of the treaty ports. Immensely popular, the pictorial impressed upon the minds of people all over China mental images of the new metropolis of Shanghai and of the international world. Although *Dianshizhai huabao* ceased publication in 1898, enough readers collected and bound their copies that it was well known to artists who grew up in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many later recalled childhood perusal of its illustrations as a factor in their own love of painting.

At the very end of his life, Wu Jiayou left the *Dianshizhai* workshop to establish his own pictorial magazine, *Feiyingge huabao* (Flying shadow pictorial), for which, over the course of three years, he made all the drawings himself. The publication, issued three times a month, was intended to be collectible, and each of the ten features—including news, natural history, famous ladies of the past, and ladies in the latest fashions—was separately numbered. When enough pages had been accumulated, the subscriber's favorite feature might then be bound as an independent book. The most poignant of Wu Jiayou's illustrations depicted, in a sympathetic and intimate fashion, the romantic sorrows of ancient ladies of the imperial harem or contemporary courtesans of the Shanghai pleasure houses [fig. 1.13], perhaps foreshadowing the great popularity of such themes in popular fiction of the ensuing years.[18] Wu Jiayou's publication ceased with his death in 1893, but lithographic publishers continued to emulate its style for many decades thereafter.

1.13 Wu Jiayou (d. 1893), *Thief in the Flower Garden*, 1891, published in the current affairs section of *Feiyingge huabao*, no. 17, 1891 (issue 2 of the second lunar month)

The traditional woodblock printing workshops did not surrender easily to competition from lithography. New year's prints continued to be produced in rural areas of northern China, where European machinery did not exist, and were often pasted on the walls of peasant homes as decorations. However, even in cities such as Suzhou and Tianjin, famous workshops at Taohuawu or Yangliuqing continued to produce festive polychromatic images for use during the traditional holidays and as souvenirs of festivals and dramas. Lithographic publishers were often located in the foreign concessions, while workshops in the Chinese city of Shanghai produced traditional woodblock new year's pictures, usually in the delicate Suzhou style. Many of the prints collected by the anthropologist Bernard Laufer in his fieldwork for the American Museum of Natural History between 1902 and 1904 were mounted as scrolls and thus were suitable for temporary display in the dwelling of a family of modest means. The increasing use of Western as opposed to native printing technology did not immediately produce a substantial shift in content. Images of modern life and traditional themes may be found in both modern lithographically and traditional xylographically produced books and prints.

Perhaps to confront the commercial threat of the Shanghai lithographic printing industry, in the mid-Guangxu era (1875–1908) one of northern China's most important woodblock centers, Yangliuqing near Tianjin, hired the Shanghai-based figure painter Qian Hui'an (1833–1911) to design new images for their new year's picture production. Qian was particularly skilled at painting female beauties in the graceful, elongated manner fashionable in the late Qing period, but he also excelled in bringing life to an extraordinary variety of folk themes and popular stories. A painting of 1900 depicts children in snow sculpting a *qilin,* the mythical quadruped believed to bring sons and good fortune, as a clever vehicle to wish the recipient bountiful harvests, progeny, and prosperity in the coming year [fig. 1.14]. Indeed, like his younger colleague Ren Yi, Qian Hui'an's success was based on his ability to incorporate novel, up-to-date elements—in his case Western shading and, from time to time, complicated architectural settings—into essentially Chinese themes and compositions.

Qian Hui'an, an early migrant to Shanghai, was active in many of the cultural activities of the city from as early as the 1850s. At the end of his life, in 1909, he was elected president of the Yu Garden Painting and Calligraphy Charitable Association, one of the most socially prestigious art groups in the city. It is indicative of the seismic economic and social

1.14 Qian Hui'an (1833–1911), *New Year's Prosperity*, dated 1900, ink and color on paper, 179.5 × 47.9 cm, Collection of Michael Yun-wen Shih, Tainan.

shifts of the late Qing period that a popular artist such as Qian Hui'an, who had lent his talents to production of the most plebian of art forms (the woodcut new year's picture), might rise to the apogee of Shanghai's art world.[19]

THE MONK XUGU

The rapidly changing Chinese society of the late nineteenth century undoubtedly made living a completely conventional life extremely difficult. Of the many artists active in nineteenth-century Shanghai, the monk Xugu (1823–1896) may have been one of the most eccentric as well as one of the most artistically original. A native of Shexian, Anhui, one of Qing-dynasty China's most important cultural and artistic centers, he is believed to have lived in Yangzhou and to have served briefly in the Qing army during the Taiping attacks on Zhenjiang and Yangzhou in 1853. Soon after, he became a Buddhist monk and abandoned his secular name, Zhu Huaigu, for the monastic name Xugu by which he was later known. Settling for a time in a Suzhou temple, but continuing to travel throughout the region, he was well known and admired by many fellow artists, calligraphers, poets, and patrons in the region, including Zhang Xiong, Gao Yong, Hu Yuan, and Ren Yi. His biographers note that although he was a monk, he did not practice vegetarianism or other standard Buddhist disciplines, and when he needed money, Xugu would sell his paintings and calligraphy. Nevertheless, he remained a monk and after his death in 1896, his remains were returned to his home temple in Suzhou, not to his native place in Anhui.

Many paintings dating to the last twenty-five years of his life survive, few more striking than his album of 1895 that is now in the Shanghai Museum [fig. 1.15]. He was a talented portraitist, but his most original paintings, like this album, depict plants, fish, or animals with a particular acuity and sensitivity that may perhaps be attributed not only to his artistic gifts but also to his Buddhist contemplation of the nature of all living things. Although his paintings respond to the Shanghai art market in their auspicious subject matter and bright color, the eccentric brushwork of his calligraphy and painting possesses a restraint and interiority that are the hallmarks of literati painting. The dry linearity of his pictorial rendering and the astringency of his calligraphy reflect the elite styles of his native Anhui, while the bright, optimistic subject matter may be more consciously aimed at the recipients of his paintings in mercantile Shanghai.

The leaf reproduced in figure 1.15, painted only a year before he died, represents goldfish, a symbol of academic and official accomplishment believed capable metaphorically of "leaping the dragon gate"—that is, passing the imperial examinations. Moreover, the name of this popular urban pet,

1.15 Xugu (1823–1896), *Goldfish*, 1895, one leaf of a ten-leaf *Album of Various Subjects*, ink and color on paper, 34.7 × 40.6 cm, Shanghai Museum

jinyu, is a homophone for "gold in surplus" and makes it a suitable symbol of wealth. The four plump creatures, varied in hue from deep orange to pure white, are outlined in Xugu's artfully animated dry ink lines, which take the viewer beyond the visual specificity of the subjects' naturalistic color to a literati-style semiabstraction.

EPIGRAPHY AND ART

If the artistic career of Ren Yi, which peaked in the 1870s and 1880s, or that of Xugu, most active in the 1880s and first half of the 1890s, may be situated in the newly commercializing treaty port world, with its hybrid society, economy, and culture, that of their friend Wu Changshi (1844–1927) blossomed after the fall of the empire in 1911. A Confucian scholar-literatus of strongly traditional bent, Wu Changshi experienced disruptions and disappointments in his early life, followed by extraordinary success as a professional painter in Republican-period Shanghai. The contours of his life exemplified the decline of the nineteenth-century Chinese empire and the subsequent optimism and idealism of the new Republic in the twentieth century.

A seal carver, calligrapher, poet, scholar, and finally painter, Wu was also blessed with the health and longevity that made possible a very productive old age. He may thus serve as an excellent example of the changes that the twentieth century brought to the art and lives of artists in the lower Yangzi valley region. Unlike Ren Yi, who was a professional painter from his early years, Wu Changshi became one only later in life, and in a direct response to the difficulties of the era. Wu Changshi, whose formal name was Wu Junqing, was born in Anji county, Zhejiang, to a family of some social status. His father was well educated, a holder of the *juren* degree, which qualified him to serve in local government. He never took up such an official post, however, and in 1860, when Wu Changshi was sixteen, the battles of the Taiping Rebellion combined with a local famine to force the family to flee their home. Their return in 1862 was lamentably brief, and by 1864 all members of his household except Wu and his father had perished. Upon returning home, Wu Changshi sat successfully for the first-level civil service examination and was awarded the status of *xiucai*. He remarried and began working as a tutor in Anji.

Wu and his father shared a love of seal-carving, and from an early age Wu Changshi devoted a great deal of effort to this art. Unfortunately, his father fell ill and died in 1868, when he was forty-seven and Wu only twenty-four. Wu Changshi later lamented that he had little opportunity to study with his very learned father and grandfather. He traveled throughout the Jiangnan area during this period of his early adulthood, first studying epigraphy and classics with the renowned scholar Yu Yue (1821–1906) in Hangzhou and then accepting the position of assistant to a wealthy official named Du Wenlan (1815–1881) in Suzhou. During the four years Wu Changshi lived in Du's household, he came to know many Suzhou scholars, including the calligrapher Yang Xian (1819–1896), who later wrote an inscription on his portrait [see fig. 1.11]. In 1882, Wu was appointed as a low-ranking official in Suzhou, and his circle of friends continued to grow, including many local poets, collectors, and artists. In the same year he was given an archaeological relic, an ancient ceramic vessel called a *fou*. Wu so treasured this object that he often called himself "Old Man Fou" or "Master of Fou Cottage."

A few years before, in the mid-1870s, when he was about thirty years old, Wu Changshi acquired rubbings of a set of late Zhou dynasty (770–221 BCE) textual engravings called the Stone Drums. These rough and eroded inscriptions possessed a power that fascinated the artist for the rest of his life, and he worked and reworked their forms throughout the remainder of his career [fig. 1.16]. The slow, irregular, yet firmly executed characters in his Stone Drum inscription calligraphy would become his unique contribution to the art of calligraphy. He, like earlier masters of the "stele school," including fellow Zhejiang native Zhao Zhiqian, was not particularly interested in the more elegant and tidy scripts associated with canonical court traditions of calligraphy but instead sought a more authentic aesthetic by returning to long-forgotten inscriptions from archeological finds.

Wu Changshi first traveled to Shanghai, which would later become his home, in 1872, where he met painter, calligrapher, and patron Gao Yong, the subject of Ren Yi's

1.16 Wu Changshi (1844–1927), *Stone Drum Script*, 1915, set of four hanging scrolls, ink on paper, each 150 × 40 cm, Shanghai Institute of Painting

slightly later portrait [see fig. 1.7]. By the mid-1880s Wu Changshi had many friends in the Shanghai art world, including the scholar-painter Zhang Xiong and the professional portraitist Ren Yi, and in 1887 he settled for a time in the city. During the next few years, his relationship with Ren Yi became increasingly close. Between 1886 and 1888, Wu Changshi carved many seals for Ren Yi, and Ren Yi repeatedly painted Wu Changshi's portrait. A masterpiece of this genre, yet one filled with humor and intimacy, is the 1888 *In the Cool Shade of the Banana Tree* [fig. 1.17], in which Ren Yi makes superb use of the fine-line style he inherited from Ren Xun. The degree to which Ren Yi had deployed this skillful brushwork for new purposes is evident in the powerful three-dimensionality of his corpulent subject. The portly Wu Changshi complained often about the intense summer heat of his native region. Here, having pulled off his shoes to cool his feet and stripped his robe down to the waist, he is caught in a moment of relief from his discomfort. Although much of the paintings' color is applied in a very conventional fashion—generally flat in tone as was common in earlier outline painting—Ren Yi emphasizes his empirical experience rather than received convention in his coloration of his friend's body. Instead of a generalized flesh tone, he clearly depicts the sunburn on Wu's face and neck, the dark birthmark on his pale upper arm, and a rounded belly that is remarkable for its paleness—it has evidently rarely been exposed sunlight. The intimacy, informality, and naturalism of this image are remarkable.

Anecdotes that have been handed down suggest that Ren Yi offered Wu Changshi helpful advice for his painting—to use seal script strokes for branches and cursive script for flowers, and thus make the most of his strength as a calligrapher and seal carver. A three-character seal Wu Changshi carved in 1893 is typical of his rough and powerful knife-handling in seal script, even when he chooses to render delicate forms [fig. 1.18a]. Ren Yi's portrait of Wu Changshi was inscribed, much later, in an unusually long seal-script colophon that pays homage to the sitter's accomplishments as a calligrapher and seal-carver [see fig. 1.17].

Wu Changshi began painting his favorite theme, the plum blossom, twenty years before meeting Ren Yi, but with Ren Yi's advice his painting became more original, the quality of his line increasingly reflecting the weathered power of ancient scripts. By this time he had, like Ren Yi, become interested in affinities between his work and that of freely brushed flower-and-rock paintings by masters of the past,

1.17 Ren Yi (1840–1895), *In the Cool Shade of the Banana Tree* (Portrait of Wu Changshi), dateable to 1888, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 129 × 58.9 cm, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou

particularly the seventeenth-century individualists Shitao and Zhu Da, the Ming literati Xu Wei and Chen Chun, and the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou. Yet for most of his contemporaries and his collectors, the compelling quality in his work was its epigraphic flavor, a quality of composition and brushwork that recalled eroded stone steles, patinated bronze vessels, or the slow knife-strokes engraved in the cool, smooth surface of a seal. A painting Wu gave to his Japanese friend Nagao Uzan in 1914 is an excellent example of his plum painting in the epigraphic manner [fig. 1.19].

1.18 Seals: (a) Wu Changshi, *Jiaoyanzhai*, 1893, *zhuwen* seal, 2.1 × 2.2 cm, Shanghai Museum; (b) Zhao Zhiqian, *Ding Wenwei*, 1859, *baiwen* seal, 2.1 × 2.2 cm, Shanghai Museum; (c) Zhao Zhiqian, *Wuxian Pan Boyin pingsheng zhenshang*, 1871, *zhuwen* seal, 2.1 × 2.2 cm, Shanghai Museum

1.19 Wu Changshi (1844–1927), *Plum Blossoms for Nagao Uzan*, 1914, hanging scroll, ink on satin, 134.8 × 42.1 cm, Kyoto National Museum, Nagao Collection

1.20 Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884), *Flowers*, 1859, one leaf from a twelve-leaf album, ink and color on paper, 22.4 × 31.5 cm, Shanghai Museum

An interest in epigraphic effects in calligraphy and painting was not new—the Hangzhou calligrapher and painter of the seventeenth century Jin Nong (1687–1764) wrote in a manner that was closely related to his own interest in archaic scripts. In the nineteenth century, however, this scholarly interest spread to other art forms, including painting, and became impetus for experimental trends. An important precursor of Wu Changshi was Zhao Zhiqian (1829–1884), a fellow Zhejiang artist, born in Kuaiji, near Shaoxing.[20] From a merchant background, Zhao Zhiqian studied relentlessly, even during the perils of the Taiping Rebellion, to achieve his goal of becoming an official. He was a talented seal-carver and calligrapher as well as an enthusiast of ancient scripts.

The Zhao Zhiqian album leaf reproduced here, dated 1859, is a work of his early maturity, painted when he worked in Hangzhou as an aide to a prominent scholar-official, Miao Zi (1807–1860), his intellectual mentor, during his period of study for the civil service examination system. In this period Zhao Zhiqian's creative exploration and reinvention of archaeological models were also at their height [fig. 1.20]. The inscriptions on Zhao's paintings are often works of art in themselves. In this case, with great design flair, he has titled the work in large, bold characters, at upper right, and then shifted into a smaller, more casual script for the text and signature that follow to the left. His writing is plump and his characters rather horizontal, all traits of the Han and Six dynasties scripts so thoroughly admired by adherents of the "stele school" of calligraphy.

Less obvious, but important to the epigraphic aesthetic, is the striking balance between areas of substance and areas of void, or painted surfaces and blank paper. The complex assemblage of separate elements of color and vegetation is conceptually parallel to the intricate arrangement of strokes within a character and of characters within the bounded rectangle or square of the seal format and is felt by seal-lovers to fill the painting with the flavor of archaic inscriptions. In this painting from a twelve-leaf album, Zhao Zhiqian has depicted the rather unusual subject of poppies, experimenting with color, matching the veins in each flower to the softer, lighter tone of the petal, and mixing greens and yellows in a complex way not often seen in earlier flower painting. He renders the folds and bends of the leaves, petals, and stalks with careful observation, but at the same time he pulls back from naturalism, creating startling contrasts by painting a few leaves in dark gray ink, even highlighting them with fine, gold lines, and carefully managing the intense blankness of the paper left in reserve between the twisting and turning blossoms. With its powerful calligraphy and subtle ink washes, this work recalls literati painting, but the unassertive restraint of that tradition is quite confidently subordinated here to Zhao's dazzling vision of the bright flowers.

Whether or not the innovations in Zhao Zhiqian's painting were stimulated by the changes in material life gradually brought about by international trade, including importation of the "Western red" or carmine that he uses for the pink poppies, or best viewed as the almost accidental products of individual genius, by the end of the nineteenth century Zhao Zhiqian's work was recognized by ardent followers as highly original. Two examples of his seal carving attest to his creativity in this art. The first, carved in 1859 for prominent fellow seal enthusiast Ding Wenwei, renders the three characters of Ding's name in intaglio [fig. 1.18b].

The intentionally naïve manner leaves the strokes of the iron knife particularly evident in the single character at right: Ding 丁. The second, a larger and more formal work of 1871 in the standard small seal script, is a connoisseur's seal carved in relief with the fine curvilinear strokes of a Tang dynasty stele [fig. 1.18c].

Despite their great differences in style and motif, the two seals demonstrate the sophisticated balances of symmetry and asymmetry; character and ground; line, grid, and square of a master seal carver. Zhao Zhiqian's seals were particularly admired for their originality in incorporating new forms found in antique stone steles, Buddhist statues, bronze mirrors, and a range of other archaeological specimens. The nine symmetrically organized characters of the 1871 seal read, beginning at upper right: "Authenticated by Pan Boyin of Wu [Suzhou]." Unlike the previous *baiwen* (white character) seal, this one is carved in the more conventional and elegant *zhuwen* (red character) format. The subsequent generation of epigraphically minded artists such as Wu Changshi greatly admired Zhao Zhiqian. Even Shanghai designers of the 1930s, such as Qian Juntao (1906–1998), found inspiration in his seals. Not only was he admired by fellow artists in China but with the opening of Sino-Japanese trade, Zhao Zhiqian's work was avidly sought by Japanese Sinophiles.

Epigraphic taste was not limited to earnest scholars of ancient calligraphy. Collecting and appreciating antiquities became such a fashion that scores of showy paintings incorporating archaeological motifs were produced, presumably for newly wealthy collectors who wished to demonstrate their high taste without losing the sensory delight of rich color found in popular art. Often called *bogu* (ancient erudition) paintings, these works incorporate ink-squeeze rubbings of archaic bronze ritual vessels, rubbings that are artfully manipulated to create illusionistic effects of three-dimensionality. This example of 1872, one panel of a set of four scrolls, includes, at front, a rubbing of a Shang dynasty spouted wine vessel with three legs, called a *jue*, and, from the Western Zhou dynasty, at back, a two-handled food-vessel, a *gui*, with its lid placed in front [fig. 1.21]. Between the vessels are displayed two rubbings of the dedicatory texts ostensibly found inside, most likely in the lid and the interior of the *gui* basin. The archaic texts of the cast-bronze were completely comprehensible only to those who had seriously studied ancient scripts, but enough of the characters can easily be read to make such a work an amusing topic of conversation at the social gatherings for which it might serve as backdrop. In the era before art historical photography, ink rubbings were a way of collecting documents about archaeological objects one did not own. In this work two painters, Ren Xun and Zhu Cheng, worked collaboratively to convert this scholarly apparatus into a set of four still-life paintings by adding a colorful array of auspicious flowers, *lingzhi* fungus, and fruit. In his signature Zhu Cheng claims credit for the white chrysanthemum, the fruit, and other flowers. The documents of epigraphic study are here brought into an art form that can appeal to more popular taste, thus blending literati and merchant culture.

1.21 Ren Xun and Zhu Cheng, *Bogutu*, 1872, one from a set of four hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper, 177.5 ×46.9 cm, Collection of Michael Yun-wen Shih, Tainan

Wu Changshi's late work, *Loquats and Wild Roses*, takes another approach to the problem of blending his literati school aesthetic with the more sensual tastes of the new class

1.22 Wu Changshi (1844–1927), *Loquats and Wild Roses*, 1920, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 151.1 × 82.8 cm, Shanghai Museum

of patrons [fig. 1.22]. His rigorous composition of crossing vertical and diagonal lines and firm brushwork is enough to delight any calligraphy enthusiast, but for the benefit of his merchant collectors he adds bright yellow and "Western red" (marketed by Pelikan and other firms as "carmine"). The inscription begins without subtlety—"the loquat is yellow like gold . . ." As a new business-oriented society grew in Shanghai, the tastes of art patrons in this city similarly shifted. Artists who lived by selling their paintings to these collectors accommodated themselves, in one way or another, to their hopes, needs, and desires. The wealth of Shanghai in the nineteenth century provided ample support for Chinese art of all kinds. The new economic and social relations, however, stimulated the development of fresh styles of art, those that appealed to a new class of patrons by combining the conventions of scholarly painting with those of more plebian taste, a popular taste informed by every kind of image that flooded into the city with its commercial prosperity.

JAPANESE COLLECTORS AND STUDENTS

Art shops in Shanghai provided a way for artists to make a living and for the new collectors, many of whom were merchants not scholars, to directly express their taste by the work they commissioned. Another novel factor that strongly affected the lives, careers, and aesthetic interests of some Chinese artists was the expansion of the market for Chinese art to other countries of Asia after the opening of the ports. Foreign buyers, including Japanese, Europeans, and Americans, began purchasing Chinese work in urban art shops. Recent scholarship has shown that some Chinese artists and businessmen, including the manager of the Guxiangshi art shop, traveled to Japan as early as the 1870s.[21] As a result, some Japanese art enthusiasts began seeking first-hand contact with Chinese artists.

In contrast to the domestic Chinese art world, where nouveau-riche Shanghai collectors sought to acquire all the novelty and color possible in their own hybrid society, Japan was already engaged in wholesale Westernization, and some of its collectors in reaction turned their interests to the most erudite of Chinese arts, seal carving, stele-style calligraphy, and literati painting. In 1891, for example, the Japanese calligrapher Kusakabe Meikaku (1838–1922), who had previously studied calligraphy with a Chinese diplomat in Tokyo, visited China to seek out men of similar interests. He met Wu Changshi as well as a number of other calligraphers at the highest levels of Chinese society, including the Suzhou literati Wu Dacheng and Yang Xian and the Hangzhou master Yu Yue. Kusakabe studied with Wu Changshi during his brief visit to China, and the two remained friends for the remainder of their lives. Wu Changshi was one of a number of Chinese artists whose reputation at home and abroad would be built, in part, through his connections with Japanese artists and collectors. In 1900 the Japanese seal carver and calligrapher Kawai Senrō (1871–1945) traveled to China in the company of the owner of a Tokyo book company, Bunkyūdō, to become Wu Changshi's student. From 1904 to 1931, Kawai visited China almost annually and like his mentor, Kusakabe, promoted Wu Changshi's reputation in Japan. Possibly under Wu Changshi's influence, Kawai acquired almost a hundred examples of Zhao Zhiqian's work, all of which unfortunately perished with him when his home was destroyed in the Tokyo fire-bombing of 1945.

Japanese art collectors were nothing new in treaty port Shanghai, but they marked a turning point for aspiring

official Wu Changshi. Having concluded, after serving for a month as magistrate in 1899, that the official career for which he was educated was not to his liking, in 1903 he established his first price list and became a professional artist. Soon after, he and the Japanese scholar Nagao Uzan, who was employed as Japanese editor and translator at Shanghai's Commercial Press, became close friends. Kawai Senrō and Nagao Uzan became the only foreign members of the Xiling Seal Society in 1904, a group for which Wu Changshi served for a time as director. In 1914, Wu gave Nagao a farewell gift as he returned to Japan, a plum blossom painting in which one may see, if so attuned, the seal script lines and cursive script flowers for which Wu was famous [see fig. 1.19].

The decade of the 1890s saw significant changes in the art world with the deaths of many of the artists discussed in this chapter. Ren Xun died in Suzhou in 1893 and Wu Jiayou in Shanghai the same year. Yang Xian and Xugu both died in Shanghai in 1896. A major loss to the Shanghai art world was the passing of Ren Yi in the last months of 1895. At this time China suffered a disaster that not only affected the lives of its artists and citizens but changed the course of the nation's history, eventually bringing down the Qing dynasty government. In 1894, Wu Changshi accepted a staff position under the influential Suzhou official, collector, and calligrapher Wu Dacheng, with whom he shared a passion for seals. Wu Dacheng, who had served with distinction as governor of Hunan province, was one of many reform-minded scholar-officials who urged the court to take a strong military stance against threatening foreign powers, particularly Russia, France, and Japan. In late 1894, following the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, Wu Dacheng was ordered by the Qing court to lead military defense of China's northern coast. Despite his fervent idealism, patriotism, and theoretical commitment to updating China's military technology, Wu Dacheng's command suffered one of the most significant military defeats in modern times. This debacle struck the death knell for China's traditional administrative system, with its classically trained officials, and ultimately for the dynasty itself. At the individual level, it ended the political career of Wu Dacheng, who would devote the remainder of his life to his calligraphy, seal carving, and collecting, and dashed the aspirations of his protégée, Wu Changshi, for a substantial career as a bureaucrat.

Indeed, the political and psychological shock experienced by the citizens of Qing dynasty China in the wake of this massive defeat by another Asian nation would mark the beginning of a new era. China had been the dominant power in East Asia for two thousand years, almost since the beginning of recorded history. Although the Chinese empire had absorbed many cultural and technological concepts from outside its borders, it was proud of having transmitted its writing system, modes of governance and thought, and civilization to neighboring countries. Just as Latin was the common written language of premodern Europe, so did classical Chinese serve as the lingua franca of East Asia, making it possible for communication among people speaking many different tongues. To Chinese, these border nations were considered tributary states that declared their peaceful intentions by sending gift-bearing envoys to the Chinese emperor. Victory by the technologically superior European powers in the mid-nineteenth century was distressing enough, but that tiny Japan could also gain military superiority was unimaginable.

At the end of the nineteenth century, even the most committed and loyal Confucian scholar-officials recognized that China's educational, administrative, military, and financial systems needed massive reform. The scholarly skills so diligently mastered by aspiring officials of Wu Changshi's generation were no longer enough to govern China, and, as we shall explore in the next chapter, the coming century would be one of great change. The nineteenth century saw, over the course of several generations, the gradual absorption of foreign motifs and techniques into traditional art. At the same time, the boundaries between popular and elite arts became more porous, a new class of patrons emerged in treaty port cities, and new economic structures for buying and selling paintings appeared. The importation of photography and photo-lithographic printing brought a wealth of new imagery into the popular imagination—ideas that spread to people who lived in cities along all major transportation routes.[22]

While the transformations in Chinese art and society were profound in the late nineteenth century, it should not be overlooked that the modernizing trends occurred against a relatively traditional and local backdrop. The paintings and prints discussed in this chapter were (with one exception) all produced using Chinese materials (ink and water-based colors on paper or silk) and relied on brushes and brush techniques perfected over previous centuries. Thus, despite developments brought by international commerce and travel, the nineteenth-century art world was still conceived in Chinese terms. Innovative artists gave a fresh look to old subjects and genres, and thus wrote a vigorous new chapter in the development of China's own painting tradition. If the nineteenth-century economic changes yielded new ways of life for some artists, particularly those who settled permanently in the treaty ports, the coming political revolution would produce powerful new institutional forces and would thrust artists and their art into a world often conceived in Western terms.