

Interviews with Nine Chinese Artists:
Narrative Research on Chinese Art Education During the 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

Interviews with Nine Chinese Artists: Narrative Research on Chinese Art Education During the 20th Century

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My thesis is a narrative inquiry based on the stories of the art learning of nine Chinese artists from different generations. Their art learning is a lifelong activity which I will analyze. My study focuses on how different social and cultural contexts affect individuals' art learning when they first learn art, as they learn to become artists, and as they continue to learn art as artists. In order to understand the process of their art learning comprehensively, I have divided their art learning into three types: formal, non-formal and life art learning. The purpose of my study is to analyze how artists have learned art and how society has influenced their art learning in the past half century in China.

Based on the analysis of my interviews with the artists, I learned that, during the 20th century, Chinese art education in elementary and secondary schools did not play a primary role in relation to these artists' art learning. Furthermore, in art classes after 1949, Western-style drawing has been dominant in the art classrooms of elementary and secondary schools in China. Students followed the adults' "concept" of realism instead of pursuing their own self-expression. Individual originality and aesthetics were often ignored. I also found that the social and cultural contexts in which the interviewees lived deeply influenced their individual art learning. What

and how they learned in their formal, non-formal and life learning differed depending on economic, political, and cultural contexts. Moreover, according to the experiences of the participants in this study, school art education in China ignored the visual experiences in the everyday lives of students. The opportunities for informal and formal learning were generally distinct. It is important to note that there were only three female artists in the study; they had fewer opportunities to learn art outside of school with their peer groups, while all the male artists had such opportunities. However, the three female artists received non-formal art learning because one's mother was an artist, one had a professional art tutor and one had opportunities to make art when she worked in the army. Finally, I found that the participants' experiences of life art learning played a more important role in their artistic creation than their formal training did.

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Dedication

To my parents,

Chen Shu Wen

and

Liu Chong Jun

I love you. This was for you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Over the past one hundred100 years, Chinese society has gone through extreme and sometimes violent changes. During this period, Chinese art education has also experienced great changes. Artists of this period offer researchers a unique perspective on the evolution that has occurred in Chinese art education by telling their experiences of both learning about art and learning how to be an artist.

This research explores learning art as a lifelong activity, and it focuses on how different social and cultural contexts in China affect individuals studying art and learning to be an artist in school and out of school. It not only includes early art learning and becoming an artist, but also includes changes in artistic styles, subject matter or media after he or she becomes an artist.

I explore the three phases in these artists' development: the period when they studied art before receiving professional art training, the period when they learned how to become an artist, and finally, the phase of being an artist and creating their critical artworks. To investigate art education in China and the way that artists "learn" to become practicing artists, this research will discuss and analyze nine Chinese artists' experiences of formal, non-formal and life art learning in different political, economic and ideological contexts. These artists are from different generations and have had different educational experiences as Chinese art education evolved, due to changes occurring in Chinese society during the 20th century.

This research has two purposes. One is to understand the development of art learning

during the extreme changes in the past century by discussing the experiences of Chinese artists growing up. Understanding the developmental history of art learning can help art educators make more effective plans for art education. In their book *Art Education in a Climate of Reform* (2008), Dorn and Orr analyze the history of American art education and point out that “[s]ince art was first introduced into American schools in 1842, goals and programs have undergone almost continuous changes.” The change that has “historically characterized this field, has been driven not so much by any new knowledge about children, art, or education, but rather by shifts in social beliefs and educational reforms” (p. 43). They observe, “knowing where art education has been in the past can assist us in making wiser plans for the future” (p. 43).

The second purpose is to analyze the experiences and stories of the artist’s art learning during the latter half of this period in order to understand two issues: how students learn art and how society influences the way students learn it. Only by understanding both is it possible for art educators to know what to teach and how to teach effectively.

Early Development of the Research Idea

In 2001, I became interested in studying how students learn art under the different art policies and the national curriculum in contemporary China, because of my experience being involved in a national research project. From 1999 to 2001, I took part in a study examining the history of Chinese art education, funded by the National Society Research Foundation. The results were published in 2001 as the *History of Chinese Art Education* (Yang Li), which is considered one of the most important historical reference works about the development of Chinese art education by the Chinese art education community. As part of this project, I had the

opportunity to interview 17 art educators and artists in order to collect data about the development of contemporary art education in China. Although all the interviews focused on important events undergone by the interviewees, most individuals wanted to talk about their personal histories in learning and teaching art. When they talked about their personal experiences of studying art, art education was not only a localized formal education in school, but also involved aspects of their day-to-day lives. Furthermore, during the interviews, I began to connect their personal experiences not only to art education policies, curriculum plans, and art textbooks, but also to changes in culture, politics, ideology and economy. At that time, I recognized that, instead of creating a record of the past, I should be investigating how students learned art as China's art education curriculum evolved during the 20th century. In order to illustrate how Chinese art education changed within different political, economic, ideological and cultural environments, it is not enough to examine documents concerning national policies, art textbooks and teaching guidelines formulated since 1904. This date marks the beginning of Chinese school art education, because this is when the first Chinese art education policy was published in China. When considering the historical records of policies, teaching plans, guidelines and textbooks produced in China during the 20th century, the rich experiences of artists and their stories about learning should also be analyzed. These detailed experiences provide a broad understanding about how they influenced individuals' art learning.

However, personal narratives were rarely used in historical research in China at that time

because it was not considered to be a valid scientific research method¹. In this situation, the *History of Chinese Art Education* only covers a few personal experiences of learning art and mainly focuses on the records of art education history such as art textbooks, national art teaching plans, art education policies and the ideas of some scholars and art educators in China. In fact, at that time, quantitative research methods were encouraged in education research because they were considered to be more scientific. When art education policy was formulated, almost all research on the subject was analyzed statistically by the National Institute for Educational Research in China.

Max Van Manen's book, *Researching Living Experience* (2001), was published in China, and he was invited to give lectures in China in 2001. One of the results of his presentations was that narrative research started to be discussed in the field of education research. I learned this research concept and applied it to my previous experience of interviewing artists and art educators. I recognized that it would be effective to explore the process of individual art learning through analyzing individual experiences and stories of art learning. When art educators understand how students learn art, they are able to create effective teaching plans and methodology. It is necessary to understand how students learn art both in the classroom and in everyday life. Therefore, I began to interview students from elementary and secondary schools instead of just interviewing teachers or giving questionnaires to students.

During the interviews, I found that students who liked art were able to recount more

¹ Zhu Xiao Man, the Director of the National Institute of Educational Research pointed this out during Prof. Van Manen's presentation in Beijing, in March 2002.

detailed stories about their experiences learning art, while students who were not very interested in art learning often had difficulty discussing their time in art class or learning art. This inspired me to think over how to select the participants for my research, and to believe that interviewing artists to understand their experiences of art learning would be very useful in understanding the various ways individuals learn art. The methods and experiences of the art learning of artists can be considered to be successful forms of art learning. Analyzing positive learning experiences can provide researchers with an understanding of how students can learn art effectively.

Based on their study experiences and stories, I started to explore students' art learning outside of school and wrote some academic articles about how art classes should draw on resources of everyday life. One of them, "Art Education Curriculum at School Should Stress Popular Visual Art" (Liu, 2004) won a gold medal in 2004 in the Fourth National Music & Art Education Thesis Competition. However, I also recognized that knowing how to effectively analyze the data is crucial, in addition to being challenging, even though some of my studies, especially those involving children's drawing from observation, were rooted in narrative data.

In 2005, after going to Concordia University to pursue more advanced studies, I started to formulate a new idea about my study based on two studies, one done by Linda Szabad-Smyth (2005) and the other by Richard Lachepelle (2003). They argued that research about teaching and learning art should not be restricted to the art classroom but include students' experience in art learning outside of art school. In her article, "Self-Study Through an Exploration of Artful and Artless Experience", Szabad-Smyth (2005) talks about how life history research was carried out with a group of generalists who were asked to reflect on their artful and artless experiences about art and art education. Lachapelle, Murray and Neim's *Aesthetic Understanding as Informed*

Experience: The Role of Knowledge in Our Art Viewing Experiences (2003) examines the process of adults' aesthetic understanding by classifying the learning model into experiential and theoretical learning. They state that experiential learning occurs when learners interact with the reality and the culture around them, and although their knowledge developed in this way would often be fragmentary and unorganized (p. 91), it will be possible to integrate it with theoretical knowledge that lead to aesthetic development. For example, seeing artwork in everyday life is a kind of experiential learning in their study. These two studies led me to reflect on what data to collect and how to collect it, in order to study the process of art learning.

In art learning, some forms of skill and knowledge are obvious and can be evaluated while others are more difficult to detect and assess. Non-art experience or life art learning could potentially influence individual artistic activities, but these are too difficult to evaluate. Similarly, some individual artistic experiences in everyday life are problematic to identify and analyze, but they are crucial for students' art learning. Collecting and analyzing artists' different experiences of art learning together would be possible if their experiences were catalogued using an appropriate method. Generally, non-art experiences are easily ignored in art education research. If the artists' experiences of art learning, hidden or obvious, are considered holistically, it can be shown more clearly how their art learning has occurred. After reading Szabad-Smyth's and Lachepelle's articles mentioned above, I became interested in exploring the experience of art learning again and hoped to analyze artists' art learning from two perspectives: the experiences of art learning in school and out of school.

Terms and Definitions

Who is an artist?

Today there are two different definitions of being an artist in China. One is that an artist should be a member of China Artists Association, the major institution of Chinese art in China. If an artist is selected to participate in the national exhibition at least three times, he or she is qualified to become a member of the Association. However, as the art market developed in China at the end of the 1990s and ideas from western contemporary art began to have more and more influence on the contemporary Chinese art community, some in that community held that an artist's "seriousness" did not necessarily define being an artist. People who make artwork are considered to be artists, even if they do not receive professional training in art. Today, they are often called "Grass-root Artists."

Asked to give a definition of what being an artist means, seven of the nine artists interviewed in this study believe that if people invested in creating art, they could be called artists whether or not they succeeded in the art community, or had professional training. Two of them (Jin Zhi Lin and Liu Bing Jiang, who are the oldest artists in this research) argue that an artist is a person who has achieved some success in the art community and whose artwork reflects human "feeling and spirit." Before studying at Concordia University, I had the same idea as Jin and Liu. However, after studying in Canada for half a year, I changed my concept about what an artist is. Today, I consider an artist to be someone who creates art, just like a carpenter is someone who makes furniture.

Three periods of each artist's experiences of art learning.

These three types of art learning are used to classify participants' experiences according

to the following three periods:

(i) The period before entering professional school is seen as the Early Art Learning Experience. However, in this study, the majority of the participants passed the entrance exam and got the opportunity to study in university, while one of the participants was not admitted to an art school because he was not able to pass the entrance exam. His early experience of learning art ended when he reached the age of 25 and was then too old to take the exam.

(ii) The period from studying in an art school to participants starting to become artists is seen as the Learning Art to Become an Artist phase. The time when they called themselves artists was based on their personal self-concept. If the artist is not admitted to a Fine Arts Academy, the experience of becoming an artist is analyzed in terms of their individual experience of starting to make a living by doing art.

(iii) The period after becoming an artist is seen as the Learning About Art as an Artist. After becoming an artist, their artistic styles or subject matter change based on society and cultural contexts, or personal artistic concepts. This is a process of art learning in order to be an artist.

The Early Experience of Learning Art has a distinct period. However, it is not very clear when participants become artists. Graduating from university and receiving a BFA definitely does not mean that they are already artists. In fact, each artist had different ideas about the definition of “artist.” Therefore, in this research, the decision of when participants believed they started being an artist was left up to them. Most of them thought when they created their own artwork and were able to use it to communicate their feeling and ideas, they were artists.

CHAPTER 2: MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF MAKING AND LEARNING ART, DEVELOPING ART EDUCATION POLICIES AND PERSONAL RESEARCH

In this Chapter, I discuss my personal experience doing research and teaching as an art educator in China. Furthermore, I also discuss my personal experience of learning art and making art from my childhood to today. My experiences as a student, teacher and researcher in China helps me to deeply understand these Chinese artists' learning in the context of the Chinese culture.

My Experience of Making Art Education Policies in the China National Institute for Educational Research

In 1996, I began my Master's of Art Education Program in the Fine Arts department in Capital Normal University. This was the first time that my supervisor, Chang Rui Luen, taught master's students in art education; in 2000 he became the first supervisor for students pursuing a Ph.D. in art education in China. We three students were the second group of master's students in art education in China.² Because there were not many researchers in art education in China, students who were studying their master's degree had the opportunity to take part in national art

² The first master's student in art education, Yun Shao Chuen, graduated from NanJing Normal University in 1986.

education projects. In 1998, I took part in a project collecting and analyzing data from schools that had art classes, a study that was organized by the China National Institute for Educational Research (CNIER).

In 1999, after completing my graduate degree, I began to work at the Center for Sports, Health and Arts Education at CNIER. This center was set up in April 1994 and was directed jointly by the CNIER and the Sports, Health and Art Education Department of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1996). Before 1993, subjects such as math, literature, sciences, sports, health education and art education belonged to the Basic Education Department in the Ministry of Education. However, many schools neglected three subjects: sports, health education and art education, and some schools even considered them to be after-school activities. Furthermore, the regional education departments rarely had an administrator responsible for art education all over the country. In order to remedy this situation, the Sports, Health and Art Education Department established its own corresponding Center for Sport, Health and Art Education.

Today, there are art education officers and inspectors responsible for art education in each province and in most cities (Ministry of Education, 1996). This administration system covers art education at the municipal, provincial and national levels, and was created to provide art educators with the authority to apply art education policy, to suggest improvements and to make decisions concerning art education at a local level, as well as to organize teacher training and to evaluate the development of local art education.

When the Sports, Health and Art Education Department began to operate, the Ministry of Education found that research on arts, health and sports education could not offer enough

information to help administrators make decisions related to the three fields. Therefore, in 1994, the research center of Sports, Health and Arts Education was built. Its main task was to organize and manage research in the three fields, to provide the Chinese government with advice and suggestions concerning them and to provide research data about them to educational administrators.

While working at the CNIER as a researcher, I was often involved in developing art education policy. Starting in 1999, I helped conduct research for the *National 10-Year Plan for Art Education in Schools (2001 to 2010)*, in addition to participating in researching and drafting the law entitled the *Regulation of Art Education* and designing the *National Countryside's Art Education Plan*. I was also involved in research that focused on the teaching and learning of art. In 2001, I was a project leader of a key study for the 10th Five-Year Education Plan of the Ministry of Education, funded by the National Youth Foundation and entitled *Secondary School Students' Ability of Art Expressions Training*. I was also an editor of national art textbooks for secondary schools and participated in art teacher training programs.

The Chinese government has improved school art education in China by strengthening administration of art education and the creation of national education policies. The Chinese government published six different sets of policies on art education since 1990, and in 2003, even passed a law concerning art education, *Regulation of Art Education*. The Chinese government tried to solve some of the more serious issues related art education like the neglect

of art education in the education system³. It devised policies dealing with the best way to improve art education. The government had two main aims with these policies. The first was to ensure that school administrators and the public knew that art education played an important role in school education. The second aim was to clearly show schools and regional educational departments their responsibilities for providing art education to students as well as setting standards to assess the development of art education in each school, city and province in China. For example, the *National 10-Year Plan for Art Education in Schools (2001 to 2010)* established that, before 2008, all schools in cities in China must begin to give art classes. This plan enabled schools, different regional educational departments and educational institutions to provide art education, and allowed the Ministry of Education to assess each province's development of art education every two years. If some schools do not offer art classes to students, regional educational departments have the responsibility to force them to do so. If regional educational departments do not follow national guidelines, they will negatively influence the assessment of that province in the report on the educational assessment of all the provinces in China. In fact, by 2004, almost 95 percent of schools in cities and 70 percent of schools in the countryside were giving art classes (The Sports, Health and Art Education Department of the Ministry of Education, 2005). Students' performance indicates this has been an effective and useful way to improve school art education..

China is a vast country with significant regional disparities in economic and social

³ For example, often schools did not offer art classes to students, and many schools did not have qualified art teachers or specialists.

development (The Sports, Health and Art Education Department of the Ministry of Education, 2000) and the country's development of art education in its regions mirrors these disparities. During my time as a researcher in the government, the Ministry of Education generally used three strategies in the process of creating effective policies in order to improve the development of art education in the different regions. The first was that the policymaking team included researchers, experienced artists and regional officers of art education (these were all ex-art teachers) who came from areas of differing economic and social development. The second was to use field surveys to investigate the status of art education in different regions and schools, and to interview art teachers. The third was to study foreign art education policy and historical research.

In 1999, when I took part in the drafting of the *National 10-Year Plan for Art Education in Schools (2001 to 2010)*, I felt that these three strategies played crucial roles in the creation and development of this plan and were very useful. As mentioned earlier, in addition to researchers in art education and artists, the team making the policy included some regional officers who were responsible for art education. This was for two reasons. One was that these officers needed a policy to support them in order to guide schools' art education programs and to push regional departments of education to provide art classes and proper facilities for students in the school system. Second, they also understood the real problems and challenges that were faced by schools and by the regional educational systems that were in the process of applying the national art education policy. Therefore, these educational policies were important in helping researchers and artists to be practical and to develop an effective policy.

Second, in order to understand the state of Chinese art education, the policymaking team used two methods to collect data. One was using questionnaires to collect and analyze statistical

data about students, teachers and the facilities that were found in art classrooms. The second method was for researchers to travel to different regions to collect data through field surveys, by visiting art classes and having meetings with art teachers. Personally, I felt the latter approach was more useful.

Before drafting the plan, our team surveyed 22 cities and towns in different regions, and then analyzed the statistics. Indeed, it would have been difficult for me to imagine the disparities of art education in different regions and in different schools if I did not have the chance to go to these regions.

I experienced these differences between the regions when I visited schools in Shenzhen in 2000. The first day, we visited Shenzhen Middle School. There were five specialists, most of whom had had solo art exhibitions; each teacher had his or her own art classroom. Students could choose to learn painting, printmaking, ceramics and so on. Some students' oil paintings were displayed in Paris. The school published the students' work in a series of books in 2003. When I visited the specialists' studios, I felt that I had come back to a fine arts department classroom at the university. Students had professional easels and materials. However, another day, I visited an elementary school in the suburbs where the teachers were generalists who had never received professional training and used chalk and blackboards to deal with art classes. Statistical data could not have described the disparity between the art classes at each school.

Based on this field survey, the basic goal of the policy was to improve art education in schools. This policy created a basic standard that all schools had to achieve through the combined efforts of the schools and the regional education departments. Schools with weak art program would have to strive to meet this standard while schools regions with well established

art programs would raise their own standards higher than that required by China's national art education policy. For example, the policy prescribes that all elementary schools must have art teachers, whether they are specialists or generalists. However, because almost all of Beijing's art teachers had received professional training as art educators, this increased the city's educational standards for art teachers. The Beijing Education Department requires all elementary schools to have specialists who at least graduated from a fine art department in junior college; therefore, Beijing's standards are higher than the national standards (2003).

During the survey, it was rare to interview students or an individual art teacher. Researchers often had a meeting with local art education supervisors and art teachers from the same school or a few schools. Using transcriptions recorded during the meetings, researchers could find common issues and design policies to resolve these issues. For example, most art teachers indicated that it was difficult for them to receive free art education training and time off with pay from their schools to pursue this training because school principals viewed art education as less important than math or other subjects. Therefore, the national plan stipulated that each art teacher should get 2 weeks of art education training every 2 years, with cost of the training to be paid by their school (2001). Because of this policy, art teachers were able to get professional training or take part in academic conferences.

Third, since the 1990s, many other countries' curricula plans, art education policies and historical research have been introduced to Chinese art educators, especially North American research on art education. While making policies, researchers often conducted comparative research. These plans and policies have had an important influence on Chinese policy in art education.

As an art education researcher in China, I believe that the Chinese government improved school art education in China by creating national art educational policies and thereby strengthening the administration of art education. Although the public does not regard art education as important as other subjects such as mathematics and foreign languages, some Chinese politicians and national leaders view art education as a form of aesthetic education that plays an important role in cultivating healthier, happier and more spiritual citizens. As Confucius stated, “After people become rich, teaching culture and music can improve and influence the quality of people and prevent vanity, luxury and a decadent society” (Guo, 1988, p. 17). Despite the public perception that art education is less important than other forms of learning, China’s Ministry of Education tries to use public policy to improve art education and benefit the whole of Chinese society.

My Experience of Doing Research

My experience doing research is divided into three different stages:

1. Exploring how individuals’ personalities and experiences influence visual perception through analyzing children’s drawing from still life and their memory.
2. Exploring Relationships between individuals’ visual perception and their artwork.
3. Studying cultural and natural environments influence children’s artwork.

Stage 1: How individuals’ personalities and experiences influence the processes of their visual perception and artwork through analyzing their drawings from still life and drawing from their memory.

In 1996, along with two others, I was admitted to study in the master's program for art education at Capital Normal University. When we were admitted, our supervisor, Chang Rui Lun, contacted us and asked us to read four books that were translated into Chinese in 1994 before the start of the first semester: *Creative and Mental Growth* (Lowenfeld, 1994), *Education Through Art* (Read, 1994), *Thoughts on Art Education* (Arnheim, 1994), and *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (Eisner, 1994). I was deeply influenced by these books. Although the authors have different ideas about art education, they introduced me to a new approach to art education. Before reading these books, I thought that the goal of art education was teaching students how to draw and how to paint using realistic techniques. I never thought drawings done by children were artwork. These authors helped me realize that children should represent their own world instead of copying or imitating adults' images.

Their ideas excited me and made me impatient to start my art education studies. The three of us in the graduate program had differing backgrounds: my classmates had studied Chinese painting as undergraduates and I had studied education. As a result, our supervisor arranged different coursework for each of us. Most of my courses were studio courses in my first semester; in addition, he believed that it was necessary for me to teach in an art class to get some practical experience. Soon, I obtained a position with a Sunday art class of children between 6 and 8 years old. At that time, I had no experience teaching art. However, based on my understanding about art education from reading Lowenfeld and Arnheim, and my personal experience of studying art, I had some ideas about how to teach my art class.

As a child, I had the opportunity to learn art outside of school. My early experiences of learning art influenced my beliefs and attitudes about the teaching and learning of

art, and in fact, they still influence my current research interests.

When I was 6 years old, I had the opportunity to learn Chinese painting from a professional artist. As an art educator today, when I recall that experience, I think that learning and teaching art is a transformational process. For example, when I wanted to draw baby ducks, my teacher and showed me how to observe them and then draw them. But he also encouraged me to draw other things through my own observation. He came to my home once a week, but often I could not wait for his class, and I tried to carefully observe and draw what I was interested in. He encouraged me to draw what I saw and what I imagined. I didn't need to follow him on everything. He often brought his artwork to illustrate how he created it. Sometimes, I also gave him my opinions about his work, like an art critic.

This experience made me realize that drawing is translating what you see or what you think to paper. I believe that drawing and painting are, like writing, a way to express myself; this is why they were rarely boring or difficult for me. Later, I also taught my friends or classmates in elementary and secondary school to sketch from real life, using my own particular method of line drawing to represent an observed object. Some of them were quickly able to draw very well; sometimes they also were surprised at how well they were able to draw. These early experiences gave me a good foundation for how to teach art. After being introduced to the ideas of Lowenfeld and Arnheim, I decided to encourage children to draw what they saw instead of copying teachers' images. I started to teach children sketching using subject matter drawn from their daily experience, such as their shoes, a bike or their toys, because these were the kind of things that interested them.

When I recall my personal experience learning art, I also consider other people's

experiences. For example, Yang Jing Zhi, the president of the Sunday Art School where I taught, was a famous researcher on children's art; her daughter, Huang Huan, was a famous child artist in China. They often gave me suggestions about teaching. Once, Huang Huan told me that when she was four years old, she started using a pen to draw because her mother hoped that by using only a pen, she would draw more confidently instead of continually erasing her drawings. This suddenly reminded me that there were a few children in my class who always erased their drawings, because they thought what they drew was never good enough. When I taught, I took a good deal of time to explain to the children that they should finish a drawing before they start to erase. If they were not satisfied with parts of the drawing, they could draw them again later. However, this was something very difficult for the children to overcome. Huang Huan's experience inspired me to ask children to use markers to draw instead of pencils. I found that they observed things more carefully, because when they made mistakes, they had to continue the drawing instead of erasing. For young children, there is no right or wrong in drawing; they only need to know what they can do.

Although I did not have any experience teaching art to 6- and 7-year-old children, my teaching method of encouraging children to draw what they saw was quite successful. The parents and other art teachers were surprised by the drawings and paintings of my students. I was also surprised by the maturity and uniqueness of their artwork and wanted to know how children could produce such work. So I conducted an experimental class with 20 children who were from 4 to 6 years old, focusing on how children observe and their art language. From the first class, I became more and more interested in children's artwork.

I gradually gained more experience in teaching children, but I soon found that it was not

easy to evaluate the artwork of children. My experience in evaluating artwork was based on whether the images looked like the “real thing” or not, which was also the standard that parents used to evaluate their children’s artwork. At the time, I had been reading the books by Lowenfeld and Arnheim, and didn’t think that realism was the only standard to use to evaluate the paintings and drawings of a child. However, I was not sure how to evaluate these children’s artwork. I also knew that the evaluations teachers gave children were also a kind of teaching because they reflected the goals of the teacher. When children learn how a teacher evaluates their artwork, they can figure out what is seen as “good” and “not good” about their work. In order to understand my students and the drawings they made, I often talked with them about what they drew and listened to their stories in the class. After class, I also took some time to talk with their parents in order to understand more about their lives and collect some of the artwork created by their children outside of school. After talking with the children and their parents, I started to recognize that it was necessary to analyze their drawings in terms of the children were and in relation to their memories and imaginations.

I showed these children’s artwork to Yang Jing Zhi and other art teachers. Sometimes, I showed some of the more interesting artwork to artists, asking them for their opinions about the work. I realized that evaluating children’s artwork was as same as criticizing the artwork of an artist. There was no precise standard, and children’s artwork also had different artistic styles. They did not simply learn how to draw like adults, but how to express their feeling and ideas in different ways. Their artwork illustrated different characteristics because the children grew up in different cultural and geographic environments.

While teaching at the Sunday Art School at Capital Normal University, I began to write

field notes to examine my artistic activities in order to find better ways to teach art to children. In the art classroom, I tried to help children avoid negative experiences that I encountered as an art student. I encouraged children to draw what they saw and what they wanted to express. Soon, based on examining my experiences of teaching children art in the classroom and my learning experiences in the graduate school studios, I began to connect the process of drawing with Arnheim's ideas on visual perception. I also began to explore Lowenfeld's ideas on art education, enhanced by my teaching practice in the art classroom.

In 1998, I participated in a national research project entitled "A Study on Art Ability of Students in Secondary School." In the project, I continued to focus on the observation and development of student artistic ability. I designed and carried out a survey of 1,200 students from elementary and secondary schools and interviewed 15 art teachers. I also investigated 80 secondary school students who were getting professional skills training in a special art class with the goal of studying in a fine art department in the future.

In this survey, I collected a great deal of raw data on the relationships between the visual perception of individuals and their drawings. All students were asked to do two drawings within 20 minutes. One was a portrait from a model. The other was a drawing of members of their family from memory. Two other graduate students and I selected almost 300 drawings and evaluated them according to three levels (good, average, bad). Then, we compared these drawings with the portraits and drawings of family members created by students from the special art class. Our conclusion was that the portraits sketched by the students from regular classes were as good as those created in the special art class, while the drawings of family members created by students from the special art class were better than those done in the regular classes (Liu,

1999).

My master's thesis, entitled *Visual Perception and Training of Observation in Secondary School* was also based on my research on the theories and practices of visual perception. As a result of my research on the relationships between individuals' visual perception and their artwork, I believe that an art curriculum should teach students how to observe what they want to draw and help them find and use their own art language to express themselves. I analyzed Lowenfeld's ideas and his research to support my opinions.

Stage 2: Relationships between individuals' visual perception and their artwork.

During the time I worked at the National Institute for Educational Research, I began to collect data for a study on the relationship between visual perception and artwork by observing various students in my art classes: adults, twins, profoundly deaf children, and children of different ages (I had passed the National Certificate Examination of Sign Language). I collected a great deal of raw data and focused on the relationship between what my subjects saw and what they knew, by analyzing their sketches from observation and their drawings using imagination and memory.

In 2001, I became the project leader for a study entitled "Helping Students to Develop Art Ability in the Nine-Year Compulsory Education Art Education Program," a key project for the tenth Five-Year Education Plan of the Ministry of Education and funded by the National Youth Foundation. The purpose of this project was primarily to emphasize the value and the purpose of helping students to develop their artistic techniques to express themselves through exploring their everyday life.

In order to focus on this project, I stopped teaching the several groups I had been instructing before and concentrated on teaching art skills to a group from elementary and secondary schools. However, my findings from my earlier research on these different groups provided my team with a good deal of information on how to teach technique to elementary and secondary school students. These students in my new groups were taught how to represent things and events that interested them using different materials and media, such as print, comic books, computers, Chinese painting and pencil sketching.

This project was conducted by some art teachers and researchers through an action research. There were four sub-teams all over China working on this project, involving 64 teachers and 11 schools. These schools were located in developed, developing and under-developed regions.

During this research, some participants were concerned with using local artistic styles, including folk art and the various regional methods of creating artwork, in order to help art teaching and learning in the art classroom. I compared artists' and children's artwork and folk art from various regions. Artworks created by students from different places had different characteristics. Local cultural and natural environments often influenced their artwork and reflected the style of local artists.

In April 2001, I became an editor for the *Art Experiment Textbook for Compulsory Education*, which was published by the China Fine Art Publishing House and was adopted by the Ministry of Education for most schools. The book advocates that drawing is a language using visual signs. Students have the ability to learn how to convey information through drawing, using any kind of tool. This kind of drawing can function as a form of narrative, explanation,

expression or recording. The main teaching strategy is to guide students to observe carefully and express themselves bravely and confidently.

My project had achieved successful results in the art classroom. Some of the participants had designed their own curriculum. However, I still found it difficult to illustrate the relationship between individuals' memory and observation and their artwork in a clear and an in-depth manner, even though I had a great deal of raw data—the children's artwork and my field notes. This problem became especially apparent in 2003 when I taught a course called "Development of Students' Skill and Art Educational Psychology" at the Graduate School in the Central Academy of Fine Art. The major part of this course focused on visual perception and the development of individuals' artistic ability. Students were interested in my research, and shared with me many of their stories. Although all of these experiences were useful for me, I still needed to find methods to better interpret and present the raw data I had collected. It seemed that I saw a beautiful sky, but I was caught under a glass ceiling. I wanted to escape the bonds of the ceiling and move towards the sky. I hoped to improve my research methodology and learn in North America.

Stage 3: How cultural and natural environments influence children's artwork.

I began studying at Concordia University in Montreal in 2004, working towards a Ph.D. degree in Art Education. With the encouragement of my advisor, Dr. David Pariser, I have been teaching art to children from the Chinese community in Montreal since the winter of 2005.

One of my Canadian classmates at Concordia told me that Chinese children who studied in her art classes liked to draw the sun in their paintings and drawings. I also found that children also like to add the sun to their paintings and drawings in China. In China, I often told children

that they should observe interesting details instead of adding the sun freely in their drawings. The sun was an important symbol for the Chinese in the Cultural Revolution. When I was a child, there was a unit to teach how to paint the sun in my old art textbooks. Therefore, I wondered if that my classmate's students were born in China and finished their early education there. However, when I taught art classes in the Montreal Chinese community, I found all children—regardless whether they were born in China or Canada—often added the sun in their drawing or painting, even if some drawings and paintings did not depict the landscape. I realized that both Cultural and natural environments influence children's artwork.

I started to focus on how cultural contexts and natural environments influence individuals' visual perceptions through a comparative study among North American students, Chinese students who have immigrated to Canada from China and Chinese children in China. As a Chinese art teacher living in a bicultural context, I concentrate on the relationships between an individual's visual perception, his or her artwork and his or her life in the constructed and natural environment.

I found that children, whether living in Beijing or Montreal, had different visual signs and different art concepts. For example, children from my class in Beijing preferred to color leaves in green, For example, children from Beijing in my class preferred to color leaves in green, but in Montreal children prefer to use red and yellow. Children from Beijing like to draw buildings as home, while children living Montreal liked to draw independent houses as home. This is rooted in the environments in which they live. In Beijing the majority of families live in apartment building and very few live in houses.

My Experience of Learning Art

My experience of learning art before elementary school.

I was born in 1969, in Kunming, Yunnan Province. Kunming is nicknamed the Spring City because although it experiences the four seasons, its weather is often like spring. My father, a retired pediatrician, likes to practice Chinese calligraphy and write traditional Chinese poems in his spare time. My mother studied agriculture, and she is a self-taught tailor and continues to sew in her spare time.

I remember only a few things related to art when I was young. When I was about 6 years old, my family went on a holiday to the Western Mountains. It is a place where there are many famous Buddhist temples. Most Buddhist temples have a figure of Buddha along with sculptures of monks and frescos. On the day after the trip, my parents went to their office and my sister and brother went to school. I was the only one at home because I had a cold. I used a brush and black ink to draw monks on all the empty walls at home. All the drawings were bigger than me. My mother still remembers two of the monks were extremely vivid, one having long hands wanting to touch the moon, the other with long legs playing in the sea. Their expressions looked like those that can be found on temple sculptures. Although my parents had to paint over my drawings that weekend, they kept one monk on the wall until they moved to another apartment. They were surprised that a child actually drew such a figure because I had no art lessons before then. When friends came to visit, they were able to recognize that the drawing was of a monk with his long arm trying to reach the moon.

When I was almost seven years old, one of my parents' friends, who was a Chinese

painter, started to teach me how to paint animals, birds and flowers every weekend. Sometimes, he showed me traditional techniques; other times, other times he helped me draw what I was interested in. For example, I raised some chickens and ducks, and I really enjoyed painting chickens. He showed me how to observe and draw chickens using an ink and brush. Later, I drew our neighbor's dog and other things I wanted to draw, by myself. The teacher also told me that in order to save money I should practice on newspaper instead of rice paper when trying something new. However, I was really interested in the visual effects created when ink, water, color and rice paper interacted with each other. Newspaper could not produce the same kind of effects. My parents tried to buy rice paper for me, and I always tried not to waste the paper. Therefore, I painted on a piece of rice paper again and again, and I often achieved special visual effects. In the beginning, I did not have any Chinese painting books. Each time, after my teacher demonstrated how to paint, he left his painting with me, so I could copy and study it. Sometimes, he brought some of his new artworks to our place to show us.

At that time, I liked to visit temples too see their sculptures and murals. My father would tell me about the history of the temples and the artwork in them. As a child, I thought that the objects in the temples were art because they were at least a few hundred years old and were very expensive. However, I did not consider the Chinese painting my art teacher did to be artwork, because the works were not antiques and were created in the present.

In elementary school from 1976 to 1980.

The Chinese education system underwent a ten-year revolution that began in 1966 with China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Zedong and lasted until a few

months after his death in 1976. Chinese educational researchers call this period the “education of disruption” (Fang, 2001). During this time, Chairman Mao proposed that students should learn from peasants, workers and soldiers instead of books and teachers. In 1976, with Chairman Mao’s death and the fall of the “Gang of Four⁴,” the educational policies reverted to those of the early 1960s. A regular school curriculum resumed after 1976, and students attended regular school classes every day and studied academic subjects (2001, p. 8).

I entered elementary school in 1976. In the first semester, I did not have a drawing class; but starting in the second semester of grade one and throughout all of grade two, I had two thirty-minute drawing classes per week. At that time, the class was called “drawing class.” The art teacher was a generalist who taught math, politics, music and drawing. Students did not have a drawing textbook, but the art teacher had a teacher’s reference book. In each class, she would choose one picture to hang on the blackboard and show us how to copy it. The subject matter was often the sun and red flags. In the beginning, we used compasses to draw a circle and a ruler to draw rays around the circle. Then, we colored the sun, first using yellow crayons to color the circle and the rays; then used red crayons to cover them again in order to have a radiant sun.

⁴ “Gang of Four” refers to Jiang Qing, Wang Hong wen, Zhang Chuen Qiao and Yao Wen Yuan. The four formed the gang during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) as important members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group and served as in extremely important posts. In October, 1976, a few months after Mao ZheDong died, they had their downfall: the CPC Central Committee declared the gang was an anti-party group. This marked the end of a turbulent political era in China.

After we could draw the sun very well, we began to learn how to add backgrounds under the sun such as some buildings, waves, fields, pines or sunflowers. We also learned how to draw a three dimensional book of Chairman Mao's quotations, a red flag with sickle and hammer, and a soldier's cup. Learning how to use a grid for writing artistic characters was also important because this could help us make slogans.. At that time, the sun was a symbol for Chairman Mao. When one of my classmates added some clouds on the sun, we found it was interesting, so we also added different kinds of clouds on or around our suns. Our art teacher stopped us immediately and told us not to draw clouds because they would cover the sunlight. The red sun was a symbol of Chairman Mao, so we had to respect it. Indeed, at that time, most children could draw the sun very well because we learned how to draw it in art class and saw representations of suns on murals, stamps, cups and even furniture.

When I was in elementary school, the art teacher never taught us art appreciation. However, I did visit an art exhibition when I was in grade one. All the students from my school saw the exhibition of political cartoons about the "Gang of Four," and we were required to observe them carefully and write an essay about how these cartoons and paintings revealed the "crimes" of their subjects. There were so many cartoons and paintings in the exhibition that we stayed there all afternoon. I did not like the cartoons and I wrote that in my essay. My father believed that I was too young to understand those politically charged cartoons criticizing the "Gang of Four." With my sister and parents' help and through reading reports about the "Gang of Four," I rewrote my essay about the cartoons with "proper ideas." The next day, my best friend told me that her father had helped her finish the essay, and she practiced reading it a few times because she did not understand some of the words in her essay. Her father worried that she would

not be able to pronounce some of the words correctly if we had to read our essays to the class. We both found that most of our classmates disliked the political cartoons, although some of the older students as well as the adults did.

Although I began to practice Chinese painting at the age of seven, and I was responsible for drawing and writing my class news and slogans on the blackboard, I did not get good marks in my art class in elementary school. This is probably because I could not always follow the directions of the teacher. The teacher invited my mother to her office and showed her my sketchbook, which contained many things besides what the teacher had asked the class to do. She complained that I always drew what interested me, not paying attention to what she taught. As a result, my parents decided to buy two sketchbooks for me: one was handed in to the teacher, in which I only drew what the teacher asked us to do, the other was only for my “scribbling.” In primary school, after my parents gave me two sketchbooks, I began to have better marks in art class. My parents often encouraged me to take me drawing seriously instead of drawing just for fun.

At that time, art education was not well understood in China. The goal of art education was to help children develop an ability to draw. Whether they were younger or older children, students were taught using the same method, which focused on showing them how to draw like an adult. The only difference in this kind of art class was that young children learned how to draw simple things such as the sun or sunflowers, while older children learned how to draw more complex objects or scenes, such as a sun with a background or a figure. When children used art as a means of expression, the teacher considered this as a waste of time. By teaching children “adult” drawing skills, parents and teachers did not value children’s self-expression.

From grade three up to and including grade five, I did not have a drawing class. Yet the *Draft Plan for a Ten-Year Full-Time Teaching System for Primary and Middle Schools*, published in 1978 by the Ministry of Education, prescribed that two drawing classes should be offered once a week from first to third grades and one drawing class for fourth and fifth grades of elementary school (Yang, 2002, p. 116). At that time, teaching art in schools was not a central aspect of school programs. Most Chinese saw visual art as a peripheral and unimportant subject rather than one that could help students have a better life in the future. Therefore, even though the national teaching system required schools to provide art classes to students, schools ignored it and parents often thought art classes were not important. For example, in my elementary school, if students hoped to achieve a grade of excellent, they needed to obtain 90 percent for mathematics, Chinese and other academic subjects, but they needed only a grade of 60 percent for art and sport.

My older brother liked to collect comic books, and his friends liked to come to our house to copy his books. Following them, I also copied the figures and other interesting things from the comics. They used pencils to draw the contours of the figures, then colored them using watercolor and ink. After I learned how to draw figures such as sirens or the Monkey King by copying them, I started to draw my own pictures based on other stories.

I liked to draw on the wall with brush and black ink. When I was ten or eleven years old, I liked to read novels and do illustrations of some of the plots. At that time, my parents often found small pictures on the wall that described stories about four characters (Monkey, Pig, Monk, and Master), who go to India to see the Scriptures of Buddha. A picture near my desk portrayed four people who traveled on a road. Another picture near a window was of a monkey fighting

fairies, and so on. The pictures of the figures were finger size, and were line drawings. When my mother cleaned up my room, she often found new pictures here and there. At the time, I created pictures in different places on the wall. A few pieces were hidden; one could only be seen when people went under the bed. At that time I was listening to a radio series based on *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne. I was fascinated by the mysterious things in Verne's writings and tried to draw pictures in the same mood as his story.

By this time I was around 10 or 11 years old, and I became interested in drawing on surfaces other than paper. I also liked to draw flowers and veins on flowerpots, windows and old furniture using watercolor and ink..

It was not easy to buy art books then, so my parents helped me make a notebook. I collected pictures from newspapers and glued them into my notebook. I also collected stamps and cards in order to copy them or just enjoy looking at them. I copied essays and poems from books, newspapers and magazines into my notebook, then drew sketches next to them or glued in some pictures as decorations.

Learning art in secondary school from 1981-1984.

In 1981, I began to study in secondary school where I had an art class once a week. At that time, the class was called "Art Class." I thought that art class was for the more mature and sophisticated students in secondary school, unlike the drawing class in elementary school. When I received my curriculum schedule, I felt proud and happy because I was more grown up and could learn more complex and interesting art instead of simple drawing. However, when I later took part in a research team on the Chinese History of Art Education, I found that I was wrong.

In the history of art education in China, the change in name from “drawing” class to “art” class had happened three times because of the changes occurring in society, not because of a student being considered more mature in secondary school; it happened because of the suggestions made by art educators.

Although I had art class for just two years in secondary school, I enjoyed the class very much. It was the first time that my art teacher was a specialist, and I had an art textbook. He was responsible for all art classes at the school, decorating the whole school and publishing the blackboard newspaper⁵. We liked to watch the way that he drew and wrote news on the blackboard at school.

My art textbook was published in 1981 and was as large as A4 paper. In the book, there were many beautiful Western and Chinese paintings and sculptures created by famous artists, such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Henri Matisse. I especially liked Botticelli’s *Spring* (1478). Its brilliant color and fluid lines touched my heart deeply. However, we did not understand why Matisse was a famous artist. We believed that we could paint as well as he could if we had the same art supplies. The teacher also believed that Matisse’s paintings were too simple. Indeed, because China had isolated itself from the world and emphasized realistic art to propagandize politics for many years, the teacher was not familiar with modern art. When my mother found *Madonna of the Rocks* (1483), created by Leonardo da Vinci in my textbook, she

⁵ A blackboard newspaper is a fixed or mobile blackboard with chalk or paint for writing news and advertisements. It is the most economical and convenient, and the most common form of propaganda. It was widely used in schools, universities and factories in the latter half of the last century.

was surprised and confused because the painting, which represented a Biblical story, appeared in a student textbook published by the government that still, in 1981, forbade many religious practices.

In 2000, when I worked with the editor of the textbook mentioned above, Cheng Tong Shuen, I told him about my mother's surprise about the religious image. He replied that the textbook was edited during a period of comparative freedom. In August 1977, Premier Deng Xiaoping decreed that national textbooks should be revised for elementary and secondary school students, and requested that all students use new textbooks in the fall semester of 1977 (Fang, 2001). However, no national publishing companies were interested in editing and publishing art textbooks. Hence, while students were using new textbooks in other subjects by 1977 or 1978, those in art class did not have any new art textbooks. Some art educators and famous artists, concerned about this situation, wrote a letter to the vice-minister of education, Pong Pei Yun, to voice their concerns. As a result, Pong had two meetings with art educators and artists and stated publicly that art education should play a very important role in an individual's development. In 1980, she talked with the Director of the People's Fine Art Publishing House and arranged for the publication of the art textbooks herself. She encouraged editors to open their minds in order to provide students with examples of "high level" culture. Hence, the editors could introduce western art and even modern artists, such as Picasso and his artwork, to students .

I still remember that in secondary school, each class followed a specific procedure. At the beginning of class, the teacher always introduced a few pieces of artwork through reproductions and discussed the artists' background. These artworks were often related to our practice in class. For example, we would examine paintings and drawings of landscapes by Chinese and western

artists, and then the teacher would show us how to copy the examples from the textbook. We often copied a still life or landscape using pencil and watercolor, and sometimes we used a pencil to sketch a plaster ball and cube. I still remember that most of us could not draw the three dimensional ball well; the teacher called these drawings “the dark side of the moon.”

In art class, the specialist often took some time to make the students concentrate on their drawings. Some students chatted with each other and waited for other students to help them with their drawings. I think that students quickly lost their motivation and interest because the drawing tasks were comparatively difficult. Furthermore, art class was not as important as math and language learning in school, so students paid less attention to it.

The new art textbooks recommended by Pong Pei Yun were very different from the school textbooks for other subjects. As a student, I was intrigued by the textbooks: I was excited to see many beautiful Western paintings and sculptures for the first time. I had never seen such artworks before because they were prohibited during the Cultural Revolution; they were thought to be bourgeois and ugly (Yang, 2002). But the influence of the new textbooks went beyond the excitement of students being introduced to a new world of art. It was an important event in the development of Chinese art education. The author of *The History of Chinese Art Education* (2001) comments that the new art textbooks were

thought to be edited the first time based on Chinese art education teaching practice. (Before this textbook, almost all art textbooks were influenced by Western or Russian art textbooks.) It provides the first complete model for a contemporary Chinese art textbook. Furthermore, it also contributed to the regularization of art education, and improved teaching art and art teacher training. However, the art textbooks did not consider children’s artistic and

psychological development, but used professional art training methods. Hence, many art teachers responded to it as “too much, too difficult, too deep.” The content of one lesson that was expected to be taught in one class had to be completed in two or three classes. Most of the contents, especially the drawings, were difficult for students to follow and finish according to the requirements of the textbook (p. 124).

In secondary school, I had the opportunity to attend the art group sessions. We drew pencil sketches or color sketches in a studio once a week. In the beginning, we drew plaster geometric figures, then plaster casts of a Greek goddess. The teacher also asked us to make quick figure drawings during the break between classes. Sometimes, he showed us art books to improve our aesthetic abilities. Most of the time, he showed us realistic and impressionist paintings. I remembered that one of them touched me deeply. It was Gustave Courbet’s *Stone Breakers* (1849). The painting shows two workingmen with a piece of cookware on the side. It reminded me of the hard life of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. I also admired the artist’s ability to render their clothes in a realistic style. When we saw Jacques Louis David’s *The Death of Marat* (1793), I felt pain in my chest and did not dare to look at it one more time because the wound in Marat’s chest was represented too realistically. One student in our art group who came from an artist family drew very well. Sometimes he taught us new techniques and told us stories about the art community. We liked seeing his sketchbook because he was able to do things that were new to us.

When I saw an article about an artist using small pieces of clothes to do collage, I decided to make my own collage. At the time, I had a lot of small pieces of different cloth left over from my mother’s sewing, and I used these to make very colorful collages. I showed them to my art

teacher and he thought they were pretty but told me if I wanted to be an artist, I had to focus on practicing my pencil sketching. I felt a bit embarrassed because I spent so much time on such a “trivial” thing.

My middle school was near the Yun Nan Academy of Fine Art. Some students of the academy came to my school to sketch students in the sports field, and we enjoyed watching them sketch. Sometimes we went to their studio to see what they were doing. The more friendly students often took the time to answer our questions. After seeing what they were working on, we imitated them in our own classroom. I remember that we used only gouache to draw because oil paint was expensive.

When I studied in secondary school, a small art museum was built in the center of my city. It was the first art gallery in my province. When we went downtown, we often went to see whether there were any exhibitions because there was never any information about museum shows in the newspaper. In addition, there was a bookstore in the museum where we were able to look at many art books. It was there that I read many books about impressionism. I also bought a few art books about figure drawing and landscape painting. One of the books that I bought there was the *Biography of Käthe Kollwitz*. It is one of my favorite books for two reasons. One is that Kollwitz is a female artist. At that time, it was not easy to learn about a female artist’s story and artwork. The other is that her artwork is full of emotion and strong images.

Learning art in high school from 1984 to 1987.

I did not have any art classes in senior high school. The *National Art Class Plan* did not require schools to offer art classes to students until 2001, when the *National Curriculum*

Standard was published.

After entering high school, I had to decide what my major was going to be and prepare for the university entrance exam. My parents and teachers wanted me to give up the idea of being an artist. They asked me to do art in my spare time, instead of choosing art as my major at university. At that time, I was not sure about what major to choose, but I was really eager to study in a good university in Beijing. Art education was weak in my province, and young people were rarely able to study in the top-ranking academies of fine art in Beijing. Therefore, I abandoned the idea of studying art, decided to stop drawing and focused on the university entrance exam.

After finishing high school and the entrance exam for university, I registered for an art class that was offered to students who wanted to study art in university at the Yunnan Academy of Fine Arts, during summer vacation. This class lasted two months. The intensive pencil sketching and color sketching courses were very useful. There, we drew for over 8 hours everyday. Every afternoon, teachers let students put their drawings together and discussed the strong and weak points of each piece. Some of the students had taken the university entrance exam a few times but were unable to pass it, and were preparing for their next attempt. We drew from plaster casts, portraits and still life. Sometimes, we just did quick figure drawings, each of us taking a turn as a model. Meanwhile, I got my entrance exam's grade back and was the top student in my high school. After a teacher from the academy learned of my entrance exam grade, he suggested that I attend their school even though I didn't take their entrance exam, which evaluated a candidate's artistic and aesthetic abilities. They were hoping to admit a few students who had good grades on the entrance exam for mathematics, Chinese language, history and

geography. However, I had already been admitted to Beijing Normal University, and I preferred to study in Beijing, a bigger world than my hometown, even though I enjoyed learning art.

My Western Art History course at the university from 1987 to 1991.

In 1987, when I began to study in Beijing Normal University, the university offered all students Chinese Art History and Western Art History as elective courses. However, it was not easy for students to register for them because there were too many students who wanted to take the course. Some students who were not able to register for it went to the class anyway. The classroom seated only 200 students and was often very crowded, forcing some students to stand because there were not enough seats. All seven of my roommates were in Western Art History, so one of us had to go to the classroom early in order to reserve seats for the rest of us. In the classes, the instructor often showed us slides of Western artwork and talked about the artists who created them and the historical context of the period that influenced them. The course covered Western art prehistoric to contemporary time. The instructor's discussion and analysis of artworks often involved different contemporary, aesthetic and philosophical theories of art. I still remember that while the instructor introduced prehistoric art, he discussed the origin and evolution of art from various viewpoints. At that time, most of us only knew the Marxist idea that art originated from the process of human labor. We were intrigued by this course and tried to read books that the instructor recommended. He told us, for example, that it was necessary for us to read the Bible or stories about the Bible because many Western artworks were based on the Bible. In addition, he recommended that I read several books about art history, translated into Chinese, including *Art and Visual Perception* written by Arnheim, *Principles of Art History*

written by Wolflin and Panofsky, and *The Foundations of Art History* written by Holly. At that time, although Western Art History was an elective course, I spent a great deal of time on it. Yet, in the late 1980s, Marxism still played an important role in the ideology of the Chinese government. Academic fields, however, were relatively open to different schools of Western philosophy, literature and art compared with the early 1980s.

In this course, I learned about Matisse's artistic philosophy and how his work fit into the context of 19th and 20th century art. I finally understood why his artwork was part of the secondary school art textbook. I wrote a letter to one of my secondary school classmates and to my sister to discuss Matisse's artwork because when we were studying art in secondary school, we did not understand the reasons for Matisse's fame as an artist. I really wanted to share what I had learned with them.

I felt that I was lucky to have taken this art course. However, some universities that my friends tended did not offer art courses. By 1986, this situation was about to change. In that year, the new national school education guidelines were published in China, because of Premier Zhao Zhi Yan's influence, aesthetic educational guidelines were again included. In 1954, Chairman Mao had omitted them. In order to institute these changes, the Ministry of Education proposed that all universities should offer art history as electives that same year (p. 201).

When I was studying at Beijing Normal University, a few of students who liked to draw and hoped to become artists created a small painting group. We often went out to draw in the garden and visited museums on holidays or the weekend. It was very interesting and helpful. When we drew landscapes together outside, we were able to learn from each other. Later, when I taught art classes, I found that it was helpful for students to learn from their classmates. We also

went to visit some fine art museums together. Some of their parents or grandparents were artists, and I learned many oil painting skills from them. It was then that I started to paint in oil.

In my opinion, my experience of learning art in school reflects the evolution of art education in China. The series of name changes from drawing class to art class mirrors the changing political climate in China during my school years. With the social and economic changes occurring in China, the content and goals of art education evolved from serving politics to developing students' drawing skills and fostering a kind of good aesthetic taste. As Eisner (1972) writes "The content, goals, and methods of art education change over time and the aims to which the field is directed are related to the social, economic, and ideological situation in which it functions" (p. 57).

In China, art teaching emphasizes "the instrumental consequences of art in work and utilizes the particular needs of the students or the society as a major basis for forming its objectives" (Chang, p. 2). This is why art as a school subject took various forms and had different educational objectives and goals in China over the 12 years of my art school education, from 1976 to 1987. During my time in university, neither ideology nor politics played an important role in the content of art courses, and instructors could introduce different philosophical ideas in their lectures.

As an art educator, when I discuss and analyze my experience of learning art in elementary school, secondary school and university, I feel deeply that it is very important for art educators to respect children's development in the art classroom. When art educators formulate the goals of art education and design their teaching methods and art curriculum, they should consider children's visual expression as "natural in the context of their needs," (Feldman, 1970, p.

158) rather than what adults expect of children.

The wish to become an artist.

After graduating from university and starting to work, I found that I still liked to paint. However, there was still no art market. My friends suggested that I should pursue a master's degree in Art Theory. Therefore, I would have an art-related job and still have the opportunity to pursue my dream in the art community. In 1996, I was admitted to the master's program in Art Education at Capital Normal University. In the first year, most of my courses were studio courses because I did not have the opportunity to take studio arts courses in my undergraduate studies in Education. In the studio art courses in my graduate studies, I focused on drawing plaster casts, studio portraits and oil painting.

One of my relatives also arranged a visit to the studio of Liu Bing Jian, a famous artist in China. Liu told me that I should not only paint in the studio, but outside like the impressionists. He also suggested that if it was possible, I should try to paint a small oil painting outside every day. Therefore, when I was studying for my master's degree, I painted both outside and inside the studio. I often used oil paint to sketch around twenty small pieces at a time; then, I showed them to Liu. He picked out the certain pieces and told me why they were better than the others. Sometimes, I also painted murals for companies to make some money. I was interested in painting small oil paintings outside more than painting in the studio. After finishing the second year of my program, I found it was not practical to study art education and paint at the same time. I also realized that it was not easy to become an artist. Therefore, I decided to focus on art education, and pursue painting as a serious hobby. Since that time, the reason why I have

pursued artistic creation has not been to become an artist, but to help myself understand how to teach and learn art.

Artistic activity as a way of finding better methods of teaching and learning art.

In 1999, I started to work at the Central Institute for Education Research as an art educator, and continued to examine my own artistic activity in the studio as a way of finding better methods of teaching and learning art. Since then, I have focused on helping adults and children develop drawing and painting skills.

In my workplace, there were a few researchers who were good at Chinese painting and calligraphy. We painted together once a week at the office. During these sessions, I learned from my colleagues and shared my skills and knowledge with them.

New experience in art studios in Canada

In 2005, I came to Canada to study for my Ph.D. in Art Education at Concordia University. After coming to Montreal, I became excited by Montreal's dynamic nature and the most everyday incidents would touch my heart or make me curious. Living in Montreal has been a new experience for me, because the city has a totally different culture from my Chinese background. In the first semester, my studio course focused on art installation and performance. I had not done installations in my studio classes during my training in China; therefore, I was intrigued by art installations and performance pieces at Concordia, because I could explore new art methods in a new cultural and educational environment. For my studio course at Concordia, I did two installations called "Misreading, Misinterpreting and Misunderstanding," and "Being

and Time.”

Suddenly, I lost my passion to paint in the traditional Chinese style. However, I did not know what I was able to paint in the new cultural context of Montreal.

After learning that the Fine Arts department at Concordia University had models for students once a week, I decided to draw nudes using Chinese painting material. I tried to sketch nudes using ink, brushes and rice paper in the studio at Concordia University in order to improve my painting skills. In China, a model would strike the same pose for several sessions in a row, so I used to draw the same pose for as long as two to three weeks. However, in Montreal the models often changed their poses every five to ten minutes. Therefore, I had to adapt myself to this situation. In order to catch up with these short poses, I just sketched the models quickly and did not have enough time to think much about anatomy and techniques.

While sketching nudes, I felt very happy and relaxed. Sometimes, I felt as if the brush was a part of my body and I could use it freely. This joyful experience was similar to my childhood creative experiences. I repeated one model's different poses on the same piece of paper, because I hoped my drawing would show more complexity or interaction between the figures on the paper, to enable the spectator to have many different interpretations of the narrative created on the paper. I drew a pose on a piece of rice paper, and then put it aside. After I found other poses that could match this drawing, I put the drawing back on the board, and then added the other poses on it. Then, I used watercolor, gouache and acrylic to finish it as a painting. At the same time, I borrowed some painting books to enhance my knowledge on modern artists' works and to inspire myself.

Although, at some point, I was really interested in exploring the possibilities of using

Chinese painting material with modern concepts, I gradually became interested in doing oil painting. After completing a work on rice paper, it was difficult to find someone to mount the painting. I learned how to mount them after watching a video tutorial, but some of my paintings were destroyed because of my lack of experience in mounting. After a while, I stopped painting nudes using Chinese material because I found it difficult to paint and mount the paintings done on rice paper by myself. Furthermore, artists around me all did oil paintings; I was not able to find any peers to discuss my experience of using Chinese painting material.



Figure 1: Liu Wan Cen's Nude (2006).

Therefore, I started to paint oil paintings. In the past, I mainly sketched outside using oil paint; when I studied art, the majority of art teachers and artists I met believed that the only way to become a good painter was to go out and sketch in natural light like the Impressionists. Here in Canada, I did the same thing in the beginning. Then, trying to reflect on my inner thoughts and feelings, I used my memory and some photos of my hometown in my paintings. As a child, I was always attracted by the shadows of the trees on the old walls of my neighborhood, and the river in my back yard. I studied the shadows at different times of the day, seeing the way they interacted with the bumps and ridges along the wall, or the fish swimming in the river. Sometimes, I expected some gods living in the river or the old trees to say hello to me.



Figure 2: Liu Wan Cen's Hometown (2006).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews three different streams of scholarly research used in this study. The first part of the review examines selected theories employed to analyze learning experiences generally and, more specifically, the stories of how artists learn art. The second part reviews studies related to Chinese art education and the contemporary art histories. The third part reviews theories related to research methods.

Selected Theories Used to Analyze Artists' Experiences and Stories of Art Learning

In the early part of the 20th century, the behaviorists' and the rationalists' theories were dominant in the education system. Influenced by them even today, learning theories emphasize passing on organizational knowledge to students in the classroom, giving them a relatively complete and systemic body of information and skills that have been developed in the past. However, many educators and psychologists have criticized this learning theory, believing it overemphasizes learning through memory and practice but ignoring the experience and individual feelings and creativities. As Kolb (1984) argues,

In the overeager embrace of the rational, scientific, and technological, our concept of the learning process itself was distorted first by rationalism and later by behaviorism. We lost touch with our own experiences as the source of personal learning and development and, in the process, lost that experiential centeredness necessary to counterbalance the loss of 'scientific' centeredness that has been progressively slipping away since Copernicus. (p. 2)

Scholars like John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky propose that human learning and development result from an individual's experiences interacting with society although they had different ideas about development and learning. Dewey (1938) expresses his experiential learning theory in this way:

I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience; or, that the new philosophy of education is committed to some kind of empirical and experiential philosophy. (p. 25)

He believes that the traditional teacher-centered method, influenced by the behaviorist learning theory, prevents a child from being creative. He points out that children should be at the centre of teaching and learning; in other words, teaching should be based on children's lives. Traditional education, he argues, influenced by rationalism and behaviorism, had a "pattern of organization" (Dewey, 1938, p. 18) that "consisted of schedules, rules, and procedures, which inhibit student learning" (Roberts, 2003, p. 5). Under this "pattern of organization," Dewey states that during his years of formal schooling, the teacher was the "ruler" of the classroom; students were required to be "docile, receptive, and obedient" (Dewey, 1938 p. 18). He advocates "increased social interaction within schools" (p. 5), and believes that "knowledge is socially constructed and based on experiences" (p. 11).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), known for his theory of cognitive development based on his epistemological studies with children, believes that environment also influences the development of individuals, although he considers cognitive structural development as a differentiation of biological regulations. Kolb (1984) relies on Jean Piaget's theory for his interpretation of intelligence, arguing that "intelligence is shaped by experience. Intelligence is not an innate

internal characteristic of the individual but arises as a product of the interaction between the person and his or her environment” (p. 12-13). Piaget believes that individual hereditary and environmental factors are two fundamental elements, interacting with each other, causing individual intellectual development (Ma, 2005, p.134). “Knowledge is invented and reinvented when children develop and continually interact with the world around them” (Driscoll, 2005, p.20). In other words, experiences or interactions with the surrounding environment play a critical role in individual learning.

At the same time as Piaget was formulating these ideas, Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) developed a socio-cultural approach to cognitive development, the Social Development Theory. Piaget and Vygotsky call attention to different aspects of cognitive development. While Vygotsky emphasizes social contributions to the process of development, Piaget puts emphasis on self-initiated discovery. However, they both believe that children’s cognitive development interacts with the world around them. According to Vygotsky, social interaction plays a crucial role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) argues:

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter psychological) and then inside the child (intra psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

Based on the theories of Dewey, Piaget, and other scholars, Kolb in his *Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (1984) proposes an experiential learning theory. He believes that except for the classroom, learning can occur from the family, from everyday life or

whenever people gather to work, play or love. He also believes that the experiential model “pursues a framework for examining and strengthening the critical linkages among education, work, and personal development” (p. xi).

Bennis (1984) states that in Kolb’s experiential theory “learning is a social process based on carefully cultivated experience which challenges every precept and concept of what nowadays passes for ‘teaching’” (p. ix). Furthermore, Kolb “knowingly shifts the ecology of learning away from the exclusivity of the classroom (and its companion, the Lecture) to the workplace, the family, the carpool, the community, or wherever we gather to work or play or love” (p. ix). Bennis believes that Kolb’s experiential theory changes “the traditional conceptions of credit hours and calendar time” and makes us think about learning from “competence, working knowledge, and information truly pertinent to jobs, families, and communities” (p. ix). Kolb’s theory also examines life long learning, but his primary focus is that the individual can learn in the broader context of the society rather than just in classrooms and schools.

However, some scholars, such as Peter Jarvis (2006), when he affirms Kolb’s experiential learning theory, argue that when Kolb discusses experiential learning, he separates experiential learning from formal learning. In practice, individual learning, especially for students, often involves a combination of experiential learning and school learning. Jarvis bases his theory on the idea that “the learner is always in the world” (p. 194), and “studying learning as something divorced from learner in the wider world is artificial and non-realistic” (p. 194). He formulates a comprehensive theory of human learning, which is

[t]he combination of a process whereby the whole person-body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and sense)

experiences a social situation, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the person's individual biography resulting in a changed (or more experienced) person (p. 25).

He states that the early learning theorists did not often "isolate learning from the educational setting" (p. 195). Therefore, most of the learning theories "from Confucianism to behaviorism and even to some of the experiential theories of learning" were "theories of learning and teaching" (p. 195). Jarvis states that learning occurs in educational settings and other situations such as "in the workplace and the family" (p. 195). Moreover, he points out that because the concept of learning has been broadened, scholars in the field of education have started to use new terms to describe different learning situations; therefore, "the terms formal, non-formal and informal learning have crept into the educational vocabulary when we have actually meant learning in formal, non-formal and informal situations" (p. 195).

Although the three terms are used in educational research, only "formal learning" has an exact and agreeable definition, which is generally referred to as school education. Non-formal and informal learning have been defined in many different ways in scholarly research. According to a literature review about the terms of formal non-formal and life learning done by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003), many studies

use one or more of the terms without any clear definition. In arguably even large numbers, issues involved are either assumed or addressed, but without the explicit use of the terms at all. A smaller, but still considerable and growing body of writing sets out definitions of one or more of the terms concerned. Within that third body of there is little agreement about how these terms should be defined. (p. 2)

In some academic research studies, learning is divided into informal and formal learning, while some scholars use the formal and non-formal terms to represent learning outside of a formal educational setting. Generally, the terms informal and formal learning have been used for a relatively long time (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003)) compared to non-formal learning. Micheal Eraut (2000) argues that classifying learning into formal and non-formal is better than into formal and informal because the connotation of informal learning is too wide to be used properly (p. 12).

However, Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm (2003) also emphasized that the “[b]oundaries or relationships between informal, non-formal and formal learning can only be understood within particular contexts” (p. 12). Therefore, within an exacting context, researchers are able to and should define these three types based on basic definitions.

In the *European Commission (2001) Communication on Lifelong Learning*, formal, non-formal and informal learning are used to describe both adult and community education together. The definitions of the three types of learning are as follows:

Formal learning: learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

Non-formal learning: learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

Informal learning: learning resulting from activities of daily life related to work, family

or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or “incidental”/ random) (p. 32-33).

In fact, in the studies mentioned above, done by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm, Coffield, Eraut and Forth(2003), the terms of formal, non-formal and informal learning are used to discuss adult learning. However, child learning also takes place without teaching and out of school. Many educators and scholars such as Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky state that children learn from the world around them. Based on their research, other researchers use informal learning to discuss children and youth learning.

My study involves analyzing the artists’ experiences as life long art learning, the period of their early time, the period of becoming an artist and as an artist learning about art. Therefore, in my study, I classify the participants’ experiences of art learning in my study as formal, non-formal and informal art learning based on the definitions of the three types of learning from *European Commission (2001) Communication on Lifelong Learning*. However, I use the term “life learning” instead of “informal learning” in order to let readers identify the three learning types more easily. Based on the definitions of the three types of learning and the characteristics of art learning, Formal Art Learning, Non-formal Art Learning, and Life Art Learning are defined as follows:

Formal Art Learning is a type of art learning in art classes offered in elementary, secondary school, high school and university (academy).

Non-formal Art Learning is a type of after-school study. In this type of learning, although participants do not study art in order to receive a certification, they do have

learning objectives. It includes two types of learning. In the first, individuals like drawing or painting and hope to improve their ability. This learning often occurs with individuals involved in small art communities or art activities with others who have some advanced techniques. For example, individuals learn art in the school's art group (made up of fellow students) or learn from people they encounter who have painting skills. The learning objectives and content are more flexible, and mainly depend on what teachers are good at or what students are interested in. The other type of non-formal art learning is preparation for the entrance examination for both art high school and university, with the goal of entering art high school or art school at university.

Life Art Learning occurs in daily life or during the process of work when participants do not have a learning objective. The world around them influences their aesthetic experience, knowledge structure or skills. It often involves playing with peers, participating in leisure activities and so on.

Review of Chinese Art Education, and Contemporary Art History

This study focuses on artists' experience of art learning in China during the past half century, which has been significantly influenced by situations of art education and art community.

School art education and the history of Fine Arts art education.

The primary works related to the history of art education in China are A History of Chinese School Art Education (2001), Chinese Contemporary Art Education (2002), and Fine Art

Education in 20th Century China: A Historical Perspective (2005). Furthermore, some aspects of the history of Chinese school art education are discussed in Chang Rui Lun's School Art Education Pedagogy (2001), although this book does not focus on the history of art education in China. Moreover, there are some articles that focus on some of the stages of art education or professional art education in China, and some recent studies on modern Chinese art education. "Two considered as the best and most complete are: Rooting and Starting of Chinese School Art Education written by Zhang Hen Xiang and Modern Chinese History of School Art Education, written by Su Ning Sheng" (Que, 2004, p. 17). In my study, the four books and two articles mentioned above are used to discuss the history of school art education and the history of fine art education in China.

A History of Chinese School Art Education (2001), edited by L. Yang, is considered one of the most important historical reference works about the development of Chinese art education policy (Song, 2002, p. 23). It is the first book on the history of Chinese school art education, focusing on the history of school art education and not on the training of professional artists. *Chinese Contemporary Art Education*, written by Pan Yue Chang in 2002, mainly analyzes fine art education from the end of the Ming Dynasty to 1999. It focuses on the important events during the period and how social changes influenced art education in China. *Fine Art Education in 20th Century China: A Historical Perspective* (2005) primarily examines the development of Chinese fine art education and investigates the importance of art academies in the development of fine art and fine art educators from the 17th to the end of the 20th century.

Based on the development of school art education, along with examining the changes in the politics and economics in Chinese society, the above-mentioned books all divide the history

of school art education into three phases: the history of art education from the feudal period up to 1904; then the period from 1904 to 1949, when modern school art education first appeared and developed in China; and finally art education during the socialist period of Chinese history, from 1950 to the end of the 20th century. These books discuss art education during the feudal period briefly, and focus on how school art education and professional art education appeared and developed during different periods of the 20th century. Following the division of the history of art education in China into three phases in these works, my research will examine three stages of art education in China, with a focus on the past century.

Some scholars posit that, in Chinese feudal society, there was no real “art education” in official schools until the end of Qing Dynasty, in the first part of the 20th century (Chang, 2000; Yang, 2001). Confucianism postulates that art education improves the aesthetics or taste of individuals and helps them become more moral. However, no documentary evidence has ever been found for the existence of art classes in the different official schools that existed before the Qing Dynasty ended. These official schools were founded to train a small number of people to be managers and scholar-bureaucrats.⁶ At that time, artists who did not receive a “literary” education were considered “workers,” while scholars taught themselves visual arts by copying the masters’ artworks, or by learning from private teachers as a means of self-expression. Another way that art was taught in China was through the handicraft industry. The artists

⁶ The official schools in China at that time were Da Xue, Hou Xue, Di Xue, Xue and Guo Xue, differentiated by their academic level.

working in the official and family handicraft industry² learned art to paint buildings and produce such things as porcelain and jade carvings. The method of teaching was the apprentice system, with skilled workers teaching apprentices or fathers teaching their sons (Chen, 2006; Chang, 2000; Yang, 2001).

Although there were two dynasties during China's feudal period that had official art schools, Chang (2009) points out that these kinds of training are not true forms of "school art education" (p. 72). The emperors in the Dong Han Dynasty (25-20) and the Song dynasty (960-1279) founded the Hong Du Meng School and the Painting School, respectively, in order to provide artists with special skills to work for the royal family some of these artists were selected to be officers in the royal court (Chang, 2000; Yang, 2001).

During the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when Christian missionaries started to preach in China, Western painting techniques were also introduced to China. In Shanghai, the Xu Jia Hui church organized the Tu Shang Studio in 1852 in order to train orphans to make religious sculptures and paintings. The Tu Shang Studio played an important role in introducing Western art and art education to Chinese society (Zhang, 1989; Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002; Chun, 2005).

The first appearance of school art education in the Qing Dynasty was in 1904 with the

² The official handicraft industry supplied handicrafts to the Royal Family, and the family handicraft industry provided goods to the public.

publication of the *School Rule* in 1904 (Zhang, 1989; Chen, 2006; Chuan, 2001; Su, 1999; Pan, 2002). Some sixty years before the *School Rule*, when the Qing government fought and lost the Opium War (1839-1842), scholars and officials in the government proposed that founding new schools based on the Western school system, combined with the development of modern industry, would create a stronger China and prevent it from becoming a colony. Their influence, combined with the desire to train engineers, technicians and workers, culminated with the Qing government instituting the *School Rule* of 1904, the first piece of legislation in the modern Chinese school system. The increasing demand for engineers, technicians, and workers who could understand or produce cartography forced schools to provide drawing classes. Therefore, the *School Rule* made drawing classes mandatory in the new school system. Thus, a series of drawing textbooks were examined and approved by the Ministry of Education of the Qing government. Younger students learned freehand drawing and how to copy, while older students learned cartography (Zhang, 1989; Chen, 2006; Chang, 2000; Su, 1999; Pan, 2002; Yang, 2001).

After the Republic of China was created in 1912, the New Culture Movement began, with scholars advocating that if China wanted to be strong and wealthy, it must adopt western political systems, become more scientifically and technologically advanced, and reject traditional Chinese culture such as Confucianism. Chinese art and culture was influenced by this trend. Many scholars wrote articles promoting how aesthetic education could improve the moral qualities of the citizenry and provide a solid base for a democratic political system. The most accepted view of aesthetic education was proposed by Chai Yuan Pei who studied philosophy in Germany for eight years and translated Schiller's works into Chinese. He held that aesthetic education played an important role in the development of the individual and could replace religion. Aesthetic and

art education could help the public improve its aesthetic ability, foster empathy, courtesy and good manners among citizens, and enrich the spirits of people, enabling China to create a more moral society and an enlightened political system (Chen, 2006; Chang, 2000; Su, 1999; Pan, 2002; Yang, 2001). During this time, people went to Japan and France to learn Western art, and they often selected two different art styles to study based on their interests, either realistic or modern style (Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002).

Because of the influence of such scholars as Chai Yuan Pei and Guo Min Dang, the government published the *Elementary and Secondary Schools Temporary Teaching Plan* in 1928, which decreed that drawing class would henceforth be called “art class.” However, from 1921 to 1949, in areas that were controlled by the Communist party, the subject was still known as “drawing class.” For the Communists, art was a way to propagandize revolutionary ideas and encourage the revolutionary struggle (Su, 1999; Yang, 2001).

In the 1920s, some private and public art schools appeared in larger Chinese cities such as Shanghai. These schools often offered classes in painting (both Chinese and western), pattern design, sculpture, and still life drawing. According to the aesthetic preferences of the directors of each school, some schools tended to promote modern styles while others pursued realism (Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002).

When the People's Republic of China was founded on the 1st of October 1949, the Soviet educational system was considered to be the most advanced and was used as a model to build the Chinese educational system. *The Drawing Curriculum Standard in Elementary and Secondary Schools (draft)* was published in 1950, influenced by Russian ideas about art education, because drawing has many political uses. Again, there was a change in the name of “art class,” to

“drawing class” based on the idea that drawing was important in teaching other visual art forms, and because these classes focused mainly on drawing. This standard required that every grade should have drawing classes, and that grade one to grade three students should receive two hours of drawing class each week, while fourth- and fifth-graders would have an hour of drawing class each week. In secondary schools, a weekly one-hour drawing class would be offered from the first to the third grade. The objectives of drawing classes in secondary school not only included helping students acquire basic drawing knowledge and skills and cultivating their character but also providing them with political instruction (Su, 1999; Yang, 2001; Chen, 2006).

From 1953 to 1956, many Russian art educational textbooks were translated into Chinese, including works on teaching methods and art theory. These books had a great influence on Chinese art education, especially the sections dealing with the teaching of drawing. For example, the *Methods of Teaching Drawing in Elementary School and Secondary School* (1957) emphasized the importance of learning to draw as opposed to other forms of art. Firstly, drawing was seen as a basis for learning other art forms such as sculpture, wood printing, and design. Secondly, it could help students develop manual dexterity for drawing and improve their hand and eye coordination, in addition to developing drawing skills for more precise observation and accurate recording (Yang, 2001; Su, 1999).

In 1952, Oavel Chistyakov’s (1832-1919) pedagogical system of pencil sketching was introduced and promoted in China by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture. In 1955, the National Art Education Conference convened in Beijing and decided to use this pedagogical system in art schools throughout China. At the same time, the Soviet painter Konstantin M. Maksimov was invited to teach oil painting at CAFA for one year. Both events

had a profound influence at that time in promoting Russian socialist realism in China (Zheng, 2008; Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002; Pan, 2005).

In 1956, a complete series of elementary and intermediate school teaching outlines for drawing was published, the first since the Chinese Republic was founded in 1949. These outlines clearly show that aesthetic education played an important role in facilitating students' general development, and drawing class was one of the most important ways to teach aesthetic education in schools (Su, 1999; Yang, 2001).

However, in 1957, in *The Question of Dealing with the Contradictions Within the Proletariat*, Chairman Mao proposed the idea that socialist national education must help students with their “moral, intellectual and physical development, and more immediately, to increase the literacy rate in China and create a more educated and socialistic nation” (2001, p. 121). Because this pedagogical concept did not include aesthetic education, art instruction was not thought to be important by education administrators. Art education became less and less a priority in schools because Mao had omitted aesthetic instruction from the national education guidelines. The teaching of drawing was limited to serving political goals, and the aesthetic aspects of education were becoming significantly less important (Yang, 2001; Fang, 2000).

In 1966, with the launch of the Cultural Revolution, school classes were suspended for two years. In 1968, students returned to class, but the ideas of the Cultural Revolution continued to be promoted in schools. In some cities, drawing continued to be taught as the “art class of the revolution” with the goal of helping students develop the artistic skills that could be used as tools to create propaganda in elementary and secondary schools. In 1968, cities such as Beijing and Shanghai created their own art textbooks for their students. The texts included instruction on

how to make political mastheads for newspapers, cartoons, and slogans. Art education became a means of political education and promoting the class struggle. Some cities, however, did not even give students “art classes of the revolution,” viewing art as a bourgeois activity (Su, 1999; Yang, 2001; Yao, 1998; Cheng, 2000).

In this politicized revolutionary climate, art schools and universities stopped recruiting students from 1966 until 1974. From 1974 to 1976, a few universities again started to enroll workers, peasants, and soldiers as students for two-year long study terms. But instead of taking university entrance exams, these students were ‘recommended’ for university study; few of those studying fine arts at university had significant artistic knowledge or technique (Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002; Pan, 2008). Despite universities being dismantled and diminished during the Cultural Revolution, many young people learned art and improved their art skills through the production of art propaganda (Chen, 2006; Pan, 2002; Pan, 2008).

In 1976, Chairman Mao died and the “Gang of Four” were removed from power, bringing China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, started by Chairman Mao, to an end. By 1977, universities again started to recruit students; and in 1979, *Art Teaching Outline for a Ten-Year Full-Time Teaching System for Primary and Middle Schools* was published, the second guideline for art teaching since 1949.. Art education was seen as an important way to provide students with aesthetic training and improve their intellectual development. Once again, the term “art class” replaced “drawing class” (Su, 1999; Yang, 2001; Yao, 1998; Cheng, 2000).

In 1986, the new national school education guidelines were published and, for the first time since Mao excluded it from the national education guidelines in 1954, aesthetic education once again started to regain its important position in the national education guidelines. The

increasing influence of art education in the Chinese education curriculum led to the publication, in 1992, of the third art teaching outline, the *Compulsory Education Elementary and Secondary Schools Art Teaching Plan*. This outline emphasized that art instruction was an important way to give students an aesthetic education. This was the first time in the history of art education in China that art class was a required course in the school curriculum and aesthetic education was once again seen as an important element in the national education guideline (Yang, 2001).

During the 1990s, there was increasing communication with other countries and cultures, particularly with the popular culture of Hong Kong and the west. These cultural influences were sometimes seen by parents and educators to be unhealthy for the psychological development of adolescents. For example, some teens idolized pop stars and imitated their dress and behavior; others watched violent cartoon programs, while still others wore “bizarre clothes.” In 1992, the Ministry of Education issued the *Bulletin on Taking Measures to Deter Negative Cultural Spread*, and proposed the development of comprehensive and wide ranging art activities to resist these negative cultural influences. It was believed that art education was one of the most important ways to combat these influences. For the authors of this bulletin, art education had two goals. One was to help students develop basic knowledge and skills, and healthy aesthetic tastes. The other was to give students moral education through the teaching of art knowledge and skills (Yang, 2001). From the 1990s to the early years of the present century, the Chinese government aimed to improve art school education, and published six different sets of art education policies, and even passed the *Regulation of Art Education* in 2003, a law concerning art education (Chen, 2006; Yang, 2001; *Policies and Files Related Chinese Art Education*, 2004)

By the year 2000, Chinese society had significantly changed from that of 1949.

Recognizing this, the Ministry of Education began the most extensive educational reforms since the establishment of the Republic of China, because the old curricula were not able to adapt to the needs of modern China. After Liberation, the Ministry of Education strictly managed the curricula to try to ensure uniform education standards throughout the country, even though different cities and regions had their own particular needs and requirements in terms of education. Furthermore, the old curricula overemphasized students developing a deep knowledge of subjects and encouraged learning through memorization, rather than fostering critical thinking and understanding society. The reform also allowed regions and schools to create their own curricula for students, based on *The National Curriculum Standard* and the local situation of art education. In addition, the new curricula focused on the interrelationship between subject knowledge and the development of Chinese society and technology. Students were encouraged to pursue their interests and to improve their ability to think critically, to develop knowledge, to analyze and solve problems, and to learn to communicate and cooperate with others. (Que Chu Xi, 2007; Ten Shuo Rao, 2002)

Choosing the Artists from different phases based on the changes of Chinese contemporary history.

Using the changes in the politics and economics of Chinese society in the 20th century as a timeline, *A History of Chinese School Art Education* (Yang, 2001) explores the development of school art education in China. Although the book discusses only the development of formal art school education and not informal art education outside of the Chinese art educational system, the authors use the seven generally accepted phases of 20th century Chinese history. These

periods, based on the political and economic changes that occurred up to the year 2000, differentiate the various periods of the history of art education in China. During the initial period is from 1904 to 1949, school art education first appeared and developed in China. The second phase examines art education from the beginning of the Chinese People's Republic from 1949 to 1957, a period when art education was influenced by Russian educational ideas. The third period explores the years 1957 to 1965, when China and the Soviet Union became estranged, while the fourth period examines school art education during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to the death of Mao in 1976. The history of art education in China from 1977 until today is divided into three periods: from 1977 until 1985, marking the beginning of more openness and reform in China; from 1986 until 1993, when changes and reforms in China were debated, expanded and developed; and from 1994 to 1999, when development and reform were more stable and accepted by the majority of the population. The oldest artist in my survey (Jin Zhi Lin) experienced art education as a young adult, before Liberation in 1949. The youngest (Huang Huan), on the other hand, was born after the national "one child policy" was established and received art education in school during and after the second period of reform in China between 1986 and 1993.

History of Chinese modern art.

Two books related to Chinese modern art history are the principle references used in this study: *Art And China's Revolution* (2006), edited by Melissa Chiu and Zhang Sheng Tian, and *The History of Chinese Modern Fine Art* (2007), written by Pan Yue Chang. Referring the development and changes in the styles of art schools and artists in China, Pan's work examines

the history of art⁷ from the end of the Ming Dynasty during the 17th century to the end of the 20th century, dividing the period into three stages. His investigation of the past 60 years of art in China, in essence, is a discussion of the period when Western art first entered China, marked by the appearance of realism, socialist realism, and multiple styles. Chiu and Zhang, however, chronicle the period from 1950 to 1976, focusing on how the social and historical contexts of the Cultural Revolution influenced the aesthetic experiences of artists by analyzing the experiences of artists.

Traditionally, Chinese painting, which uses brushes, ink, and rice paper to represent and emphasize self-expression, is the prominent type of art in China. At the end of the Ming Dynasty after the 16th century, missionaries brought western art to China, and western art techniques started to influence Chinese art. By the start of the twentieth century, after the Qing government lost the Opium War, some scholars in China believed that China needed to westernize if it wanted to become a powerful country. These ideas had a strong influence in “reforming” Chinese painting with western concepts. At the same time, traditional Chinese painters countered this movement by defending and promoting traditional Chinese painting. Western art theories and styles became prominent in big cities because scholars who had studied art in Japan and Europe

⁷ In China, the term ‘art’ was not used until 1919, when scholars, influenced by westernWestern culture, started to use the term “art” in their writings. Before the term became commonly used in China, scholars did not see art as inclusive but viewed it as discrete activities: architecture, sculpture, painting and so on.

promoted these ideas through journals and by setting up art schools that popularized them. Realism and modernist art concepts co-existed in the Chinese art community, although there was vigorous debate between the supporters of each approach during this period (Pan, 2008).

In 1949, with the creation of the People's Republic of China (Mainland China), Chinese artists were encouraged to employ Soviet socialist realism, though this practice was not mandatory. However, Chinese painting was disparaged somewhat, because there were individuals in the Chinese art community who believed that this style of painting was not strong enough to represent the life of the “masses” and the leaders and events of the revolution. Oil painting, however, was considered to be a better medium to convey the message of revolution. These views were tempered by Mao’s suggestion that China should not become completely westernized; it should create its “own Chinese things with characteristic national form and style.” The inauguration of the Hundred Flowers Campaign⁸, launched in 1956, also helped improve the status of traditional Chinese painting.

During the Cultural Revolution, art was viewed as a vital tool to influence ideas, and also as a means of political propaganda. Because many artists were sent to the countryside for reeducation and politically themed artworks were in demand, young people with painting ability were conscripted to produce “art.” Kui Yi Shen (2008), in *Propaganda Posters and Art During*

⁸ In 1956, Mao announced the "Hundred Flowers Blooming Together" as the party's guidelines for the development of the arts. To promote research work in these fields, he encouraged independent thinking, debates about freedom, and freedom to create and criticise. Meanwhile, he said the artists and scientists should also study Marxism-Leninism and use it as their guideline.

the Cultural Revolution, divides the art of the Cultural Revolution into two periods: the Red Guard and Rebel Faction art (from 1966 to 1970) and the Worker-peasant-soldier art (from 1971 to 1976) (p. 149). He argues that the Red Guard and Rebel Faction art was used to “overthrow Mao’s rivals and to suppress the intelligentsia” (p. 149) and “sing the praises of Mao Zedong” (p. 149). The Worker-peasant-soldier art had three characteristics: (i) the style was based on the model of theatrical works promoted by Mao’s wife; (ii) the expansion of themes the expansion of themes incorporated, often with local flavor, often with local flavor, the activities of the Maoist triad of workers, peasants, and soldiers; and (iii) the producers of this art were young people drawn from ranks of workers, soldiers and peasants, while “the professional artists who were trained in the art colleges before the Cultural Revolution worked mainly in supporting roles, to facilitate the conversion of amateur paintings into something that could be exhibited” (p. 159). According to Chui (2008) the artwork that did not follow these styles or standards was often viewed negatively and was labeled “black paintings” (p. 7).

After 1976, the “Gang of Four” was removed from power and the country began to reform and become more open. Although realism was still prominent in the art community, Chinese artists started to reflect on their artistic creation and their experiences during the Cultural Revolution and to explore different concepts of art, not just socialist realism. During the 1980s, western contemporary art and philosophy had a significant impact on the art community, and the experiments of Chinese art were seen as imitating western styles. From 1990 onward, Chinese artists used western stylistic elements to explore their own world and experience. When the art market appeared after 2000, artwork became more and more varied, employing many different styles and media.

Theories Related to Research Methods

In this section, two issues are discussed: one concerning what research method to choose, and the other on how to ask questions in the interviews.

Collection of raw data.

This study collected the raw data through interviewing and observing Chinese artists in their studio to get their stories and recollections about learning art and learning to be an artist.

In terms of the interview process, Flick (1998) points out that there is a wide range of interview methods. On one side of this continuum, interviewers can use tightly structured problem-centered interviews with standardized and closed questions; while at the other end of the continuum is the in-depth interview with open-ended and unstructured conversation.

My research explores how Chinese artists learn to be artists, following several generations and the changes that occurred in Chinese society during the 20th century. It is very important for me to understand the experiences of these artists, how they reflected on their own experiences in a changing time and what these experiences meant to them. Because I expected that each artist would have different experiences about learning art due to the changing nature of art education in China during the period when they were learning their craft, closed questions and tightly structured interviews seemed less effective to me than in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. For this research, I used the in-depth interview method. In order to collect concrete and comprehensive data, this research follows the methodology outlined by Irving Seidman in his *Structure for In-depth, Phenomenological Interviewing* (2006), which helps

researchers design in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. He posits that this type of interview can help researchers understand the context of people's experience, the details of their experience and the meaning of those experiences, not simply to collect answers to questions or to mechanically test hypotheses.

I planned my interviews in three sections. The first part focused on the participant's life history, and my task was to "put the participant's experience in context" (Seidman, p. 15), by asking as many questions as possible in order to become familiar with different aspects of the interviewee's life. Seidman points out that the researcher can ask participants to "reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood and at work" (p. 15). For example, using this technique, I asked participants about the circumstances and stories about learning art with their peer group. In the second part of Seidman's process, interviewers focus on the concrete details of participants' present day experience concerning the subject. In this section, the interviewer's questions placed the participants' experience in the context of their social setting. The third and last part of the process involves participants being asked to "reflect on the meaning of their experience" (p. 18) based on the first two parts of interview.

As I proceeded with my interviews, I found the first and the second part of Seidman's process were flexible and could be interwoven. As the participants recounted their early experiences regarding art education in a changing China, I found that I could ask questions related to the second part of Seidman's interview process, encouraging participants to give more concrete details about formal, non-formal and life art learning in their experiences in China. Furthermore, because my research focus on these artists' experiences of learning art, their

present-day artistic lives do not play a significant role in my research. Generally, I followed Seidman's interview method: first becoming familiar with the participants, secondly, exploring the specific details related to my research topic; and thirdly, getting the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. Throughout the interview process, for my research, I was especially vigilant for information related to formal, non-formal and life art learning.

In this research, I not only collected and analyzed artists' experiences and stories of learning and creating, but I also documented their childhood and adult artworks. Artwork is a very important resource when studying and analyzing personal experiences. Van Manen (2001) argues that art can be used as a source of lived experience because

[e]ach artistic medium (painting, sculpture, music, cinematography, etc) has its own language of expression. Objects of art are visual, tactile, auditory, kinetic texts—texts consisting of not a verbal language but a language nevertheless, and language with its own grammar. Because artists are involved in giving shape to their lived experience, the products of art are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations. (74)

Another art educator who supports the use of artwork as an important source of data is June Mcfee (1995). While Van Manen uses personal artwork to understand individual experience, Mcfee studies personal artwork from the perspective of the role that art plays in culture and society. She argues that, in most cultures, art is a major form of communication. Each member of the culture

[l]earns to 'read' or understand the culture through the art that expresses values, patterns of organization, social structures, and belief systems. Every culture has some form of art,

even though the members may not have a concept or word for it. (p. 178)

I documented the artwork of the artists I interviewed. I invited them to talk about their childhood work as well as their early productions. I asked them questions about their childhood work, but only one artist, Huang Huan, had her juvenilia. In all the cases, discussions of the artists' childhood artworks were based on the artists' memories and reconstruction. Even though Huang Huan showed her original works to me, I still asked her describe some of her early artwork that she could remember. In all cases, I gathered photos of the artworks they created as "artists," which I used as a basis for discussion and as a rich source for understanding the contexts within which they worked.

For the interviewing process I respected the idea that each participant had his or her own unique school and out-of-school experience of learning and creating art. Based on Seidman's (1991) ideas about interview goals and methods, participants were asked to recall information concerning their early educational experiences; social and cultural influences; peers, family and teachers; their formal and life art-making experiences (these were of special interest to me); and their aesthetic experience in their everyday lives. They were also asked to describe why they decided to become professional artists and how they became an artist. Initially, I asked participants a general, ready-made set of questions that allowed them to reflect on their own personal experiences. I then asked more specific questions based on the participants' own unique experiences, questions that were different for each participant. This helped me to get detailed and concrete information about their formative art experiences.

Questions used in the interviews.

I mainly collected the Chinese artists' personal stories about learning art by interviewing them. It was very important to decide what questions to ask in the interview. Although I used a narrative inquiry, when designing interview questions, I adapted and combined some ideas from life history researches. In discussing methodology of life history research, Van Manen (1992) points out that "it is impossible to offer ready-made questions," when researchers conduct an interview (p. 67), he and other researchers provide suggestions about how to ask questions.

Van Manen states that it is important to "realize that the interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place" (p. 68). At the same time, based on his experiences of conducting interviews, he also points out that the interviewees often like to "begin to generalize about the experience." In order to deal with this situation, the interviewer should "insert a question that turns the discourse back to the level of concrete experience: 'Can you give an example?', 'what was it like?' etc." (p. 68). Szabad-Smyth's (2002) experiences of conducting interviews with generalist teachers show that a successful interviewer starts with general questions, then goes on to more specific ones, and finally asks personal questions of the interviewees. However, Van Manen's and Szabad-Smyth's opinions about how to start an interview differ. Whereas Van Manen believes that an interview should start with more specific questions about the goal of the interview, Szabad-Smyth argues, "questions [should] remain open-ended and loosely structured to allow the participants to journey through key events in their lives" (p. 75).

At the commencement of my interviews, I followed Van Manen's and Szabad-Smyth's advice and talked to the artists about my research goals and the fact that the focus of my study is on the process of art learning. This let interviewees know what information I was interested in. In

the beginning, I often asked more general and open questions. Then, based on their answers, I asked more specific questions. For example, during the interviews, I often let them describe their experiences of art learning at a certain period; then, based on their answers, I asked particular questions or asked them to give more details.

In order to help the interviewees to retell their stories easily, Szabad-Smyth expanded her “line of questioning to include play, aesthetics and the other arts as areas to reflect upon for art stories” (p. 74). Before starting the interviews, this idea had already inspired me to develop my research; based not only on the artists’ art learning in art classes but also on their aesthetic development and everyday experiences. Furthermore, similar to Szabad-Smyth’s interview strategies, I expanded my questions to include the cultural and social contexts in which the interviewees were raised. This not only helped me understand their stories better but also helped the participants recall their experiences without difficulty.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA

Research Design

The method of this study is primarily based on narrative inquiry. The data consists of artists' personal stories and experiences as artists from different generations growing up in China. The individual backgrounds of the artists allowed me to identify and analyze the principles common to their art learning

Narrative inquiry is very useful for studying individual art learning. As a subject, the process of art learning is complex, and some experiences are unique to the individual. Webster and Mertova (2007) suggest that narrative inquiry, like a story, can help researchers discover the complex features of teaching and learning, and understand the interrelationships between individuals and their social and cultural contexts. They argue that “[n]arrative can tap the social context or culture in which teaching and learning takes place. Just as a story unfolds the complexities of characters, relationships and settings, so can narrative illuminate complex problems in teaching and learning” (p. 13).

The raw data for this study has been collected through interviews with nine artists. Individual stories of learning art in different social and cultural settings are discussed and analyzed in order to answer two things. First, what roles do life, non-formal and formal experiences play in artists' early process of learning art, the process of becoming an artist and of being an artist? Second, what relationships exist between artists learning art and the social and cultural context that they experienced?

The nature of narrative inquiry facilitates the investigations of these different perspectives.

As Webster (2007) and Leonard argue, “[T]he appeal of narrative method lies largely in its ability to explore and communicate the internal and external experience” (p. 10).

The artists’ stories about their lives provided a rich resource to help me understand how individuals in different social-cultural contexts construct and reconstruct their artistic concepts and skills holistically. In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of how art is taught and how artists learn art, I approach my research from three different perspectives. First, I divided the different experiences that artists had of art learning in three categories: formal, non-formal and life learning. Second, I analyzed these types of art learning experiences in different political, economic, social and cultural contexts of the past 60 years in China since these participants come from different generations. Third, I divided their experiences into three periods: early experience, learning to become an artist and learning as an artist.

Research Participants

The criteria for choosing the artists for my study were: a) I had access to them through my personal network; b) They were successful professional artists, and most had shown artworks in national exhibitions at least three times and were members of the China National Art Association, or; and c) The artists’ art learning experiences spanned Chinese different political periods, from before the Japanese war up until now.

Based on my former experiences of interview art educators, I fully recognize that if both an interviewer and an interviewee are too friendly with each other or do not know each other at all, it is difficult to collect good quality raw data. When they know each other, but are not friends, the interview is often successful. Therefore, I added a requirement to recruit artists in my

personal network to participate in the study. We had a close professional relationship, but I was not their friend before the interviews. Some worked with me in art education research projects in China, some were my art teachers in university, and some were my classmates. This allowed us to build a trusting relationship but not a close friendship and encouraged the interviewees to tell their story with confidence, thus providing me with good quality raw data.

I called various artists who met the criteria of my study, and 11 artists agreed to take part. One interviewee introduced me to two “grass-root artists”⁹ who were living in Song Zhuang, the contemporary art village in Beijing. Following my plan, I interviewed, one of the two artists.

The artists who participated in my study represent different age groups and different political and economic periods. Using the changes in the politics and economy of Chinese society in the 20th century as a timeline, *Chinese History of Art Education* (Li Yang, 2000) explores the development of school art education in China. The book discusses only the development of formal art school education, and not informal art education outside of the Chinese art educational system. The authors use the seven generally accepted phases of 20th century Chinese history based on the political and economic changes that occurred up to the year 2000 to differentiate the various periods of the history of art education in China.

⁹ In China, grass-root artists emerged towards the end of the 20th century when art marketing appeared. Grassroots artists are those artists who did not receive professional training at university, but they persevered in working hard at their own artistic creations. They make a living by selling their artwork.

The initial period is from 1904 to 1949, when school art education first appeared and developed in China. The second phase examines art education from the beginning of the Chinese People's Republic from 1949 to 1957, a period when art education was influenced by Russian educational ideas. The third period explores the years 1957 to 1965, when China and the Soviet Union became estranged, while the fourth period examines school art education during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to the death of Mao in 1976. The history of art education in China from 1977 until today includes the three periods: from 1977 until 1985, marking the beginning of more openness and reform in China; from 1986 until 1993, when changes and reforms in China were debated, expanded and developed; and from 1994 to 1999 when development and reform were more stable and accepted by the majority of the population.

Each artist was chosen because his or her formative period of art education and training was during a specific period of history in China, starting roughly from the Kuo Ming Dang period in 1928. These artists are primarily painters, although a few of them also make sculptures, printed photos, and artistic installations. Jin Zhi Lin, the oldest artist in my survey, received his art education before 1949 when he was a child. Huang Huan, the youngest on the other hand, was born after the national "one child policy" was established and received art education in school during and after the second period of reform in China between 1986 and 1993.

Some of the older participants had more stories and experiences concerning their artistic creations and being involved in the art community than the younger participants' had. The younger artists had just started being professional artists and did not have many stories to share at this stage of their artistic careers. For example, Huang Huan, the youngest participant, was 31 years old at the time of interview and had only a few exhibitions by that time.

Initially I interviewed 12 Chinese artists for this study. These artists included three female artists and nine male artists in Beijing and Shanghai. Finally, I narrowed my choice to nine artists because of one participant's withdrawing, some technical problems occurring and the need for a better gender balance.

One male artist decided to withdraw from the study because he felt uncomfortable about recounting his stories and experiences. He initially recounted his experiences of learning art to be an artist, but after the interview ended, he felt uncomfortable about what he had talked about. In the end, he decided not to participate in the study and requested that the video of his interview be omitted. He gave three reasons why he withdrew. The first was that he did not have enough time to think over what he had said, believing that his responses were too casual and subjective. He feared that if what he had said in the interview were published, it would have been worrisome for him. Secondly, exploring his art in the future would be a long process, and he felt it was too soon to reflect on his somewhat limited experience in the art world. Thirdly, some of the stories he told involved other artists or aspects of the art community, and he thought it wasn't appropriate to talk about either at that time.

The sound of the video interviews with two artists was not clear because of technical problems; therefore, those interviews could not be used. One female artist and one male artist were similar in age, but since I had more men than woman in my study, I dropped one male artist and kept the female artist in order to maintain the gender balance. In the end, the study is composed of 9 participants: three female and six male artists.

Data Gathering

Participant observation.

I spent two to four days observing and interviewing each artist in his or her studio. Before or after interviewing, I observed their daily activities in the studio and sometimes videoed what went on there. During my observations, I also took some simple field notes.

Interview process.

All the interviews were conducted in the artists' studios in Beijing or Shanghai from May to the end of August 2009. I interviewed most of the artists three times based on the in-depth interview techniques proposed by Seidman (1991). However, there were three artists who only agreed to be interviewed twice. Two of them, Wu Ming Zhong and Chu Shu Xia were preparing for an exhibition, and Shang Yang accepted to answer questions in only two interviews due to illness. Therefore, when I interviewed these three artists, the first interview was a combination of the first and second interview format that was used for the other participants.

Shekedi (2005) believes that 90 minutes is an appropriate time for an interview because less than one hour is too short for the interviewee to reconstruct, put into context and reflect on their experience, while two hours or more is too long and tiring for the interviewee. Therefore, in planning my research I limited each interview to approximately 90 minutes. However, after starting the interview, I found that those artists who possess teaching or research experience were very passionate about recalling and telling their experience of learning art and learning to be an artist. When they recounted their experiences, the interview time was often more than three hours. One of the interviews, the one with the oldest artist, Jin Zhi Lin, lasted over 5 hours. When this happened, I did not interrupt his reminiscences, but let him continue in more detail by

asking some of the questions that normally would be asked during the second interview. After this interview, I learned that in the interview process, sometimes it is necessary to make some adjustments to the research design. It is not always possible to rigidly follow the suggested interview methods. When the interview evolves into a friendly, informative conversation where both the participant and researcher feel comfortable, it is not necessary to follow the time parameters for the interview suggested by the interview experts.

Of course, while some interviews went smoothly, others were more difficult. For example, Wang Yuan Yu, who proved to be difficult during the first interview, and I almost decided not to interview him a second time. However, I did manage to interview him four times. I had never met him before the interview. He did not have the opportunity to study in the Academy of Fine Arts and was prejudiced about professional art training. During the first interview, he spent a lot of time criticizing the Academy of Fine Arts. As a result, I had to ask him specific questions in order to get him to talk about his experiences of learning art. He often described his experiences and stories in one or two simple sentences and liked to use abstract or academic terms to discuss his experience of learning art. After thinking about this interview, I felt that he would like to share his stories with people, but maybe he misunderstood the nature of my study, or he thought the interview should be an academic discussion. Therefore, in the second interview, I decided to share some of my personal experience of learning art, of wanting to become an artist and finally becoming an art educator. I hoped this would make him feel more at ease. I think that my personal experiences helped him to understand the nature of the study and made him feel more comfortable talking about his experience instead of abstract ideas. In the second interview, he was much more comfortable recounting and reflecting on his stories and

experiences as an artist.

I found the interviewing process exciting. Although I knew some of the artists for many years, I had never spoken with them in a situation like this and I was able to better understand their experiences and artistic creation.

Equipment.

I used a digital camera, with enough memory to store 10 hours of video to record all my interviews. I also carried a 2TB mobile hard drive to store all the videos of the interviews. After each interview was complete, I transferred the video from the digital camera to the hard disc, and created a folder for each artist and a serial number for each interview. At the same time, I wrote simple field notes during and after interviews. After the first and second interview, I went over the video of each interview and based on my field notes, I prepared questions for the next interview.

Video-documentary

In order to offer readers a better understanding of these Chinese artists' experiences of learning art and learning to be an artist, this study has enclosed a 3-5 minute video documentary of each artist enclosed in the thesis jacket. These videos include interviews and in some cases, with the permission of the artist, show them working in their studios and their family photographs. Other videos are records of exhibitions of artists or their participation in social activities.

Procedure for data collection

Although transcribing the interviews from the video was time-consuming, I transcribed the nine artists' interviews by myself. Many ethnographers believe that transcription of an interview is very important in research. Seidman (2006) argues that although transcription is a demanding, tedious work, it is valuable because it helps researchers understand their interviewees better (p. 17). Based on my experience taking part in a project about the history of Chinese art education, I know that transcription is an important part of the research process. By transcribing the interviews, I came to a researchers better understanding of the stories and experiences and was able to retell them more accurately. In fact, while transcribing the interviews, I often gained some new insights on how to analyze the raw data.

Because the original video documentary of all the interviews is almost 80 hours, I had to take 9 months to transcribe, and translate all the transcriptions into English from Chinese. First, I transcribed the interviews into Mandarin, which is the interviewees' and my mother tongue. However, the participants, raised in different areas, especially in southern provinces, spoke Mandarin with different accents and used some slang from their hometowns. Sometimes I had to listen to the interview several times or call the interviewees in order to clarify and understand what they said. Then, I translated all the Chinese transcription of the interviews into English. In translating the interviews, because of the differences between Chinese and Western culture, some words and sentences could be possibly translated in different meanings. Therefore, in order to be faithful to what the participants' meant in the interviews, I had to talk with some of them on phone to verify my translation.

During the transcription process, I transcribed an entire interview instead of selecting a

portion of the interview that related directly to my questions. Whereas some participants liked to frame their responses into a broader political context, others answered questions in relation to the Chinese art community and how that influenced their stories or experiences. Although some of these stories and experiences are not directly related to art education, they enrich my research and help me understand the context of the participants' experience.

Procedure of coding formal, non-formal and life art learning.

After finishing all of the transcription and translation of the interviews, I coded the data based on the definitions of the three types of art learning: the artists' experiences of formal, non-formal and life art learning. First, I used different colors to categorize different types of art learning for each artist. Red, green and yellow colors represented the experiences of formal art learning, non-formal experiences, and life art learning, respectively. Then, I invited a Canadian artist who was interested in my study to examine my coding system. First, he read all of my interviews, then, based on the definitions of three types of art learning, we read my interviews and looked at the three categories together. We both agreed on the majority of the categories. When we had different opinions about the categories, we discussed it and I analyzed the coding again. Finally, if we did not agree on which art learning type an artist's experience was, I did not use that specific experience in the cross-analysis chapter of this thesis.

Limitations.

I transcribed all the interviews and tried to use the participants' own words to objectively tell their stories. However, when these interviews were translated into English, because of the

differences between Chinese and Western culture and the different artistic concepts of China and of the West, preserving the original expressions and ideas of the participants was very challenging. Although I tried to retell their stories accurately, some of the unique issues the artists spoke of might have disappeared in translation.

I would like to discuss why this study is not gender balanced. I recruited the participants among the artists whom I knew; however, they were not friends of mine. When I interviewed them, I asked the artists to describe the gender ratio of their university art classes. In the 1950s, Liu Bing Jiang told me that their studio had five students, but only one was a girl. Shang Yang recalls that in his university classes, there were a dozen boys, and one or two girls, and Chen Shu Xia told me that at the high school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, there were 40 students, only six of them girls. Although other artists were not able to remember clearly how many female students were in their classes, they thought there were more boys than girls. Thus, the gender imbalance in my study reflects the reality of Chinese professional art training.

Two video documentaries of the interviews were stored on DVD, while others were saved on a 2TB mobile hard disc. When I came back to Montreal from China, some of the DVDs were damaged and were unable to be recovered. Therefore, I believe that using DVDs to store data is not as safe as using a mobile hard disc.

CHAPTER 5: EXTENDED BIOGRAPHIES OF THE NINE ARTISTS

Map Listing the Artists' Town or City of Origin



1. Luang Nan County in Hebei Province
Tang Shan in Hebei Province
(Luang Nan County is part of Tang Shan)
2. Beijing
3. Zhu Lu County in Hebei Province
4. Qing Dao in Shangdong Province
5. Hong Hu in Hubei Province
6. Wen Zhuo in Zhejiang Province
7. Shuang Feng County in Hunan Province

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Jin Zhi Lin | |
| Kong Zi | |
| Liu Bing Jiang and Huang Huan | |
| Wu Ming Zhong | |
| Wang Yan Yu | |
| Shang Yang | |
| Chen Shu Xia | |
| Cao Ming Qiu | |

Jin Zhi Lin

Jin was born in 1928 into a comfortable, middle-class family of intellectuals, in Luang Nan county of Hebei province. His father and grandfather were both adept at Chinese literature and calligraphy and loved to collect antiques and paintings, which helped him to learn about and understand Chinese art, while the beauty of the surrounding natural environment and the folk art of the area nurtured his aesthetic vision.



Figure 3: Jin Zhi Lin working at his studio in summer, 2009.

In 1940, after the Japanese occupied his hometown, his life changed a great deal. He had to leave home to cities and lived independently from the first grade. During this period, his life had been very hard, but drawing and Chinese painting were his only interests.

Jin states that his formal art training in Chinese painting started after he went to Beijing in 1946 to study at the Beijing Teacher Training School. His school art teacher, Li Zhi Chao and his private teacher, Wu Jing Ting, were both respected members of the Chinese painting

community. He also practiced pencil sketching and Chinese painting at the Students' Holly Painting Club in school.

In 1946, after being moved by the paintings of Xu Bei Hong, Jin decided to study painting at an art college. In 1947, he was admitted to the Beijing Public College of Fine Art. Although realism was the dominant style in art school, he loved modernism, and he also created abstract artwork.

After 1949, the Chinese art community promoted the use of a realistic style to reflect the new life of the masses. Moreover, he was moved by the lives of the people of the new China, and loved it from the bottom of his heart. He believed that the function of art should reflect the life of the people, and he immersed himself in creating realistic work representing the lives of everyday people, although he was not naturally inclined towards realism. Jin's educational experience is reflected in Duan Lian's (1995) thesis about art education in China:

Chinese art education emphasizes skill training. There are two systems for teaching skills in China. One is the Chinese traditional system of teaching art; another is the Western classical system. The Western system of teaching drawing came to China from France in the early part of this century. But in the 1950's, as a substitute, the Russian art education system came to China and replaced the French system. (p. 1)

After graduating in 1951, he became a teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. As a young art teacher, he had many opportunities to cooperate and learn from famous artists such as Deng Xi Wen, Wang Shi Kuo, and Luo Gong Liu.

Between the liberation and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Jin created a number of realistic oil paintings. Two of his realistic narrative paintings, *Nan Ni Wan* (1961) and

Chairman Mao Taking Part in the Great Production Movement in Yan'an (1959), helped him become a mainstream artist. Jin considers this the point when he started to become an artist, although these paintings did not represent his personal artistic language.

In 1961, Jin Zhi Lin was transferred to the Jilin Province Art College from the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, he was criticized because he was a famous artist in Jilin province, and he was subsequently sent to a May Seventh Cadre School. There, from 1966 to 1973, he worked at several jobs as a laborer in a logging camp, on a deer farm, in construction, on a farm planting corn and rice, and as a cart driver. He rarely had the chance to paint.

In 1973, the Cadre School was disbanded, and he then went to Yan'an and worked at the Yan'an Masses' Museum of Art as a painter. The fact that peasants did not have enough food to eat made him consider how he could serve workers and peasants through art. He wanted to encourage the masses to make art to promote agricultural production. He organized art groups for villagers, factory workers and the police, and taught them to paint and depict the things around them by painting murals and by producing propaganda papers and paper cutting. By painting murals, drawing comic books, writing poetry, and singing folk songs praising good behavior and satirizing bad conduct, he felt that using art was an effective way to promote production and improve the life of the peasantry. He invested himself in this to such an extent that he rarely had time to paint.

In 1976, the "Gang of Four" was removed from power, and the Chinese government started to advocate the strengthening of national and traditional culture. In 1979, Jin started a survey of folk art in Yan'an. He and his team "went from village to village to do surveys and

organized the first folk art exhibition in Beijing in 1980” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

In order to understand local folk art and help folk artists, he “started to read art history, history, and different kinds of ancient books because folk art involved not only painting and paper cutting, but was also somewhat related to anthropology” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Based on his survey and research in Yan’an, in 1985, he published his academic article, *China's Folk Art Modeling System*. He argued “that folk art was independent of the traditional system of Chinese painting and the Western system of art. I see it as a third system (personal interview, August 07, 2009). This article accelerated the momentum to create the Folk Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

In 1986, he was transferred back to the Folk Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts as a professor teaching theory courses, primarily engaged in anthropological research. His books on folk art and anthropology were translated into French, Japanese and English. In 1995, he received the French Supreme Council Gold Cross award because of his contribution to research on folk culture. Today, he is also a member of the National Education Commission concerned with art textbooks for elementary and secondary schools and a member of China National Folk Cultural Protection Project Expert Committee.

After retiring in 1993, although he focused research on China's original culture, he started to paint again. His experiences of doing research in archeology, folklore, and cultural studies as a type of life art learning interacted with and enhanced his unique artistic concept. He believes that he has found his own artistic language. Today, he still travels to his hometown, and to northern Shaanxi, to sketch the landscape. He also had solo exhibitions in France and Beijing in 2001 and 2004.

Although he loves painting, he feels that an “artist’s mission is not only to make art, but is also to help the masses enjoy art, love life and do art. As a result, from 2004 to 2007, he helped organize the first International Peasants’ Art Festival in China.

Looking back on his life and his experience of being an artist, he reflects on how the changes in China affected his work.

In Beijing, I was in the center of Chinese art community. Therefore, the subject matter of my artwork dealt with important questions and historical events, and I was a mainstream artist. However, when I left Beijing in 1961, I left the center of Chinese art. Hence, I no longer followed the mainstream and I did what I liked. If China hadn’t been liberated in 1949, my art would have been more abstract because I had started to explore that in several pieces. However, after the liberation in 1949, our president Xu Bei Hong in the Central Academy of Fine Arts advocated a realistic style, so my paintings had to focus on representing characters and have them in dramatic stories. Honestly, I did not have this ability. In all my artworks, only one piece was successful, *Nan Ni Wan*. After coming back to the Central Academy of Fine Arts (in 1986), I became an academic scholar of anthropology, although I also participated in various exhibitions (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

In terms of his painting, he feels that the art community does not give him any recognition “because they think I am an academic scholar.” Archeologists do not respect him because they think he is an artist.

However, his efforts—particularly his work as an oil painter—have now been recognized by the Chinese art community. In May 2010, when he was 83 years old, the "Jin Zhi Lin Solo Oil Painting Exhibition" opened at the China Art Museum, an exhibition jointly sponsored by the

Central Academy of Fine Arts, the Art Museum of China, and the Chinese Artists Association. Two hundred of his oil paintings, almost one hundred of his sketches, and a review of his research dedicated to folk art were displayed. At the same time, between September 14 and December 17, 2010, “Art Through the Cultural Revolution” was exhibited at the Woodbury Art Museum at Utah Valley State College. This exhibition mainly included Jin Zhi Lin and his students’ artwork before 1980 in Yan’an.

Jin Zhi Lin’s painting, *Nan Ni Wan*, sold for 13.44 million Chinese Yuan at the Hanhai spring auction of 2009, and is considered one of the most important artworks of Revolutionary realism in Chinese art history.

Liu Bing Jiang

Liu Bing Jiang was born in Beijing in 1937 to parents whose families were involved in banking. He was the only child in the family and since early childhood he enjoyed drawing, an activity that for him, as a child, was like a game. When he was older, he liked collecting the pictures printed on *Yangpian* cigarette boxes and also liked to draw the images from these cards.

After the Anti-Japanese War in 1946, Americans and American culture started to come to China. From the age of eight to twelve, he watched many American films; his favorites were from the *Tarzan* series. In addition to being a Tarzan fan, he loved to draw the characters from these films.

During the Korean War, while he was in secondary school, there were caricatures about the Korean War in all of the daily newspapers, and Russian caricature magazines were published in China due to the friendship between the two countries. Thus, Liu became interested in copying

caricatures.



Figure 4: Liu Bing Jiang working at his studio in summer, 2009.

In 1953, he had the chance to see an exhibition by Xue Bei Hong, and was so moved by the paintings he decided to become an artist. He received non-formal art learning in an art group in his high school to prepare for the Central Academy of Fine Arts' entrance exam.

In 1955, after graduating from high school, Liu was admitted to the Central Academy of Fine Arts to study oil painting, the start of his formal art learning. But in 1959, Liu was targeted as being a "white expert," one of many students who were frequently criticized from 1959 to 1960 as focusing only on their studies while ignoring ideology and politics.

Even at a young age, Liu was considered to be a "mature" artist. Before graduating from the university, he already had a reputation in the Chinese art community. Two of his oil paintings *Fisherwomen and Fishermen* (1958) and *Young Southern Girl Embroidering* (1959), were selected for an exhibition celebrating The Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of the People's

Republic of China, an impressive achievement during this period. These successes were followed by his oil painting *Fishermen* (1961), created for his graduation exhibition during his fourth and final year of study, which was selected for the national exhibition in 1961. By the time he graduated from university and received his BFA, he was basically an artist.

After graduation in 1961, he taught in the Fine Art Department at China National University in Beijing. While teaching he continued to paint and especially enjoyed sketching models in oil paint. He often visited his teacher Dong Xi Wen who influenced work throughout his career.

As a university art teacher during the Cultural Revolution, Liu often went to the countryside or a May Seventh Cadre School, in order to study through labor Mao's thoughts and revolutionary ideology, to receive re-education and to take part in different political activities and campaigns. During this time, he also tried to paint in the "revolutionary, romantic style" of "red, light and bright" promoted by the government, but his attempts almost got him into political trouble because he used elements of impressionism in his work instead of totally following the style sanctioned by the government.

Fortunately, during the Cultural Revolution, he sometimes was able to secretly meet with other artists to discuss art. And as a teacher of art in a department of fine art, he was allowed to travel to most parts of China once every seven years to experience the life of the masses and collect source material for his artwork. Much of the work that he created focused on ethnic minorities and was not seen during the Cultural Revolution, but it created a stir in the Chinese art community once the Cultural Revolution had ended. When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, artists finally were able to create artwork in comparative freedom, and his artwork became

influential in the art community. This is because during the Cultural Revolution, he was resolved
On making portraits using oil painting, and painting people I really wanted to paint. I was
a peripatetic. I did not take part in political activities. Even though I was selected to paint
political propaganda paintings or cartoons, I never gave up painting the things and people
that touched my heart from real life.” (personal interview, July 02, 2009)

In 1979, he and his wife, Zhou Ling, received a commission to create a 175 square meter
mural in the Beijing Hotel, which won an award in the national art exhibition. During the 1980s,
he also became a professor and a committee member of the National Mural Association. He also
was a judge of the Sixth, Seventh, and Tenth National Art Exhibition.

He has published a number of books, and some, like *Liu Bing Jiang Xinjiang sketches*,
Liu Bing Jiang minority sketches set and *Liu Bing Jiang sketch* were popular in China during the
1980's. His sketches have been used to teach students studying art.

In 1984, the Chinese government sent him to France to study art; he lived there for two
years. He is now retired from the university and continues to work on his art at his studio in
Beijing Cao Yang Art village. He is a member of the Chinese Artist Association's Mural Arts
Council.

Shang Yang

Shang Yang was born in 1942 in the Hubei Province in a small town called Hong Hu,
beside the Chang Jiang River. He had a big family, consisting of two older sisters, a younger
sister, and a younger brother.

His grandfather and father both enjoyed painting, and his father was an avid painter all

his life. As Shang said, “I saw my father paint as soon as I was born.” He believed that his father was his first and most important art teacher. As a young child, Shang began looking at his father’s art books, containing photos of oil paintings by Corot and Van Gogh.

Starting when he was seven years old, he began to copy the masterpieces of Chinese paintings, but he also liked to draw things that he was interested in. He really liked art class in school because his art teacher encouraged him to draw, inspired by his own ideas.

He started middle school in 1954. According to Shang, “In the 1950’s, the people of China were full of hope for a new life. People were full of youthful spirit” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). It was during this time that he decided he was going to be an artist, and he began preparing for the High School of Fine Art College’s entrance exam. He practiced pencil sketching and watercolor techniques at home and with the school art group.

In 1957, when he was fifteen, Shang started studies at the Wuhan Junior College of Teaching Fine Arts and began realizing his dream of becoming an artist. In 1961, Shang entered the Hubei Fine Arts Academy and studied oil painting there for four years, but it was a time of economic difficulties for him. He did not have enough money to buy art supplies to practice, so he experimented using different inexpensive materials and approaches to create artworks that looked like oil paintings. This experience accustomed him to using integrated media to make art. At the same time, this experience also cultivated his persistence.



Figure 5: Shang Yang working at his studio in summer, 2009.

Although he spent eight years studying at the art high school and Academy of Fine Art, there was a great gap between what he learned in art school and what he expected to learn, because students too often had to take part in political campaigns and didn't have enough time to study. Fortunately, in spite of the political climate, the president of his academy, a famous oil painter, tried to allow students to do as many art-related things as possible during these campaigns. In 1959, based on his sketches and drafts that he made in the countryside, he painted *Today are Masters, but Toilers Before Liberation*, which was selected and displayed in the national art exhibition.

He had a good start on his journey towards his dream of becoming an artist. He graduated from university in 1965; but not until fourteen years later, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, was he able to create art. He thought he would never be able to “freely create art” or have his work shown in the provincial exhibition.

In 1979, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, he became the first graduate student in the

oil painting program at his Academy of Fine Arts. He had two supervisors, Professors Yang Li Guan and Liu Yi Wen. During his MFA studies, realism was still the dominant style in the Chinese art community. However, he wanted to explore some of his own ideas that “had sprouted in my mind during my studies for my bachelor’s degree” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

In order to finish his MFA and to demonstrate his artistic creation and future areas of artistic exploration, in the spring of 1981, he traveled to the northern area of Shanxi to prepare for his graduate exhibition. There, he did new work with the goal of forming “my own style and rid myself of past artistic concepts and methods, including Russian artistic ideas. My artwork *Boatman in Yellow River* was my main artwork in my graduate exhibition” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). This painting and his documentary text about it were published in the magazine *China Art*.

At the same time, he used very rough form of local lino paper and strong rice paper to do oil painting. He believed that he started to use his personal artistic language to express himself ever since he created his artworks for the graduation exhibition, and he could now be called an artist.

After graduating and receiving his MFA, he became a teacher in the Hu Bei Academy of Fine Art. In the 1980s, he tried to show his non-representational images. At that time, critics in China used the phrase “Shang Yang yellow” to describe a color he often used in this new approach. He won a few gold medals in national exhibitions. However, he soon became dissatisfied with this approach, experimenting with different painting methods that led to his *Big Landscape* series. At the end of the 1980s, he became vice-president of the Hu Bei Academy of Fine Art. Later, as a professor, he taught at the Capital Normal University and retired in 2004.

Today, he works at his studio in Jiu Chang Art District, and continues with his artistic experimentation.

He was seen as the pioneer artist in contemporary art circles in China and has exhibited widely in China since the 1980s. He has shown internationally at galleries in London, Paris, Tokyo, St. Peterburg, and Helsinki. Shang Yang's work often appropriates images from traditional Chinese landscape painting, which are screened onto the canvas by a machine; he then distorts the image with graffiti or obtrusive geometrical designs. He has also been involved in creating artistic installations.

Cao Ming Qiu

In 1954, Cao Ming Qiu was born in Shuang Feng County, a very small and poor county in Hunan Province. Because of his grandfather's bourgeois background, his parents did not have full-time jobs, and this caused him and his brothers to live difficult lives.

Cao's primary and middle schools did not offer art classes. However, because of his good handwriting, one of his teachers, Wang Yuan Xian, believed that he would be talented in art and started to teach him art techniques when he was fourteen. After just one year of learning to sketch from Wang, he was able to draw big political propaganda posters for his hometown. In 1970, he began high school and continued to practice art techniques on his own and sometimes help the Revolutionary Committee paint Chairman Mao's portrait.

He graduated from high school in 1972. In order to survive, he had to work at several part-time jobs, which included being a rickshaw operator, a packer, and a carpenter. He realized that he could earn a bit more money painting political propaganda, and he gave up the other jobs

to focus on painting.



Figure 6: Cao Ming Qiu working at his studio in summer, 2009.

In 1976, the Cultural Revolution was over and universities started recruiting students again in 1977. During this time, Cao began to think about becoming an artist. In 1980, he passed the entrance exam and was admitted to the Hu Nan Industrial College.

Cao mentioned that one course provided by the department was Chinese Meticulous Painting (Chinese realistic painting), designed to help students develop their artistic ability, although he had studied industrial design. Since that time, he has been practicing Chinese Meticulous painting. He started to love peonies and often travels to different areas to paint and sketch them, although he believes that his personality is more suited to working in an impressionistic style.

After graduation, he was assigned to a printing factory in his hometown. However, the work that he was offered in the factory wasn't what he actually wanted to do, so he refused the

job and started his own small business. “I did portraits, painted advertisements, and designed brands and logos. I designed many logos for individual businesses, stores and factories. (personal interview, July 29, 2009)”

In 1987, after he had been in business for three years, the local government arranged a position for him as an art teacher in the First Middle School of Shuang Feng County.

He worked in art education for almost five years, but in 1992, when he was 38 years old, he took the exam for the two-year Chinese painting program at the Guanzhuo Academy of Fine Arts, because he still wanted to be an artist and improve his artistic ability. It was a demanding program. He told me:

When I had the chance to study painting, I focused all my effort on it, like a terribly thirsty person hell-bent on drinking when he finds a fountain. In order to paint my peonies, I went to Zhenzhou and Hezhe to sketch peonies three times. After two years, my five pieces were included in the graduating exhibition and three of them were collected by the Academy (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

After finishing his MFA courses, he went to Loudi City and worked in the local Art Research Institute. However, at the beginning of the Chinese economic reforms, he decided he wanted to become involved in these changes, and he quickly relocated to Shengzhen, the earliest open city in China. He worked at the Fu Tian Art Center as a professional artist. He started “to focus on my artistic creation. There, I had enough time to do artistic creation. Artistic creation is my job” (personal interview, July 29, 2009). Finally, he was becoming a professional artist who received his salary from government.

In 2000, one of his Chinese paintings of a peony was collected by the National Art

Museum. Peonies are popular subjects in Chinese painting, and his is only the third depicting the flower in the Museum.

He considers himself an open-minded artist. He tried different materials and methods: traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, porcelain, ceramics, acrylic, and elements from fashion design. In 2003, he started to work in fashion and participated in competitions and won a number of awards, one being the national award of fashion design that he received in 2007. In 2004, four of his ceramic pieces were collected by the National Art Museum.

He has been successful in the new Chinese art market and thinks that it provides good opportunity for artists in China, even though he thinks that it is sometimes a bit chaotic.

Kong Zi

Kong Zi was born in Tang Shan, Hebei, in 1952. Before her birth, her parents were active in the Communist party and participated in the revolution. Kong was the oldest of four siblings, including one brother and two sisters.

As a toddler, she lived with her grandmother who raised her in a village in Hebei; she grew up the same as other children, living in a traditional countryside with beautiful landscape. When Kong was four years old, she went back to live with her parents in the city.



Figure 7: Kong Zi working at her studio in summer, 2009.

In 1958, she started at the Tang Shan Cadre's Children School. The school's educational quality was very good, and it offered various after-school activities and groups. In 1963, with her school's encouragement, she participated in a national children's art competition, but she was not awarded any prizes.

In 1965, she began studying at the well-regarded Tang Shan second middle school in Hebei Province. There, she participated in the school's art group.

The Cultural Revolution began in 1966. By the end of 1967, Kong joined the *Red Painting Soldiers*, one of the Red Guard's organizations at her school. She became very involved in creating political propaganda posters. This experience allowed her to develop art techniques, and she gained valuable knowledge about art.

In 1968, following the calls of Chairman Mao, she went to the countryside to be re-educated as a peasant and by and large stopped making artwork. In 1971, she joined the army. It was there that she says that she first received art training and began to paint formally. From 1972 to 1976, she worked in a hospital for six months of the year and spent the other six months in a workshop creating political propaganda art. By producing propaganda art, her artistic ability steadily improved.

In the beginning, she enjoyed oil painting. However, the art cadre at the workshop, a graduate of the CAF high school, believed that it would be better for her to use Chinese painting to represent the painting *Going to Mountain* (1973) instead of oil paint. Furthermore, the cadre told Kong that

a soldier's allowance of six dollars per month was not enough to buy art supplies, since a tube of paint cost ten or twenty cents, and I also needed to buy canvas and erasers.

However, Chinese painting was very practical for soldiers because you just needed a brush, a small carpet, some ink and rice paper, basically (personal interview, August 12, 2009).

Therefore, she focused on Chinese painting. Initially, she often needed some help, but later, particularly when she took part in the national art workshop, she was not only able to complete her pieces but was able to help other workshop participants. The themes of her artworks reflected the artistic ideas of that era, that art should serve politics. Her first artwork created in the army was an oil painting, which was called *Going to Mountain to Pick Herbs*. In 1972, her Chinese painting, *I Also Want to Go to the Countryside in the Future* was published as a poster.

In 1980, when her troop recommended her to go to the First Chinese Medical University, she “almost gave up painting” (personal interview, August 12, 2009). However, in the end, she “didn't get the opportunity to go to medical school” (personal interview, August 12, 2009). Later, she got married and was transferred to Beijing and worked in preventative medicine. She was able to use a bit of her artistic ability in her job, which piqued her interest in painting and drawing again. “Promoting public health was a part of my job. I often used gouache to paint and I also made videos on topics like how to control and eliminate rats and how to prevent and cure diseases. This made me passionate about painting again” (personal interview, August 12, 2009).

In order to improve her artistic ability so that she could pass the entrance exam, she studied Chinese Figure Painting at the Zhe Jian Academy of Fine Art from September 1985 to

July 1986. This was a great help to her. Because she was able to see a great deal of avant-garde art, her artistic concept changed dramatically, and she decided she wanted to become an artist. She started to try expressionism instead of realism.

In 1987, when she was 34 years old, she passed the entrance exam and finally became a university student. She studied three years at the PLA Academy of Fine Art. She said that her first two years there she re-digested what she had already learned at the Zhe Jian Academy of Fine Art. In her final year, she started the artistic creation required for graduation. This was a time when her art concept underwent a major change. Originally, she was influenced by the idea that art should serve politics and the “masses,” that life was a source of creation and that her artwork should be “encouraging to people” (personal interview, August 12, 2009). However, her graduate artwork was more focused on self-expression.

After graduating from the PLA Academy of Fine Arts in 1991, she went back to the army. She taught art class to retire people in the Senior University because her troop did not have positions for professional artists; this meant that the army could not employ her as an artist. She had to make her artwork in her spare time as a hobby. In 2005, when she was over 50 years old, she left the army to work in the Chinese Painting Institute, in order to dedicate herself to her artwork. Today, her artwork depicts life in the army and the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Some of her artworks were published or selected to be shown at a variety of army art exhibitions, and she has received several awards. Her art-making experiences were typical of Chinese art communities during the Cultural Revolution.

Chen Shu Xia

Chen Shu Xia was born in Wen Zhuo, Zhe Jian Province in 1962. Wen Zhuo is a commercial port city in the southern area of China, and was one of the first places to become more open after the Cultural Revolution. Her grandparents and her parents were all business people.

As a young girl, Chen's mother encouraged her to begin pursuing her dream of becoming an artist. At the age of ten, Chen's parents found a painter to teach her Chinese painting. At the same time, she learned pencil sketching and color sketching from another oil painter in preparation for the university's entrance exam.

In 1974, when she was just 12 years old, two of Chen's paintings—*Study Group* and *Department Stores*—were selected for the National Children's Drawing and Painting Exhibition in the China Fine Art Museum.

Secondary school was a busy time for Chen. She continued practicing sketching from real life using pencil and gouache. In addition, she practiced the traditional Chinese method of learning art by copying paintings from ancient Chinese masters. At the same time, she joined an art group that organized afterschool activities for talented students to practice art. Chen was also the illustrator for the school's poster board.



Figure 8: Chen Shu Xia working at her studio in summer, 2009.

In 1979, when Chen Shu Xia was 15 years old, she was admitted to the high school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Chen said that because her parents took care of her so much, hoping that she would invest all of her time in learning, she rarely had to look after herself. As a famous child in her hometown, leaving a small city in southern China for Beijing, she found her greatest challenges were learning to arrange her own life and studying effectively. In Beijing, her life changed dramatically.

In her hometown, she was a well-known child artist, but after moving to Beijing, that changed:

I had to work very hard but I was able to do comparatively well. Most students in my class were from Beijing, and some of these students' parents were teachers in CAF or their jobs were related to art. At the time I was not able to speak Mandarin very well, sometimes I really felt nervous to talk with people and my ability to take care of myself wasn't very good. Because my parents wanted me to concentrate on my studies, they

tried to do everything for me; as a result, I had not developed good survival skills. For example, they never let me help the family buy things because they worried that this would waste my time. I did not know how to spend money properly. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)

Chen recognized her weaknesses and tried to better organize her life. She didn't always succeed, but she tried her best to adapt to her new life. The most important thing for her was to study.

Chen's four years at the Central Academy High School gave her the ability to draw realistically. In 1983, after graduating from the high school, she entered the Folk Art and Comic Book Art Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. This gave her a good opportunity to work with different materials. In the 1980s, Chinese society became more open. She still did not know much about contemporary art, and the majority of the work in collections that students were able to see did not include work from the post-impressionist period or after. However, when she watched western films, she recognized that western artistic concepts were different than those of China. "Suddenly, I seemed to lose interest in drawing and painting and became interested in photography and printmaking" (personal interview, July 1, 2009).

In 1987, when she graduated from CAF, she chose to be an art teacher at the CAF high school because she liked to paint, although the salary was low and life was difficult. She takes the complexities, joys and sorrows of everyday life and converts them into serene visual images of common objects and everyday activities. In 2003, Chen became an associate professor in the Art Education Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

Her artwork represents her feelings about everyday life. Even though her artwork does

not deal with what is considered to be ‘important’ subject matter, she has received some national art awards. Although she focuses on representing her inner emotions and feelings, her artworks are well received in the art market. Since 2000, she has had many important solo exhibitions, including exhibitions at the Shanghai Art Museum in 2005 and the Sheng Zhen Museum in 2009.

Wu Ming Zhong

Wu Ming Zhong was born in Zhu Lu County, in the province of Hebei, in 1963. Wu was born as a Protestant, as his grandfather was a clergyman. He had three brothers. His father was a doctor who practiced Chinese medicine, and his mother was good at mending clothing.

As a child, Wu enjoyed drawing and often drew with his peers at elementary and secondary school. When he was about 12 years old, one of his parents’ friends noticed his artistic abilities and suggested that they encourage him to become an artist. Thus, his mother found a teacher to give him art lessons.

In 1976, while he was in high school, Wu decided to study at the fine art academy to realize his long-term dream of becoming an artist. He put great effort into practicing painting and drawing. However, due to his lack of professional art training, he did not pass the entrance exam for university after he graduated from high school in 1979.



Figure 9: Wu Ming Zhong working at his studio in summer, 2009.

Later, he practiced pencil and color sketching while he worked part-time. In 1981 he began working full-time as a maintenance worker in a factory, choosing to work the night shift, so he could practice drawing during the day. In 1983, when he was 21 years old, he was admitted to study in the Hebei Normal University Department of Fine Arts.

At university, Wu worked hard. He attributes this to two things. First, he changed his fate “by taking the university entrance exam, changing from a worker to a university student.” He realized that doing his best was “my only choice.” And secondly, he had a “special feeling for art” and was excited to know more about it. (personal interview, June 22, 2009).

During his studies, Soviet Realism was still the predominant style taught, but he was not satisfied with this. He believed that good artwork “meant that images should look real and reflect technical skill. I always wanted to explore something that was blurred or illegible and not easy to express in one draft” (personal interview, June 22, 2009).

He explored and learned different painting styles by himself. He also hoped to make

some experimental art, integrating some of Chinese painting's elements and aesthetic views into oil painting, but he did not implement this idea.

After graduating he taught in his department, but he still wanted to be an artist. However, he felt that the artistic environment in Hebei Province was not very good. He decided to take the graduate exam in Beijing. During his time as a MFA student, his life was quite challenging, since he had neither a job nor much money. But he continued to explore what he wanted.

In 1997, after graduating, he taught in the Capital Normal University. He still was interested in contemporary art and he started to explore different art forms using his personal experience in a society undergoing radical change as one of his subjects. When he did his “glass figures,” he believed that he had started to become mature in his artistic creation. Wu painted people as though they were made of glass. Glass is fragile and so are people.

In 2003, with the help of the Chinese National Fund for Studying Abroad, he studied at the Repin State Academic Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Russia for one year. During his year in Russian he studied realism at the institute but also went to see contemporary art exhibitions and worked on his “glass figures” in his own studio.

In 2004, Wu came back to Beijing. Since his studies at university, Wu had been looking for a way to better express himself, something very difficult because he was working in a “relatively traditional environment” while what he was pursuing was “avant guard.” In the winter of 2004, he entered the local contemporary art scene by sharing a studio with a graduate student in the village of Shuo Jia. After he moved there, he felt it was “really wonderful,” and he quickly became successful. As one of China's important contemporary artists, he had his solo exhibition—including paintings and artistic installation—in the Jing Ri Museum in 2009 and in

Shanghai in 2010.

Wang Yan Yu

Wang Yan Yu was born in the seaside city of Qing Dao, Shandong Province, in 1963. He had two older brothers and one older sister. His family lived between the city and the suburbs. When he was six years old, they had financial difficulties due to his father's death.

His mother was very busy making a living and did not have much time to care for Wang. Therefore, he spent much of his time in the field and at the seashore, playing games with his peers. Wang notes, "Today, when I think about these games, I still feel they are very interesting, and my subject matter focuses on my experience of playing these games back then" (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

In 1969, when he was seven years old, he began studying in primary school. In addition to practicing pencil sketching in the school art group during secondary school, Wang was responsible for drawing and writing the posters for the classroom blackboard. In 1977, after graduating from secondary school, he discontinued his studies to help his mother with work at home, as she was very ill.

In 1979, at the age of 17, he began working in a rubber factory. That same year, one of his co-workers was admitted to study at a fine art university. This, coupled with his desire to escape from the harsh working conditions of the factory, inspired him to pursue art studies at a university. Thus, Wang chose to work the night shift, so he could practice color and pencil sketching during the day.



Figure 10: Wang Yan Yu working at his studio in summer, 2009.

Between 1980 and 1985, he focused on preparing for the entrance exam. However, after five tries, he was not admitted to study at the university. By 1985, he was no longer qualified to take the entrance exam because he exceeded the age limit of 25 years. He continued to practice painting, however, under the guidance of He Yun Lan. There was no art market in China during these years, and Wang needed more time to take care of his family. Thus, in 1989, he decided to give up drawing and painting.

In the 1990s, China started to reform its economic system, and in 1995, he was laid off from his factory. In order to make a living, he started to make and sell crafts. He used materials that were inexpensive and easy to find in Qingdao. He also created copies of an African sculpture that he saw pictured in a book; then tried to make original wood sculptures.

Influenced by his friends, he took one year to carve over 20 wood sculptures, including basso-relievo, and in 2001, he participated in the Beijing Art Exhibition and the result was much better than he expected, selling all his carvings and receiving a lot of attention.

During the year after the exhibition, he made almost 40 wood sculptures, and took part in the 2002 Beijing China Art Exhibition. He believed that making wood sculpture offered him “the chance to exhibit my wooden artworks in the Beijing Art Exhibition” and led him “from being a worker making arts and crafts to becoming an artist” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

In 2002, he became a sculptor and started to make a living by selling his work. In 2006, the art market was booming in China; influenced by his friends, who made good money selling their paintings, he decided to try to paint too. He said that “originally I painted, drew and practiced in order to pass the university entrance exam” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). However, he was finally able to benefit from all the practice he had done many years before.

In the beginning, he painted landscapes, abstracts and political subjects, following the popular trends of other artists. Although he sold some of the work, he didn’t think that they were “mature.” He was not recognized by critics until he started to paint his family life and his childhood experiences. Soon, all of his sculptures and paintings dealt with this subject matter. He had a few solo exhibitions and found that people were willing to buy his paintings and sculptures.

In 2007, he moved from his hometown in Qin Dao city to the Song Zhuan Artist village in Beijing. He has been staying in Song Zhuang by himself, and returning home during Chinese festivals and holidays. He believes that staying with a few hundred artists gives him “the confidence and the ambition to become a success as an artist” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Huang Huan

Huang Huan was born in Beijing in 1977. She is an only child. Her mother was a

professor, who taught oil painting at a university, and her father was a musical editor at Chinese Central Television.



Figure 11: Huang Huan working at her studio in summer, 2009.

Because her parents created an environment that nurtured her artistic development, Huang became a famous child artist. Her artwork received both international and national awards when she was a child. The Si Chuang Art Publishing House published a collection of her sketches, and her drawings were in textbooks. She had opportunities to travel in Germany, Italy and Austria in 1986, and go to Moscow with her mother in 1988 because of her talent in drawing.

She graduated from elementary school in 1989, and her artistic ability allowed her the opportunity to study at the well-respected Beijing's Eighth Middle School. When she was 12 years old, she was awarded one of the ten National Hopeful Stars for her artistic abilities. At age 13, her school hosted a solo art exhibition for her artwork.

During her final year of secondary school, she decided to take the entrance exam for the high school of Center Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), which trains young artists. In order to pass

the entrance exam, she put great effort into practicing pencil and color sketching. In addition to taking art classes designed to prepare students for CAFA's entrance exam, she practiced with university students at her mother's studio.

In 1992, she was admitted to the high school of CAFA. In the first 3 years, curricula focused on helping students to improve basic techniques. Huang decided to study Chinese painting in her fourth year of high school at CAFA.

In 2001, for her graduate exhibition, she painted a series of portraits of Tibetans whom she had seen during a visit to Tibet. She used Chinese painting technique for her graduate exhibition, but she did not like the results because she felt that she was imitating the language of other artists in her images.

She started to study for her MFA in 2001, and she created works with different materials instead of doing Chinese painting. Her subject matter focused primarily on her personal life and experiences as a young woman.

In 2003, Huang started to study for her Ph.D., which at the time was the first Ph.D. program for visual art in China. During this time she also taught art courses at different universities, and participated in domestic and international art exhibitions, receiving several awards.

In 2007, after graduating and receiving her Ph.D., she worked at the Beijing Fashion College as an art teacher. She recalled the story of her life and put it on canvas and one day hopes to make an animated version of her life.

Huang was a famous child artist, and was good at sketching using lines. But in the process of taking the the high school of Central Academy of Fine Arts' examination, she did not

think that a using single line to represent images was right, and tried to follow the Soviet realistic pencil sketching method using plural lines to represent images. During her studies for her B.F.A. and M.F.A., she recognized that using lines to create images was also a type of artistic style. Especially after seeing the Buddhist murals of Dunhuang, and copying and sketching some of them, Huang had a better appreciation of using a single line to represent images, and her use of line became more mature. She believes that the process of creating her paintings for the graduate exhibition of her M.F.A. made her a more mature artist.

CHAPTER 6: CROSS-ANALYSIS

In order to better explore how the social and cultural development in China impacted the art learning of those who took part in this study, I divided artists' learning experiences into three categories: formal, non-formal, and life learning (see p. 6). These three types of art learning are used to classify participants' experiences according to the following three periods, which are analyzed in the Cross-Analysis chapter: the Early Art Learning Experience, Learning Art to Become an Artist and Artists Learning about Art (see p. 6).

Early Experience of Learning Art

During this phase, the participants' formal, non-formal and life art learning are discussed in order to understand the process of art learning. Moreover, the reasons for, and the process of deciding to become an artist, and the reasons for choosing their majors in fine arts are discussed.

Learning Art to Become an Artist

During this phase, the artists' experiences of becoming an artist are analyzed as formal, non-formal and life art learning. Furthermore, the creative processes in which the participants considered themselves artists are discussed.

As an Artist Learning about Art

During this phase, the focus is the participants' experiences of their formal, non-formal and life art learning after they considered themselves to be artists. Moreover, the process of their artistic creation and the context in which they worked are discussed.

Part One: Early Experience of Art Learning

The participants' experiences of art learning, from birth to the time when they received professional training from an institution in order to become an artist, is seen as the early experience of art learning. Depending on their cultural and social backgrounds, different participants had different periods of time that delineated their early experience of art learning.

Some of them, like Shang Yang, Chen Shu Xia, and Huang Huan, started their professional training after graduating from secondary school, when they entered a high school for fine arts. Their early experiences of art learning generally were before they were 15 or 16 years old.

Others, like Liu Bing Jiang, and Jin Zhi Lin, entered an academy of fine arts to study after graduating from high school or teacher training school. Their early experiences of art learning were before they were 19 years old.

However, three of the artists in this study entered a university after working by themselves for some years. Wu Ming Zhong did not enter a university to receive professional training until he was 23 years old. Cao Ming Qiu entered a university in 1979 when he was 32 years old. Kong Zi had a special experience because of the Cultural Revolution. She did not finish secondary school but went to the countryside to receive re-education. In 1971, she joined the army and became a soldier, and there was involved in making political propaganda posters with professional artists. This experience could be considered as professional training without a certification for her. Therefore, although she went to university when she was 37 years old, her experience of art learning in the army was part of her experience of becoming an artist. Kong's early experience of art learning continued from her birth until she entered the army.

Formal art learning in elementary and secondary school.

Influenced by the political climate, the policies of the public education system in China have often changed in the past half-century. However, except for the period of the Cultural Revolution, basic education in China consisted of pre-school (kindergarten), a nine-year compulsory education from elementary to intermediate school, and a high school education that includes ordinary high school or technical and vocational high school (Ministry of Education of People's Republic China, 2011). The length of time spent in elementary school varied between five and six years and the number of years spent in secondary school has always been three years. During the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, there were 5 years of elementary school, and 2 or 3 years of intermediate school, and 2 years of high school.

However, sometimes, after graduating from intermediate school or high school, students had to go to work in the countryside or in a factory to learn from peasants or workers instead of learning in school. Furthermore, from 1966 to 1977, universities stopped recruiting students through the use of entrance exams.

After 1986, China's National Education Plan established a nine-year compulsory education system (Ministry of Education of People's Republic China, 2011) as law, consisting of six years of elementary school and three years of intermediate school. Although students were expected to finish elementary school in six years, some were able to graduate early and start intermediate school at an earlier age. For example, after just five years of elementary school, Huang Huan was admitted into an intermediate school because the school expected her to be able to help them win art competitions and encourage other students to learn art.

In addition to ordinary high schools, China also has technical and vocational high schools specialized for specific skills, such as art. Four of the participants discussed herein studied at Academy of Fine Arts high schools, and one participant attended a teacher training high school. Three of the participants attended ordinary high schools, while the remaining two did not attend high school at all: one of them because of re-education in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, the other one because of family issues.

Based on my analysis of the interviews, I found that in elementary and intermediate schools, art classes were available for students because of the national educational guidelines in China. Ordinary high schools did not offer art classes until 2001 when the new National Art Education Guideline was published. Therefore, the discussion of formal art learning in this analysis includes only the experience of elementary and intermediate schools' art classes, except for one interviewee who studied in a teacher training high school. The experience of the four participants at the high school of the Academy of Fine Arts will be placed in the section concerning learning to become an artist.

All but one of the participants, Cao Ming Qiu, had art classes in elementary school; all but two, Cao Ming Qiu and Wu Ming Zhong, had art classes in intermediate school. In fact, Wu Ming Zhong could not remember if the intermediate school he attended even offered art classes.

Most of these artists remembered that their primary and secondary schools offered art classes, but they could not remember exactly what they learned and have some very vague memories about how the teachers taught them art or what they drew. Only two of the participants believed that the art classes offered in schools were useful.

Formal art learning: What were the art teachers' background?

Most art teachers in elementary schools were generalists. However, in intermediate schools, most of the art teachers had professional training in art, and some of them did Chinese painting.

Except for Jin Zhi Lin, whose art teacher was a well-known local painter of Chinese painting, the elementary teachers who taught the participants were not professionally trained art teachers.

In intermediate school, Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jiang, He Yun Lan, Shang Yan, Kong Zi, Wang Yan Yu, and Huang Huan had professional art teachers, while local Chinese painters taught Jin Zhi Lin and Kong Zi.

Formal art learning: How did art teachers teach in school?

All the participants recalled that in both elementary and intermediate school, art teachers usually demonstrated how to draw things on the blackboard using chalk, and the students copied them. Only Huang Huan mentioned that she copied pencil sketches or watercolors from textbooks in intermediate school in the late 1980s.

Students in art classrooms have used art textbooks since the 1980s, but from the liberation in 1949 until the 1980s, only art teachers were provided with reference materials.

Based on the artists' recollections about how art teachers taught them, we can clearly find that the main teaching method at schools was a teacher demonstrating an image on the blackboard and students copying it. In both elementary and intermediate school, students' self-expression was not encouraged in art classes.

Formal art learning: What art supplies did students use?

Most of those interviewed remembered that art supplies consisted primarily of paper, pencils and crayons, while blackboard and chalk were the most common teaching tools for art teachers.

As Kong Zi said, in the 1960s, “We always drew a five pointed star, or an apple following the art teacher instead of using a still life or actual object. It was very simple. First we used a pencil to draw images and then colored them with crayons” (personal interview, July 29, 2009). Chen Shu Xia said that pencil and paper were the main materials used in art classes in the 1970s. Wu Ming Zhong also talked about how in the 1970s, “art supplies were in short supply and their quality was also poor. I still remember that crayons scarcely colored the paper” (personal interview, June 22, 2009).

Before the early 1980s, good quality art supplies were lacking in China. Kong said that her uncle and aunt bought a box of twenty-four colored pencils for her. All the children were envious of her. “In those years, children rarely had such a good art supplies” (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

Jin Lin Jin mentioned that in addition to pencils, he had ink, watercolor and brushes to do artwork in primary school before the Second War. This is because before liberation in 1949, brushes and ink were the basic tools for writing in China. After the liberation, brushes were no longer the major writing tools, with pens taking their place because they were more convenient and easier to use.

After the late 1980s, Huang Huan began to draw with watercolors in art class. At that

time, China was undergoing a reform, the economy was rapidly developing and the standard of living was rising. Consequently, different kinds of art supplies became more available than before.

In the interviews, all artists mentioned they used pencils to draw in their childhood. Children like to use pencil because it can be easily erased. As Kong Zi said, before going to primary school, she enjoyed drawing in the morning with a pencil “because I was able to erase it. After studying in primary school, I used crayon to color my drawings in art classes. Soon, I liked to draw images using pencil; then, used crayon to color the images” (personal interview, July 29, 2009). In my experience, pencil is the most common drawing tool for Chinese children.

Before the 1990s, especially during the Cultural Revolution, there was a lack of art supplies in art classrooms because of the poor economic situation in China at that time. In general, during this period, the basic art supplies that students used in schools consisted only of pencils, paper and crayons. In 2000, when I took part in the national survey of art education to evaluate whether different provinces’ art education programs achieved the national standard and requirements set out in the *National 10-Year Plan for Art Education in Schools (1991 to 2000)*, I noticed that in the developed areas, schools had art classrooms with computers, and students were offered different types of art classes, such as classes in pottery, graphic design, print, and sculpture. However, in developing areas, art teachers still used blackboard and chalk to teach, and students used pencil and oil pastels to draw.

What did art teachers teach in school?

As mentioned above, only some of the participants could remember details about what

the art teachers taught them at art classrooms.

It is not easy to analyze what students were taught before the Liberation in 1949 since the only interviewee who received art education at that time was Jin Zhi Lin. He could not recall what he learned in elementary and intermediate school except for one thing connected to his artistic personality. He said that he always remembered:

[t]he teacher drew a pine tree on the blackboard as an example to let us copy in elementary school. His lines for the tree were very smooth, but I drew a distorted image even though there was an example. I was not able to draw an accurate outline. This is my nature. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

Based on this example and the art textbooks that were published at that time, I conclude that copying was one of the teaching methods used.

In the period between the Liberation in 1949 and the 1980s, art teachers from both intermediate and primary schools taught students to draw things that had political meaning or reflected events and ideas of that time. Kong Zip, Chen Shoo Xia, and Wu Ming Hong all mentioned that red flags, five-pointed stars, and Tiananmen Square were the most popular things to draw in art classrooms.

Kong Zi was not able to remember what she learned in intermediate school except for drawing five-pointed stars and an apple. In fact, she only studied in intermediate school for less than 1 year because the Cultural Revolution had just started. Chen Shu Xia had art class in primary school during the Cultural Revolution, but she was not able to remember what she learned except that “[i]n the intermediate school, my teacher was a professional art teacher. In the art class, the art teacher drew an image, such as a ship, a red flag, a five-pointed star and so

on. Then, students followed the teacher's example" personal interview, July 1, 2009). At the same age as Chen Shu Xia, Wu Ming Zhong did not have a professional art teacher, and he just remembers that he drew red flags and Tiananmen Square in primary school. Because he did not have a memory of later art classes, he thought it was possible that he did not have art class at the secondary school.

From 1949 to the early 1980s, the things children drew in class had political meaning. I remember that children also drew similar things after school. The red flag and the five-pointed star are integral parts of the national flag, while Tiananmen Square is an iconic symbol of the capital of China, Beijing. Some things reflected the important events or ideas of the time, such as a ballot box, a red guard, or a big smoking chimney. Wang Yan Yu said that sometimes he drew a Red Guard at work; other times students drew sunflowers, pigs, peanuts or chickens. Wang liked to draw tall smoking chimneys, thinking that

they were 'lovely.' Today we see it as pollution, but at the time, it was a symbol for modern society. When I thought about what represented 'modern society', I always thought of it as an image full of smoking chimneys. At school, I also learned how to make a pencil sketch of an egg. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

The Red Guards that Wang mentioned he drew in art class were one of the products of the Cultural Revolution. In order to strengthen the national economy and make it develop rapidly, the Chinese government made an effort to transform the nation from an agricultural into an industrialized country. As Wang Yan Yu said, smokestacks were seen as a symbol of industrialization; and teaching how to draw peanuts, chickens and pigs in art classes was not only because children liked them, but also because they represented agricultural development.

Similarly, Shang Yang remembers his art teacher drawing a broom and a box with the characters of “Ballot Box” on the board in the art class. After the liberation (1949), everyone was encouraged to participate in working, and love of labor was a part of moral education. Therefore, working tools such as brooms were seen as a symbol of the slogan that “Working is most glorious.” In 1954, China had its first democratic election, and the art teachers used the image of a ballot box to announce the event to their art classes. Shang Yang recalls, “In 1954, democratic voting first occurred in China, a very important event in Chinese politics that was reflected in the schools” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

In the 1980s, with the economy developing rapidly, the lifestyle of the Chinese people started to change, and people began to have televisions and other appliances, and art teachers started to teach students how to draw televisions. Huang Huan, who studied in primary school in the 1980s, remembered, “Once my art teacher taught us using compasses to draw a big circle as a head and other small circles as eyes... Sometimes, we also used a ruler to draw a red flag, or a television” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). Huan thought that this was because, in those years, school art textbooks had these kinds of exercises. She had art class in the first and second grade in secondary school, and often copied the examples from art textbooks, including pencil sketches or watercolors.

Only two of the participants, Shang Yang and Wang Yan Yu, clearly stated that the art classes offered in schools were helpful. Shang Yan claimed that his primary school’s art class gave him a good foundation in art, although he did not have any impressions about his art class in secondary school. However, Wang Yan Yu had a more positive memory of his art classes in primary and secondary school because he learned how to draw roosters, chickens and so on.

Shang Yan only remembered that his art teacher received professional art education, but Shang could not recall what he learned and how he was taught in secondary school. Shang Yang was impressed with his primary art class, stating that his artistic ability was “set in stone by my school” (personal interview, July 10, 2009); he had determined then to be an artist. However, this was not the case for the other students in his class. This was because the art teacher encouraged him to develop his creativity based on his personal artistic ability, which was influenced by his artist father. Shang Yang recalls that his primary school art teacher was a “very old and nice man” (personal interview, July 10, 2009), who considered him as a good example for his classmates. The teacher often made chalk drawings for the students to copy, but because Shang Yang was taught by his father, he was able to be more “artistically creative and imaginative than the teacher” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). He said:

I drew a young pioneer who was sweeping the classroom with a broom, with others cleaning the windows. I was able to draw a part of my classroom and the activities of a group of students. The teacher was surprised and believed that I had the talent to become an artist. I still remembered that in 1954, democratic voting first occurred in China. This was a very the important event in Chinese politics, and of course, it was reflected in schools. My art teacher used a piece of chalk to draw a box, and wrote “ballot box” on the side of the box. I drew a man who was voting in front of the ballot box and other people waiting in line. My teacher was very happy and thought he was not able to draw this kind of picture. He always gave me full marks. I knew why he gave me full marks because he hoped to encourage me to create my own art based on his drawings on the board. This was very useful for me to become interested in creation instead of copying.

(personal interview, July 10, 2009).

Wang Yan Yu recalled that his art teacher showed the class how to draw a pig, and then the class followed his instruction. The teacher always used contours to make his drawings, and colored them with crayon. Wang thinks that the teacher was not a professional, but he was “a nice person, and I learned how to draw a pig or rooster from him” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). Wang’s secondary school art class was very good, but other subjects were not so memorable. The art class was “my favorite class. In my school, it was a very formal class with a special art classroom. I believe that my art teacher had received professional training. In the class, we often drew an old grandfather or a Red Guard” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Based on these artists’ experiences of formal art learning, I realize that school art education’s goals included both the moral and political education of their students from 1949 to the 1980s. At the same time, what students learned was influenced by the socio-cultural contexts in which they grew up. Before the 1980s, in art class, children learned the simplified version of what adults cared about, represented by geometric symbols that students could draw with rulers, such as flags and five-point stars. In addition, Huang Huan and Wang Yan Yu mentioned that art classes offered pencil sketching. Huang recalled that in the late 1980s, students were copying images from textbooks without the teacher demonstrating on the blackboard. In 1981, for the first time since the liberation, art textbooks were used in primary and secondary school. At this time, art education became more important than before, and art textbooks were written especially for students.

At the same time, this also reflects that before the late 1990s, the concept of art education in China was still very restrictive. Influenced by the Western notion of art education, some

researchers acknowledged the idea of self-expression. For example, Yang Jing Zhi, in *Understanding Contemporary Children's Artwork and the Art Curriculum for Children* (1996), and *Art Education and Development of Human Being* (1999), argues that children have their own ways to represent their ideas and feelings. However, art education for children was impacted by the art concepts of the Chinese art community and the idea that realistic representation was the only style for children to learn, rather than self-expression. Art teachers did not recognize how important the role of self-expression was in the growth of children. In school art education, art teachers did not let children express themselves using their own stories about their own world.

In art class, students were not encouraged to explore their world or to engage in self-expression; on the contrary, they were expected to copy the images that their teacher demonstrated. If children drew in their own way, or drew their favorite things, adults or teachers would think what the children did was graffiti, and they were not serious about learning. Generally, realism was the only standard of assessment, even though the majority of the children were not able to draw or paint realistically. At that time, even some art teachers did not have this ability. Hence, in art class, only simple images were drawn. According to the participants in this study, school art education did not play an important role in their artistic growth.

Non-formal art learning before receiving the professional training in fine arts school or university.

Non-formal art learning includes two types of learning. One involves individuals who enjoy drawing or painting and hope to improve their ability. This learning often occurs with individuals involved in a small art community or art activities, or those with links to people who

have some advanced techniques. For example, individuals learn art in their school's art group or learn from people who have painting skills. The learning objectives and content are more flexible and mainly depend on what teachers are good at or what students are interested in.

The other type of non-formal art learning is to prepare for the entrance examination for art high school or university. Generally, in China, the quality of art education offered in primary and secondary schools was not advanced enough to help students gain admittance to a fine arts high school or an academy of fine arts. Therefore, students had to practice out of school. However, during the Cultural Revolution, universities stopped enrolling students. Although they started admitting again in 1972, acceptance to university was based on family background and the personal political performance of potential students, instead of passing an entrance exam. Therefore, at that time, learning art for the entrance exam of a university did not exist.

Non-formal learning: Individuals liked to draw and hoped to improve their drawing ability.

The nature of non-formal art learning is based on an individual's particular circumstances. Each interviewee had different experiences, but, in general, they learned from their parents, private art teachers or in school art groups.

Shang Yang and Huang Huan learned from their parents because their parents had professional skills. They began to learn skills similar to those their parents learned when they were young. Shang Yang, whose father was good at Chinese painting, said, "I was born watching my father painting" (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

He began copying Chinese landscape paintings when he was seven years old. Huang

Huan's mother encouraged her to use lines to represent what she wanted to draw when she was four years old. Her mother took her to the Beijing zoo to sketch every month, taught her how to observe and depict the movements of animals and took her to different cities to draw. Her mother encouraged her to draw with a pen instead of a pencil because she wanted her daughter to be able to draw boldly and confidently. These two artists developed good skills when they were young.

While Huang and Shang were taught and encouraged by their parents, Jin Zhi Lin, Chen Shu Xia, Cao Ming Qiu and Wu Ming Zhong received instruction from tutors. When Jin Zhi Lin was studying in secondary school, he stayed at the house of an art teacher, a local well-known Chinese artist, who taught him Chinese painting during holidays. Chen Shu Xia was 11 years old when she began to learn Chinese painting; she also learned pencil and color sketching from an oil painter. As a student during the Cultural Revolution, Cao Ming Qiu had a teacher in the secondary school who found that his handwriting was very good. The teacher taught him drawing techniques as well as some color sketching, after school. Wu Ming Zhong started learning Chinese painting from a Chinese painter at the age of 12 when a family friend told his mother that he was talented in art.

Most of the participants took part in school art groups, but everyone had a different experience. Chen Shu Xia, Huang Huan, and Kong Zi did not enjoy their activities in the groups, but Wang Yan Yu liked participating in the groups very much. Chen Shu Xia rarely drew in the group because she did not learn much in the school art group compared to what she learned from her private art teacher. Like Chen, Huang Huan had similar experiences in her school art groups, recalling that when she was in middle school, she participated in the school art group, which had over twenty students. The art teacher often asked us to draw still life. I was not interested in

doing that. In fact, I did not know how to do it and I really did not want to do it. I was continuing to focus on my line sketching. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

In Kong Zi's secondary school art group, her art teacher was a Chinese painting artist who taught students Chinese painting. However, Kong Zi preferred to do pencil sketches rather than Chinese painting. Less than a year after the Cultural Revolution began, this art group stopped. The only participant who believed that the learning in the secondary school art group was very useful was Wang Yan Yu, because there he learned how to do pencil sketching.

In terms of non-formal art learning, the majority of the participants believed that learning art from parents or from private teachers was more effective than learning art in art groups at school. In private classes, participants had the chance to decide what they wanted to learn and teachers decided what the students should learn based on their level, but in the school art groups, art teachers chose what the students should learn based on the level of the majority of the students and on the teaching plan. Therefore, the participants who had better artistic ability, like Huang Huan and Chen Shu Xia, were not interested in learning in school groups.

Non-formal art learning: Learning in order to be admitted to art school.

In the process of learning art, all participants received non-formal art learning with professional private training in order to pass the entrance exam for high school or university of fine art.

Non-formal art learning: The contents of non-formal art learning

In order to pass the entrance exam for university or for fine arts high school, students

needed to focus on four subjects: pencil sketching, color sketching, sketching the figure, and artistic creation. However, the participants emphasized the importance of pencil sketching skills in order to pass the entrance exam.

There were different standards of pencil sketching before and after Liberation in 1949. After 1949, the Chistyakov method became the only method to teach art in China (Duan, 1996, p. 3). Pencil sketching was thought to be the foundation of all artistic creation and should be three-dimensional because this is one of the basic features of an object. This method mainly helps learners to develop their artistic ability in two ways: sketching real life and copying other people's pencil sketches.

Jin said that before 1949, the National College of Arts in Peking (Beijing's name before 1949) was influenced by French pre-impressionistic art because its president, Xu Bei Hong, studied art in France. He wanted to recruit students graduating from intermediate school instead of high school so that at a very early age, they learned that painting should be based on observation and artists should not rely on theory to paint. If an individual had a strong grounding in theory, it would be easy for him or her to produce work that lacked expression. Students from secondary school, he felt, had more acute sensitivity in their artwork. Xu believed that students should learn pencil sketching by drawing plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculptures. In order to pass the exam, Jin Zhi Lin's classmate's brother taught pencil sketching in his school's painting and calligraphy group.

After the Liberation, the professional art education system in China was influenced by the Soviet Union system, using the pedagogical system developed by Pavel Chistyakov. As Chen Rui Lin (2006) points out, "[i]n 1953, the National Ministry of Culture had a meeting about

pencil sketching teaching methods, and further promoted it in universities” (p. 175). It was believed that Chistyakov’s pedagogical system used scientific procedures to teach students to “accurately depict the external appearance of objects” (p. 175). In 1955, the Ministry began to implement administrative measures to advocate the program (Pan, 2003, p. 53). On the one hand, it enabled students to improve their realistic painting skills and gave them the foundation to create realistic works. It also encouraged the “naturalistic” tendencies of students. On the other hand, “this approach was implemented by administrative measures, and teaching methods from Europe and Japan were excluded. This means that in China, there has been only one concept of teaching since 1955” (Chen, 2006, p. 198). Although the relations between China and the Soviet Union were ruptured by 1957, even this did not change the situation. After the “Gang of Four” was removed from power in 1976, Chinese society started changing and being increasingly impacted by Western culture, yet the standards for the university entrance examinations did not significantly change. As a result, in order to take the college entrance examinations, people had to practice pencil sketching in the same way. Even by 1992, the youngest interviewee, Huang Huan, still followed this way to practice pencil sketching in order to pass the entrance exam. Therefore, it can be said that this standard existed until the early 1990s.

Based on the interviews, it is clear to see what the interviewees learned in order to pass the exam. In 1955, in order to pass the university entrance exam, Liu Bing Jiang and his friend went to the Beijing library and copied the pencil sketches of Xu Bei Hong. They also copied the works of Ilya Yafimovich Repin (1844-1930). Similarly, in 1955, in order to pass the entrance examinations for fine arts high school, Shang Yang drew bowls, eggs, and onions in a realistic style with pencil or watercolor at home, as well as participating in the school art group to sketch

still life, fruits, or sketching landscape outside. Finally, in 1957, he was admitted to the Wuhan Art Normal School.

In 1979, Chen Shu Xia was admitted to the Central Academy of Fine Arts at the age of 15. She said that in the beginning, she learned Chinese painting. However, in order to meet the needs of the university entrance exam, she started to learn pencil and color sketching from an oil painter. This teacher believed that his goal was “to help students develop realistic capability” (personal interview, July 1, 2009). Chen’s ability to paint and draw realistically is demonstrated by her story about when she was 12 years old; she hung a gouache painting of a pot on the wall of her teacher’s house. It was so lifelike that the teacher’s wife mistook it for a real pot, ready to remove it off the wall.

The supremacy of Russian realism as the major artistic standard in China forced students who had developed the ability of depicting images in other styles to follow it and to give up their old skills. For instance, Huang Huan, who had been doing line drawings since she was 4 or 5 years old, had never drawn in the Russian realistic style before deciding to take the entrance exam for the high school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She had to learn to sketch using repeating lines to depict objects in order to be admitted to the high school of fine arts. She said that her experience of drawing with single lines was a great help and allowed her to pass the exam even though she only received training for a little over one year. She pointed out that “at the time, I suffered. I thought all my experiences of drawing were nothing, and believed that all the methods that I used to draw and paint in the past were wrong” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). She mentioned that the High School of the Central Fine Art Academy had standards for pencil sketching, quick sketching and color sketching based on the Russian realistic style. A

quick sketch, for example, required that the student used repeating lines and had to have the correct proportions and structure of the figure. If students failed to follow these standards, their work would have been criticized. Therefore,

we had to practice drawing and painting according to the methods and style of the school.

I had used single lines to draw since I was a child. After following the school's way of quick sketching for a while, I started to think I didn't know how to draw. Today, when I think about it, I think how silly everything was. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Huang Huan's experiences in high school in 1992 mirror those of Chen. She reports that the painting sketches of her classmates were very good, and some of her classmates' drawings were very realistic, "like black and white photographs (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Wu Ming Zhong started learning to draw and paint when he was about 12 years old. When he first started taking the exam, he was never able to pass it because his art teachers had not been trained in the Soviet realism style. In order to get instruction from a teacher who received this training in a fine arts academy, he travelled three hours to another city to see the teacher every week. He believes that this teacher's instruction was very important in helping him pass the entrance exam. However, he didn't know what the pencil sketching standard was until he got the chance to participate in the exam. After taking the exam, he understood what the accepted standard for pencil sketching was, and began to practice pencil sketching following the standards. He was admitted to university after taking the exam for the second time.

Almost all the participants mentioned that they learned pencil and color sketching from professional teachers. If an individual had received good training for the exam, or had a teacher who was familiar with Soviet realism, it was quite easy to pass the exam. For example, Liu Bing

Jiang, Chen Shu Xia, Huang Huan and Shang Yan received training that followed the precepts of Soviet realism. As soon as they graduated from secondary school or high school, they were accepted to the Academy of Fine Arts or High school of Fine Arts. In other cases, individuals had to take the time to learn the principles of Soviet realism in order to pass the entrance exam.

Based on the participants' stories, although pencil sketching was the most important skill in order to enter a fine arts school, sketching figures quickly, color sketching, and artistic creation also had to be practiced. Generally, if students developed the realistic skills to do pencil sketching well, the other three skills were easy to prepare for. Quick figure drawing required individuals to draw figures' poses in a realistic style, and artistic creation was based on the subject matter for which students created a draft. In color sketching, students often used gouache to draw still life. Chen Shu Xia, a teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, explained why gouache is used for color sketching instead of watercolor or oil paint. She pointed out that making watercolor needs technique, and oil painting needs more time to finish. However, gouache dries quickly and is easy to finish in three hours. Nowadays, acrylic is sometimes used in examinations; however, gouache is used more often because it is cheaper.

Non-formal art learning: Different ways of studying for the entrance examination

Before and after the Cultural Revolution, students learned art in different ways: from private teachers, learning at various institutions such as cultural centers, or in art classes, in school art groups, by themselves or learning with a peer group. In fact, most students used several methods at the same time to prepare for their exam. Participants who graduated from secondary school during the Cultural Revolution did not have a chance to take the exam.

However, after universities began to recruit again, they also took this type of art learning in order to be admitted to schools.

A. School art group. Before Liberation and before the Cultural Revolution, Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jiang and Shang Yan learned art in school groups, and believed that practicing in the groups was useful for the exam. Yet, after the Cultural Revolution, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan thought that they would not learn more in a group setting, therefore, they rarely participated in the art group's activities.

B. Private teachers or art classes for the entrance exam. These classes were offered by artists or local cultural centers. Chen Shu Xia, Wu Ming Zhong, Huang Huan and Wang Yan Yu were taught by private teachers while preparing for the exam. Huang Huan, Wang Yan Yu and Wu Ming also participated in an art class in a local cultural center for the exam.

C. Self-teaching. Some of the participants prepared for the entrance exam by themselves. Liu Bing Jiang, Shang Yang and Cao Ming Qiu had this experience. Liu often went to the Beijing library to copy some artists' pencil sketches with his friends. Shang Yang practiced at home using pencil or watercolor at home, and went to different art exhibitions.

D. Other ways of learning. Some participants, unlike those mentioned above, had different social relationships and circumstances. Because of that, they had to take "unique" approaches to learning. Huang Huan's mother taught drawing in the Academy of Fine Arts. She was able to go to her mother's studio and do pencil sketching with her mother's university students. On the contrary, Wu Ming Zhong lived in an isolated area, forcing him to go to another city to study in a college as an auditor in order to get instructions.

Non-formal art learning: The process of learning to pass the entrance examination

The kinds of preparation and learning listed in the last section were influenced by whether students were admitted to professional art schools or if they gave up taking the entrance exam to university art schools. Jin Zhi Lin and Liu Bing Jiang were admitted to the Central Academy of Fine Arts after graduating from high school, and Huang Huan, Shang Yang, and Chen Shu Xia were admitted to a high school of an Academy of Fine Arts after graduating from secondary school. How long they spent learning was determined by when they were admitted to the academy. Jin Zhi Lin spent more than a year preparing for the exam; Liu Bing Jiang, Huan Huang, and Shang Yang prepared for more than 2 years; and Chen Shu Xia, who began studying at a very young age, prepared for the exam for over five years.

Other participants did not have the opportunity to study in an art school when they graduated from high school or secondary school. Because they worked in a full time or part-time job, they had to take this kind of learning after work. Cao Ming Qiu spent an extra year to prepare for his exam, feeling he needed more time to prepare. Wang Yan Yu did not start this type of learning until he was 25 years old. He spent 5 years from 1984 to 1989 preparing for the entrance exam. He passed the examination of professional skills twice, but he did not pass the other exam that included mathematics, Chinese, politics, English, history and geography. Wu Ming Zhong took 4 years to prepare for his exam, and said that when he started in the Fine Arts department of Hebei Normal University in 1983, the department had recruited only fifteen new students. He was 21 years old, in the middle of the class in terms of his age. The oldest student was 3 years older than him, and the youngest one was 4 years younger. When universities started

to recruit students after the Cultural Revolution, fine arts students were a mix of older and younger students. Wu stated that in the Fine Art department, the big difference in age between the students was because entry into the department was very “competitive.”

Conclusion

This type of non-formal art learning to pass the entrance exam plays an important role for the students becoming an artist. In the artists’ early experiences of learning art, non-formal art learning included two situations. One is that individuals studied art out of art classes offered by their schools based on the requirements of the after school activities in the *National Education Plan*. After-school activities were included in National Educational Plan since Ministry of Education published *The Regulation of Secondary School (Draft)* and *Regulation of Elementary School (Draft)* in 1952 (Ministry of Education, 1952) in order to help those students who had some talent in art develop their artistic ability. The other is that individuals studied art in order to be admitted to art school. Participants were able to develop their artistic skills using this type of learning. Even though Wang Yan Yu was not able to pass the exam and finally did not study in art school at university, he believes that this learning built a foundation of techniques that enabled him to become an artist in the art market.

It also reflects that there were different art learning conditions in China, such as high quality art teachers, visiting art exhibitions and the availability of art books in libraries in different places. Participants who were from large cities such as Beijing, Wuhan and Qingdao had better learning conditions than others. Participants from small cities, such as Tang Shan, Shuang Feng and Zhu Lu, experienced more difficult conditions while preparing for the exam. In

Beijing before the Cultural Revolution, when Liu Bing Jiang decided to become an artist, he had many opportunities to learn art for the exam. For example, he copied realistic pencil sketches with his good friend in the library, went to the Central Academy of Fine Arts to look at students' works and participated in art classes offered by the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

Although Wu Ming Zhong had studied painting and drawing, because his art teacher did not attend an Academy of Fine Arts and had not received training in Soviet realism, he was not able to pass the entrance exam. In order to get instruction from a teacher who had graduated from an Academy of Fine Arts and was thus familiar with Soviet realism, he spent six hours a day commuting to another city to study with this teacher. If they did not have an art teacher familiar with Soviet teaching methods, students had to spend more time preparing for the entrance exam, or take many detours in order to achieve their goal of entering an art school.

This kind of study is intensive and requires a great deal of time investment. Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jiang, Shang Yang, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan studied outside of the school environment. In order to have more study time, Wu Ming and Wang Yan Yu chose to work the night shift at a factory and paint during the day. The content of this type of art learning was focused on developing the realistic techniques.

Early experience of life art learning

Life art learning plays a very important role in the process of learning art. When participants told their stories of their early art learning experiences, they also often mentioned some of their aesthetic experiences. These seemed not to be directly related to the art learning experiences, but these events had a great influence on the themes and styles of their later artistic

creation. They also played an important role in the development of their art concepts. When I recall my own experiences of learning art, I understand how these “artless” experiences have influenced my own art learning. Especially influenced by the natural environment, when I was a child, I often wanted to draw what impressed me on paper, an experience still fresh in my memory after many years.

In the artists’ early experiences, life art learning includes learning by doing, imitating activities of others making art, seeing artwork, copying images, learning during leisure time, learning from the family and learning from the natural environment.

The nine artists who participated in this study were born in different times, in different cultural, political and economic situations in China. Therefore, the specific elements of these different forms of life art learning that they received reflect different political, economic and cultural currents that existed when they were very young.

Life art learning: Learning from making art

In this study, examples of life art learning include writing and drawing the blackboard news¹⁰ for the classroom or school, drawing political propaganda posters, participating in a variety of children painting competitions or exhibitions and making art for family or friends.

During the Cultural Revolution, the need for political propaganda and slogans made this

¹⁰ Blackboard news was on blackboards that usually were near the door of the school, which displayed international and domestic news stories and important notices or information about the school. Each classroom also had a blackboard on the wall at the back of classroom which often displayed students’ essays.

type of art learning extremely important. At the same time, Chairman Mao pointed out that practice was the best way to learn. He believed that knowledge came from practice, but also should be used in practice. At that time, in schools and universities teachers stopped teaching, and students learned directly from peasants, workers and soldiers in factories, in rural areas and in the army. Some participants improved their skills by making political propaganda posters in the Cultural Revolution. Kong Zi said that, at that time, “young people had more opportunities to make artwork instead of mature artists” (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

Posting blackboard news

Cao Ming Qiu, Chen Shu Xia, Wang Yan Yu and Huang Huan posted blackboard news for their schools or classrooms. Chen Shu Xia thought that this experience helped her improve her drawing speed. Shang Yang also helped drawing his school posters. Based on a stamp, he painted a large portrait of Sun Zhong Shang¹¹ with watercolors for the school.

Political propaganda posters

Kong Zi and Cao Ming both improved their art skills through painting political posters during the Cultural Revolution. Kong Zi stated that young people had more chances to do art because during the Cultural Revolution, many artists received “education” in the countryside and did not have the opportunity to draw or paint. As a result, “many propaganda drawings and

¹¹ Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925)

paintings had to be done by children” (personal interview, July 29, 2009). After participating in her school’s Red Painting Brush of the Red Guards, Kong Zi first passed the materials to older students who were painting, washed brushes and drew manga of political leaders. Finally she was able to paint portraits of political leaders with grid drawing. Cao Ming Qiu also drew portraits of the relatives of Chairman Mao with pencils. Later, he painted large portraits of Chairman Mao and Lin Biao using furniture paint. He even made a living by painting propaganda posters instead of being a part-time worker after graduating from high school. He believed that his life as a carpenter was too hard, but by producing propaganda paintings he “could make a little bit of money, more money than building buildings” (personal interview, July 29, 2009), so he quit his part-time carpentry job and focused on propaganda painting. For him, although propaganda painting was mainly a way to survive, it also improved his painting skills.

At the time, I painted what people wanted. The subject matter focused on images of workers, peasants, and soldiers. For example, some paintings had them working in fields full of green vivid plants, while others showed peasants harvesting their crops.

Sometimes, I painted Chairman Mao’s portrait with one of his quotations. I painted 20 or 30 of these propaganda paintings. Each piece often was 5 x 6 meters. This kind of work was a very useful practice. Later, when I studied in university, I was able to paint movie posters very fast and I was able to do a few pieces in a day while people who got professional training were often not able to do it (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

Kong and Cao believed that the experience was very important in improving their artistic skills. Kong Zi said that working in the team of *Red Painting Brush* taught her many things. For example, “I learned that there were different kinds of art forms and media such as Chinese

painting, oil painting, gouache, print, and sculpture, and understood the difference between a sketch and a pencil sketch” (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

Making artwork for others

Shang Yang and Wu Ming Zhong had similar experiences of making art for others. After secondary school, Shang Yang missed his primary school classmates, so he made painted cards to send to his old classmates. He used his finger to paint a cow’s body, and then added the rest of the body and the background with a brush. Wu Ming painted glass paintings for his neighbors’ furniture, which were a new local folk art and a style of Chinese painting. He used his fingers and a brush to draw landscape on a glass.

Participating in various competitions or exhibitions

Kong Zi, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan participated in children’s art competitions; Xia and Huan won awards in China and in the International Children Painting Competition. Shang Yang and Huang Huan had an opportunity to exhibit their artwork as students.

From 1949 to 1977, children’s art education was impacted by the ideas of the Chinese art community, and was essentially controlled by the “professional model.” Drawing and painting instructions for children, and the evaluation of their art, were primarily influenced by the skills possessed by professional artists and the ideas of adults. In China, some art educators who look favorably on the influence of Western modernism on children art call the results of this kind of training as “artworks of children with professional content,” and argue that “this type of artwork depicted a world which adults believed to be that of children” (He Yuan Lan, a speech in the

opening ceremony of national children artwork exhibition in Tian Jian, June 2005).

During the Cultural Revolution, children's artistic creation was affected by the political situation. As Chen Shu Xia said, "[a]t the time, my oil painting teacher told me that if you wanted to create artwork, you should read newspapers. According to him, creation was always related to politics. Creation needed to have a significant subject matter" (personal interview, July 1, 2009). An example of one of his works that followed his teacher's idea was called *Study Group*, an image of four or five children studying together at a table. Similarly, in 1963, the drawing that Kong Zi did for the national children's art competition reflected the same kind of idea. The drawing depicted a female soldier guarding an island at night. When Kong Zi created her artwork for the competition, she did not mention any adults giving her suggestions, but said that she copied a photo from the jacket of a magazine. Although the artworks were created by children, they were done in a realistic style. In order to create *The Cloth Counter in the Department Store*, Chen Shu Xia went to a store to sketch, then created her drawing based on her sketches.

In the 1980s, China started to become more open to other countries, and people had more opportunities to communicate with people from other nations. Huang Huan, born in 1977, had different kinds of opportunities than other participants in this study. For example, she participated in the International Children's Painting Competition. From the time she started primary school, Huang Huan won many national and international children's art competitions. Although many of her subjects focused on society, they reflected the experience of children and children's imaginations. One of her awards was given by the Japanese TV Net. The theme of the competition was "What would you do if you were a leader of our world?" She was inspired by

“The Little Match Girl” by Hans Christian Andersen, and painted a big traditional wooden Chinese building, surrounded by less beautiful and smaller buildings. Poor children who were characters in children’s stories from around the world were shown craning their necks out the windows. With this work, Huan represented her own world and life, and won the gold medal. When she was in elementary school, her class wanted to have a meaningful young pioneer’s day. Therefore, they decided to do something benefiting the environment, so they cleaned up the bushes around the school and collected bottles and sold them. Then they donated the money to a school in the countryside. She documented the event with a painting, which depicts “many trees, and some of us are sweeping and others are picking up bottles” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

In one of her paintings she painted the bottom of the sea as she imagined it to be: “everybody was living in the sea and some of us were communicating with sea creatures” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). In the same year, a Russian women’s magazine organized an international children’s painting competition, the subject being what children envisioned for the future of their country. Huan had visited Germany when she was nine years old, and was impressed by the “seas of beautiful flowers” (personal interview, July 31, 2009) there. In Germany there were flowers everywhere, each house had flowers and along the roads there were many flowers. The trip and her impressions of it inspired her to paint *My Homeland is a Garden*, because “[i]t was the beginning of 90’s and the economy of China started to develop. I hoped that Beijing would be as beautiful as Germany was. I thought that every home in our Beijing would be a sea of flowers like Germany” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). The painting presented a traditional Chinese wooden building, surrounded by peonies “as big as trees, where

flowers were growing in the water, and flowers grew in the trees surrounding the building. On the roof of the building, a man was playing the flute. It was very poetic” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Shang Yang and Huang Huan’s artwork were displayed in exhibitions. However, their personal situations were quite different. While Shang Yang sketched students repairing desks and chairs in his elementary school campus for the Wu Han Teaching Exhibition with the guidance of her teacher in 1953, Huang Huan had more opportunities to be involved in artistic creation than other children because her family was better-off financially. She drew illustrations for newspapers and for student drawing textbooks. She also created artworks for her solo exhibition based on her own life. She said that when she was 13,

My school helped me to hold a solo art exhibition in school. The works included my paintings, sketches and a tapestry using wool thread sown on a blanket. All the pieces reflected my experience and life. For example, one represented my Mom painting, and another represented a holiday, with some of my classmates making Chinese dumplings on the playground while others were cooking them in the hole they dug. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

After the Cultural Revolution, the subject of children’s artworks changed and started to reflect the ideas and experiences of children, rather than the viewpoints of adults. This also illustrates how the concepts and ideas of art education were changing in China at that time.

Life art learning: Learning from copying images or figures from comic books, film or newspaper.

All the participants had the experience of copying from comics, books, cards, movies or magazines. They used various methods of copying. They usually copied images with lines, but sometimes students employed more complex approaches, such as Chinese painting or watercolors after they entered secondary school.

Copying comic books was done by all the participants except for Huang Huan. This was because Huang's mother, who was a professor in a fine arts school at a university, was against her copying comic book images and asked her daughter to draw her own images, because her mother believed that images from comic books were just a formula that would not improve children's taste. Therefore, she just copied the old masters' works that she liked and wanted to keep.

What the students liked to copy were those images that they could find from the world around them, and in different periods, their choices were influenced by different kinds of popular art. While Jin Zhi Lin and Liu Bing Jiang liked to copy ancient Chinese warriors and heroes' images using lines, Kong Zi liked to copy comic images of the ancient fairies. Chen Shu Xia, Wang Yan Yu and Wu Ming Zhong copied images from comic books. After the victory of the Allies in World War II, Liu Bing Jiang saw a lot of American movies and enjoyed copying images from them. At that time, he often painted characters drawn from Tarzan movies, while during the Korean War; he liked to imitate satiric cartoons from Soviet magazines. He also used themes and images from the Beijing Opera. Wang Yan Yu also liked to copy cartoon images from films.

In addition to copying these images in pencil and pen, some of them copied images using more complex media. Liu Bing Jiang copied People's Liberation Army soldiers from

photographs using watercolors, and Wang Yan Yu copied images from calendars about the Monkey King using Chinese painting techniques. In order to get the visual effect of Chinese paintings, Wang went to a vegetable store to buy paper that was used to wrap vegetables. “With this paper I could create special visual effects similar to those an artist could achieve using rice paper, watercolor and ink” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). Wu Ming Zhong not only copied images from comics in the style of Chinese painting, but also mounted and hung them in the traditional way. Kong Zi copied a photo of a hero saving people and a photo of Mao Zhe Dong.

Copying is a good way of learning, although some art educators are against it. Some art experts believe that children’s copying adult painting is not a good pedagogical method because adults and children have different ways of thinking and interpreting the world (Yang Jing Zhi presentation for art teachers in the China National Institute for Education, 2000). For example, Emery (2002) believes that in the classrooms, ““originality” is seen as highly valued in modernist terms” (p. 21). Therefore, children are not encouraged to copy the images from other sources and popular culture. However, during the process of copying, children often are able to learn the language that is in the work they are copying. Their self-expression is influenced by what they learn from copying. In the interviews, the participants provided more details of their experiences to show how this approach was a helpful way to learn art. Liu Bing Jiang mentioned that, in the beginning, he copied images of ancient heroes, but later, he was able to draw different heroes from his imagination. Some studies in art education show that copying comic characters can help children pass their period of realism and artistic imitation (Toku, 2001), and illustrated copying is a good way to learn drawing (Liu, 2004).

The contents of the images that children copied were closely connected with the changes

occurring in Chinese society. At different times, mass media or popular images were always used to convey the value of ideas that the society had; they reflected the changes in society, or even political ideas. What children copied changed as society changed, although children still exhibited their different developmental stages of artistic ability, and boys and girls liked to copy different things. Generally, girls liked to copy images of fairies and boys preferred to copy pictures of heroes (Liu, 2004). The stories of Liu Bing Jiang clearly show how images changed in different periods of Chinese society. These stories took place from the early 1940s to the early 1950s. When he was 7 or 8 years old, he became interested in picture cards that came in boxes of cigarettes, called Yang Pian. The cards had images on them of characters from traditional Chinese classical literature, from such works as the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *All Are Brothers*, and *Stories of Three Countries*. Here, “Yang Pian” meant “Western card.” “Yan” was always seen as something from another country. At that time, many industrial productions were imported from Western countries. Liu Bing Jiang stated that “[a]fter the Anti-Japanese War, Americans came to China. I watched many American films from the age of eight to twelve. My favorite movies were the Tarzan series. I still remember that the earliest Tarzan was Johnny Weismuller” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

After studying in secondary school, during the Korean War, Liu Bing Jiang started to draw caricatures.

There were caricatures in the newspapers everyday. At that time in China, a few famous caricaturists satirized Dean Acheson and Harry Truman. The Russian caricature magazines were published in China because of the friendship between China and Russia. The Russian magazines were very interesting and some of the Russian caricatures were

done very well. I copied them” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

At that time, children unconsciously participated in society and learned from the world around them through copying what they were interested in.

Life art learning: Learning from imitating other artworks.

Imitating other artists' works is a good way to learn art. Some of the artists participating in this study, such as Kong Zi, Wu Ming Zhong, Wang Yan Yu and Huang Huan had this kind of experience.

Wu Ming Zhong imitated his peer group and his art teacher to create his artwork. When he was 10 years old, he saw his friends working on a Chinese landscape painting, and he did one too. However, he and his friends did not have a good art teacher to instruct them. “There were only a few good friends who drew together. A few of my friends liked to draw and paint. The oldest among us was able to draw very well. Therefore, after seeing what he painted, I went home and imitated what he did” (personal interview, June 22, 2009). After studying in high school, when he saw his art teacher making glass paintings, he felt that they were very beautiful. Because of this, he began to make glass paintings for his family and neighbors. His method was

first, I used Chinese ink to draw the shapes of mountains, water and trees; then, I used my finger to mix colors with furniture paint. I patted the colors on the glass. The trees were green, and the sky was blue. It was also possible to use a brush to paint on the glass. This kind of painting had radiant color and it was beautiful. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

At the age of 16, before going to the countryside, Kong Zi visited her father and painted two large posters using oil paint. At that time, she had never painted an oil painting, although she

saw the Red Guards painting in the school. As a member of the team of Red Painting Brush, she had observed many older students making wall paintings. She imitated their process, and made two boards for her father's factory.

I painted the board with white oil paint. Then according a propaganda painting, first, I gridded and drew the outline of the images; then, I made a draft using brown; third, I painted the dark parts; then, the lighter parts, and at the end I added the highlights. After painting for half a month, finally, I finished it. Each piece was almost two by three meters.
(personal interview, July 29, 2009)

Wang Yan Yu learned professional art skills through imitating the older students' pencil sketching. Huang Huan watched her mother painting in oil and acrylic. She also asked her mother for materials and painted by herself.

Life art learning: Learning art from leisure activities.

Leisure is a part of culture, and also is influenced by people's lifestyle in different times. Before Liberation in 1949, children had more opportunities to see folk customs in the countryside and watch movies and opera in cities. After Liberation, the new country promoted a new scientific life, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Some traditional folk customs were forbidden because they were seen as fraudulent activities. At that time, the mass media was full of political propaganda artwork, and people rarely had the opportunity to see traditional folk customs.

Jin Zhi Lin mentioned that his hometown was famous because of Shadow plays. When he was a child, he

was able to watch the Shadow play every week. If the Shadow play was performed using light at night it was called Pi Ying, but if it was performed using the sun's rays in the day, we called it as Xi Ying. The puppets were beautiful. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

At the same time, in his hometown, there was a Guan Di temple (one of the Gods in Chinese folk legends). If

[i]t did not rain in the summer, the peasants would put on the Guan Di sculpture parade, and it was very interesting. In the sunshine, Guan Di's face was red, and his head sweated. We children were very curious about it, and we went to the back to check. We discovered that somebody put oil on his head so that he looked like he sweated. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

At the same, he loved to collect stamps and "had been collecting stamps since primary school, and I had many stamps" (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Li Bing Jiang liked to go to the Beijing Opera with his father, and collected the Yang Pian with images.

Huang Huan also remembered that her father often took her "to different concerts and listened to different musicals. He liked to explain different musical styles to me" (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Shang Yang often visited some temples and bazaars with his father, and also listened to some stories about the history of painting and calligraphy.

Wang Yan Yu describes going:

out with my peers to a field or to the seashore, and we played games that children in the village played. Today, when I think about those games, I still feel they are very

interesting and my subject matter focuses on my experience of playing the games back then. (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Life art learning: Learning from self-expression.

Lowenfeld (1975) wrote that “the process of drawing, painting, and constructing is a complex one in which the child brings together diverse elements of his experience to make a new and meaningful whole” (p. 3). Children’s artwork is not to show their drawing techniques, but mainly to reflect their understanding and feelings about the world and life around them. What they draw is a combination of what they feel in their hearts and what they see, feel and hear in life. Therefore, Lowenfeld argues that art is mainly a tool for children to express themselves (p. 7).

All the participants experienced learning through their self-expression that can be seen as improvisational. Children draw with any possible materials such as chalk, pencil, a small stone, a stick, or crayon, on paper, the ground, or a wall. Children like to draw what they are interested in. Some times they draw what they see or experience, sometimes, they draw what they know from the world of adults.

Based on the stories of the interviewees, it is clear that children prefer to draw what they see in the world around them. When Liu Bing Jiang was around four or five years old, “I was the only child. When I felt alone, I often drew oxen, horses, camels or figures on the walls or on the paving stones in the yard with chalk (personal interview, July 02, 2009). He often saw these animals in Beijing and was really interested in them. When he was interested in something, he liked to draw it in pencil or chalk.

Shang Yang also liked to draw things he was interested in. In his Chinese class, when he saw an old glove with a hole in it on his desk, he was touched by it. So, he drew a detailed image of it on a piece of paper.

Around the age of four, Kong Zi lived with her grandparents in a rural area. Like other rural children, she liked drawing graffiti on the ground with a branch. Later, after returning to her parents in the city and having the opportunity to see a performance of traditional drama, she liked to draw a fairy who dressed in ancient costumes.

Wang Yan Yu liked to draw chickens a lot because his family raised many chickens. His math and Chinese textbooks were full of images of dogs and chickens. In the first grade math textbook, there was a formula for $2+2=4$, so he “drew two chickens under the number two, and four chickens under the number four” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

It is also clear to see how social values and popular ideas influence the subject matter of children’s drawing, although children’s self-expression was a kind game-playing. Some of the participants drew the popular events or images of that time. Shang Yang still remembers that during the Korean War, when he was almost 10 or 11 years old, he always listened to the radio and heard about the American imperialists and the Chinese Volunteer Army. One day, suddenly he

wanted to draw the Chinese Volunteer Army catching American soldiers. In fact, I never saw any Chinese soldiers or American soldiers, and I never saw the face of an American. I just knew that Americans all had big noses. Based on my imagination, I drew a row of American soldiers with big noses raising their hands. At the same time, a row of Chinese Voluntary soldiers were guarding them with guns. It was very rough drawing but I really

liked to draw this kind of narrative subject matter. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

Wang Yan Yu did not draw what he saw, but drew what adults talked about. When he was over six years old, he “got some chalk and drew a rooster on the back of the cabinet along with a few big Chinese characters that read: Chairman Mao Long Life. In those days, because people often said that a golden rooster heralded the break of day, I drew the rooster” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Life art learning: Learning from seeing people doing art.

Seeing people doing something is a way to learn, especially in learning techniques. Apprentices often learn from their master by seeing the procedure used to make something. In the process of art learning, both seeing and practicing are useful. Except for art teachers demonstrating techniques, students see people making artworks unconsciously or consciously. Generally, art teachers show students some techniques or procedures. In this study, only the participants’ experience of seeing people doing art is analyzed. Among the participants, Shang Yang, Kong Zi, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan mentioned that they had this experience. Others possibly saw people making art, but in the interview they did not talk about it. Shang Yang believed that watching other people producing artwork influenced him a great deal. His father could paint figures, landscapes, flowers and birds. He said that he

saw my father paint as soon as I was born. When I was very young, I just saw him put a carpet on the table and I did not know what he was doing because I was too short to see.

Gradually, I came to understand what my father was doing and became interested in what he did. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

In the interview, he talked about how this experience influenced his future works. Shang often noticed how he used both Chinese flower blue and ochre.

Both of these colors impressed me very much. Flower blue was not ordinary blue. Using a brush to drop a little bit of flower blue into a dish, you then add a tiny bit of water. The color is then spread on rice paper where it is slowly absorbed into the paper. The effect on the paper reminded me of the expanse of the Changjiang River, which was this kind of light blue. When my father put some of the ochre beside the light blue and it bled into the blue, the contrast that appeared touched my heart. Sometime, the ochre would mix a little bit with blue, or a little bit of blue would run into ochre, producing a subtle warm green. Sometimes, when the ink on the brush dipped into the colors, a delicate, indescribable tone was created. Many critics say that my style always changes, but I know that there exists something constant in my painting. This is the tone I learned from my father, and my memories of my childhood. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

Kong Zi remembers that the ladies in her grandmother's village always made shoes and sometimes embroidered them with flowers or grass, although she cannot remember those patterns exactly.

Wang Yuan Yu learned how to draw pencil sketches watching older children who were able to draw very well. He "often watched what they did, and then followed what they did, to make my own pencil sketch. Using this method during middle school, I developed my own techniques to make pencil sketches that were very useful as I continued to learn art" (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Hunag Huan also enjoyed seeing artists doing artwork when she visited Russia as a 13-

year-old girl. She

liked to watch street artists creating their work. They were able to paint a portrait in public. At the time, I was only able to draw portraits using lines and did not know how to use color to make a portrait quickly. I really admired these streets artists. In those years, there were not any street artists in China. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Some art teachers also believe that people can improve their skills by watching others creating art. When Chen Shu Xia's teacher created his own artworks, he let her see what he was doing.

This experience makes non-artists feel that making art is not as mysterious as they imagine and that they might also able to create their own art. Observing is also a good way of learning art.

Life art learning: Learning from artworks.

When the interviewees were children, they had different definitions of "artwork." As Chen Shu Xia mentioned,

then I had a different concept of what "art" was. Then, I believed that any image was art. It was difficult for me to understand things from everyday life also could be artwork. The artworks I saw were comic books, revolutionary dramas and films, and political propaganda posters. For me, if I was able to draw or paint things or figures realistically, I considered them to be works of art (personal interview, July 1, 2009).

Many children believed that only drawing or painting were artwork. When the participants told their experience about the works of art they saw when they were young, they

described Chinese paintings and oil painting, pencil sketches and traditional Chinese woodprints. Some of the works they saw during childhood were original paintings, and others were reproductions.

Before the Liberation, Jin Zhi Lin was able to see a great deal of original Chinese paintings because his family loved collecting antiques and paintings, and his father liked to look at his collection with his children or friends. At the same time, Jin also saw oil paintings from magazines, but he really did not understand them because the quality of printing was not good.

Shang Yang's father is a Chinese painter. When Shang was a little boy, he had already seen some Chinese paintings. However, the books that his father bought impressed him. One book contained many watercolor and pencil sketches. One drawing deeply affected him because it looked like the scene that he could see from his backyard. He described this artwork as,

[o]n the bank of the river, a person was taking an umbrella and walking into the wind and rain. In the background, a small sailboat appeared in the river haze. This was a pencil and watercolor painting with light and shade. Although it differed in style from traditional Chinese painting, it had a quaint Chinese landscape name: Jian Gan Xing Li, and had the same aesthetic as traditional Chinese painting. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

Shang Yang recalled that one book in particular introduced him to Western art, and an image of a work by Corot had a great effect on his life. The painting was like a "breath of fresh air" for him, showing an environment almost like his hometown. It depicted a humid, foggy and gloomy place, with lightly shifting shadows that "touched my heart, even my body" (personal interview, July 10, 2009). Much later he learned that Corot was a famous French artist, though after Shang became a painter he was not so enthusiastic about Corot's style. Another painting

that greatly impressed him, but in a negative way, was a still-life by Van Gogh. He disliked it because it was messy, although “I didn’t realize who the artist was until later. At that time, I did not even know where France was” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

When Wang Yan Yu was 12 or 13 years old, he started to like propaganda paintings from the Cultural Revolution very much. This is “because the young people were always full of idealism and were not afraid of big storms. It encouraged people. I felt they were honorable and optimistic” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). However, Wu Ming Zhong claimed that in those years, “the artworks I saw were mostly political propaganda paintings or political cartoons such as *Defending Treasure Island* or *Beat Down Liu Shao Qi*. I did not see any professional artwork” (personal interview, June 22, 2009). Although Chen Shu Xia did not make any comments about political propaganda posters, she considered them to be works of art.

Duen Xiao Ping pointed out that, after 1976, art was supposed to serve the masses instead of serving politics. Political propaganda posters were not the “mainstream” of art, and Chinese paintings and other artwork began to be published again. At that time, Wang Yan Yu, who was studying in middle school, liked to go to the bookstore to look at books related to drawing and painting, in order to learn more about them. He “really liked the printed collections of Wang Shu Hui’s *Gongbi*-style illustrations” for the classical Chinese novel *Red Building Dreams*, written during the Qing Dynasty. He said,

[i]t was the first time for me to see this kind of painting and I wondered how there could be such beautiful paintings in the world. I went to see them again and again. Another artist’s artwork: *The Monkey King* [he could not remember the artist’s name] was also one of my favorites. His painting was published on a calendar that my family had. (personal

interview, July 2, 2009)

At the end of the Cultural Revolution, the realistic style was seen as mainstream, and the subject matter of Chinese painting such as flowers, landscapes or birds were seen as bourgeois. However, ordinary people liked to have decorative glass paintings painted in the Chinese style at their home. As Wu Ming Zhong mentions,

[a]t the time, in my hometown, it was fashionable to use glass paintings to decorate rooms. Orchids, birds, landscape, or fairies were painted on the glass of the cabinets and on individual glasses. The content was from Chinese painting, creating a new form of folk art. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

Huang Huan was born in 1977 and, compared to other participants, had more opportunities to see different styles of artworks, both original works and reproductions. At the age of nine and thirteen, she visited Europe and Russia. She saw many works of art in Russia, but “was not crazy about Russian art, and I often browsed through museums because the artwork had no relationship to my own life.” She “liked German and French art more than Russian art. Particularly, I liked Miro’s artwork very much” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

The participants’ ideas about artworks also depended on the art concepts of their era. While Huang Huan had different opportunities to see different artistic styles after the 1980s, and liked abstract art, Cheng Shu Xia believed that realistic art was seen as artwork at the end of the Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, Kong Zi saw some real artworks because of a rather unfortunate event. At that time, in her school some students smashed plaster casts and burnt pencil sketches of plaster casts because these things were thought to be bourgeois and should be

destroyed. Kong Zi stated,

I admired the students who drew these pencil sketches, and I also felt bad that those insurrectionists destroyed the artworks and I thought I would not have any opportunity to learn what the other students were able to do. I still remember the sculpture of Venus, which I didn't think was bad. On the contrary, I thought it was beautiful. (personal interview, July 29, 2009)

Life art learning: Learning from the environment around them.

Learning from the environment is an aesthetic experience, rather than a type of learning knowledge or skill. This experience is not the direct result of the knowledge or techniques that children can implement immediately in their artistic creation. However, this experience is crucial for an artist, and plays a very important role in his or her future development of an artist. In the interview process, most participants mentioned this kind of experience, although they spent their childhood in different places, such as the countryside, small towns or big cities.

Jin Zhi Lin did not make a lot of art when he was a child. However, he remembered being moved by nature twice as a child. The first was when he was in the fourth grade:

After picking beans in the field in the evening, I saw red clouds and the sunset. It was very beautiful, so I rushed home, and quickly returned with some painting tools to reproduce the scene on paper. Today, I am not able to remember what material I used, whether watercolors or ink. However, it was not pencil, because I remember that I brought a water bottle. This is one of the two events that I can remember where I created art. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

The other one was in the fifth grade in the summer:

When I was in the classroom at noon, the sun was very strong. Ivies with dark purple shadows were on the white walls, and I was totally absorbed by them. I had not yet seen the impressionists' artworks at that time, but I was very interested in color under the bright sunshine. I used watercolors to paint the scene. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

Jin Zhi Lin also remembered his family had a pond full of reeds, and a garden with peach and cherry trees. After a rainy night, he found many crabs on the paths the next morning. He lived a pastoral life, and as children, he and his siblings often worked in the fields. He had a deep feeling for "rural nature," and deeply loved nature and the colors in it. He believes that he loves to paint landscapes because he grew up in the beautiful countryside.

Liu Bing Jiang was born in Beijing. He also remembers the environment of Beijing:

At that time, there were many oxen, horses, and camels that carried coal or other goods into the city. A fellow led a long line of camels that had bells hanging from their necks. You could hear the jingling of the bells. Whenever I heard it, I was always excited and opened the gate to go outside to see the camels – it was always very interesting. After seeing the line of these enormous animals, when I got back home, I really wanted to draw them with a pencil on paper. (personal interview, July 02, 2009)

Shang Yang was born in 1942 in Honghu, which is a small town beside the Changjiang River in Hebei province. The landscape impressed him very much:

The Changjiang River was always misty. When I stood on the bank of the river, I was able to see the boundless, misty sky. Beyond the riverbank, there were houses with white

walls, black tiles, and stone paths. This was a typical small Chinese town, which was bordered by the countryside and had a good dock as well. Therefore, it was pretty quiet, but not too isolated. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

In fact, this experience also influenced his appreciation of art. He had a resonance between the artwork he saw and the environment he experienced. Shang mentioned that when he was about six or seven years old, a drawing impressed him deeply; the drawing was like the scene one could see from his backyard.

Before Kong Zi was around 4 years old, she stayed in the countryside. However, she always believed that she had been in the countryside for a long time because the landscape of her grandmother's village had impressed her deeply. She recalled,

I often wallow in the memory of the landscape of my father's hometown and remember it as being very beautiful. There was a big river behind the village. People liked to fish on the banks that were covered with willows. When spring came, plum trees, apple trees ... everything was booming. On the contrary, the perceptions of and feelings about the city were much less vivid. My impression of city life was just my family's house. My perceptions of the village were full of emotion. (personal interview, July 29, 2009)

Huang Huan went to Germany with four other Chinese children to participate in an international children's communication project as a child artist for a month. She was impressed by the local environment, and felt that Germany was an ocean of cars and flowers, and China was an ocean of people. Later, one of her paintings was inspired by Germany's beautiful environment. She hoped that Beijing could be as beautiful as the cities in Germany, an ocean of flowers.

Summary

In the artists' early art learning, life art learning plays a very important role. The artists learned from various sources: making art (blackboard news and political propaganda posters, tasks of making art arranged by themselves, and participating in various competitions or exhibitions); copying images or figures from comic books, films and newspapers; imitating others' activities; leisure activities; self-expression; seeing people doing art; appreciating artworks; and the environment where they lived. These kinds of art study play a very important role in developing children's artistic ability. In everyday life, children improve their artistic ability and unconsciously develop their aesthetics. National teaching policies and teaching plans often ignore this type of art learning in elementary and secondary school.

The reasons for and process of deciding to become an artist and reasons for choosing art as a major

Although this section does not discuss the methods of the artists' art learning, it is important in understanding the process and ways of their art learning. The reasons for and the process of deciding to become an artist and reasons for choosing their majors reflect the social and cultural contexts in which they lived. Furthermore, this section reflects on the participants' early experiences of art learning.

The reasons for becoming an artist.

All the participants loved painting and drawing very much. These are natural activities for children; every child likes to paint or draw. But not every child thinks seriously that he or she

will become an artist, and makes an effort to achieve it. Therefore, there are other more important factors that assist those who are interested in pursuing art to keep them on the artistic path and keep them motivated. These factors include the expectations of their parents, seeing the work of outstanding artists, changing their social states or having a decent career. Sometimes, some of these factors work together.

At the same time, the circumstances and political climate also had an impact on the decisions of several of the participants in this study. The process of deciding to become an artist was different for each participant. Some had an easier time making their dreams a reality: entering university, receiving professional art training and then engaging in work related to art. Others wanted to be an artist when they were children, but because there were no opportunities, the idea of being an artist emerged again many years later. They then decided to take steps to realize their dream. Those participants who received their secondary schooling during the Cultural Revolution often had this kind of experience. During the Cultural Revolution, it was impossible to become an artist, and many gave up this dream. It was a time when it was not acceptable for people to want to be famous or to be “experts,” and the universities were effectively closed (Chen, 2006, p. 232). In 1976, when the Cultural Revolution ended, the government again encouraged people to seek expertise in different fields, and universities started to recruit students. This gave people the chance to pursue their dreams and change their fate by studying at university and getting a decent job. At that time, some of the interviewees again decided to pursue art. After the 1990s, the appearance of the art market in China allowed people who did not have a chance to have art-related work to start successful careers in art.

Influenced by other artists' works.

Both Jin Zhi Lin, born in 1928, and Liu Bing Jiang, born in 1937, wanted to become artists after seeing Xu Bei Hong's solo exhibitions in 1946 and in 1953, and applied to the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Fortunately, both were admitted as soon as they graduated from high school. Jin recalled that in 1946,

Xu Bei Hong came to Beijing to set up the College of Fine Arts. I saw his exhibition in the same year. This was the first time for me to see such good paintings, and I was moved by them deeply, especially one of his oil paintings called *Flute*. An oriental woman who was playing the flute was very elegant, and the background was autumn water and sky. When I saw his paintings, I decided to study painting at the art college. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

Parents' expectation.

Although Shang Yang, Chen Shu Xia, Huang Huan and Wu Ming Zhong's parents had different occupations, they all wanted their children to become artists. Shang Yang said:

When I graduated from the Hubei Academy of Fine Art in 1965, my father wrote to me and told me that now I was an artist and had realized the dream of three generations of my family, and that I would have a bright future. In fact, when I was born, my father hoped I would be an artist in the future. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)

Chen Shu Xia and Wu Ming Zhong's parents were not artists, but they tried to find teachers or opportunities in order to help them to be an artist. Wu mentioned: "Although my family did not have a lot of money, they paid for me to audit art class in a training school in

another county” (personal interview, June 22, 2009).

Motivation to go to university to get a good job.

Four of the participants, Cao Ming Qiu, Kong Zi, Wang Yan Yu and Wu Ming Zhong had to consistently work to realize their dream of studying in a university. Getting a good job motivated them to reach their goal despite the disadvantages they faced.

Traditionally, the Chinese believe that one’s social status can be changed through studying. It is often said that “a young man was a cow herder in the morning, but a minister of the court in the evening.” This means that laborers are able to change their fate by studying and taking part in imperial examinations.

After 1949, although in China the working people were considered to be “the masters of the country”, in reality, there were different groups with different political and economic status. Based on the socialist principle of distribution, “from each according to his ability, and to each according to his need” (Wu & Wen, 2006), *The Decision on the Wage Reform* was published in 1956 by the State Council. People’s wages were decided by the individual’s educational background, job, work ability, work experience and basic needs. If people graduated from universities or technical high schools, they would have a better salary. At the same time, this wage system also confirmed that the “social level,” or the political and economic life of an individual, was the main criteria for distinguishing between cadres, soldiers, workers and staff. Peasants were not included in this system. If an individual graduated from a university, he would be a cadre. Because the Chinese political climate changed and all universities stopped enrollment during the Cultural Revolution, this phenomenon did not exist during this period. Before and

after the Cultural Revolution, however, people were able to change their social status through access to higher education.

In China before 1989, the state provided some subsidies because it was responsible for students' accommodation and tuition fees, particularly for those students with financial difficulties. If students selected teaching as a major, the government provided them with basic meals. At the same time, graduating from a university would guarantee a permanent job. Therefore, for young people, studying in a university was the best way to get a good job and secure a good future. Studying art in a university meant that in the future, students could get an art-related job. Therefore, admittance to university could be the first step in realizing the dream of becoming an artist. At the same time, they could receive professional training and develop their artistic ability. At the age of 15, Shang Yang was admitted to the Wuhan Junior College of Teaching Fine Arts in 1957. He believed that this “started my dream to be an artist. In those years, after entering this kind of school, the government would arrange our job positions. Even if we joined the army, we could be a lieutenant and still perform art-related jobs” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). Liu Bing Jiang also believes that he “gradually began to walk toward the right path. I passed the exam for studying in CAF and was admitted” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

After they decided to become artists, all the participants chose to study art in an Academy of Fine Arts or a fine arts high school to receive a “professional” art education, in order to realize their dream of becoming artists. Most of them were very fortunate, and entered a university at different ages and received professional art training. Shang Yang, Chen Shu Xia and Huan Huang were 15 or 16 years old when they were admitted to a Fine Arts Academy high school. When Jin

Zhi Lin Jin and Liu Bing Jiang graduated from high school and were about 18 years old, they also entered the Central Academy of Fine Arts. However, Cao Ming Qiu, Kong Zi, Wu Ming Zhong and Wang Yan Yu had a different experience. They had to work while preparing for the university entrance exams. Wu Ming Zhong was admitted to study in the Fine Art department of a normal university when he was 21 years old, Cao Ming Qiu studied industrial design in an industrial college at the age of 26, Kong Zi studied Chinese painting in the People's Liberation Army Academy of Fine Art at age 35, and although Wang Yan Yu tried the university entrance exam seven times, he was never admitted and was barred for writing it after he turned 25. In 1981, people older than 25 were not able to write the university entrance exam and were only allowed to study at Night College. Cao Ming Qiu was fortunate to start university at age 26 in 1980, one year before the above-mentioned law was enacted. Kong Zi worked in the army and was able to take the exam for the Army Academy of Fine Art.

Reason for choosing their majors.

Each of the participants studied one or more of the following majors: oil painting, Chinese painting, folk art and industrial design. Jin Zhi Lin, Shang Yang, Liu Bing Jiang and Wu Ming Zhong studied oil painting, while Chen Shu Xia studied comic book design in the folk art department. Kong Zi and Huang Huan studied Chinese painting, and Cao Ming Qiu obtained a degree in industrial design. As stated earlier, Wang Yan Yu wanted to study industrial design at university, but was denied admittance. He taught himself wood sculpture, and later oil painting.

Deciding what major to study was influenced by their own interests, the prevailing social and cultural life in China at the time and by their personal ability in art.

Influenced by cultural contexts.

Although some participants did not do oil painting, most of them mentioned in the interviews that they like oil painting. Why do they like oil painting? One reason is that the colors of oil paintings look beautiful. From an early age, Jin Zhi Lin has been influenced by Chinese painting, and during high school, he did many Chinese paintings. However, he decided to study oil painting in the Beijing College of Fine Arts, which offered two majors: Chinese Painting, and Western Painting. “I decided to study Western painting because I loved paintings with beautiful color. Although I liked Chinese paintings, it just emphasizes how to use Chinese ink instead of color” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). Liu Bing Jiang was also touched by the color of oil painting when he visited Xu Bei Hong’s solo exhibition at his first year of high school in 1953. He was surprised, and “started to think about becoming an artist. The colors of his oil paintings were very beautiful, and his sketches were very good” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

Another reason the interviewees liked oil painting was the impact of the cultural environment. After the Liberation, Chinese culture, especially art, tried to follow Russia. As Kong Zi said, she had to learn Chinese painting although she liked oil painting a lot. She pointed out: “I did not know why I liked oil painting and disliked Chinese painting. It was possible that I was influenced by political climate, and Russian culture.” She stated that “basically, I disliked Chinese painting and wanted to paint in oil. However, in the army, when an officer told soldiers to do something, it was an order, and soldiers were supposed to obey. Although I cried for a few days, I started painting using the Chinese Gongbi style” (personal interview, July 29, 2009).

Shang Yang and Huang Huan mentioned that only the excellent students got the

opportunity to study oil painting at the University. Shang Yang remembered that “it was the dream of the 44 students in my class to major in oil painting, and it was competitive to get into this program because in those years, oil painting was popular” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). Finally, six of the 44 students had the opportunity to study oil painting.

Huang Huan also said that “[i]n the high school, oil painting was thought to be the best major and was preferred. All the students believed that the best students were able to pass the entrance exam to study in the oil painting department in the CAF” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Some people like oil painting because oil painting’s colors are richer than those of Chinese paintings. Professor Cheng Rui Lin points out that “traditional Chinese painting had been neglected for some time” (Pan, 2009, p. 255) because of the influence of Soviet doctrines in socialist literature, their methods and ideas concerning artistic creation, along with the predominance of the Russian revolutionary realistic style. When Chang Rui Lun (2000) discusses the history of art textbooks in his *School Art Education*, he also points out that the reason for this problem was that

in the early 50s, the Chinese government and art community advocated the former Soviet Union’s Revolutionary realistic style as the correct and only standard of art, and viewed it as the main teaching model and teaching content. Chinese painting was excluded from the curriculum in the school because it was not seen as having a scientific content compared to Russian painting. (p. 177)

Art classrooms in schools were influenced by this idea; the students did not have a correct understanding of what art was, and at the same time, they also “misunderstood Chinese

traditional arts and believed that it was unscientific and backward because of its differences with the realistic art” (p. 87). This resulted “a phenomenon that good students were selected to learn oil painting, and those who were not as good could only learn Chinese painting” (p. 87).

Cao Ming Qiu wanted to learn Fashion Design, but mainstream ideas influenced his decision:

[t]he college was not a fine art academy, but had two majors related to art, fashion design and industrial design. I really wanted to study fashion, but, at the time, people believed that it was only suitable for women, designing clothes was not a man’s job. In the end I had to learn industrial design. (personal interview, July 29, 2009)

The choice of a major is also affected by individual needs and ability.

Wang Yan Yu chose Industrial Design because it was easy to find a good job after finishing this major at school. Chen Shu Xia selected Comic Book Design in the Department of the Festival Painting and Comic Book Design because she had a strong ability in realistic style, and she wanted to tell stories through drawing or painting. Today this major is part of the Department of Folk Art. From the 1950s to the 1990s, comic books were popular in China. Chen Shu Xia mentions,

[t]he Folk Art Department was different than other departments. It was divided into two majors, folk art and comic book art. My major was comic book drawing and design. After 1949, this was an important art form in China. I studied it because I had strong ability to draw and paint realistically and I was able to draw figures or stories quickly. At the time people liked that very much. I remember that there were many stores that rented comic

books to children or adults. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)

Huang Huan also mentioned that oil painting was a Western art form and if she wanted to learn oil painting, it was good for her to study in Russia or France instead of studying in China.

Therefore, she chose to learn Chinese painting. However, she said that at that time,

although I had learned Chinese painting, I was not crazy about it. I felt that Chinese painting looked very old, like it was taken from an old chest. However, my mom and I thought that this major was suitable for me because I was good at using lines to draw.

(personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Based on my analysis of the interviews, it is obvious that the participants' choice of major was impacted both by the cultural context, and their personal ability and needs.

Summary

Based on analyzing the artists' interviews about their early experience of art learning, I found that school art education as formal art learning did not play an important role in their experience of art learning. In their application for studying at fine arts high schools or schools of fine arts at university, their non-formal art learning was the main experience. Life art learning is a more effective and more interesting art learning method. This type of art learning is considered to be an essential experience in the participants' art learning.

Based on the learning experiences of the participants in this study, we can see the simplicity of both teaching methods and concepts and art supplies in China's primary and secondary schools from the early 1930s until the 1980s.

Part Two: Learning to Become an Artist

After the participants decided to become artists, all of them wanted to receive a professional education in art schools at a university or an art high school. However, they had different experiences of learning art to become artists because the social and cultural situations in China have changed in the past half-century.

From the Liberation of China in 1949 to the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and from the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 to the emerging art market of the 1990s, if an individual wanted to become an artist, studying in art school at university or art high school was the best way. A graduate of an art school was able to obtain art-related work and had more opportunities to become an artist.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), universities stopped enrolling because of the political climate. Young people had to go rural areas to receive re-education after graduating from secondary or high school, and abandoned their dream of being an artist. At the time, the idea of art as a way to achieve fame and fortune was rejected because this was considered dishonorable. Furthermore, it was advocated that workers, peasants and soldiers had to cooperate with people who had received professional training and the artworks were made as collective works (Pan, 2009, p. 28). At the same time, art had to serve politics. In this climate, some of those who had already graduated from universities and were engaged in an art-related work had to give up the dream of being an artist. Because of the need for political propaganda posters, some young art lovers who did not receive professional training were able to learn art techniques by producing the posters. Learning from doing propaganda posters was the main way to learn art.

After the end of 1990s, with the abrupt changes in Chinese society, the Chinese art

market started to appear. Artists now could make a living by selling their artwork. This development provided more opportunities for those who wanted to become an artist, especially for those who did not study at art school or did not have an art-related job. These individuals learned and grew as artists in the art community and market. They learned during the process of making art, a kind of learning by doing, or life art learning. Learning from making artworks started to exist with the formal art learning in formal institutional settings in learning art to become an artist.

In this part, the experiences of the participants learning art in their pursuit to become artists are analyzed and discussed from three types of art learning perspectives: formal art learning, non-formal art learning and life art learning, in order to understand how they learned art to become an artist. Moreover, discussing their artistic creation is very important because artwork is a symbol of the artist becoming an artist.

Formal art learning.

Except for Wang Yan Yu, all the artists received professional art training in university, but the duration of their professional training and their experiences during that period were different. Some artists began to start professional art education in a fine arts high school when they were 15 or 16 years old. Some artists started to work after finishing university, while others went straight into MFA or PhD programs. After working for a while, some of them returned to university to study MFAs. Each of them had different experiences in terms of formal art learning.

The national education system in China has the following requirements: 4 years at a fine arts high school. 4 years of university for a bachelor's degree, 2-3 years for non-degree

specialization with the so-called associate bachelor's degrees and postgraduate education, comprising 2-3 years for a master's degree and 3-4 years for doctorates.

The following table summarizes the formal art learning experience of the nine artists interviewed in this study.

Table 1: The artists' formal art learning experience.

Artists	Academy of Fine Arts high school	Undergraduate	Master's	Ph.D.	Total years of formal art learning
Jin Zhi Lin	0	4 years Bachelor's degree	0	0	4 years
Liu Bing Jiang	0	4 years Bachelor's degree	0	0	4 years
Shang Yang	4 years	4 years Bachelor's degree	3 years MFA	0	11 years
Kong Zi	0	3 years Associate Bachelor's degree	0	0	3 years
Cao Ming Qiu	0	3 years Associate Bachelor's degree	2 years Finished the courses only	0	5 years
Chen Shu Xia	4 years	4 years Bachelor's degree	0	0	8 years
Wu Ming Zhong	0	4 years Bachelor's degree	0	0	4 years
Wang Yan Yu	0	0	0	0	0
Huang Huan	4 years	4 years Bachelor's degree	3 years MFA	4 years Ph.D.	15 years

Although each individual has different majors and degrees and studied during different eras, this section only analyzes the most influential aspects of their art studies in formal learning.

Formal art learning: Development of basic drawing and painting skills.

Formal art learning helped the participants develop strong realistic techniques. They all studied in different eras and had different majors (oil painting, folk art, Chinese painting and industrial design), but learned realism through doing pencil and color sketches, especially using the Soviet realism that was given emphasis after the Liberation. It is clear to see that this type of training started in fine arts academy high schools and continued to the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Shang Yang, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan studied at a high school of fine arts during the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s, respectively. In fine arts high schools, the teaching method primarily followed the Soviet Union's methods of art education to help students develop the basic skills of realism, and built a foundation for them to study at university. The participants from different eras and with different majors experienced almost the same learning approaches and content, making pencil sketches from plaster casts and models and sketching still life using gouache or oil paint. There, the purpose of study was to develop a capacity to draw or paint realistically.

Shang Yang studied in the high school of an academy from 1957 to 1961. He recalled, "At that time, I was not sure what art was. I just copied mechanically from real life. If my drawings looked like real objects, I was very happy" (personal interview, July 10, 2009). Chen Shu Xia mentioned that they always admired classmates who were able to draw or paint figures

or objects that looked real. Huang Huan felt that her basic techniques were not as good as those of her classmates. After school, she had to study in a studio to practice pencil sketching, because in her class, students could render objects and figures extremely well. Some of their pencil sketches looked like black and white photos. They had the experiences and technique to reproduce objects in an extremely realistic style. Although the teachers never said whose pieces were good, at the end of the each semester all the students' pieces were displayed in the classroom, and, based on the teacher's grades on each piece, it was obvious to see who was able to draw very well.

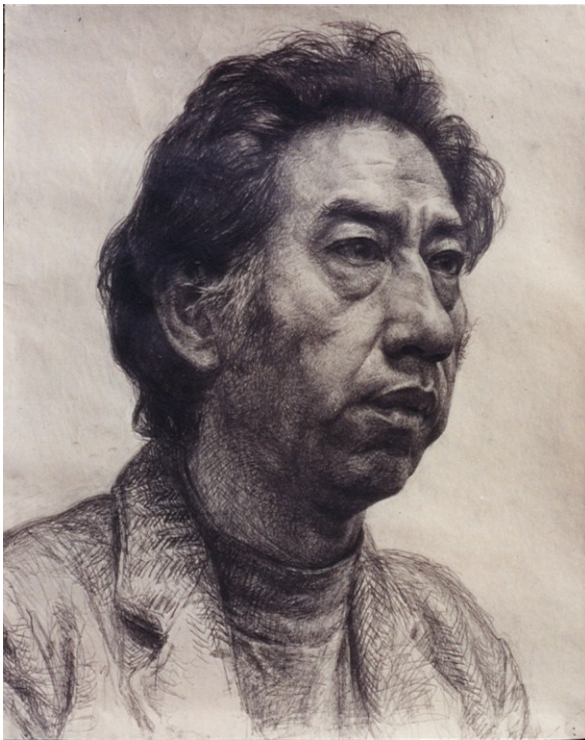


Figure 12: Huang Huan's Repairman (1995). Great progress in pencil sketching after working in CAFA.

Shang and Chen believed that the instruction provided there was important and useful. Chen stated that what she was taught in high school was more important than what she learned at

university:

During my time at the high school of CAFA, what I learned was more important than what I learned at university. We received the Russian fine arts training. Although I was young, I started when I was fifteen and finished at nineteen, I learned what the teachers taught and built a solid base. When I studied in CAFA, I did not need to spend time on basic skills (personal interview, July 1, 2009).

Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jiang, Shang Yan, Wu Ming Zhong, Cheng Shu Xia and Huang Huan all mentioned that pencil sketching was the main basic skill in the Academy of fine arts, and art school at university.

Before the Liberation in 1949, different art schools encouraged different styles. Jin Zhi Lin's art college tended to promote realism, following "a realistic style like that of Xu Bei Hong":

In this college, I did not do any still life or portraits. In the first year, we started from drawing plaster casts of ancient Greek sculptures. Then we drew the Roman and Renaissance plaster cases, such as Michelangelo's slaves, and Laocoon. In the third year, we began to draw pencil sketches of nude models. Then, we painted nudes in oil.

Teachers liked to demonstrate to the students how to draw or paint. (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Although the participants had different majors at university after the Liberation, Chistyakov's pedagogical system of pencil sketching was the basis of every Chinese art program. Liu Bing Jiang pointed out that "pencil sketching and oil painting classes were held in the morning." In addition to pencil and color sketching, they had courses "in anatomy, perspective, art history, politics and physical education" (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

After the Cultural Revolution and the changes that led China to become more open to the outside world, many aspects of Chinese life remained the same; this was reflected in how art was taught. Wu Ming Zhong remembers that “[i]n those days, teachers were familiar with Russian art and its realistic style” (personal interview, June 22, 2009), and students were taught by teaching methods from the Soviet Union. Teachers did not encourage students to use what Wu describes as,

new, individual, or novel ways to make art. When the teacher was in the studio, I did my pencil sketch according to what the teacher wanted. After he left, I did my pencil sketch using the classical instead of the Russian method. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

Formal art learning: Effects of teachers’ artistic concepts and suggestions.

Some teachers and courses had a crucial influence on how the participants learned art and became artists. Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jian and Huang Huan described how some teachers taught them important lessons. Chen Shu Xia and Cao Ming Qiu talked about some of their courses that were very useful for them.

In 1947, Jin Zhi Lin studied in the Beijing Public Art College. After Liberation, artworks and artistic ideas from liberated areas influenced him a great deal. This is because after 1949, some of their art teachers came from the liberated areas. The art in Yan’an had a great impact on him; it allowed him to “leave the ivory tower and enter the real life, interact with the masses and visit the countryside” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Liu Bing Jian mentioned that in the Central Academy of Fine Art, teachers showed students good and bad taste in drawing. Once, his sketches were selected as good examples of

how to use lines to represent figures. He believed that the teacher's praise for his sketch not only made him happy, but also had a profound influence on his drawing. Later, he tried to use lines to sketch.

Liu Bing Jiang and Shang Yang believed that, in the 1950s, impressionism had a very important influence on them. After the Liberation, especially after 1957, Soviet realism was the only standard for the Chinese art community. Therefore, students in art schools mainly studied Soviet realism. However, they had access to other art forms and styles. Shang Yang and Liu Bing Jiang mentioned that, in 1956, although Impressionism was considered as bourgeois art by socialist countries, they suddenly had the opportunity to study Impressionism. They both believed that the artworks of the Impressionists played a very important role in their whole life. Liu recalled,

[a]t that time, my brain was full of Xu Bei Hong, and the Russian school. Suddenly, I saw so many Impressionistic artworks that I was astounded. I will always remember that moment, how up until then, I had never seen anything like it. They had beautiful colors, and I constitutionally like color. These artworks had a great influence on me. The significance of their influence is as great as the influence of Xu Beihong's work that made me decide to become an artist. It was an important turning point for my artistic creation. Immediately, I was attracted by Impressionism. (personal interview, July 02, 2009)

Although Liu did not understand and like Post-Impressionism very much, these artworks still impressed him a great deal. When Shang Yang saw them for the first time, he believed that they were true art. Liu Bing Jiang never was concerned "about the narrative paintings with

historical or important subject matter anymore” (personal interview, July 02, 2009), as he describes:

In 1956, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev began to criticize Stalin’s legacy and leadership. One result was that Impressionism began to be discussed in Russia. Some Russian museums had good collections of Impressionist art that had been collected before the Russian Revolution, and therefore, Russian art magazines began to publish articles about Impressionist artworks. Because of these articles, Impressionism began to be talked about in the Chinese art community and was discussed in art magazines in China (personal interview, July 02, 2009)



Figure 13: Liu Bing Jiang’s Sketching of Oil Painting (1957), influenced by Impressionism.

At that time, it was believed that Impressionism had realistic and humanistic elements and it was necessary to take a second look at the Impressionist works of art.

When Xu Bei Hong studied in France from 1919 to 1927, the realistic paintings of the European art schools had a profound impact on him. After coming back to China, he advocated reforming Chinese painting by learning from Western realistic painting (Chen, 2006, p. 143). He believed that art should be established based on realism, and “[d]rawing is the foundation of all visual arts” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

In the 1950s, at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the position and role of Chinese painting was discussed, and it was decided to reform the type of Chinese painting that was taught. It was decided that Chinese painting should place figures in the center of a work in order to better represent the masses in the new era. The president of Central Academy of Fine Arts at the time, Jiang Fung, decided to set up a pencil sketching course in the Chinese painting department (Chen, 2006, p. 175). In fact, in China, the debate about including pencil sketching in the Chinese painting department was a controversial one.

In 1962, Professor Pan Tian Shuo (1898-1971) said Chinese painting was different from Western painting. He argued that Chinese painting did not use light and dark to represent images, but employed line. He advocated the establishment of a set of pencil sketch pedagogy that was suitable for Chinese painting (Pan, 2009, p. 258). But from 1955 until 1979, when the second national meeting about pencil sketch teaching in higher education was held, Chistyakov’s pedagogical system of pencil sketching was dominant (Ministry of Education of People’s Republic of China, 2011).

In 1996, when Huang Huan started to learn in the Chinese Painting Department, her teacher tried new teaching methods to teach pencil sketching. At CAFA,

pencil sketching was seen as a basic technique, and every student, whether studying oil

painting or Chinese painting, had to learn it. However, in my department teachers had many controversies about how to teach pencil sketching to students studying Chinese painting. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Huang Huan believed that the most useful course for her was a pencil sketching course because her teacher applied his own innovative way to teach students. “The method of teaching pencil sketching in the Chinese painting department was different from oil painting and other departments. The basis of Chinese painting is lines, so pencil sketching should emphasize using lines to create a shape” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). Figure 14 shows Huang’s *Grandfather Liu* (1996), which was created in her pencil sketching course at the Chinese painting department at the CAFA. This work was collected by the CAFA.



Figure 14: Huang Huan’s Grandfather Liu (1996).

Moreover, Huan Huang mentions that when she studied her MFA, her supervisor had a great influence on her because he encouraged Huang to try different materials, and do what she

wanted to do.

When Chen Shu Xia discussed her major, Comic Book Design, she said that it provided a good platform to try different media to design her own comic book. She thought that students from different majors did not have so much artistic latitude.

In China, at the Fine Art College, the students' majors were quite limited. For example, for an oil painting major, there were different studios. Generally, they included realism and expressionism. If in the beginning, students enrolled in the realism studio, for the next four years they had to study there until they graduated. It was impossible for them to try different studios. It was the same when students studied in the Chinese painting department, where they had two majors to choose from, the Xieyi or Gongbi studios (personal interview, July 1, 2009).

She tried to use different media to create artworks, such as screen drawing, oil painting and photography.

During the 1980s, Cao Ming Qiu studied in an Industrial Design department where they did not train artists. However, his college offered students a course in Chinese Meticulous painting in order to help them develop the ability to collect materials for their design. This course taught him how to paint Chinese Meticulous painting, and this style of painting became the starting point for his paintings. Although today he believes that his personality is more suited to Impressionism, this course was his entry into painting. When he was 39 years old, he was admitted to the graduate program of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts because he was able to do Chinese Meticulous painting.

Non-formal art learning.

Not all the interviewees mentioned their experiences of non-formal art learning. Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jian and Wu Ming Zhong pursued a more informal path because they hoped to learn things that their courses did not offer them. One of the participants, Kong Zi, before entering the academy had had over 19 years of experience in artistic creation, although most of her artworks were political propaganda art. She took part in a 6-month art workshop organized by her troop each year, where professional painters gave students help and guidance. The program did not give the participants any kind of certification for their studies. Therefore, in this study, Kong's experience was considered as a type of non-formal art learning. At the same time, Kong Zi studied in the Zhe Jian Academy of Fine Arts for 1 year. This learning experience is also considered as non-formal art learning, because the experience of art learning in this academy did not offer Zi a certification.

Non-formal art learning: Learning based on the artists' interests during receiving formal art learning at university.

Before 1949, although Lin Zhi Jin's college emphasized realism, he taught himself an abstract style because he was interested in modern art. He collected and studied modern art.

Liu Bing Jiang studied in the oil painting department, but audited courses in the Chinese Painting Department. He was inspired to use lines to represent images by his Chinese painting teacher, Wei Qi Mei, in the classroom. He practiced traditional Chinese line drawings and Chinese painting in his spare time because the oil painting department did not offer classes in traditional Chinese line drawing. He mentioned that when he was a little boy, he "copied images

of characters from cigarette packages. These images were created with line” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). In addition, as a little boy, he was very interested in looking at the illustrations in traditional thread-bound books. These illustrations were often called embroidered portraits and were drawn using lines. Lastly, as a child, he always drew using lines because he didn’t understand how to shade using a pencil. Until the mid-1950s, Chinese culture was significantly influenced by the Soviet Union, but in 1956, Mao Ze Dong argued that Chinese literature and art should reflect the national spirit (Chen, 2005; Pan, 2002). Consequently, some artists also advocated a “Chinese Wind of oil painting.” Liu’s teacher Dong Xi Weng, a famous oil painter, but skilled at Chinese painting, pointed out that painting should show things the Chinese people love, and represent the Chinese people’s spirit and aesthetic view (Ai, 2010, p. 114).

Wu Ming Zhong arranged a plan to learn Western classical painting skills and other artistic styles in his spare time because his teachers just taught socialist realism as the only way to create realistic work in class. He also felt that he

did not have enough knowledge. The cultural circumstances in which I grew up were poor. Sometimes, I found that I did not know certain aspects of art history, and it was very interesting and new when I read about them. I helped myself make up for my missed lessons. I made a schedule to read the history of Chinese and Western philosophy. I read them by myself and I really wanted to understand them. I still remember that I read the book *Art and Visual Perception* by Arnheim several times. In the beginning, I did not understand what he said, but I forced myself to read it. I would read it a few times if I did not understand it, and after that, I finally understood what he said. Ideas and concepts like those of Gustel’s were very strange for me. When I was studying at university, the

academic environment was relatively open, especially during the Trend of Thought movement in 1985. We had many chances to explore Western philosophy and aesthetics. We even saw some things about post-modernism. In fact, I was not so clear about what post-modernism was, but I was interested in it. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

Non-formal art learning: Learning art based on opportunities.

Based on the interviews, it is clear that the participants' non-formal art learning occurred because of their personal interest during their academic studies.

As mentioned above, Kong Zi is the only one of the participants who became an artist through non-formal art learning, although when she was 34 years old, she studied at the Academy for three years. Non-formal art learning reflected a special epoch in the past half century in China.

When Kong studied in middle school, she learned some pencil techniques on her own. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, she acquired more technical ability and knowledge about art when she participated in creating political propaganda posters in a Red Guards group called "Red Painting Brush." After joining the army, she began to get training, and paint formally. She learned from making art instead of receiving professional training, a type of learning that is sometimes like the relationships between masters and apprentices. Her first experience of non-formal art learning in the army was as an assistant to a team making a stage backdrop for a Beijing Opera, *Circumvent the Tiger Mountain*. Their troop hired a student from the CAFA to help them make the backdrop and from them she "learned many techniques and much knowledge about art":

I knew how to basically paint a scene, but not how to create fine details like in oil painting. A strong visual effect was important for painting the scene; big brushwork would create good effects. We used gouache to paint on cloth. For example, if we needed to make a stump, we would first use wood to make a stand, then we used cloth to wrap it. Finally, we painted the bark and the texture of wood on it. When it was lit by a lamp, the stump looked very nice and looked like the real thing. (personal interview, August 12, 2009)

The experience, she believes, was a great opportunity for her to learn.

From 1972 to 1976, Kong made political propaganda paintings in the army workshops for six months a year. In the workshops, both professional artists and workshop participants who were art enthusiasts from the army helped them. Here, “people with good technique helped others with less ability” (personal interview, August 12, 2009).

One of the workshops that she believes was extremely useful for her, because it taught her some basic skills instead of just creating artworks, was criticized by Jiang Qing, the wife of Chairman Mao. Jiang Qing believed that it was to train experts, thus helping soldiers to become “white experts. It departed from the revolutionary path that art should serve the masses because it only focused on the technique and ignored artistic creation” (personal interview, August 12, 2009).

She describes how they learned from seeing other painters demonstrating techniques: In the class, the teachers taught us how to use a brush and how to paint the face and drapery. When a teacher demonstrated how to paint, we gathered around him to watch what he did. I felt that studying in the class was useful for me to develop my artistic

ability. (personal interview, August 12, 2009)

At the same time, she also talks about how she learned traditional methods:

First, we used pencil and rice paper to trace the original painting, and on the second day we used ink brushes to draw following the pencil tracing. I began to like to Xieyi Style and painted a few paintings in this style. (personal interview, August 12, 2009)

Initially, she needed the help of professional artists to complete her artworks. After taking part in workshops that taught her the basic techniques, she was able to paint by herself, producing works like *Coming to Countryside in Spring*. Although she sometimes “encountered difficulties,” she “was able to take the time to deal with them” by herself (personal interview, August 12, 2009). For example, when she was having trouble painting a hand, she would ask someone to pose so she could sketch it and complete the work.

In 1985, Kong went to the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts to study for one year. There, she entered an art community from a relatively closed environment. Her classmates had received professional art training, and she learned a great deal there. She even thought that when she studied in the PLA Academy, she just re-digested what she learned in Zhe Jian Academy. She recognized that her art concepts had changed significantly. This transformation was also rooted in Zhe Jiang Academy. There, she was influenced by “the idea that art should serve politics and the masses, that life was a source of creation, and that her artwork should be encouraging to people” (personal interview, August 12, 2009). However, after encountering different artistic groups at the Academy and taking part in different workshops and exhibitions, her ideas suddenly became more focused, and her subjects started investigate the “trivial from everyday life.” (personal interview, August 12, 2009)

Life art learning to become an artist

Life art learning occurred in different eras. Based on the art learning experience of the participants, the character of society in different eras is shown by how art was learned. Some participants, such as Jin Zhi Lin, Shang Yang, Cheng Shu Xia, Huang Huan and Kong Zi, mention how life art learning influenced their artistic and aesthetic concepts. Wang Yan Yu's art learning was completely informal, due in part to the unique changes that Chinese society was experiencing at the time. Wang was the only participant who did not receive professional art training at university. After being laid off in 1994, he made a living by making handicrafts, and then participated in various art fairs. His evolution from a craft maker to an artist was a gradual process, as he taught himself and ventured into the art market. He is generally known as a self-taught artist because he did not receive any formal art training. He mainly learned art through the process of making artwork by himself; therefore, he obtained his knowledge and experience about art through life art learning.

Life art learning: Art learning from other kinds of arts.

Jin Zhi Lin and Cheng Shu Xia's art concepts were influenced by appreciating other forms of art.

Jin Zhi Lin learned from music concerts. After the Liberation, Jin had opportunities to see artwork from liberated areas, which reflected a healthy and positive attitude towards life. He believed that this was what he was looking for. He thought that he had found his own artistic language at the first national conference of representatives of the arts community in Beijing in

1949. As a student, he took part in this party conference as a volunteer and a singer in a chorus.

He describes,

this was my first time seeing Chairman Mao. Two performances at the conference impacted my artistic concept deeply. Li Bo, a singer from the Lu Xun Art Academy, sang a Yan'an folk song: "The Sun Rises, the Mountain is Red." It was so resonant and brightened my heart. Whenever I hear this song, I am brought to tears. I also saw how Mao was affected by this song. Another was the Huaihai Campaign Songs. Singers were soldiers participating in the Huaihai Campaign. They just came back from the front. Their faces were black and red, and their uniforms were washed to be the old gray. Their singing was full of passion. I was extremely touched. This is my most favorite concert I have ever seen. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

In 1983, Chen Shu Xia mainly studied realism at the university. Although Western artists' collections were published in China in the 1980s, they only included artists up to Impressionists. As a result, she began to learn about Western contemporary art by watching European films. China had started to have more and more contact with other countries, and she saw more published collections of foreign artists. Most of the art books focused on pre-impressionistic artists; therefore, she did not know much about contemporary art. But foreign movies gave her a "window" to see that Western concepts of art were different than those of Chinese art:

[a]t that time, there were movie weeks featuring films from places like France and Switzerland. My classmates and I went by bicycle to watch these movies, and became eager to know about the foreign world. Suddenly, I seemed to lose my interest in drawing and painting, and became interested in photography and printmaking. (personal interview,

July 1, 2009)

Life art learning: Learning from communicating with others or taking part in activities.

Communicating with different people, no matter whether they were artists or non-artists, and participating in different activities, whether related to art or not, helped the participants learn art.

Learning from other artists or taking part in art activities.

As a young teacher in CAFA, Jin Zhi Lin had the opportunity to receive life art learning. He sketched outside and met celebrated artists, which greatly enhanced his artistic skills and ideas. He still remembers some of these individuals, such as Professor Wang Shi Kuo, who believed that a portrait should reflect the history of that person's family, and professor Dong Xi Weng, who thought oil painting by Chinese artists should reflect the aesthetics of the Chinese people rather than imitating Western styles. Lin also mentioned that in 1955, a Soviet artist Mack Hmobk. M (1913-1993) taught a course at the Central Academy of Fine Arts for two years. Although Lin did not participate in this class, as a young teacher, he often visited it, and "it had a great influence on my use of color in oil painting" (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Kong Zi mentioned that her art concepts changed after she visited different exhibitions during her studies at Zhe Jiang and the People Liberation Army Academy. She met different artistic groups at the Zhe Jian Academy of Fine Arts, and took part in different workshops and exhibitions there. Suddenly, "I had my ideas straightened out, and my subject matter started to be involved with trivia from everyday life" (personal interview, August 12, 2009).

Wang Yuan Yu started to be a professional artist after making his wood sculptures and taking part in art exhibitions in Beijing. This not only let his crafts become artwork and offered him opportunities to display his pieces with other artists, but also inspired his artistic creation. He believed that he learned from other artists and audiences in the exhibitions.

Learning from communicating with non-artists

Huang Huan grew up in an artist family. She believed that artists were superior, but after going to the countryside and factories to experience life, she began to believe that “artists were also real workers and producers” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). For her, if artwork did not affect people or was not understood, then the work would lose its meaning. She hoped her artwork would have some “significance, and was not sold to make money. I did not want my artwork being a fuss about nothing” (personal interview, July 31, 2009). For example, when she went to An Shan Steel Company to experience life and draw the steelworkers and their lives with her classmates, the workers asked her a question: “what use does your drawing and painting have?” She says,

This question confused me and I really did not know how to answer. If we thought about it carefully, these drawings had no use. They often said: “how much does a kilo of the Qi Bai Shi’s shrimps cost?” and “how much does a donkey of Huang Zhou cost?” (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

These questions made her wonder if her drawings were unimportant and would have no use in the future. She started to ponder the status of artists in society, and tried to see art from the perspective of a non-artist, and even to think about what the life of a famous Chinese artist, Qi

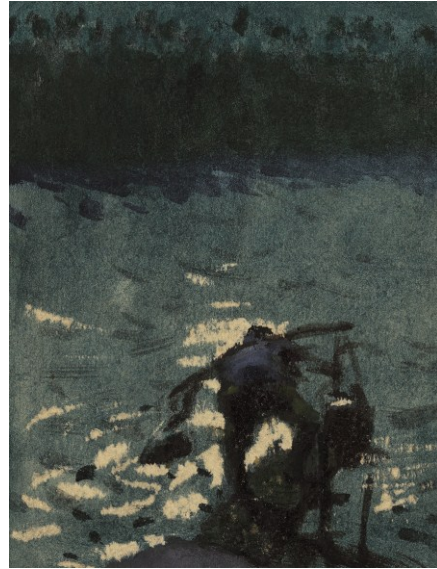
Bai Shi, was like. She started to read Qi's biography, and found that as a Chinese painting master, Qi "had to provide his family the necessities of life by exchanging his artwork, like a worker smelting steel or a rural grandmother sitting on the ground to strip walnuts everyday in order to make money" (personal interview, July 31, 2009). Finally, Huang believed whether someone was an artist or a worker, they did the same thing in society.

Life art learning: Learning from exploring by self-exploration.

Shang Yang, Wu Ming Zhong and Wang Yuan Yu have the experience of learning from self-exploration, and believe that this type of learning experience played an important role for them in the process of becoming an artist.

Because of his economic difficulties, the life art learning that Shang Yang received was unique to his situation. During his high school and college studies, every month, I had only two dollars to buy basic things like toothpaste and soap, along with art supplies. I had to spend almost all of my money on classroom art supplies, and I did not have enough for materials to practice in my spare time. So, in order to practice, I tried to find cheaper ways to do it, and, finally, I found a good way to practice that cost little. (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

Figures 15-17 show Shang's early paintings. These works were done on a very small scale in gouache, because Shang did not have enough money at that time.



Figures 15-17: Examples of Shang's early painting experiments with gouache.

He analyzes how this experience influenced his artistic creation:

[t]oday, I like to create my artwork using integrated materials, and in China, I was seen as one of the earliest artists using mixed media techniques. I feel it is difficult to create if I do not use these techniques. This resulted from my economic situation during my time in high school and university. I constantly explored ways to make art using less money.

Today, when I recall those years, I think that those experiments I tried seemed a little bit strange and offbeat but they turned out to be very valuable. (personal interview, July 10,

2009).

His oil paintings were always thin because he wanted to save paint, but he wanted to find a way to use a small amount of material to create paintings with “massive visual effects.”

(personal interview, July 10, 2009)

Today, I still paint very thin, but it looks very massive, because of my experience in the high school and university. This experiment of saving material made me paint thinly and dislike a surface that was too thick with paint. Today most of my oil paintings are thin. Some seem massive but they were painted using many thin flats again and again. Some people believed that my oil paintings must be thick because the colors were mottled and haphazard, but when they look at them closely, they can see the charcoal marks of the original draft of the image. (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

This experience not only influenced his artistic creation, but also cultivated his traits of persistence and diligence, characteristics fostered in him as the son of an impoverished intellectual family; he knows he should never give up and always try to move forward.

Wu Ming Zhong also mentions how he explored a way to express fragility:

[i]n the beginning, I used the balloon figures because they would break as if they were pricked. However, after the balloon figures were inflated with air and blown up, the shape of people was not clear, and I wanted to have a visual figure with identifiable characteristics. Later, I thought about the texture of glass. Glass has rigidity, but is easily broken. Using glass to represent the fragility of people had never been applied before in art history. I did nothing else but explore this by myself. I did experiments using small sized paintings. I practiced and at the outset, I could not paint what I wanted to. I slowly

established some methods for painting these glass people, and then started to paint big pieces. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

Wu believed that if expression comes from personal aspects of artists' lives, they could not find any ready-made artistic language or style to represent their ideas. Artists have to explore their artistic languages and styles by experimenting. It is only at that point that artistic creation occurs.

Wang Yan Yu had a different experience than the others. He became an artist through life art learning in the art market. In the beginning, he made different kinds of craft art to make a living. He started by gluing cobbles on porcelain plates, and then drew the legs and water plants, creating a "crab." He also bought many plates for another project, gluing sea sand on the plates, and then used tree bark to create "rocks" on the plates. Because there was a large amount of bamboo in the city, he used it to make craft pieces, such as pencil vases decorated with carved figures or drawings. He invested "just a little bit of money and was able to produce them. Soon, I had a small shop to sell my art and crafts. My wife looked after the shop and I made art and crafts at home" (personal interview, July 2, 2009). He made his wood sculptures from copying African artworks. He learned from his personal exploring and started to be a professional artist after taking part in an art exhibition in Beijing.

Creating artworks while becoming an artist

Artistic creation plays the most important role in the process of becoming an artist. When the participants talked about when they started to be an artist, their reasons were based on their artistic creation. They often mentioned that when they did specific pieces or found new styles,

they thought that they were artists. The participants' experience of artistic creation showed the individuals' progress and how different eras of Chinese society after 1949 influenced them.

All the learning that the participants experienced is ultimately reflected in their artwork. While their works reflect their development of technique and artistic concepts, they also reflect China's radical transformation in social, political and economic matters. Their subject matter and artistic styles are different and reflect the time when they were created. Jing Zhi Ling, Liu Bing Jing and Shang Yang all had the experience of creating narrative realistic artworks during the process of their art learning when they were becoming artists. As Pan, in his book *Contemporary History of Chinese Art* says, "[i]nfluenced by the Soviet socialism and realism, Chinese artists created many artworks that reflected historical deeds of heroic struggle, and praise workers and peasants' new life" (p. 122).

Kong Zi and Cao Ming Qiu produced artwork during the Cultural Revolution. In *Posters and Art During the Cultural Revolution*, Kui Yi Shen (2008) divides Cultural Revolution art into two periods: the Red Guard and Rebel Faction Art (from 1966 to 1970), and the Worker-Peasant-Soldier Art (from 1971 to 1976). He believes that the function of the Red Guard and Rebel Faction Art was to use artwork to "overthrow Mao's rivals and to suppress the intelligentsia" and "sing the praises of Mao Zedong"(p. 149). The Worker-Peasant-Soldier Art had three characteristics: the style was based on the model theatrical works promoted by Mao's wife; themes expanded to incorporate, often with local flavor, the activities of the Maoist triad of workers, peasants, and soldiers; and thirdly, art producers were young people from ranks of workers, soldiers or peasants, and "the professional artists who were trained in the art colleges before the Cultural Revolution worked mainly in supporting roles, to facilitate the conversion of

amateur paintings into something that could be exhibited” (p. 158, 159,). Cao who was from a small town painted many posters praising Chairman Mao and showing peasants, soldiers and workers working together.

Cheng Shu Xia, Wu Ming Zhong, Wang Yan Yu and Huang Huan received their education after the end of the Cultural Revolution, when China started its reforms. Their works reflected their personal experience and feelings instead of “important” or “mainstream” subject matter.

Narrative realism.

Jing Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jiang and Shang Yang had similar experiences creating work in their period of art learning during their development toward becoming artists, between 1949 and 1966. Some of Shang’s painting experiences, however, involved the time at the end of the Cultural Revolution. His personal history reflected these changes, from creating works influenced by socialist realism to his rejection of it in order to find his own artistic language.

When Jin talked about his artwork, he primarily mentioned the works he created as a young teacher at the CAFA, often sketching scenes with other oil painters. He often received commissions from the National Museums to paint narrative realism influenced by Soviet realism.

In order to make this narrative realistic artwork, he often went to the places where these events occurred to collect data and information. He recalled his first commission in 1955 was from the Military Museum to paint the portrait of Luo Shen Jiao, who had drowned saving a North Korean girl. In order to collect the data to do the painting, he spent two months in the Democratic Republic of Korea.

In 1959, while painting *Chairman Mao in the Great Production Movement*, Jin went to Yan'an to collect raw data. He found Yan'an was an extremely sacred place. When they arrived there by airplane, it was in the afternoon. He remembers, “[t]he sunlight was glittering on Pao Ta Hill. The image of the golden hill and blue sky was reflected in the water. It was very beautiful. It was impossible for me to describe how happy I was” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

The day after his arrival, he moved into a peasant's home. In the morning, he went to a mountain to herd sheep with a young man, who was the subject of his first portrait. What he had learned from the Impressionists like Monet, Manet and Xu Bei Hong had disappeared, because everything was earth, and the man's face was the color of earth, and the sky was the color of earth:

The reflected light was not blue. I could not find any cold tones so I used my passion to paint. My oil paintings were local oil paintings instead of Western oil paintings. I also visited a peasant who talked with Chairman Mao during the Great Production Movement and I painted his portrait. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

In 1960, Jin received a commission from the Military Museum, because the museum needed the historical painting of Nan Ni Wan. He went to Yan'an and stayed there for almost six months. He was impressed by the relationship between the Communists and the common people, and between the army and the masses. His artistic statement of the painting was based on the masses and on labor. There had been a three year period of natural disasters in China, and he wanted to use that theme “to inspire people all over the country to unite and overcome difficulties. I traveled to the mountains and rivers in Nan Ni Wan, and did lots of sketches. Finally, I took almost four years to finish the painting. It was 260×95cm” (personal interview,

August 07, 2009). Jin believed that after finishing this painting, he was an artist.



Figure 18: Jin Zhi Lin's Nan Ni Wan (1960). He thought that he was an artist after finishing this oil painting.

At that time, Jin believed that “good artwork should come from my heart and have the feeling of everyday life” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). He does not like artworks that focus on technique and ignore feelings. Commenting on his own work, he observes, “no matter what painting I do, I hope that they are from life” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). The artistic creation was influenced by Chairman Mao’s idea that art should serve the masses. The articles that he published also focused on the idea that “art should come from the masses, and give back to the masses.” Jin stated that “this was also my artistic statement” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). After painting *Nan Ni Wan* to *Chairman Mao Taking Part in the Great Production Movement in Yan’an*, he “always painted soldiers working with peasants in the wilderness or Chairman Mao staying with soldiers and peasants...I did not only paint leaders or soldiers. I liked to paint Chairman Mao, soldiers and peasants together” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Liu Bing Jiang and Shang Yang also had a similar process of making artworks. They both mentioned that before the Cultural Revolution, when students learned basic skills, they also created artwork, although the work followed revolutionary realism. According to Chairman Mao's view on art, "art should serve the people," and to better understand the people, students had to spend three months of every year in the countryside or in a factory to experience life. They handed in drafts and received comments from their teachers. Therefore, they had the experience of creating artwork before their graduation exhibition, and their artwork reflected their experience in rural areas.

Liu and Shang's works represent their eras; they both focused on working people. Liu said that they often went with the school to the countryside to experience peasant life as a part of the re-education program. Therefore, students' subject matter often reflected the life in the countryside. In the first year, Liu created an artwork called *Night*. It showed a ewe giving birth to a lamb, while an old man smoking a pipe looked on, with a hurricane lamp close by.

The year 1959, when Liu was a third-year university student, was the tenth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The students were called upon to make artwork for this event as an offering to the country. The university provided money and the time for students to go anywhere they wanted to experience the "new" China. Liu said that he "went to Da Yu Island in Shang Dong province. I stayed there for two months and went fishing with fishermen and fisherwomen of the island" (personal interview, July 02, 2009). Based on this experience, he created *Fishermen*, a painting that "represented a group of fisherman and fisherwomen who were carrying fishing nets and sails on their shoulders, walking towards their boats and the rising sun" (personal interview, July 02, 2009). The painting does not have any

specific theme or story. It depicts a girl dressed in red and a fisherman with a dark, tanned face dressed in white. Liu says, “when I stayed with these fishermen and fisherwomen, I was always touched by this kind of scene. I painted the scene also because the vibrant colors of the Island moved me. I did not paint it from a political perspective” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). Although he said that he was focusing on depicting the sunlight and the different colors of the painting because of his interest in Impressionism, his painting was interpreted as “showing the fishermen and women’s optimism and heroic qualities” (personal interview, July 02, 2009) in the “new” country.

At the same time, he also made a painting of a young southern girl who was embroidering. The two pieces were selected for the national exhibition.

When he was preparing his graduation exhibition, he went back to Dayu Island because “the local people had been very nice to me” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). His graduating piece was “a painting of fishermen, with a boatman holding the helm of a boat full of fish.” This painting was part of the national exhibition in 1961. Liu believed that he was an artist when he graduated from university. Shang Yang’s first artwork created at the art academy was also based on his experience in the countryside. He went to the countryside for three months every year to participate in political activities. The university asked students to do artwork for twenty days of the three months. At the end of his stay in the countryside, his teachers went to different villages “to see student drafts of their paintings, and talked about them with the students in the places where the students lived. We often did big drafts with charcoal” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). In 1959, based on his sketches and drafts of the works he did in the countryside, he painted *Today is Masters, but Toilers Before Liberation*. This oil painting “reflected the spirit of

the new peasants and world-shaking change between the old and new society, which was selected to be displayed in the national art exhibition” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).



Figure 19: Shang’s Today is Masters, but Toilers Before Liberation (1959).

In 1977, after he had not painted in oil for over 11 years, his *The Sky in the Communist Areas* was displayed in the provincial exhibition. This artwork was partially made by accident. He was interested in taking part in the national exhibition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Peoples Army. However, he “wasn’t able to re-create military life” because he “didn’t have any experience in the army” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). As a result, he painted a historical painting: *The Sky in the Communist Areas* which represented “a woman soldier leading a group of children reaping the harvest and learning characters on a blackboard, while in the background there was smoke from a distant war.” Although he had not painted in oil for a long time, he felt he was able “to paint because I had a good technical training, and step by step, I finally finished this painting” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

In 1979, when Shang started his MFA, he made some abstract paintings that his

supervisors did not like because they wanted him to paint realistically. He did not talk more about the artworks he produced during his MFA.

In 1981, Shang Yang went to Shang Bei to experience life there in preparation for his graduation exhibition. He started to use his own artistic language. Although his theme still focused on the great force of humanity, he experimented with new techniques to represent it instead of relying on Soviet realism. He again sketched the boatmen of Huang He River for his painting *Boatman in Yellow River*, which was his primary piece in his exhibition. He said,

in this lonely place, I really felt the great force of human beings that enable human beings to survive. Overcoming the natural environment was illustrated by the tiny forms of the boatmen's bodies compared to the vastness of the Yellow River. These people who seem so relaxed and carefree in everyday life became stronger and more imposing in my eyes. Through them we can see the significance of the existence of human beings against a backdrop of the vastness of the natural environment. (personal interview, July 10, 2009)



Figure 20: Shang's Boatman in Yellow River (1981).

He also painted some oil paintings on local line paper. At that time, he tried to find his own artistic language by moving away from the depiction of color and space, light and shade,

and volume. This was because he believed that if artists pursued the “impersonality of an object as much as possible, they would ignore or blind their feelings.” Therefore, he tried to reduce the relationship between “warm and cold colors, and the relationship between space and volume” (personal interview, July 10, 2009). His graduation exhibition caused a stir in the art community at that time, and he started to think that he was an artist.

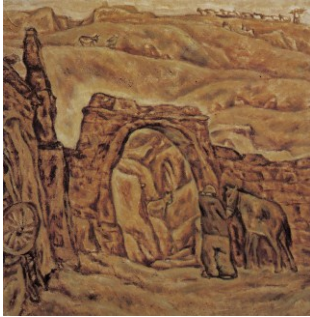


Figure 21: Shang’s Shang Bei (1982).

Propaganda posters.

Kong Zi’s experience reflected the three characteristics of the Worker-Peasant-Soldier Art (from 1971 to 1976) outlined by Kuiyi Shen. Kong Zi started to make political propaganda posters after joining the army. In those years, “most of the time artistic creation tended to be a collective effort” (personal interview, August 12, 2009). Although she did not have professional training, she took part in some exhibitions and received some awards with the help of professional artists in the Army workshops.

In 1970, Chinese troops had a one and a half month class that pooled all the knowledge of soldiers who liked painting or making artwork to create works of art. When Kong started, the subject matter was limited to “army life.” Although she did not have any experience in creating artwork, she tried oil painting. She used figures from an army magazine and the image of a large

mountain on the back cover as the elements in her painting. She later added an old man with a bamboo basket to the composition, and called it *Going to Mountain to Pick up Herbs*. She believed that the painting was somewhat of a political artwork. Her painting reflected three generations of Chinese people: a youth, a middle-aged person and a senior who were working together. This painting was selected for the provincial troop exhibition.

In order to take part in the Beijing troop's exhibition, she participated in the provincial troop art class. There she got instruction from professional artists and continued to improve her piece *Going to Mountain to Pick up Herbs*. Although she had limited skills, she believed that her subject matter was interesting. She altered aspects of the painting, which depicted a "grandfather showing a young female soldier how to pick herbs" (personal interview, August 12, 2009). The painting was selected for the Beijing troop exhibition. Again, she got an opportunity to take part in the artistic creation group in the Beijing troop.

Based on an art cadre suggestion, she used Chinese painting to express *Going to Mountain* instead of oil paint, and changed the name of her painting to *Warm*, which showed a young female surgeon giving Chinese herbs to an old woman with a few children watching them through the doorway. It was exhibited in the Beijing troop art exhibition and was published later.

Her artistic creation reflected the tone of artworks created during the Cultural Revolution. In 1972, the Art Creation Group let her paint a draft of a Chinese line drawing done by a Saturday night soldier at one of the workshops, showing a group of children looking at a soldier holding a red flower. She painted *I Also Want to be a Soldier in the Future*. Perhaps because of the political climate of the time, the leader of the group suggested that she change the title and the subject matter of the work to *I Also Want to Go to the Countryside in the Future*, and the

soldier became a young intellectual. She used the meticulous method that she had used in her first painting. Cadre Yang, who was responsible for instructing her, suggested that “painting it more roughly would improve the work.” Cadre Yang used,

more rough lines to redo the figure of the intellectual youth in my painting, showing that my artistic ability still needed more development. Therefore, I felt that the painting I did before was better than what the painting became after Cadre Yang’s suggestions. I was really dissatisfied with his changes. However, this painting was approved and I copied it again from the original, paying special attention to Cadre Yang’s rough brushwork. I used my own method to do the face and used Cadre Yang’s technique to paint the clothes.

Later, this painting was recommended by Cadre Yang and was published by the People Art Publishing House. (personal interview, August 12, 2009)



Figure 22: Kong Zi's *I Also Want to Go to the Countryside in the Future* (1972).

She also pointed out that at that time people were not concerned about ownership of ideas or things and did not worry about becoming famous. A good propaganda painting had contributions from everyone in the group, even though at the end of the process, only the first painter generally signed his name. People with good technique helped others with less ability, and they in turn learned from those with more ability.

In 1976, after the Tang Shan earthquake, Kong went to the affected areas to experience life and did some woodprints. Wood printing was a relatively quick and easy procedure, and could be published in newspapers in a short period of time.

Kong Zi changed her artistic style and concept in 1984, after starting her studies in the

Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Arts.

Representing the artists' world and experience.

After the Cultural Revolution ended, because of the profound changes in Chinese society, the predominance of narrative realism in Chinese art was replaced by many different aesthetic concepts. In the 1980s, the Chinese art community became increasingly influenced by Western artistic concepts. In 1985, the New Art shook the foundations of the mainstream artistic concepts prevalent in China for the previous 30 years. Chinese art irreversibly entered into another era, although the “New Wave” was mostly a simple imitation of Western art.

The works created by Chen Shu Xia who studied in the Central Academy of Fine Arts reflected this change, moving from Soviet Realism to a Western-influenced art. She said that during her time as a painting and drawing student at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, she became interested in photography. At that time, all courses were required courses and students were not offered elective courses. Chen recalled that,

[f]or students, if they were interested in one of them, they could continue to study it, and if they were not interested in it, this course was over for them after they received their credit. I was interested in a photography course and I took a lot of time to continue studying it after finishing the course. This was reflected by the work I presented for the graduating students show which was photographs, not paintings or drawings. The work was called *There Was a Man and There is Not a Man*. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)

Chen's work was a surrealist series of photographs, with three photos of a man reading a newspaper; everything is the same in the series, except the man disappearing from the image at

the end. Even his shadow is still in the photograph. To create the image she had to remove the man, creating the impression that he had actually vanished. To create the fourth photograph, she took two photographs of the room, one with the man reading the newspaper in the room and the other just of the room without the man. She had to combine the photo without the man with the shadow of the man from the other photographs, a process that took days of work in the darkroom, requiring her to develop many photographs to finally achieve the effect she wanted.

The other artwork was a photograph of her looking into a mirror, which she describes:

The first three photos are the same, I am looking into mirror, and the last photo is the same photo, but reflection in the mirror is not my face, but the back of my head. I hoped this artwork would show people that we are not able to understand ourselves completely and should try to see ourselves from different perspectives. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)

Chen explains why she was interested in making surrealistic photos. She felt that people had already seen realistic images, and felt that she did not need to recreate the same kind of images. What she needed to do was “to express my own special feelings and thoughts. I hoped that the audiences would be able to experience my feelings and I would be able to influence them. I believe that realistic things cannot express my emotions” (personal interview, July 1, 2009). Chen’s aesthetic is based on her personal experience and life. It is completely different from the concepts and the type of subject matter prevalent before and during the Cultural Revolution.

Kong Zi’s works reflect these changes better. From 1972 to 1976, she made political propaganda paintings. The work she created, such as *Going to Mountain* and *I Also Want to Go to the Countryside in the Future* exemplify the esthetic of the Cultural Revolution. However, in

1985, when she studied at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, her art concept and subject matter changed considerably:

At the end of the program, I did two pieces of Chinese painting for the graduating exhibition. At the time, I had tried exaggeration and distortion in my art, as well as pursuing formalism. Before starting our work, we went to the Zhou Shan archipelago to experience life. Therefore, two of my artworks reflected the lives of fishermen. Before studying at the Zhe Jian Academy, when I did my first artistic creation I wasn't able to paint in a realistic style, but still I tried to pursue it. However, after studying in the Academy, I started to have a comparatively new concept of art, and I started to like expressionism. Therefore, although my realistic techniques were pretty good, I tried to exaggerate and distort, and I also recognized that it was not easy to successfully distort the figure. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)

In 1990, Kong Zi believed that her artwork in the graduating exhibition was quite original, and the art community was quite positive about them. Before doing the work for her graduate exhibition, she went to Da Lian Mountain where the Yu people lived, but her subject matter did not focus on important or political issues. She was attracted to the Yu's "traditional clothing and their way of life," and her artwork in the graduate exhibition represented that. She thinks that her depiction of the Yu people was

just a way to express my ideas and experience of life. My classmates thought the color in my painting was kind of oppressive, even though the colors were very bright. I did not deliberately try to represent any ideas. At the time, I was middle aged and was busy looking after my family and learning art. My artwork expressed my feelings instead of

trying to lecture. This was a milestone for my artistic creation. (personal interview, July 1, 2009)



Figure 23: Kong Zi's painting of Yu People in Da Lian Mountain (1990). Chinese painting, ink on rice-paper

Wang Yan Yu and Wu Ming Zhong are similar in age to Chen Shu Xia. Their subject matter and styles also reflected their personal interests. Before graduation, Wu was interested in religion, and his work dealt with “an ancient fairytale from a legend.” He considers that it was successful because,

most of the time, students just focused on sketching; only when students were close to graduation did they begin their artistic creations. Therefore, we encountered big challenges when we started to prepare for our graduating show. It wasn't possible for us

to explore a subject in depth, and many of us imitated the work of others. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

After receiving his BFA and becoming an art teacher in a university, Wu still explored subjects that he was interested in. In 1994, he studied for his MFA in Beijing, and although his supervisor was interested in realism, he continued to paint using his experience as his subject. In 1997, after graduating, he taught in the Capital Normal University. During this time, China became a commercial society. He believed that “this was very good for people,” but as a young university teacher, he was not able to participate in this new “consumer” society:

I was stuck in my situation. Suddenly, I became interested in bar codes. I expressed some aspects of my “situation” in paintings that combined bar codes with figures with gaping mouths. I continued to explore this concept, hoping to express the situation of people in society. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

After one year, Wu started to focus on political subject matter. He was aware of political things because politics played a very important role in my life. If I had grown up in a period like today, I would not be interested in or sensitive to politics. The subject of my artworks was based on themes about press conferences and international negotiations. The figures were realistic except for their heads, which I represented as eggs. It was a kind of a formulaic image. I called it the *Egg Series*. This was what I understood about the politicians’ role in society and expressed my attitude about politicians. I did not trust them. In the paintings, people’s bodies were true, but their heads were eggs. However, this was not enough to represent my ideas because I was concerned with the common situation of people in society. My first painting of glass people with political, moral and

implicit significance was called *Taking as Many Photos as Possible*. This piece represented delegates from two countries signing an agreement together after negotiating with each other. However, perhaps they will tear up the agreement because of some accidents. I started to consider that fragility of relationships between countries, groups or people. When 9/11 happened and the two skyscrapers instantly collapsed and disappeared into dust, this inspired me to do glass people. In 2002, I painted people that were chatting in a big cardboard box, like we are doing today, but we really don't know the dangers existing outside of the box. This artwork's name was *Friends, Please Beware of Moving*. I wanted to remind politicians to be careful. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)



Figure 24: Wu Ming Zhong's painting Hey, Be Careful (2008). 200x250cm acrylic on canvas.

Wang Yan Yu started his artistic creation in the 1990s, when the art market appeared in China. In the beginning, he made crafts to make a living. When his sculpture was sold in the art fair in Beijing in 2001 and 2002, he started to be a sculptor. "Making wood sculpture offered me

the chance to exhibit my wood artworks in the Beijing Art Exhibition and led me from being a worker making arts and crafts to become an artist” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). In the beginning, he started to copy African wood sculptures. Later, he created basso-relievo and sculptures by himself. In the 2002 Beijing Art Exhibition, his sculptures represented the dissolute relationships between men and women. In a piece of wood he carved some distorted nudes.

In 2006, he started to paint landscapes and abstracts because of the booming art market. Soon, his subject matter focused on political subjects, following the popular trends of other artists, but he does not consider these works to be “mature.” In 2004, he was inspired by an image from *Chinese Photography*, which showed two boys from the countryside waiting for their mother to give them cake. It touched his heart deeply because his family was also poor when he was a child; therefore, he was able to understand the mood of the image. The original model for the children in his paintings was his son. He pointed out that

[m]y son was a fat baby with two small eyes, like my eyes. When he laughed, he was very lovely. The original shapes of the parents in my paintings were my father and mother-in-law, who were peasants and were very natural. Being their son-in-law, I was very familiar with them. I started to create artwork using my own ideas and my own artistic language. I no longer followed the artistic currents and imitated the styles that were sold easily. What I painted focused on my childhood experience and the games I often played when I was a child. (personal interview, July 2, 2009)

Although Wang recognized that his painting skills needed to improve, he was confident that what he represented was lifelike and vivid.



*Figure 25: Wang Yuan Yu's painting, *Going Fishing*, is based on his own ideas and artistic language.*

As an artist, growing up in the art market, Wang talked about people who bought his artwork. He said that “most of the people who buy my paintings are from my generation” because his artworks tell the stories of the interesting things he did with his peers. Therefore, his buyers are familiar with similar games and experiences.

I felt that one saying is true: ‘art is from life’. Indeed, artistic creation should not try to catch up with the tidal current [of what is popular in art]. The artwork I did let me know who I am and let me feel happy. I used my own way to describe my narrative experience. Now, my oil paintings and my wood sculptures are focused on children and their everyday life. I had the chance and tried to make artworks based on political satire

because it sold well. Although I was able to sell some, I felt I labored to do it and did not enjoy it. (personal interview, July 2, 2009)

Because of the skills he developed through wood carving, Wang used the palette knife to paint instead of brushes.

Since the late 1990s, Chinese art has gradually alienated the people and the collective grand narrative has moved to depicting everyday life (Yin, 2009). The artwork created by Huang Huan, born in 1977, reflects this trend.

She was not satisfied by her artwork created for the graduation exhibition because she borrowed another artistic language to represent her experience in Tibet. After studying her MFA, she started to formulate her own artistic language. When she was 23 years old, she became very interested in marriage.

At that time, I did not have a boyfriend, and felt very lonely. I had always observed married people. Many couples looked like each other. I found it was very interesting.

There was not a blood relationship between the husbands and their wives. But why they were like each other? This was because people are always narcissistic. Hence, they like those people who look like themselves. I liked to explore the relationship between husbands and wives, or between lovers. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Therefore, Huang created a series of works, *Lover Comrades*, in a printmaking studio. She used different material to represent this subject matter. She painted different colors on wood board, then drew directly on the board with a brush and Chinese ink. If the result was good, she kept it. If she felt that it was not perfect, she used a knife to carve on it. If she felt that it still was not enough to express her thoughts, she would print some of the paintings on paper. Therefore,

“some of my artworks were the painted wooden board, others half painted and half carved”
(personal interview, July 31, 2009).

At the same time, she did another project inspired by the hierarchy she perceived in society. She felt her academy was a society with a rigid social order, where [g]reat professors were held in great esteem by students, while young teachers were talked of casually and maliciously by students. Students who were able to paint well felt they were a superior class, but it was not easy for students who could not draw well to make friends. Workers, plumbers and cleaners were all invisible groups. In other places, these workers were more likely to be acknowledged and valued. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

She considered that everyone, whether professor or worker, was a human being. With this in mind, she did over twenty large portraits with exaggerated features. Then, she used a computer to re-combine the eyes, noses and mouths “to interfere with people’s identity.” She believes that “all people have strengths and weaknesses, and when they die, everybody, whether a great professor or a plumber, is the same” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Huang said that if she did a portrait of professor Guan Jun, nobody would have been surprised. However, “we often don’t even notice the cleaners who clean our buildings everyday. When I put the professor’s eyes and a mouth of a cleaner together, the status of each changes” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

In 2001, she stayed in a village in Gui Zhuo province for one month. The village had no electricity and the lives of people there impressed her. She observes,

these people of my sketches looked a bit like monkeys. Local people were more thin and

agile. There, sheep, dogs, and chickens had their own characteristics. For example, roosters had very nice cock feathers, and could fly a short distance. When you thought that people were like monkeys, you would reflect on people's living conditions. I thought that human beings were very evil. While they have created a civilization that other creatures could not do, they deprived the natural life state of other creatures and destroyed the harmony of the nature. Human civilization is out of sync with the pace of natural world. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Based on her experiences and feeling in the countryside, she created *Tomorrow Would be Longer*, a series of four artworks in the Chinese painting style. It portrays the unromantic and long days of women on a boat, which might capsize or get caught in a storm. Women living in mountains calmly accept their unromantic lives, but urban women are always looking forward to a more exciting tomorrow. Before living with these women, she always felt her life was unfair and complained why she "did not have this or that" (personal interview, July 31, 2009). This was because she felt people living in cities desire far too much. These women's attitude about life in the countryside inspired her to create these artworks using Chinese painting.

While she was excited about these women living in the mountains, she also had to face her own life. At the time, when she "was affiliated with [her] friends, classmates, teachers, and people from the art community" (personal interview, July 31, 2009), she encountered many difficulties. She doubted whether there was mutual trust and help between people. Although she was in anguish, she used art to solve these dilemmas in her studio. Each painting was her own reflection on these things, exploring the relationships between women and men, and among women.

She pointed out her subject matter often focused on women, but the images of these women, whether in sketches or painting, did not have strong female characteristics. This was because

I always thought that women were more human, while men were more like animals. I wanted to paint women to express something of human nature. In my artworks, women always were at ease and they did not have sexy body and beautiful long hair. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)



*Figure 26: Huang Huan's Painting *Where Are You?* (2002).*

Summary

Based on their experiences and stories about becoming artists, it is clear that pursuing a

professional education could have helped the interviewees build a foundation to become an artist. Yet it does not mean that acceptance in a professional art education program and receiving a BFA or MFA immediately enabled them to become an artist. Formal art learning in art school simply made their path towards becoming an artist smoother.

In the more day-to-day process of becoming artists, many casual and natural factors influenced the participants; each one had his or her unique experience. Even if they received Formal Art Learning in art school, the less structured form of art learning also influenced them in many different ways, often to a great extent by the social, ideological, cultural and economic situations of the eras in which they lived.

Except for Wang, all the other participants received professional art training in art school in university. They primarily learned art through Formal Art Learning, although their studies included aspects of the three types of art learning: Formal Art Learning, Non-Formal Art Learning and Life Art Learning. Sometimes, these various learning types were interwoven. Some participants took the time to develop their artistic ability outside of school, in order to meet the requirements of the teachers, to learn something related to their aesthetic interests or to audit courses not offered by their department. In this method of study, non-formal learning is not very obvious, but it is blended with formal art learning most of the time. However, life art learning in daily life or in a specific learning environment had a great influence on their artistic ideas and concepts.

It is clear to see that Chinese art education often teaches art techniques and helps students develop basic skills. This teaching method often separates techniques from artistic creation. Some professors believe that teaching art and making art are two different things, and see artistic

creation as how artists express their thoughts and emotions through artwork. In art schools, students should learn basic knowledge and practice basic art skills. After acquiring strong basic skills, students will be able to create their works.

Part Three: As an Artist, Learning about Art

Although I asked the participants to talk about how their experiences of art learning influenced the process of learning as artists (except for the oldest artist, Jin Zhi Lin, and the youngest, Huang Huan), most of them did not recount their experiences at this stage of their career as clearly and concretely as they did their earliest memories of becoming an artist. When they were asked what experiences influenced their artistic creation, some responded with general ideas or referred to critical articles about their artistic creation; others believed that they had just started being artists. In this section, I will explore the participants' reflections on their experiences of being artists.

As artists, the majority learned art through life and non-formal art learning situations. Huang Huan was the sole individual who had formal art training, pursuing a Ph.D. in art during this period. Two other participants, Liu Bing Jiang and Wu Ming Zhong, received non-formal training; they studied art in France and Russia, respectively, but they did not gain a certification.

Formal art learning: as an artist learning about art.

After becoming an artist, this type of art learning does not play as important a role as it does in the process of becoming an artist. Among the participants, Huang Huan, as the only individual who had formal art training after being an artist, never explained if this helped her develop her creativity.

Non-formal art learning.

Non-formal learning played an important role in the participants' art studying as artists.

They improved their skills and concepts by visiting and studying in different countries, working with different artistic media, and creating their own artwork.

Non-formal art learning: Learning in other countries.

Liu Bing Jiang and Wu Ming Zhong, as mentioned above, were able to study abroad after the start of the economic reforms in China. From 1984 to 1987, Liu was sent to France by the Chinese government. In Paris, he lived in a studio that a Chinese-French artist bought specifically for artists from China. Liu paid all his travelling expenses and arranged his schedule by himself. In Paris, he mainly visited museums, went to different studios to paint and sometimes visited other countries. He also sold his paintings to survive, and from time to time painted portraits on the street.

Liu believed that this experience had a great influence on him. He said that, before visiting France,

I saw these oil paintings in printed collections. When I had the opportunity to visit Paris, I tried to see as many of these masterworks as possible. Seeing these works in person, as opposed to seeing them in print, was a totally different experience. I was deeply touched by them and was much better able to understand them. (personal interview, July 02, 2009)

For Liu, sketching from plaster casts in university did not lead to creativity or excitement. Only when he saw the original sculpture on which the cast was based, did he have an emotional reaction. Studying from a book or looking at a cast does not provide the viewer with an idea of the actual scale of the work. Liu remembers,

You can't imagine the feelings that they have on you until you actually stand in front of

them. I felt that the sculptor just lopped off the needless parts from the big piece of marble. It was so elegant and priceless. Our Chinese grotto sculptures tended to be more formulaic” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

In Paris, Liu discovered that he preferred classical art to contemporary art. Seeing the original works of European masters convinced him to respect “classical art,” and follow his personal artistic beliefs in order to progress. “Contemporary art is not what I have been pursuing,” he said. “Even if it is the mainstream, I do not want to ‘catch up’ to it” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).

He also believed that the experience of spending time in Europe helped Chinese artists understand the spirit of Western art. Liu felt that his artistic style and skills changed after staying in France for two years, and seeing the artwork of the “masters.”

Wu Ming Zhong’s experiences of studying in Russia were somewhat different compared with Liu’s time in France. Wu traveled to Russia in 2003 and studied at the Repin State Academic Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture for one year. The Institute stressed realism, and his professor was not interested in Wu’s experimentation. When Wu showed his work to his studio supervisor, the only response was, “You should paint in this style [realism]” (personal interview, June 22, 2009). Wu decided to continue working on his subject of “glass” people on his own. When he did go to the studio at the Institute, however, he completely followed the realistic style that was promoted by the Academy, yet when there were contemporary art exhibitions in St. Petersburg, he often made the time to go see them.

It is necessary for mature artists to pursue what they are interested in. When comparing Liu and Wu’s experiences, it is clear that that it is better for artists to arrange their learning

activities based on their own interests.

Non-formal art learning: Learning by working with different media.

Jin Zhi Lin, Shang Yang, Cao Ming Qiu, Chen Shu Xia and Huang Huan all had the experience of learning from or being inspired by other art media. For example, after his retirement, Jin Zhi Lin had time to paint again. He only sketched outside, and his subject matter focused on landscape and plants. He said that his oil painting “involved traditional Chinese painting elements. The size of my oil paintings follows that of the traditional Chinese painting, Tiao Fu” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). Tiao Fu is a type of Chinese painting in which the size is generally narrow and long, and two or four panels together. Jin said that he used Chinese brushes to paint in oil and believed that his oil paintings “reflect the Chinese aesthetic view” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

Shang Yan believed that most of his pieces that were created in the 1980s did not involve volume and light and shade. In order to get rid of the realistic elements, he “used some traditional methods of Chinese painting” (personal interview, July 10, 2009).

Although Cao Ming Qiu considers Chinese painting to be the most suitable outlet for his “artistic expression,” he explains why he tried to paint in oil. When painting a subject for a long time,

to a certain extent, I hope to change my style. I had already reached my personal peak; if I did not change, it was possible for me to paint in this style for the rest of my life. There are many of these examples in the history of Chinese painting. However, it was not easy for an artist to change his style or give up the things he is good at in a short time(personal

interview, July 29, 2009).



*Figure 27: Cao Ming Qiu's oil painting of *Flower* (2005).*

Therefore, Cao started to try other materials, like oil paints, to depict one of his favorite subjects, the peony. On one hand, he relied on the Chinese painting skills he had learned previously to create his new oil paintings. On the other hand, the experience of making oil paintings made him better understand how to deal with colors and how to use new ways to create his Chinese paintings. Cao believed that trying different kinds of media helped his Chinese painting boldly break through some of the concepts of traditional ink painting that had been holding back his work, particularly in his use of color. This experience made him more sensitive and also broadened his concept of art.

When Chen Shu Xia talks about her recent artwork in 2007, she also points out that some of her works are also influenced by the concepts of Chinese landscape painting.

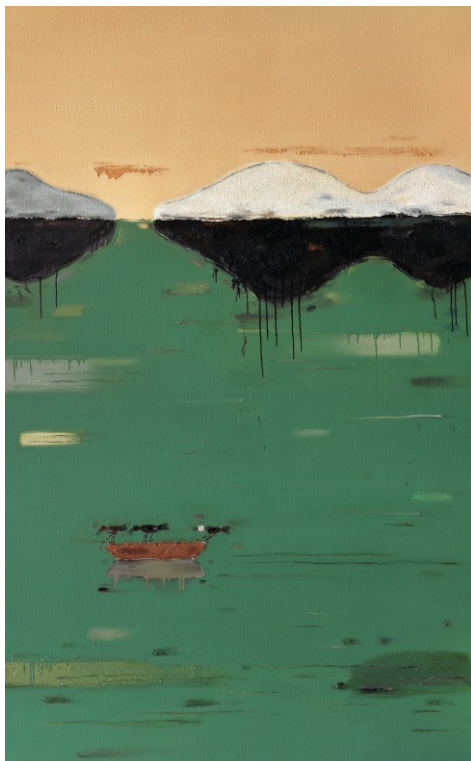


Figure 28: Chen Shu Xia's Three Birds (2008).

Wang Yuan Yu started making wood sculpture by accident and believed that doing wood sculpture allowed him to give his paintings more “spatial depth” (personal interview, July 2, 2009).

Huang Huan pointed out that teaching traditional Chinese line painting inspired her to try different ways to create Chinese paintings. In 2006, she taught her students line drawing, a traditional form of Chinese painting. Before teaching the course, she always painted using colored ink, but the class forced her to study line drawing at a more profound level, leading her to reflect on “how to paint a Chinese painting” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

Non-formal art learning: Learning through doing.

Cao Ming Qiu started making ceramics as a result of being asked by a collector to help him create designs for ceramic works. He started to paint on ceramics in a factory in Jingdezhen, having no experience in that field beforehand. At the factory, he did all the work by himself. Cao said that it was very important in the creative process for an artist to start something “with interest and finish it with perseverance” (personal interview, July 29, 2009).



Figure 29: Cao Ming Qiu’s ceramics (1996).

Although most of the participants did not mention that they learned from their art-making, all of them learned from the process of their creation. It is very important for all artists to learn as they practice.

Life art learning.

Life art learning often occurred in the participants’ everyday life and played a vital role in their art learning. Talking with people, being involved themselves in art communities and

experiencing the ordinary things of everyday life inspired them and showed them new perspectives. All the artists mentioned life art learning as an artist's learning about art.

Life art learning: Learning through communicating with other artists or being involved in an art community.

An important approach in learning to be an artist is through speaking and interacting with other artists and by being involved themselves in the activities of art communities. Jin Zhi Lin, Liu Bing Jin, Wu Ming Zhong and Wang Yuan Yu all experienced these kinds of activities.

Jin approached his art learning by investigating folk art and communicating with folk artists from the countryside. He started to study folk art in 1979, and spent a great deal of his time involving himself in a survey of local culture and folk art. For Jin, folk art cultivated his ideas about art “like milk nurtures a child.” Folk artists from the countryside showed him another concept of art different from the “mainstream.” Jin believes that “these old women helped me open the door to see many of the old prototypes hidden in everyday life, revealing the common and conventional folk and cultural symbols” (personal interview, August 07, 2009). The artistic concepts of grandmothers especially enriched his artistic creation. Jin gives an example of how this influenced his artistic ideas. In December of 1985, the Central Academy of Fine Arts Department of Comics and Festival Paintings invited six older female folk artists from Yan'an to introduce folk art to students:

One event had a deep impact on my artistic creation. One artist was very good at cutting a tiger out of paper, but she had never seen a tiger. After visiting the Beijing Zoo and seeing tigers, she was excited and started to cut tigers because she finally

saw real tigers in a zoo. The next morning, the artist showed her paper-cut tigers to me. I found that these tigers were not as good as the ones that she had created before. She cut her tigers based on impressions of real tigers she saw in the zoo, and she tried to depict their movement. However, because she did not have basic skills of sketching and drawing, it was difficult for her to express movement. As a result, she became less able to reproduce the tiger in her paper cuttings. It made me reconsider the relationship between art and life; art cannot simply come from experiencing life. It is right that life is the source of art, but art is not necessarily a direct reflection of life. In the beginning, somebody saw tigers, and they cut patterns of the tigers based on what they saw. Then, the patterns were passed down from generation to generation. Gradually, these “tigers” became a symbol and different folk artists gave their tigers some new elements based on their own aesthetics even though they had never seen any tigers. I changed my art concept of realism, a style that I had learned from the mainstream art world. (personal interview, July 31, 2009)

Liu Bing Jiang also mentioned how he had learned from visits with his art professor, Huang Yong Yu, during the Cultural Revolution. In Huang’s small room, he discovered the concept that “creating a world was more important than describing a world” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). At that time, Huang was in a difficult situation because he had been criticized as a

“black painter¹².” But he continued to paint using “big brushes to dip water, ink, gouache, and gold and silver powder together to paint water lilies, bitterns, and landscapes of his hometown on rice paper” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). Huang’s ex-students often crowded into his small 10-square-meter room to discuss art and see his paintings. They also experimented in Huang’s way. From this relationship, a new school formed in China. Today, it is called Ink and Color Painting.

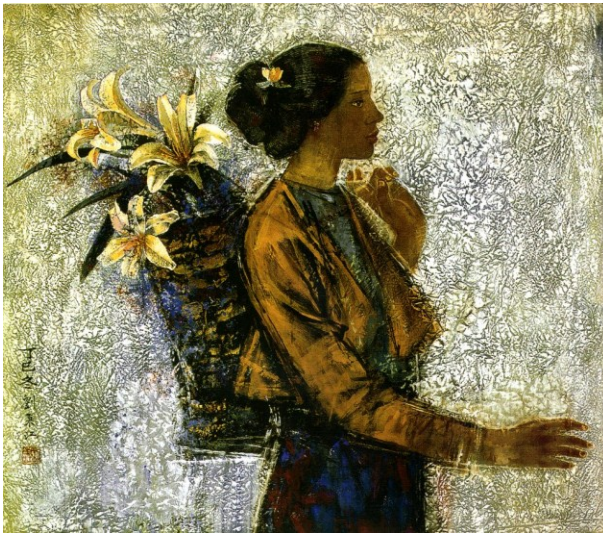


Figure 30: Liu Bing Jiang’s ink and color painting of *Girl* (1977). He was considered one of the pioneers of this group.

In 2007, Wang Yuan Yu moved to the Song Zhuang artists’ village in Beijing and “worked together with hundreds of other artists.” He told me, “This made me feel confident. In

¹²During the Cultural Revolution, many artists were given negative labels if their artwork did not reflect the revolutionary ideals.

Song Zhuang, it was easy to see different artistic trends and communicate and interact with other artists” (personal interview, July 2, 2009). For Wang, taking part in exhibitions in Song Zhuang was especially important because the audience and his fellow artists gave him new ideas, which helped him decide what he should do.

Wu Ming Zhong rented a studio in a contemporary art community although he still taught in university. Entering the contemporary art community profoundly changed his career. Since becoming active in that community, he said,

I participated in contemporary art activities and communicated with other contemporary artists. Soon, I had the opportunity to take part in exhibitions. My fame rose so quickly. In fact, I did not expect success to come so fast. Before going to Shuo Jia Village, I knew very little about the contemporary art community. After moving there, I found it was really wonderful. (personal interview, June 22, 2009)

In 2006, an Italian art professor from the University of Rome, who was giving presentations about his new book recently published in Beijing, met with Wu and suggested that he should paint larger paintings. Before the meeting, Wu’s biggest works were 3x3 meters square, but after talking to the professor, he started a piece that was 6x6 meters.

Life art learning: Learning from or being inspired by everyday life.

Several of the participants in the study reported learning from or being inspired by everyday life. Jin Zhi Lin, Huang Huan, Wu Ming Zhong and Chen Shu Xia all spoke about the influence of daily life on their work.

In 1982, when Jin Zhi Lin was staying in France, he visited many museums. But one

event helped him recognize that “each nation has its own philosophy and aesthetics. This is a natural element in art and culture. Chinese oil painting needed to express Chinese aesthetics and life” (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

That year the Grand Palace was displaying work by several Chinese painting masters, such as Qi Bei Shi, Wu Chang Shuo, Ren Bo Nian and Huang Bin Hong. Although in China they are seen as masters of Chinese painting, in France, there were only a few people visiting their work. At the same time, Chinese comic books were also displayed there; this exhibition had a lot of visitors. It seemed to Jin it was because different cultures have different aesthetics, although artistic principles are universal. Therefore, he thought that Chinese oil painting should have its own aesthetics instead of following Western aesthetics completely.

When “9/11 happened and the two skyscrapers instantly collapsed and disappeared into dust,” Wu Ming Zhong began to explore the “fragility of relationships between countries, groups or people” using “glass people” (Personal interview, August 26, 2009). In his works, he shows that relationships between countries, groups or people were as brittle as glass.

In 2007, the severe earthquake that occurred in Si Chuang Province influenced Chen Shu Xia’s art concept. She believed that the development of contemporary society is destroying nature, and her oil painting started to represent landscapes based on her idea of the relationship between people and nature. She thought that nature was always strong and human beings were frail.

Huang Huan believed that her creation was profoundly connected with her state of life. When she had a boyfriend, she was content and her life “was very sweet.” She said, “My artworks were also very sweet, although sometimes I was tired of this kind of sweet artwork. I

often believed that good works are created in a state of suffering” (personal interview, July 31, 2009).

The Process of Important Artworks They Made

After becoming an artist, the participants had different experiences because of the evolving political situation in China after 1949. Before the Cultural Revolution, art tended to reflect Chinese revolutionary history and the new life of the masses. The function of art was seen as a tool in the production of political propaganda. Artists did not have many opportunities to develop their own artistic style and subject matter. They often focused on important events and reflected on the political climate in China. The dominant and “standard” artistic style was socialist realism.

During the Cultural Revolution, Jing Qing, Chairman Mao’s wife, promoted a new artistic standard, Romantic Revolutionary Realism. This style emphasized using light, bright colors and especially the color red to represent Chairman Mao and the masses (Zheng, 2008, p.23). If artists did not follow this style, their artwork was not displayed in exhibitions, or was seen as degenerate (p. 24).

After the Cultural Revolution ended in the latter half of the 1970s, China started economic reforms, and artists had more opportunities to explore different ideas; however, for the most part, the Chinese art community remained quite conservative. Jin Zhi Lin mentioned that images of Botticelli’s *Venus* and Michelangelo’s *David*, published in a 1980 article in *Art* magazine, led to a serious debate about whether these works were art or erotica. During the 1980s, the Chinese art community started to become more liberated, but ideas about

contemporary art were new for Chinese artists. Jin gave an example that clarifies the situation. In 1985, some artworks by Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008), a contemporary artist from the United States, were displayed in Beijing for the first time. Rauschenberg's installations, made with materials from everyday life, made a deep impression on Chinese artists. Wen Li Peng, the chairman of the Oil Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts at that time, said,

When the museum staff opened the box, they just saw some feathers, rubber, wheels, and thought that these materials were to pack the artworks. Therefore, they put them aside and looked for Rauschenberg's "real" artwork. In fact, the items they found in the packing crate were the elements that comprised his artworks. The *Chinese Art Paper* devoted three quarters of an issue to discuss Rauschenberg's exhibition, an unprecedented thing (personal interview, August 07, 2009).

In the end of the 1990s, when the art market appeared in China and artists could make a living through selling their works, multiple art styles started to coexist in China. In *Young Chinese Artists*, Christoph Noe and Cordelia Steiner (2008) argue that self-expression is very important for young Chinese artists. They point out that young Chinese artists are

more self-centered and concerned with their own lives in comparison to previous generations. This generation has known only peace and an ever-growing economy in which this very growth takes precedence over democratic reforms. Mass consumerism is widespread, and a socialist system has been replaced with a capitalist one that diverges from the collectivist ideology and ideals of the past. Taken together with the frenetic urban expansion within China, these changes represent a deep influence on individual experience and perception. (p. 8)

Romantic revolutionary realism.

During the Cultural Revolution, only two of the interviewees, Liu Bing Jian and Jin Zhi Lin, were already artists. Both tried to reflect the new political climate in their paintings and hoped to get the chance to display them. However, their work was not accepted for any official exhibition because they did not follow the standards of Romantic Revolutionary Realism, which meant that the color red had to be combined with light and bright imagery.

Liu said that in order to take part in an exhibition in 1972, he painted two oil paintings of Tibetans, *Tibetan Woman Joining the Communist Party* and *A Working Middle-Aged Man*. He said that he “wanted to pursue the prominent wind,” but he “was not able to follow the revolutionary art.” This was because he “did not paint using enough red, brightness and light,” but instead he “used a palette knife to paint.” These two paintings almost got him into trouble. He said, “the leader, who was responsible for culture and education in Beijing, thought the faces of the figures in my paintings were made with rough rather than smooth strokes and mixed cold and warm colors. He believed that my paintings had problems and he suggested that my university should investigate me and my thought” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).



Figure 31: Liu Bing Jiang's oil painting of *A Working Middle-Aged Man* (1973).



Figure 32: Liu Bing Jiang's oil painting of *Tibetan Woman Joining the Communist Party* (1973).

The same thing happened to Jin Zhi Lin. In 1974, he created the portrait, *Female Director*,

which was based on a real character, Cheng Zhi Xing. However, he pointed out:

[w]hen this painting was sent to the National Art Exhibition, the committee believed that the figure was too personal and was not good-looking enough. Furthermore, her coat was too old and needed to be replaced with a newer one. Third, the kerosene lamp depicted in the painting was a symbol of poverty and backwardness, and it had to be removed. I covered up the kerosene lamp, but I did not change the image of the character, nor the coat. As a result, the painting was not displayed in the exhibition. (personal interview, August 07, 2009)

In fact, Jin believed that this painting's subject matter reflected the political climate of the period. In the interview, he describes why he painted it.

In 1969, when Chen was 16 years old, she came to Yan'an from Beijing, and worked in the countryside voluntarily with other young people from the cities to help reform the countryside. She worked with peasants in the field with all her heart to improve production, and they in turn greatly admired her. When I went to the countryside, I saw how she led the masses of people to protect crops from the flash floods that often occurred in the region, and worked with the masses to organizing meetings. I created a portrait based on her, called *Female Director*. A young lady was sitting on the stone bed with an old lamb fur coat that an old peasant gave her. She had just finished reading a government report and was listening to opinions of the peasants. I focused on the relationship between her and the people. The old hoe behind her represented the relationship between her and the people, showing that she was a member of the masses. (personal interview, August 07, 2009).



Figure 33: Jin Zhi Lin's oil painting of *Female Director* (1975).

Later, they both continued to follow their own artistic path and avoided using red, light colors and bright imagery in their work. Liu worked on portraits while Jin focused on landscape, peasants and young intellectuals who received re-education in Yan'an.

Oil sketching.

Liu Bing Jiang and Jin Zhi Lin liked to sketch from real life, and the majority of their artwork was painted this way during the Cultural Revolution.

After leaving Beijing in 1966, Jin Zhi Lin was interested in sketching figures and landscapes using oil in his spare time. During his work on the survey of folk art in Yan'an, his artworks, such as *An Xi River Funeral* and *The Lantern Festival*, were influenced by his surroundings and the way of life of the people who lived there. After retiring, Jin had time to paint again. He only sketched outside, focusing on landscape and plants. He says,

[e]ach year in the spring, I stay in Beijing visiting the parks and interesting places [there]

to sketch. When summer comes, I return to my hometown in the country to sketch. During the autumn, I travel to the villages along the Yellow River to paint. I sometimes draw crazily, I feel that I am not able to control my brush, and I do not care about color and volume. In this state, my emotions are volatile. When I am like this, I feel immersed in nature, as if I have become part of nature. (personal interview, August 07, 2009).



Figure 34: Jin Zhi Lin's oil painting of Landscape (2001).

During the Cultural Revolution, Liu Bing Jiang focused on doing portraits, using oils. He said that for yearlong periods, “I visited Xing Jian province. I really liked to paint or draw the Kurds because the men were heroic and women’s costumes were very beautiful” (personal interview, July 02, 2009).



Figure 35: Liu Bing Jian's oil sketching of Kurdish girl's Portrait (1978).

Artists recreating their own world and experience.

Many artists strove to reproduce the events of their lives or create worlds based on their own experiences or those of others. In the interviews, Huang Huan, Chen Shu Xai, Wu Ming Zhong and Wang Yuan Yu spoke about expressing their experiences and feelings in their artwork.

Inspired by the human wish to fly, Hunag Huan developed her story of a bird and human from her desire to create a kind of bird-human hybrid. She gave two reasons why she wanted to explore this idea. The first was that individuals always want to pursue what they cannot have. The other was that the flight of a bird inspires feelings of freedom in people. According to Huang, in her story,

a girl wanted to become a bird, and a bird hoped to be a girl. Hence, they decided that they would have a corporeal exchange with each other. To find a way to help them realize their dream, the bird carried the girl, despite great hardship, to many different lands.

However, in the exchange process, the girl's body remained human but her head changed

to that of a bird. The bird's head became the head of a girl but its body remained the same. Their dreams were not realized. Desire was only a kind of imagination. I used tools of Chinese painting to create pieces based on this story, artworks that many consider to be "sweet." (personal interview, July 31, 2009)



Figure 36: Huang Huan's Bird and Human Being (2008).

In fact, Huang planned to make an animation of this story. She designed some of the character's clothes and drew images and some landscapes for her animation, but so far, she does not have enough money to finish it.

Cheng Shu Xia was interested in everyday life, and when she began to paint, she used her room, friends and family as subjects. The works were completely focused on her everyday life. She says,

Later, I painted many still lifes, especially of fruits. For me, a fruit is a life. For example, an apple grows on a tree and starts from a bud; the apple evolves from a flower on the tree, to a small apple, and then develops into a mature apple that we eventually eat. At the same time, I also painted figures that were my friends. These figures were not very realistic because I hoped to express their inner, true nature and did not want their outer appearance to influence how I portrayed them. (personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Wang Yuan Yu uses oil painting and sculpture to depict what he is familiar with. Through his artwork, he interprets his childhood experiences and also includes his son's experience of growing up in the countryside.

Wu Ming Zhong continued to develop his glass figure style, his subject matter often involving politics. He recalls that in 2002,

I painted people that were chatting in a big cardboard box, like we are doing today, but we really don't know the dangers existing outside of the box. This artwork's name was *Friends, Please Beware of Moving*. I wanted to remind politicians to be careful. (personal interview, June 22, 2009).



Figure 37: Wu Ming Zhong's painting of Friends, Please Beware of Moving

Doing artwork for commissions.

After the Cultural Revolution in China, some public areas started to be decorated instead of being places for posting political propaganda. Some artists took the opportunity to create artworks for these spaces. Later, as the Chinese economy grew, a fledgling art market appeared, which started to boom by the beginning of the 2000s.

Most of the participants in this study have received commissions. Both Liu Bing Jiang and Cao Ming Qiu talked about commissions during their interviews.

In 1982, Liu Bing Jiang and his wife Zhou Ling received a commission from the Beijing

Hotel. They were excited that they had “this good opportunity to put our artistic ability to good use. We really wanted to create an excellent artwork” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). They did not ask for any assistance, and did everything by themselves, “from selecting the subject matter to designing the whole mural, from creating the first draft to transferring it to the wall” (personal interview, July 02, 2009). The mural was called *Creating, Harvesting and Happiness*. It included over 70 figures and over one hundred birds and animals. They used lines to draw all of the outlines.

Cao Ming Qiu received private commission and, as stated earlier in this chapter, one collector’s request encouraged him to explore the world of ceramics. He also worked with a tailor and tried his hand at fashion design.

Summary

As artists, the participants in this study continued to learn from the world around them. Formal art learning did not play an important role in their work at this time, while non-formal art learning and life art learning were the primary ways they expanded their artistic knowledge. They learned from other artists and involvement in artistic activities, and their work benefited from trying different media and different art formats, in addition to learning from the process of their artistic creation.

Based on these participants’ experiences, it is clear to see that it is better for artists to choose their learning activities based on their interests, which motivates them to learn effectively and efficiently, ensuring that they will improve their art skills and practice.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

This study investigates the process of how artists in 20th century China studied art and how they became artists. For the artists participating in the study, their art learning entails lifelong learning, which includes their early art learning experiences, the process of becoming an artist, and the way that learning art aided them to be artists—all examined in this study. The study also analyzes the participants' experiences of learning art in and outside of school. The concluding chapter, based on the analysis of the data collected and used in the study, has implications for art education policies and practices in the classroom in China.

During the past century, a number of revolutionary changes have occurred in the ideology, economy, culture and politics of China. These changes have radically affected the functions of art and shaped childhood art learning, the process of learning to be an artist and, finally, the experience of an artist learning about art. Furthermore, influences from outside the country, particularly from Western Europe and the Soviet Union, played a very important role in individual art learning. These revolutionary changes from inside and influences from outside apparently impacted individual art learning in school and outside of school. However, traditional Chinese culture, especially Chinese art and customs, which sometimes were thought to be feudalistic and in need of reform, had always fostered art learning outside of school. In spite of social changes and the Western influences on Chinese art and art education, traditional Chinese art and customs still impacted the way artists learned and created art.

Chinese society has dramatically changed from what it was in the early 20th century: the ending of the feudal Qing Dynasty in 1911, Japanese invasion in 1931, the end of the Second

World War in 1945, Liberation in 1949, Mao's Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and the political and economic reforms from the 1980s. The way educators, the government and Chinese society defined and viewed art, artists, and art education also changed radically. Although early in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Western culture—including art—was introduced to China, Chinese painting was dominant, only after 1911, did it occur on a large-scale, because many scholars believed that Western culture was helpful in building a strong China. After 1911, some artists started to study art in Japan, France, Britain, Belgium and the United States. After returning home, they taught modernist and realistic art in art schools because they received different art concepts overseas. At that time, different painting styles, Chinese painting and Western painting, co-existed in the art community. In high schools, geometry and mechanical drawing were included in art textbooks because Western industry started to appear in China. After Liberation, painting with the realistic style became mainstream because of the needs of political propaganda and influence from Russian art concepts. Students only learned realistic techniques at elementary school, intermediate school and fine art departments at universities. What children created was also related to the political climate in their art classrooms. After the Cultural Revolution ended, especially during the Chinese economic and political reforms in the 1990s, different styles started to appear in the art community. In the 1990s, some art educators started to discuss the necessity of children's self-expression (Yang, 1996), and basic art knowledge and techniques were taught in elementary and intermediate schools. However, realistic techniques and skills were mainstream in the fine art departments in universities.

Many scholars have discussed the effect of social and economic changes on art education. Feldman (1970), in *Becoming Human Through Art*, argues that what society as a whole defines

as art is the most crucial influence on the objectives and content of art education. Dorn and Orr (2008) argue that the way artists function within a society is highly influenced by the educational system which itself is a product of that specific society. They point out that:

[a]rt is a social undertaking, in part, because the artist is a product of society, lives and works in a social culture, and functions within a social system. Education is even more social in that it is regulated by the society to serve that society and is governed by national, state, and local laws that not only require all children to be educated, but also dictate how that should be done. (p. 11)

Therefore, art education, both the content and teaching methods, is shaped by social factors in each society.

Based on the experience of the participants' art learning, it is clear that not only formal art learning in school is influenced by social values, but also individuals' experience of life and non-formal art learning is impacted by society's concept of art and everyday life. The art that the participants created as children outside of school reflected different contents, subject matters, and styles—often influenced by the world around them, especially popular culture. Liu Bing Jiang pointed out that after World War II, when the Japanese left and Americans came to China, he watched many American movies and started to draw the characters from American movies in the 1940s. During the Korean War in the 1950s, when Liu studied in intermediate school, he started to copy political caricatures from Russian caricatures related to the war. Shang Yang also mentioned that the subjects of his drawings outside the class were related to the Korean War because he often listened to the news about the war.

Most of the participants mentioned that although art classes did not offer them a way to

learn Chinese painting, they tried Chinese painting on their own. They were taught by their private teachers or fellow artists or were influenced by original Chinese paintings or reproductions that they saw in books or calendars. In their everyday life, Chinese art and customs always impacted them, even though, during the Cultural Revolution, some Chinese art and customs were considered feudalistic. Cao Ming Qiu mentioned that the traditional cloth pattern used in his hometown when he was young inspired him to design his fabric 40 years later.

The world around children decides how they should express themselves in their art. As Freedman (2003) points out, “[t]he contents and structures of children’s drawings differ across histories and cultures, indicating that development is influenced by time and place” (p. 76).

Relevance of the Findings for Chinese Art Education Program Development

This study offers six important findings about Chinese art education in the past century. Through an analysis of my interviews, I found the following:

(i) During the 20th century, Chinese school art education in elementary and intermediate schools did not play a primary role in relation to learning art. Participants reported that the most significant part of their art education came outside of school, in non-formal and life learning situations. The art taught in schools failed to meet the national art education goals.

(ii) In art classes in elementary and intermediate schools after 1949, Western-style drawing has been dominant in China instead of traditional Chinese art. Most of the participants reported that they learned Chinese painting in their spare time, from their peers or private teachers, and felt it was very interesting. None of them mentioned that they learned Chinese painting in school except the oldest participants.

(iii) Whether in primary school, intermediate school, high school or university, students followed the adult “concept” of realism. Influenced by political movements, art education institutes often ignored the artists’ self-expression. It is clear that there has been a bias in favor of realism and developing basic techniques and skills in Chinese art education in the last century, based on the participants’ experience of art learning in elementary and intermediate schools and at art schools in universities.

(iv) The social and cultural contexts in which the artists lived have deeply influenced their art learning. Depending on the economic, political and cultural contexts, the artists had different ways of formal, non-formal and life art learning; the content of their art differed as well. For example artists’ art learning had to follow the “subjective” decisions of government , when the social function of art was an instrument of political propaganda and the government was the only patron of art during the Cultural Revolution, ensuring that realism, known as Socialist Realism, was dominant in the art community. Other styles were not encouraged. When the art market in China first appeared at the end of the 1990s, the social function of art started to serve both public and private interests, and artists began to learn from both the newly emerging art market and already existing aesthetic concepts. As a result, since that time, the artistic styles of artists has become much more diverse.

(v) Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, school art education in China ignored the visual experiences of the everyday lives of students. The links between life and formal learning were severed. Artists recognized the value and meaning of their art learning in everyday life only when they became more mature or were already practicing artists. In art education, art teachers help students recognize their visual experiences gained from their life

learning outside school. Students from elementary and intermediate schools or even students at art school in university were not able to readily recognize or analyze the meaning of this kind of visual experience, except in terms of getting help from others who had professional art training.

(vi) The participants' life experiences played a very important role in their artistic creation. For example, when Shang Yang mentioned that he was considered to be artist whose artistic style always changed, he pointed out, "I know that there exists something constant in my painting. This is the tone I learned from my father, and my childhood memories" (personal interview, July 10, 2009). Wang Yuan Yu's oil paintings and wood sculptures represent his childhood experiences. Wu Ming Zhong also believes that he focused on political subject matter because politics played a very important role in his life. He thinks, "if I had grown up in a period like today, I would not be interested in or sensitive to politics" (personal interview, June 22, 2009).

Recommendations for Chinese Art Education

Based on analysis of the interviews in this study, there are two important recommendations for Chinese art education.

(i) Practicing Chinese painting should be encouraged in art classrooms. Based on the experiences of the artists studied, it was discovered that they enjoyed Chinese painting and believed that it was useful even when they practiced art as professional artists. In their early experiences of art learning, the participants painted or learned Chinese painting outside of school, and only the oldest participant mentioned that he learned Chinese painting in the art classroom. They learned from parents, peers, or private art teachers outside of school, and found it an

enjoyable experience. Some of them also mentioned that they preferred oil painting to Chinese painting when they were young; two participants even mentioned that the best students always chose to learn oil painting in university. However, they came to like Chinese painting when they had the chance to learn it. When most of them discussed their experience of being an artist, they all felt that their oil paintings benefited from practicing Chinese painting.

The participants' experiences demonstrate that school art education ignored teaching Chinese painting in art classrooms after 1949. Although Mao stated that art workers should explore and develop "national" or Chinese art (Wan, 2006, p. 169), learning Western art, to some degree, had a more important position in the art classroom.

Some of the participants had the experience of doing Chinese painting and enjoyed it, but in the art classroom, teachers rarely taught Chinese painting, a situation that continues today. This is because of two reasons. One is that some art educators believed that Chinese painting is separated from modern students' everyday lives. Today, people use hard pens instead of brushes as writing tools. Before learning to paint, students have to learn how to use a brush. Therefore, it is not practical to teach students Chinese painting in the art classroom. The other reason is that in the entrance exam for art school at university, only the basic skills of Western painting such as pencil and color sketching are tested, even if students want to study Chinese painting at university.

(ii) Chinese art teachers should be encouraged not only to teach students basic art knowledge and techniques, but also to find teaching material from the natural and cultural environments around their students. The participants all mentioned that in their childhood, the local landscape and cultural environment around them had a deep influence, and this effect is

still presented in their artistic creation. After some of them became mature artists, they were able to recognize the importance of the natural and cultural environment in the process of their art learning.

After 1949 in China, the teaching materials for art were prepared based on the mainstream concepts about what should be taught and the function of art in propaganda. Because of this, school art education should introduce basic knowledge about visual arts and general knowledge, both about the world and Chinese art history. Folk art from the local regions where students lived was often ignored. Since the 1980s, art education in China has been seen as teaching the basic knowledge and principles of art. In the 1990s, the Chinese Ministry of Education started to be aware of the problem that what teachers taught was far removed from the world around students, and began to encourage art teachers in different regions to add regional folk art and folk material to their curriculum, as a kind of supplement to the national textbooks. However, based on the participants' experiences, not only can local folk art be used as teaching material, but also the folk customs and habits, the local landscape and historical monuments of a particular region can be a means of exploration in the art classroom.

China has a long history and diverse landscape, and as a result, it has a rich and diverse heritage of folk customs and traditions. When art teachers use national art textbooks, they should integrate these customs and traditions into the curriculum and avoid mechanically following the textbook.

Suggestions for Chinese Art Educators

Based on the participants' experience of art learning, I have three suggestions for art

educators: one concerning art education policy, and two about art teaching content and teaching methods.

(i) In the past century, Chinese school art education over-emphasized societal values and needs, and totally ignored the cognitive developmental process of children. Furthermore, when they designed the curriculum, school art educators did not pay attention to the cultural background Chinese children live in. This led school art education to fail to consider the interest of students and to achieve the goals of national art education. The majority of the participants felt that they did not learn much art in school. Compared with their experiences in formal art learning, their non-formal and life learning were more effective and efficient. This is because in school, art teachers just presented material or information that was too far beyond the level of the students, designed more for teaching skills and concepts to adults. In most cases, children did not have the ability to keep up with the material. However, when the children made art outside of school, they had opportunities to try what they liked based on their own level, instead of pursuing the national art education objectives.

Art education is influenced by the needs of society, and what is taught and how to teach always change based on the needs of society. In the Chinese cultural environment this phenomenon is more obvious. In traditional Chinese culture, children are regarded as "little adults." Therefore, in early childhood education, children are educated to follow adult values and behaviors. Children are expected too soon to say farewell to their childhood and are forced to advance into the adult world (Liu, 2002; Winner, 1989). As Kinney (1995) points out,

[w]e find not only the prevailing notion that childhood is a phase of human development which is not valued for its own merits, but also, simultaneously, a deep reverence for the

intellectual and moral potential of the child, which required development through education.... Our sources also suggest a general tendency to place a high premium on juvenile precocity, self-control and studiousness and a correspondingly dim view of play and unrestrained activity. (p. 12).

Therefore, in such cultural context, Chinese art educators will encounter more challenges than their Western colleagues when they strive to follow child developmental process in the art classroom.

As Efland (1990) believes, art educators are not able to change or influence the needs of society, but can propose broader ideas about teaching content and methods in the art classroom. This does not mean, as Eisner points out, that the goals of art education should always be the same as the goals of government, influential groups or individuals. Eisner (1972) emphasizes, “every art educator has both the right and responsibility to analyze and criticize government art education policy and art education practices in society, in addition to offering their own ideas concerning the goals and methods of art education” (p. 59). This means that art educators are able to create art curricula that, in the long term, are more effective.

While the needs of society should be respected, the process of children’s cognitive development should also be considered. When Chinese art educators make art education policies or textbooks, it is necessary to consider both children’s developmental level and the world around them: social values, needs, and cultural context. Art education goals should be based on all of these factors, not just one of them.

(ii) While the changes that occurred in China during the 20th century had a significant influence on art teaching, the experience of art learning by the interviewees in this study also

reflected the process of how they learned art. Based on their recollections about learning art, it is clear that art skills and knowledge are gained not only from school, but also from everyday life. In addition, the visual experiences of their daily existence also played an important role in the development of their artistic concepts, knowledge and skills and their way of expressing themselves.

Although an individual's visual experience is influenced deeply by environmental context, traditional ceremonies, posters, films, comic books and so on, for most participants, this type of art learning experience was not evident. Often the visual experience of individuals was ignored because they did not have the opportunity to learn about, and thus understand the meaning of their visual experiences. Moreover, they did not receive any instructions from those with professional art training that could help students recognize and understand the meaning of their visual experiences. However, if a person's experiences in learning art are analyzed as a lifetime process of art learning, it is obvious that the "hidden" aspects of art learning in everyday life, along with other forms of life art learning, have a subtle but profound influence on the working process of artists and on their aesthetic concepts and technical skills. Those artists who had constructed their own body of concepts and skills were able to integrate the variety of their visual experiences into their systemic body of knowledge, whether their experiences occurred in childhood or adulthood. Most of their visual experience was hidden or existed as fragments during their early years of learning art and the time when they were learning from their personal experience how to become an artist. Only when they had a solid base of aesthetic concepts and skills could they start exploring by themselves instead of relying on the concepts and techniques taught by their teachers. It was as if they themselves could catch fish instead of getting fish

caught by others. However, this depends on the premise that they could develop the tools needed to catch fish.

When art educators consider what should be taught in schools, they should reflect on how to provide students with the tools to create works of art instead of just directly giving them the final result. School art education should help students develop art concepts and skills to integrate visual experiences from everyday life into their body of knowledge, instead of having fragmented knowledge. Moreover, school art education should enable students to formulate and acquire a new body of knowledge. Therefore, art teachers should help students integrate their individual visual experience and the knowledge they learn from everyday life into the knowledge of art that they acquire from textbooks, etc.

Based on the learning experiences of the participants, we can see how their interests and background influenced their learning. As Freedman (1970) argues,

educators should be aware of the interests and motivations of children, as well as the environment from which they come. Children's interest and their motivations were influenced by two factors. One is from their nature and other from the environment they come from. (p. 145)

We can clearly see from the experiences of the artists, drawn from different generations of 20th century China, that they were interested in drawing different subjects because they lived in different cultural and environmental contexts. The academic component of what is taught in schools is very important as a form of art literacy, but the "content" of the everyday lives of students is also important; particularly since the daily routine of people has been radically changed as science and technology develop. Therefore, art educators should always notice

students' visual experiences, detect the changes and reflect them in class. Art teachers should help students integrate their knowledge and skills from everyday life holistically into what they learn in the art classroom. As Freedman (2003) argues,

[k]nowledge is derived from a variety of sources outside of school, including visual culture. These fragmented, often contradictory, multidisciplinary, and intercultural references may have more to do with students understanding of a discipline. As a result, curriculum is beginning to include a greater focus on critical analyses of visual culture and on student assessment appropriate to the visual arts. (p. 22)

(iii) Teachers can use a wide variety of concrete experiences to help students learn art, such as working in groups to get experience, seeing from another perspectives, and doing art and field trips, etc. Based on the interviews, it is clear that not only did the artists learn art from teachers, but also from their peer groups, the process of making art, copying or imitating images from popular culture, seeing others doing art, playing games, taking part in folk activities, traveling and so on. Art educators should notice these learning methods and use them to help students learn art efficiently in art classrooms.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study examined the process of the Chinese artists' art learning across different generations in the past half-century. The questions needing further study are: Is it necessary for art teachers to teach Chinese painting in the art classroom today and how should it be taught? Secondly, how do art teachers help students integrate their knowledge and skills from everyday life into what they learn in the art classroom? Thirdly, what differences are there between how

males and females learn art in everyday life?

Some of the participants had experience doing Chinese painting and enjoyed doing it, but teachers in art classrooms rarely teach Chinese painting. Based on the experiences of the artists studied, it was discovered that they enjoyed Chinese painting and thought that it was something useful to learn.

Furthermore, compared with the past century, digital technology now plays a major role in students' lives. Their lives are surrounded by computers, videogames, digital music players, cell phones and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging have become important parts of their lives. Therefore, when Chinese art educators plan to encourage students to practice Chinese paintings, it is vital to study how to teach traditional Chinese art in school. Teachers should not only teach students traditional Chinese painting, but also help them go beyond it.

It is necessary to explore both how to teach and what should be taught in art classes, in order to help students integrate their visual experiences outside of school into their knowledge. In different social and cultural contexts, students have different visual experiences. Therefore, art teachers and art educators need to develop different teaching methods and course contents. However, it is always necessary for students to learn the basic knowledge of and techniques for making art.

Although there are only three female artists in the current study, these artists clearly had less experience learning art outside of school. In the future, it is necessary to study how male and female students develop their own visual experiences in everyday life.

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APPENDIX A: PERSONAL DATA AND INTERVIEWS WITH RESPONDENTS

Jin Zhi Lin

Jin was born in Hebei Province in May 1928. He studied at the National Beijing Art College and the Central Academy of Fine Arts from 1947 to 1951. After graduating from Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1951, he became a teacher in the Academy, and taught in the Department of Oil Painting and Deng Xi Wen's studio. In 1961, he was transferred to Jilin College of Fine Arts as a teacher. From 1973 to 1985, he settled in Yan'an, and worked in the Yan'an Masses Art Museum. He taught at the Folk Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts from 1986 to 1993. At the same time, He was a PhD supervisor, and a member of the National Education Commission of art textbooks for elementary and secondary school. In 2002, he received the French Supreme Council Gold Cross award. He has held several solo exhibitions in France and Beijing.

Interview with Jin Zhi Lin in his home in Beijing during summer 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born on May 5, 1928 in Luang Nan county, Hebei province. My grandfather was an educator, who founded the first public elementary school in my county after graduating from Bao Ding Teacher Training School. He was the principle in this school and all my brothers and sisters

studied there. My father graduated from Beijing Survey Training School, and he worked in Ningbo port as a Navy Flight Officer, and worked on the sea survey for the Navy.

Since my father was an only son, when my grandfather was seriously ill, he returned home to take care of him. After my grandfather died, my father inherited his career as the school's principal. Before the Second World War, the Japanese occupied my hometown and carried out a kind of slavery education (students were prohibited from speaking Chinese or study Chinese history or culture). Because my father was unwilling to do so, he resigned and stayed at home.

My father and grandfather had a good, traditional Chinese education that included studying Chinese culture and calligraphy. Generally, old Chinese intellectuals were good at calligraphy and writing classical poetry. My grandfather and my father were no exception. My family loved collecting antiques and paintings. When my father worked in Ningbo, he often bought antiques and Chinese paintings from Shanghai, Suzhou and other places. My father liked to look at his collections with children or friends. I have seen a lot of original Chinese paintings in part because my family had some when I was young. My education in Chinese painting has been mainly due to my family. In my hometown, there were not any oil painters, and we never went to art exhibitions. Although I had not seen any original oil paintings, I knew about them from the covers of magazines. My father subscribed to a lot of magazines. One of Magazines, *Orient*, published some oil paintings on the cover, several created by Xu Bei Hong. The colors tended to be purple and green, and thinking back it might be due to the poor printing quality. It made people feel that the elements of the painting were unstable. At that time, I did not understand why people painted in this way and I was not interested in them. Now I recognize

that these oil paintings were printed poorly.

I did love to collect stamps. I had been collecting stamps since the primary school, and I had many stamps. However, during the Cultural Revolution, (because I was considered an authority in painting and could be targeted as 'bourgeois' by the Red Guard) I could not guarantee my safety. So I asked one of my relatives to keep these stamps. However, a series of my stamps consisted of portraits of Chiang Kai-shek. My relative was very afraid of this, and he burnt all my stamps. I have always felt very sorry about that.

When I was a kid, I never thought to be a painter because our family was against fame and wealth. My grandfather and my father were detached. Their life philosophy was not being well known, not becoming an official or a businessman.

My family mainly depended on the wages of my grandfather and father, and did not have a lot of land. We had a pond with reeds, and a vegetable garden with peach and cherry trees. After it rained, we were able to find a lot of crabs on the paths the next morning. I lived a kind of pastoral life. As a child, my siblings and I also participated in working in the fields. I had deep feelings for rural nature. I really loved nature and the colors outdoors.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

I did not do a lot of art when I was a child. I just remember two things related doing art. Once, after picking beans in the fields in the evening, I saw red clouds and a sunset. It was very beautiful, so I rushed home, and quickly returned with some painting tools to reproduce it on paper. It was about in the fourth grade of primary school. Today, I am not able to remember what material I used, whether watercolors or ink. However, it was not pencil, because I remember that

I brought a water bottle. This is one of the two events that I can remember where I created art.

The other one was in the fifth grade in primary school in the summer. When I was in the classroom at noon, the sun was very strong. Ivies with dark purple shadows were on the white walls, and I was totally absorbed by them. I had not yet seen the impressionists' artworks at that time, but I was very interested in color under the bright sunshine. I used watercolors to paint it.

We had art class in primary school. We used pencil to draw in grade one and grade two. Starting the third grade we used Chinese ink to draw, as well as watercolors. Our art teacher was a famous local Chinese painter. I always remember that the teacher drew a pine tree on the blackboard as an example to let us copy. His lines for the tree were very smooth, but I drew a distorted image even though there was an example. I was not able to draw an accurate outline. This is my nature. Later, when I studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, in order to compensate for my weakness, I made a lot of effort to practice sketching. My professor Xu Bei Hong was able to draw very smoothly. I like Van Gogh's style, but I am not able to draw like Ingres.

My hometown was famous because of Shadow plays. When I was a child, I was able to watch the Shadow play every week. If the Shadow play was performed using light at night it was called Plying, but if it was performed using the sun's rays in day, we called it as Xiying. The Puppets were beautiful.

Our village had a Guandi temple. If it did not rain in the summer, the peasants would put on the Guandi sculpture parade, and it was very interesting. In the sunshine, Guandi's face was red, and his head also sweat. We children were very curious about it, and we went to the back to check. We discovered that somebody put oil on his head so that he looked like he sweated.

In 1940, the Japanese occupied my hometown when I was in the fifth grade. My life changed a great deal. The Japanese had started their changes to the Chinese educational system, which my father objected to, and he quit his job. After Grandfather died and my father lost his job, suddenly my family had big difficulties because we had been living on their salaries.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

During my first winter vacation in secondary school, I came back home during the New Year. One midnight, the Japanese army went to our village to grab food and carts. They grabbed me to be a coachman because my older brother studied in Beijing and my younger brother was too young. Therefore, they arrested me. An old man, my neighbor helped me escape from this mischance. He told the translator he wanted me to fetch his cigarettes from his home. I understood what he meant, and I ran back and hid in a haystack. I did not come out until there were no sounds. Then, I went back to the school to my region, and I did not return until 1956. At that time, my hometown was in an area that the Japanese army and the Communist army occupied alternately.

In 1946, the communist party carried out the land reform for the first time. It was difficult to decide if my family was part of the peasantry or the land owning class. At that time, there were two identities, landlords and peasants. My family did not have extra land, but we had a lot of antiques. Finally, it was decided that my family was part of the middle peasantry. However, in 1947, our hometown had a second land reform. This time, the organization was much more politically left wing, and my family was classified as part of the landlord class. However, my father did not agree with this and he had a very difficult time from that time on.

I had been living independently since 1941, when I started the first grade of secondary school up until I graduated from university. It is easy to imagine the difficulties I encountered during these years.

My art teacher at secondary school was a well-known local Chinese painter, Zhang Yun Qian. He liked me. His son was my classmate. During summer and winter holidays, I stayed at his house. He liked to teach his son and I Chinese painting. His paintings were very good, and he was not only able to draw flowers, but also birds and landscapes.

At that time, I copied many comic books. I liked novels about martial arts and knights. Next door to my school was a small store. For a penny, we could rent comic books to read or copy. At that time, all images of comic books were drawn using line. I don't remember what special things I copied. Although I did not have strong ability to draw in a realistic way, I loved to copy comic books.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in Beijing Teaching Training School and in university as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

In 1944, after graduating from secondary school, the art teacher provided his son and me with some money to go to Beijing and take the high school entrance exam. This was because my county did not have a high school. His son was not accepted by any high school, and went home. I was admitted to the Beijing Teacher Training School. It was the only teacher training school to train primary school teachers in Beijing. Therefore, both the Japanese and the Kuo Ming Dang party funded the school (the school was a means for both the Japanese and the Kuo Ming Dang to promote their own specific political and social aims). There were many art books and

paintings in the school library.

I formally started learning painting at this time. My art teacher, Li Zhi-Chao, was a famous Chinese painter in Beijing. His art style was seen as more conservative. When he taught us, we mainly practiced by copying Shi Tao's paintings. I also had a private teacher, Mr. Wu Jing Ting. One of my classmates, Zhang An Ban introduced him to me. He encouraged me to copy Wang Shi Gu's paintings instead of copying Jiang Zhi Yuan Hua. This had great influence on me, starting my formal study of Chinese painting.

Because our school was to train elementary school teachers, music, sports and art were very important subjects. Those students who were one grade ahead than me organized the Holly Painting Association. My school offered a classroom as a studio and a large painting table. After completing our studies every day, my classmates went to sleep, while I went to the studio. In the studio, first, I would light some incense to make my mind calm down. I used to copy scrolls of Chinese paintings, so after I was more relaxed, I started my work. I often copied a small part of a scroll every day. Today I still keep a painting that I copied when I was 17 or 18 years old. It is also almost two meters long. Besides practicing Chinese painting, one of my classmates' brother taught us pencil sketching.

My school offered students food and clothing because it was a teacher training school. In summer, they distributed winter clothes, and in winter, we could get the summer clothes. Therefore, when the summer was over I sold the summer clothes and in the spring I sold the winter clothes. My teachers and my classmates were nice to me. When staying in high school, in order to survive, I did a lot of part-time work. I often went to Tianjin to buy watermelon and millet to sell in Beijing. I also sold newspapers.

At that time, my life was very difficult, but I never thought to make a little bit money through selling paintings. I just liked to paint. In the beginning of 1947, the year I graduated from teacher training school, the Yellow River flooded, and many people suffered from it. In Beihai Park, the Beijing art community held a charity exhibition, and sold paintings to help victims. I made four paintings, *spring*, *summer*, *autumn* and *winter* for this exhibition. The first morning, I went to the park very early, and the first thing I saw was that my paintings had been sold because they had a red ‘sold’ label attached to them. This was the first time for me to participate in an art exhibition. This gave me great encouragement.

In 1946, Xu Bei Hong came to Beijing to set up the College of Fine Art. I saw his exhibition in the same year. This was the first time for me to see such good paintings, and I was moved by them deeply, especially one of his oil paintings, *Flute*. An oriental woman who was playing the flute was very elegant, and the background was autumn water and sky. When I saw his paintings, I decided to study painting at the art college. At that time, there were two majors in the Beijing College of Fine Arts, the Department of Chinese Painting and the Department of Western Painting. I decided to study Western painting because I loved paintings with beautiful color. Although I liked Chinese paintings, Chinese painting just emphasizes how to use Chinese ink instead of color.

After graduating in 1947, I applied for the Beijing College of Fine Art. That year there was a controversy about Chinese painting. My teacher from the teacher training school, Mr. Lee Zhi Chao expressed his opposition to Xu Bei Hong’s artistic ideas. He believed that Xu Bei Hong's Chinese paintings were not real Chinese painting because they were influenced by Western art. Mr. Lee and his group also went to our classroom to convince us to write articles

against Xu Bei Hong. Both groups wanted to get the support of young students. As a student, I was not sure which side I should support, since I liked both.

In this college, all teachers followed a realistic style like that of Xu Bei Hong. Before liberation in 1949, there were two groups of oil painters in China. One line followed traditional European art, like most of our teachers who studied in France or other European countries and received training at different royal academies in Europe. They accepted classical art up to the Impressionistic period, but were against post- impressionism and the art concepts that followed. The other group was influenced by Japanese oil painting and by those who had studied oil painting in Japan. They accepted more modern art concepts than those who studied in Europe. This was because Japan had industrialized relatively recently, and that they believed that Western art from the Impressionistic period and later was more important than what came before it. After liberation in 1949, it added a third school of painting, Russian style of oil painting.

In this college, I did not do any still life or portraits. In the first year, we started from drawing plaster casts of ancient Greek sculptures. Then we drew the Roman and Renaissance plaster cases, such as Michelangelo's slaves, and Laocoon. In the third year, we began to draw pencil sketches of nude models. Then, we painted nudes in oil. Teachers would like to demonstrate to the students how to draw or paint. However, as far as my personal interest was concerned, I was interested in modern art. I tried to paint following ideas and methods of Cubism. At that time, the Second World War was over, and Japan had surrendered. I bought a lot of Japanese art magazines that I was able to read because the period of Japanese control of the Chinese education system allowed me to learn Japanese. Most of the artworks' themes in these magazines glorified the Japanese invasion. I ripped out all of these paintings, and just kept the

Picassos, Kandinsky's and other modern artists featured in these magazines. I compiled a history of modern art that included a total of 36 artists.

In 1948, the professors of my college held an art exhibition in Beijing. This is the best exhibition I have ever seen in my life. It included Chinese paintings and oil paintings because most professors were able to do both. Professor Dong Xi Wen's oil paintings were my favorite paintings. His *Road Team* depicted a group of workers who were constructing the road in the sunshine. Another of his paintings, *Desert Camel*, represented a group of camels traveling in the desert at sundown. I also liked Mr. Wu Zuo Ren's painting, *a Tibetan Woman Backing Water* compared with other his paintings with classical techniques and were created in the studio. My favorite artworks represented life outdoors. At that time, I had not any opportunity to see the artwork from the communist areas.

In university, I had to make a living by myself like in teacher training school. Professor Xu Bei Hong introduced me to an elementary school to teach drawing classes in order to make a living. Every Thursday and Friday afternoon, I taught kids instead of going to class. I was able to get a bag of white flour each month, which I gave to the student canteen in lieu of a monthly food fee. The experience of making a living by myself had a great influence on me. It made me sympathize with the working class and it made me like to talk to them

In 1949, when the PLA besieged Beijing, I was in a desperate state because I did not have food to eat. The elementary school where I taught had closed. I had a Chinese painting that my father gave me, which was green and blue landscape 3 or 4 meters long and very beautiful. My father told me I should only sell it if I was in very serious difficulties. Because I needed to get money to buy food, I brought it to an antiques market to sell, but they told me that it was a fake.

One of my Chinese painting teachers told me that painting was real, but the inscription was a fake. If I cut off this part of it I could sell it. I did like what the teacher said, and I got a bag of flour immediately. Today, this painting could sell for ten million. At that time, I felt desperate. On the one hand, I wasn't able to get food. On the other hand, I was also still looking for my own artistic language. Soon, Beijing was liberated, and I had a scholarship and grant. I was really enthusiastic. After liberation, our world underwent a big change. The government gave us scholarships or grants. After graduating, we were able to get jobs in the art field. Before liberation, graduation meant unemployment for students, and the most of my fellow graduates weren't able to work in art related jobs.

Before Liberation, why didn't we have food to eat? It was because grain merchants hoarded food. After liberation, these merchants were arrested and we all had food. At that time, our teachers often let us sketch at the Tiang Bridge neighborhood where poor folk artists performed. As soon as Beijing was liberated, thugs and criminals who bullied folk artists were arrested. Folk art and peasant art appeared in the national art community. China's feudal society had lasted 2000 years, and peasants had been oppressed. Now the peasants began to become their own masters.

In 1949, the New China was born, and Art Department of the Lu Xun Art Academy from Yan'an and Beijing College of Fine Arts were merged into the Academy of Fine Art, which was called the Central Academy of Fine Arts. The art in Yan'an had a great impact on me. It allowed me to leave the ivory tower and enter the real life and interact with the masses and visit the countryside.

In fact, in Beijing before the liberation, I had seen art from communist areas. One of my

classmates showed me a book of woodprints selected during the 8 year Anti-Japanese War in China's northern provinces. My favorite work was Vegetable Garden that was created by Gu Yuan. In this woodprint, people were reaping cabbage, and the Loess Plateau was in the far distance. It included three colors, white, black and light green. The artwork was full of a clear, healthy, radiant feeling, which I had never seen in Beijing in the Academy. At that time, I really felt that the sky was clearing in the communist areas, and people's lives were healthy. I liked Yan'an's art. It was what I hoped to pursue.

In 1949, I found my own artistic language at the first national conference of representatives from arts community.

In 1949, the first of the national conference of representatives from arts community was held in Beijing. As a student, I took part in this conference's party as a volunteer and a singer of the chorus. This was my first time seeing Chairman Mao. Two performances at the conference impacted my artistic concept deeply.

Li Bo, a singer from the Lu Xun Art Academy, sang a Yan'an folk song "The sun rises, the mountain is red". It was so resonant and brightened my heart. Whenever I hear this song, I am brought to tears. I also saw how Mao was affected by this song.

Another was the Huaihai Campaign Songs. Singers were soldiers participating in the Huaihai Campaign. They just came back from the front. Their faces were black and red, and their uniforms were washed to be the old gray. Their singing was full of passion. I was extremely touched. This is my favorite concert that I have ever seen.

I still have the playbill. During the Cultural Revolution, when I lost everything and had only one quilt, I still kept it. In this party, I recognized what kind art was I expected to create.

One of my classmates was a ticket collector. He did not know Chairman Mao. When Chairman Mao came, he asked Chairman Mao to show his ticket. After he came back to the Academy, he told us that he was scared. It became a joke in our class.

After the liberation, folk songs from Yan'an's, woodblock printing, New Year pictures, and paper-cutting that were created by the masses touched my heart. Yuan An's art from was so positive and healthy. Before liberation, in Beijing, the best art was from those progressive intellectuals like Xu Bei Hong, and the art from the lower classes had never been seen. When the Japanese occupied Beijing, the city was full of decadent music.

At the end of 1949, Professor Dong Xi Weng painted a portrait of Chairman Mao with us, six students in the Academy of Fine Arts, and this portrait was hung in Tiananmen. Then high schools' and universities' students went to clean and scrub the Tiananmen Square that was piled full of garbage. After cleaning it up, we took part in the founding ceremony.

In 1951, after graduating, I became a teacher at the Center Academy of Fine Arts. I often went to the countryside or factories to understand masses' life with students. We organized art classes for workers in the Taiyuan Iron and Steel factory. In 1954, I took my students to rural areas for a few months. The local youth group engaged in agricultural experiments and corn pollination. It took only a few years for China's agriculture to quickly develop. This was great. At that time my work reflected the working people as heroes in the labor scene. I used oil painting to sketch these exciting moments, such as *Women working in the field, peasants digging the well*.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience you had and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

As a young teacher, I had many chances to sketch outside or cooperate with the great masters. Therefore, my artistic skills and concepts were greatly enhanced. I still remember some of their ideas of art. Prof. Wang Shi Kuo believed that a portrait should reflect a person's family history. Professor Dong Xi Weng believed that the oil painting that was created by Chinese artists should reflect Chinese people's aesthetics instead of imitating Western styles.

In the early 50's, the 19th century Russian critical realism and contemporary Soviet realism were introduced into China. In 1955, a Soviet artist Markc Hmobk. (1913 - 1993) taught a training course at the Central Academy of Fine Arts for two years. I did not participate in this class, but I often visited it and it had a great influence on my use of color in oil painting.

In the same year, I accepted the task from the Military Museum to paint Luo Sheng Jiao's portrait. In order to save a North Korean girl who fell into the water, he died. I went to Democratic Republic of Korea for two months to collect data to do this painting. Although the cease-fire agreement was signed it was still not safe. I had to travel at night.

As long as China was liberated, I hoped to go to Yan'an, but I never had the chance.

In 1958, the ten most important buildings in China were built or being built in Beijing, three of which were the History Museum, the Museum of the Revolution and the Military Museum. Professor Luo Gong Liu and I were responsible for organizing artists to create paintings for these three museums. The titles and sizes of the paintings had been decided by the committee from each Museum. Luo was a famous professor, and didn't have the time to do this. Therefore, he let me to do it. I was his secretary. I distributed different subjects of to the teachers at CAFA. One of the titles of prospective work was the Great Production Movement, and because I wanted to go to Yan'an, I gave myself this subject so that I could travel there.

So in 1959, I went to Yan'an to paint Chairman Mao in the Great Production Movement. This was my first to visit Yan'an. I found it an extremely sacred place. When we arrived there by airplane, it was in the afternoon. The sunlight was glittering on Bao Ta Hill. The golden hill and blue sky were reflected in the water. It was very beautiful. It was impossible for me to describe how happy I was.

The day after my arrival, I moved into a peasants' home. In the morning, I went to a mountain to herd sheep with a young man. My first portrait was the young man. This time, what I learned from the Impressionists like Monet, Matisse, and Xu Beihong had disappeared. It was because everything was loess, his face was the color of earth, and the sky was the color of loess. The reflected light was not blue. I could not find any cold tones so I used my passion to paint. My oil paintings were local oil paintings instead of Western oil paintings. I also visited a peasant who talked with Chairman Mao during the Great Production Movement and I painted his portrait. I treasure these two works and I have never wanted to sell them.

Good artwork should come from my heart and have the feeling of everyday life. I do not like artwork that focuses on technique and ignores feeling. No matter what painting I do, I hope that they are from life.

In 1960, the Military Museum needed the historical painting of Nan Ni Wan, and I accepted this commission. I went to Yan'an and stayed there almost a half of year. The relationships between the communists and the common people, and relationships between army and masses impressed me. The masses and doing labor is my creative philosophy. My artistic statement of the painting was in masses and in labor. At that time, there was a three-year period of natural disasters in China, and I wanted to use this theme to inspire people all over the country

to unite and overcome difficulties. I traveled to the mountains and rivers in Nan Ni Wan, and sketched a lot as raw data. Finally, I took almost four years to finish it. It was 260cmX95cm. During the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards wanted to destroy it because the leader who organized the army to plant grain in Nan Ni Wan was purged. The military museum let me remove it and keep it. In 2007, I sold it.

At that time, the articles that I wrote also focused on the idea that art should come from the masses, and give back to the masses. This was also my artistic statement. When I painted, whether the oil painting of *Nan Ni Wan*, or oil painting of *Chairman Mao taking part in the great production movement in Yan'an*, I always painted soldiers working with peasants in the wilderness or Chairman Mao staying with soldiers and peasants. I did not only paint leaders or soldiers. I liked to paint Chairman Mao, soldiers and peasants together.

After I came back from Yan'an, I wrote an application to the Academy and wanted to become a peasant in Yuan An. This was because I wanted to integrate myself among the workers and the peasants. I have believed that the best quotation of Mao Ze Dong's is "There is a standard to see if intellectuals are revolutionary, are not revolutionary, or are counter-revolutionary: if they combine themselves with workers and peasants, they are revolutionaries. If they do not themselves become workers or peasants, they are not revolutionary or counter-revolutionary. There is only one line that determines whether he could combine with the workers and peasants or not."

In 1961, because some thought I was a Guo Ming Dang when I was in high school, The Central Academy of Fine Arts transferred me to the Jin Lin Province Art College. In fact, this accusation was false, but I did not know about this until 1966. In 1955, I went to this province

and painted the large forest. The majestic landscape of the Northern motherland was very exciting. However, at that time, after coming back from Yan'an, my aesthetics had changed. Pure natural landscape was not what I was really interested in. I liked landscape with human life and culture. I also loved the life of peasants, including their paper cuts, folk songs and their life style. Therefore, this transfer made me flummoxed. However, at that time, the organization could make us go where, and we had to go. Not to mention, I was a deputy secretary of the Communist Youth League and as such I was expected to obey.

I went to the Jilin College of the Art as an oil painting teacher. Although I also went to the northeastern rural areas of the province and visited workers, I still missed Yan'an. At that time, in the whole of Jilin Province, only one person subscribed the *Yan'an daily*, and it was me. When I heard the folk songs of Yuan'an, my tears were unstoppable. Therefore, I asked the leader of the college to allow me to go to Yuan'an to paint during my vacation. The school leaders at the college told me that in Beijing, you could travel all over the country to paint, but now in Jilin province, you had to stay in Jilin. My artworks all represented the Northeastern landscape and the life of the people who lived there, such as *ChangBai Forest Sea*, and *Storm in Birches*.

There is a price to life. It was not that Chairman Mao advocated that people should totally immerse themselves in everyday life of the masses without sacrifice. Everything does not come without a struggle.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution started. If I was in Beijing, I would have been a small potato, and no one would have paid attention to me. However, in Jilin, I became an authority, and became one of the demons. Radical Cultural Revolutionists did not believe that I wanted to go to Yan'an and combine the workers and peasants. They thought that Liu Shao Qi sent me to Yan'an

as guerilla to overthrow the regime. They tried to force me to inform on my fellow teachers. I did not want to talk nonsense, but eventually I could not bear their criticism. I decided to commit suicide and jumped off a building, but I did not die. My family was destroyed from these attacks.

Later, no evidence was found, and I was no longer a target. In 1969, we were all sent to a May Seventh Cadre School. These years working as a laborer were very good for me. I really learned something about life. I learned logging, raising deer, house building, planting corn and rice, and driving carts. There, my comrades were from different fields, and including singers, policemen, professors, agriculture experts and so on. It was like a small society. Before, all my contacts were painters, and it was a limited circle in an academic ivory tower. Many people said they lost a lot in the Cultural Revolution. However, for me, as long as I survived, it was like a harvest. This was because I really entered into society. I embraced life in the Cultural Revolution. I had a few opportunities to paint after work, and used them to record the life at the cadre school, producing works like: *After working in the field*, *Playing Chess*, and *Sunday in the Cadre School*.

In 1973, the Cadre School was disbanded. At that time, Yan'an established the Masses' Museum of Art. The Museum needed a painter so I went Yan'an. The curator was Li Zi Xin, who was an artist in Yan'an before 1949. After liberation, Yan'an's artists like Li Zi Xin were considered to have life experience, but needed to improve their technique. Therefore, the Central Academy of Fine Arts set up a cadre class in Beijing for these artists from the communist areas.

When I was at CAFA, I taught him pencil sketching.¹³

In August 1973, Premier Zhou En Lai (Premier of the People's Republic of China) went to Yan'an and found that peasants did not have enough food to eat. However, before 1949, when Chairman Mao was there, the peasants had surplus food every year. Zhou En Lai told the local leaders to guarantee that the peasants there would have enough to eat within three years. Therefore, the central task of Yan'an was to produce grain.

I realized that painting was not able to resolve the practical difficulties of peasants. We, as professional artists, could paint, participate in art exhibitions in Beijing, publish our artworks in the art journal and receive awards, but this did not help the lives of peasants. They did not see the exhibitions or read art magazines. My oil paintings could not help them. At this time I recognized that I would become a builder in Yan'an instead of an artist.

I started to think about how to serve workers and peasants through art. During these years, there was a very famous county in China, Hu County, where peasant paintings were very good. Local peasants expressed their life through art. I went there to learn because I wanted to encourage the masses to make art to promote agricultural production.

After visiting Hu county, I went to the poorest county in Yan'an and worked there for more than a year. I organized three art groups for villagers, workers and a traffic police, and helped them to learn painting technique and to depict the things around them with murals, propaganda, and paper cutting. By painting murals, drawing comic books, writing poetry, and

singing folk songs to praising good behavior and satirize bad conduct. Using art promoted production. I rarely had time to paint. I invested myself in using art to help peasants improve their agricultural production.

In 1974, urban educated youth from Beijing came to Yan'an to receive reeducation from peasants. I was excited. This group of 17 or 18-year-old young people came to participate in the construction of Yan'an. They had the same dream as me: to become unified with the masses. I saw them as my comrades although I was 20 years older than them. I established a good friendship with these educated youth, and I painted many of their portraits.

Cheng Zhi Xing was one of them. In 1969, when she was 16 years old, she came to Yan'an from Beijing, and worked in the countryside voluntarily with other young people from the cities to help reform the countryside. She worked with peasants in the field with all her heart to improve production, and they in turn greatly admired her. When I went to the countryside I saw how she led the masses of people to protect crops from the flash floods that often occurred in the region, and work with the masses to organizing meetings. I created a portrait based on her called *Female Director*. A young lady was sitting on the stone bed with an old lamb fur coat that an old peasant gave her. She had just finished reading a government report and was listening to opinions of the peasants. I focused on the relationship between her. The old hoe behind her represented the relationship between her and the masses of people, showing that she was a member of the masses.

However, when this painting was sent to the National Art Exhibition, the Committee believed that the figure was too personal and was not good-looking enough. Furthermore, her coat was too old, and it should be replaced with a newer one. Third, the kerosene lamp was

symbol of poverty and backwardness, and it should be removed. I covered up the kerosene lamp, but I did not change the image of the character, nor the coat. As a result, the painting was not displayed in the Exhibition. In July 1980, the editor of Art Magazine, He Xin, came to Yan'an and saw this painting. He believed that this was a good painting. In 1980, He published the article *Reading the Female Director created by Jin Zhi Lin*, in that magazine. In this article, he argued that art should start from life. The art concept that was typically used, using the color red with light, bright imagery, should be abandoned. He pointed out that the typicality was based on the personality in artistic creation. At this time, Chinese art community was pretty conservative. In the same year, this magazine published the picture of Venus by Botticelli and Michelangelo's David, causing a big debate because many people, including many artists, believed that these were not art but eroticization.

In 1976, the Gang of Four was removed from power. The Chinese government advocated strengthening national and traditional culture. As an art worker, I started working on it consciously. In 1979, I started a survey of folk art in Yan'an.

We went from village to village to do surveys, and organized the first folk art exhibition for folk artists in Beijing in 1980. I had spent most of my time involved in this survey on local culture and folk art that had been ignored since the 19th century. For me, the folk art has cultivated my art concept like milk nurtures a child. These folk artists from the countryside showed me another art concept that was different from the mainstream. During this time, my artwork reflected and recorded the local folk life, such as *Anse Xi River Funeral*, *the Lantern Festival*. In fact, my paintings recorded folk customs and reflected folk art.

We invited some peasant folk artists to the county cultural centers to do paper-cutting for

a month. The cultural centers provided materials to them. These women were very happy because they were able to see their value in society. Traditional art in this region was preserved very well. However, some professional artists from our museums criticized their artwork as being low art, for example, criticizing the artists' lack of ability with perspective. Why did we study and inherit such kind of art? After a discussion, these artists agreed that these folk artists did not need perspective because they had a different type of artistic concept.

When I started work on the survey, I really liked the paper cutting done by these artists because of their use of traditional patterns, radiant color and vivid lines. In fact, until that time, I had never studied them or understood them from a cultural or social perspective.

I later found out, after talking with folk artists, that those old patterns had special cultural meanings. The life of society was multidimensional and alive. Marriage was human reproduction, and the Spring Festival represents reproduction in the natural world.

That year, I started to read art history, history, and different kinds of ancient books because folk artwork involved not only painting and paper cutting, but was also somewhat related to anthropology. For example, a grandmother that creates a paper cutting of five dolls holding hands is using the same image as what was painted on prehistoric pottery. Chinese art history generally refers to it as the *dancing dolls*, and it meant that people danced as a kind of entertainment after doing labor. I showed this picture in a book to the grandmother. She replied that they were not dancing dolls, but that the five figures represented the five different gods of east, west, north, south, and the center. People used the five dolls to protect their home.

These old women helped me open the door to see many of the old prototypes hidden in everyday life, revealing the common and conventional folk and cultural symbols. Especially the

grandmothers' artistic concepts enriched my artistic creation.

1982, because of a France-China Friendship Association's invitation, a folk art master and I went to France to perform. This was my first trip abroad. I had an opportunity to visit the Louvre. I admired Delacroix's painting. I took over three hours to look at it and I could not walk away.

When I stayed in France, the Grand Palace was displaying Chinese painting masters' artworks, such as works by Qi Bei Shi, Wu Chang Shuo, Ren Bo Nian, and Huang Bin Hong. These were the masters of China, but there few people visited it. However, the comic exhibition from China was crowded. Therefore, the common principle of art is after being touched by someone or something the artist has the urge or necessity to create. However, each nation has its own philosophy and aesthetics. This is a natural element in art and culture. Chinese oil painting needed to express Chinese aesthetics and life.

In Western art, landscape represents the landscape as an object, but Chinese landscape painting emphasizes humans as an integral part of nature. In a painting, mountains were always in the upper part of the image, with the water at the bottom, and people in the middle. In Western still life, flowers are removed from plants, and birds were killed. However, Chinese painting called still life is painting of birds and flowers which are still a living part of nature.

1985 was an important time for Chinese because ideas about art were starting to become more liberated. That winter, the artwork done by a contemporary artist from the United States, Robert Rauschenberg, was first displayed in Beijing. His installations, made with materials from everyday life, made a deep impression on Chinese artists. The chairman of the Oil Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts at that time, Wen Li Peng, said when the

museum staffs opened the box, they just saw some feathers, rubber, wheels, and they thought that these material were to pack the boxes. Therefore, they threw them to the side, and then went looking for his artworks. In fact, these things were part of his artworks. *Chinese Art Paper* used three quarters of its issue to discuss Rauschenberg's exhibition, an unprecedented thing.

In December of the same year, the Central Academy of Fine Arts Department of Comics and Festival Paintings invited six older female folk artists from Yan'an to introduce folk art to students.

This department was founded in 1979. Jiang Feng, a famous painter who had recently been rehabilitated after the Cultural Revolution, was appointed as the president of the Academy. He built this department based on the idea that art was to serve the masses. However, soon television and movie stars became popular and comic books became less and less important in public life. Students graduating from this department found it difficult to find an appropriate job. At the same time Western contemporary art began to enter China, especially the Robert Rauschenberg's solo exhibition create a great shock in the Chinese art community. In this case, the Chairman of the Department of Comics and Festival Painting decided to make this department the Folk Art Department. My article, "China's folk art modeling system" (1985) published in *Art Research*, a journal of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, provided theoretical support for this change. Based on my survey and research in Yan'an, I argue that folk art was an independent of the traditional system of Chinese painting and the Western system of art. I see it as a third system.

When those six women introduced fork art to students in Beijing, one event had a deep impact on my artistic creation. One artist was very good at cutting a tiger, but before she had

never seen tiger. After visiting the Beijing Zoo, and saw tigers, she was excited and started to cut tigers because she saw real tigers in zoo. The next morning, the artist showed her paper-cut tigers to me. I found that these tigers were not as good as that the ones that she had cut before. She cut her tigers based on impressions of real tigers she saw in the zoo, and she tried to depict their movement. However, because she did not have basic skills of sketching and drawings, it was difficult for her to express movement. As a result, she became less able to reproduce the tiger in her paper cuttings. It made me reconsider the relationship between art and life, art cannot simply come from experiencing life. It was right that the life was the source of art, but art was not necessarily a direct reflection of life. In the beginning, somebody saw tigers, and they cut patterns of the tigers based on what they saw. Then, the patterns were passed down from generation to generation. Step by step, tigers became a symbol and different folk artists gave their tigers some new elements based on their aesthetics even though they did never see any tigers. I changed my art concept of realism, a style that I had learned from the mainstream art world.

In 1986, I transferred back to the Folk Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts as a professor teaching theory courses. I mainly engaged in anthropological research. Sometimes, I took part in some art exhibitions and I still continue to paint, but just focused on landscape because through landscape I could express myself. I was not interested in painting figures. My research focused on the continuation and development of Living China's original culture.

I started from the traditional patterns of paper-cutting and their variant patterns, using folk customs and folk art, unearthed relics, and archaeological literature to find the linkages

between them in order to reveal the origins of Chinese culture. Although some of my books had been translated into French and Japanese, painting is still the most important thing in my life. I did research because it is one of my responsibilities.

After retiring, I had time to paint. I stayed in Beijing in the spring each year, visiting the parks and interesting places in Beijing to sketch. When summer comes, I return to my hometown in the country to sketch. During the autumn, I travel to the villages along the Yellow River to paint. I sometimes draw crazily, I feel that I am not able to control my brush, and I do not care about color and volume. In this state my emotions are volatile. When I am like this I feel emerged in nature, as if I have become part of nature. My oil paint involved with traditional Chinese painting elements. My oil paintings' sizes follow Traditional Chinese painting's Tiao Fu. I used Chinese brush to paint my oil painting in order to express my feeling more freely. In fact, my oil painting reflected Chinese aesthetic view.

Of course, some people criticize that the colors of my paintings are not right. In 2004, when I had my solo exhibition in France, I discussed this problem with several French artists, but they did not see anything wrong. Many housewives liked my work in France.

Mr. Kalan, the chairman of the Charles Leopold Meyer Foundation for Human Progress proposed having an international peasant festival in Yan'an because he "believes that when professional artists from different cultures meet, they like to compare and emphasize what is different between their cultures. However, the folk art often reflects what is common between human cultures. Therefore, when folk artists communicate with each other, it makes the different cultures more linked with each other." In 2007, he helped organized the first International Peasants' Art Festival in China. In order to organize it, he rarely had time to paint although he

loved painting. This is because he believed “that artists’ mission was not only to make art, but also to help the masses enjoy art, love life and do art.”

Although when he was a young people, his artwork *Nan Ni Wan* was successful, and because worked in Beijing, I was in the center of Chinese art community. However, after he left Beijing in 1961, he believed that he “left the art center of Chinese art.” Hence, I no longer followed the mainstream and I did what I liked. If China wasn’t liberated in 1949, my art would have been more abstract because I had started to explore that in several pieces. However, after liberation, our president Xu Bei Hong in the Central Academy of Fine Arts advocated a realistic style, so my paintings had to focus on characters and them to create a dramatic story. Honestly, I did not have this ability. In all my artworks, only one piece. After coming back the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I became an academic scholar of anthropology, although I also participate in various exhibitions.

Today, sometimes, I also feel confused. As far as my painting is concerned, the art community does not recognize me because they think I am an academic scholar. Archeologists don’t respect me because they think I am an artist. But it is not too bad. I am able to do what I want to do without any restrictions.

Liu Bing Jiang

Liu is a professor at the National Minorities University. Even as a teacher during the Cultural Revolution, he traveled extensively in the southwest, Tibet and Xinjiang, collecting a vast number of drawings and sketches. In 1980, he and his wife Zhou Ling took two years to create a huge mural in the Beijing hotel, *Creativity Reaping Happiness*. In 1982, the Chinese

government sent him to Paris as visiting scholar to study at Lu Xia Guan's studio for 2 years.

He was born in Beijing in 1937, the only child of parents whose families were involved in banking. After seeing Xu Bei Hong's solo exhibition in 1954, he was inspired to become an artist and prepared for the entrance examination of the Central Fine Art College, refusing opportunities to study in the Military University and Beijing University. In 1957, he studied at the Central Fine Art College, but in 1959 he was branded a "white student" and censured for focusing on art study at the expense of political struggle. After graduating in 1961, he taught art in the National Minorities University. After 1977, he became an influential artist in China.

Interview: Liu Bing Jiang in her studio and her home during summer, 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that you saw, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to do art at that time.

I was born in Beijing in 1937, the only child of parents whose families were involved in banking. I remember that when I felt alone, around age of four or age of five, I often drew oxen, horses, cameras or figures on the walls or on the paving stones in the yard with chalk. I was really interested in animals. At that time, there were many oxen, horses, and camels that carried coal or other goods into the city. A fellow led a long line of camels that had bells hanging from their necks. You could hear the jingling of the bells. Whenever I heard it, I was always excited and opened the gate to go outside to see the camels - it was always very interesting. After seeing the line of these enormous animals, when I got back home, I really wanted to draw them with a

pencil and paper. When I was interested in something, I liked to draw it in pencil or chalk.

Later, when I was a little bit older, I became interested in picture cards you could get in boxes of cigarettes, called Yangpian. Those picture cards had a great influence on me. The cards had images on them of the characters from traditional Chinese classical literature, from such works as the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, *All Are Brothers*, and *Stories of Three Countries*. Those figures all wore ancient costumes. Some were historical figures, and others were heroes or brigands. Although I was young, I was familiar with the stories and characters of these classical works because I liked to listen to them when they were broadcast on the radio. When I was young, my father liked to watch the Beijing opera very much and he always took me with him to see the performances. In the Beijing Opera, these stories were also included among the plays that were performed. I liked and admired these ancient heroes or brigands very much. I spent a lot of time drawing them. My father liked to smoke, and because of that, I was able to collect the cards from the cigarette packages he bought. I copied the figures on the cards, in addition to creating new characters following the plots of the stories. Some adults were interested in what I drew because I could draw these heroes' costume and images very well, and included a lot of details, such as their different hairstyles, weapons, clothes and expressions.

My parents helped me keep these drawings because they also liked them. Unfortunately, these drawings have been lost because we have moved so many times in the last few years. For me, drawing was a kind of game. As an only child, I amused myself through drawing.

After the Anti-Japanese War, Americans came to China. I watched many American films from the age of eight to twelve. My favorite movies were the Tarzan series. I still remember that the earliest Tarzan was Johnny Weissmuller. In African jungles, he lived with an African tribe as

well as with chimpanzees, elephants, lions, orangutans, and crocodiles. Today I still keep the introduction to these films. I also watched *Gone with the Wind*. I often drew characters from the movies from memory after watching the movies, in addition to drawing the figures from the Beijing Opera, because I always went to watch it with my father. Sometimes, my father knew some of the stars of the Opera, so I was able to meet them. Because of this, the characters of the Beijing opera became my subject matter. Using pencil on paper, I used lines to create these images.

I had art class during elementary school; however, I was not able to remember what I did in the art class. The only thing I remember was that my art teacher often praised me.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary and high school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some events and experiences that impressed you.

After starting secondary school, I began to have history class. I really liked the Han Dynasty, but I didn't like to study the history of the Qing Dynasty, but I never forgot this period, a series of humiliations for China that ended in it forfeiting its sovereignty. I admired the Western world because of how strong they were. I remember that I liked to draw the uniforms of German soldiers, because they were impressive and made German soldiers look very capable and professional.

During secondary school, during the Korean War, I started to draw caricatures. There were caricatures in the newspaper everyday. At that time, in China, a few famous caricaturists satirized Dean Acheson and Harry Truman. The Russian's caricature magazines were published

in China because of the friendship between China and Russia. The Russian magazines were very interesting and some of the Russian caricatures were done very well. I copied them. I did not draw my own, and I just copied. I created my own caricatures ten years later during the Cultural Revolution because they were needed for political activities.

At that time, I liked the Chinese Army Pictorials. I often used watercolor to copy the helmeted soldiers carrying Russian machine guns that were shown in the magazine. I did not have art teachers or art books. I painted based on my instinct, and tried to paint images to look like the photographs in this magazine.

At the beginning of high school, I never thought about being a painter. I was good at mathematics. My parents and I believed that my major should be science or engineering, although I liked to draw very much. After Liberation (1949), I had some opportunities to look at some real artwork because some professional art magazines and journals started to appear in China. In 1953, when I was in the first year of high school, an event occurred that was crucial in influencing my life. That was the year Xue Bei Hong died, and his personal bequest was that his artwork was displayed, including many artworks he made in France. I was surprised and I started to think about becoming an artist. The colors of his oil paintings were very beautiful, and his sketches were very good.

At that time, a few of my classmates, included Ding Shao Guang, often went to the Beijing Library to borrow art books, especially from the Xu Bei Hong collection and his sketch books. We often brought lunch, and copied his sketches at the library. We worked hard. Xu Bei Hong had a crucial effect on me to choose art as my major. If I did not see this retrospective of his work after his death, I never would have thought about studying art in university.

There was an art group in my school, and the art classroom had plaster portraits and geometrical forms. We often worked hard to draw pencil sketches of them. During the noon break, we were always drawing instead of taking a break. My art teacher was professional, and he often taught us some basic knowledge and techniques. We mainly practiced pencil sketching. On Sunday, we often went to the Central Academy of Fine Arts to see the students' artwork. Some of the better artwork was hung in the corridors. Seeing others' artworks was also a kind of learning. I still have my pencil sketches that I did in high school.

I copied many Russian's pencil sketches, such as Ilya Repin and Valentin servo. While I was in high school, the reasons why I drew changed. It was not for recreation or as a response to my loneliness anymore, but was to improve my drawing skills because I wanted to be an artist.

I decided to take the entrance exam of Central Academy of Fine Arts. At the time, the Central Academy of Fine Arts enlisted a group of students from high schools and let them learn art on each Sunday in order to find some young people (seedlings) that were talented in art. There were professional teachers to teach these students. Because I was always praised in this group, I was encouraged to practice and work hard.

I began to walk toward the right path gradually. I passed the exam for studying in CAF and was admitted. I still remember that the exam included pencil sketching, artistic creation and exams based on the core curriculum of Chinese, Mathematics, Politics, and Russian. The subject of my artistic creation was my school's sports festival. I painted a scene of students running the hurdles, with other students cheering them on beside the track. In 1956, before taking the entrance exam, I was recommended for admission to the pilot school of the Air Force. In those years, being a pilot was many young peoples' dream, and the Chinese Air Force was just being

built. However, I did not go because I wanted to study art. Then, I was recommended for the Russian Language School. In those days, there were many Russian experts in the Chinese Army so the Chinese government built a special school to train translators. I also refused. Finally, my school recommended me for admission to Beijing University to study in the Eastern Language department. After thinking it over, I decided to give it up because I was determined to learn art and become an artist. As a result, I was not allowed to join the Colleagues of the Communist Party because I disobeyed the school's decisions.

Before being admitted to study in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I yearned to become a student there. When I walked near the Academy and saw the people coming and going from the school, I often admired them and thought that they were great.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in university as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

I started to study at the Academy in 1956. I worked hard and did many sketches and drafts for paintings. I still have them today, though I think that they are a bit immature. But I think it is necessary for a learner to experience this process.

At that time, pencil sketch and oil painting classes were held in the morning. Basically, there were no classes in the afternoon. Besides classes in pencil and color sketching, we had classes in anatomy, perspective, art history, politics and physical education.

In my first year, I was really interested in making an oil painting of Wen Tian Xiang (he was a hero in the Song Dynasty), so I read Mongolian history and the history of Chinese weapons. I designed and started to paint Wen Tian Xiang and the Mongols, but I gave up because

I felt it still needed more historical details and I was not able to find them at the time.

In CAF, students should submit a big draft of a potential artwork at the end of each semester, and hand in a draft for a smaller work every two weeks. It was different than today. Today, students studying in fine art departments do their draft for their creating artwork near the end of their studies, just before graduation. Because of this, most students do not know how to create a big work or even smaller works based on their own ideas, and you can imagine how that affects the quality of their work. During those years, we often went with the school to the countryside to experience peasant life, part of the re-education program. Therefore, our subject matter often reflected the life of the countryside. In the first year, I created an artwork called Night. It showed an ewe giving birth to a lamb, while a kindly old man smoking a pipe looked on, with a hurricane lamp close by.

1956 was the first time I studied Impressionistic art. I still remember Prof. Wei Qi Mei, who is now over eighty years old, bringing a stack of printed collections of Impressionistic artists to our classroom. They were published in Switzerland. At that time, my brain was full of Xu Bei Hong, and the Russian school. Suddenly, I saw so many impressionistic artworks that I was astounded. I will always remember that moment, how up until then, I had never seen anything like it. They had beautiful color, and I constitutionally like color. These artworks had a great influence on me. The significance of their influence is as great as the influence of Xu Bei Hong's work that made me decide to become an artist. It was an important turning point for my artistic creation. Immediately, I was attracted by impressionism. However, at that time, I did not understand the post-impressionism, especially Van Gogh's artworks. I even thought his artwork was ugly and it was not interesting. I liked the early impressionists such as Pissarro, Monet,

Manet, and Degas. However, I kept some distance from the post- impressionists such as van Gogh, Cezanne, and Gauguin. I didn't recognize how great their artworks were.

In those years, Impressionism was considered as bourgeois art by socialist countries. Why was Prof. Wei able to bring these printed collections of impressionists to our classroom? In 1956, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was criticizing Stalin's ideology. The result was that Impressionism began to be discussed in Russia. At the same time, some Russian museums had good collections of impressionist art that had been collected before the Russian Revolution, and therefore, Russian art magazines began to publish articles about impressionist artworks. Influenced by it, impressionism began to be talked about in the Chinese art community, and discussed in art magazines in China. The president of CAF, Jiang Feng, believed that there were some realistic and humanistic elements in impressionism. For example, Degas's work sometimes depicted the lower classes, drinking in small bars. In the political climate in China at the time, Prof. Wei was only able to bring these artworks to our classroom. Before then, he wouldn't have dared do it. After seeing these artworks, I did not pay attention to the narrative paintings with historical or important subject matter anymore.

I started to copy many impressionist artworks. Xu Bei Hong brought a lot of copies of impressionist artwork back to China and hung them up in the halls of the school.

In 1959, the Central Academy of Fine Arts started a studio teaching system. It was prescribed that during the earlier three years, students developed their basic skills. Students had to decide which studio they would like to study at when they were in third year. Generally, the studio supervisor came to studios to see students' artwork and students also considered which studio they would like to choose. There were then three oil painting studios in CAF. The first

studio was the Russian revolutionary realistic style and the supervisor was Luo Gong Liu, who studied in the Soviet Union. The second studio was European style, and the supervisor was Wu Zuo Ren who had studied in Belgium, and the third was more nationalist and modern, with Dong Xi Wen as the supervisor.

From 1959 to 1960, there was a large campaign criticizing “white and expert” students who just focused on their studies and ignored ideology and politics. In my class of six students, four had problems and were criticized. One of my classmates and I were seen as representatives of “white and expert” and were criticized again and again. The university took three measures to deal with these “white and expert” students. Firstly, artworks of these students were not permitted to be hung on the walls in the corridors as examples of superior work. Secondly, these students’ marks were reduced by one grade. For example, if the student’s color sketch was a five (five being the highest mark), the teacher would give him four. Thirdly, teachers were forbidden to teach these students because for these students, the more knowledge they received the more harm this would bring them. For me, whether my artworks were hung on the wall or not, or whether my mark was good or not, I could bear that. However, forbidding teachers to teach us really bothered me, although we four talked about our assignments and artworks together. Some teachers ignored us and we just stayed alone and dealt with this isolation individually.

At that time, no teachers wanted to teach us, and I felt I was like a foundling with a great hurt in my heart. We were greatly discriminated against. We critiqued each other’s artworks because no teachers would comment on them, and we went to the library together.

In my class, there were meetings where one of my classmates would criticize me for not having any friends in class and that my best friend was the library. Today, that would be

considered praise, but then it was a criticism. This meant that I just studied and did not care about politics. Why was I seen as a “white and expert” student? On the one hand, I just focused on drawing and painting, and rarely talked about my thoughts with those red students. In fact, I was not interested in talking with them. For me, the important thing was studying. On the other hand, some of my classmates were seen as the rightist and I sometimes sympathized with them. In fact, I was very lucky not to be considered as a rightist, although I was seen as a student with incorrect thoughts.

This situation put me under a great deal of pressure, but was also a kind of motivation to push me to work hard. Although half a century has past, I still felt the effects of it. Today, what the “white and expert” students have shown is that we are excellent artists. The early experiences of a person will greatly influence the rest of his life.

In those days, some professors did not discriminate against the “white and expert” students. Dong Xi Wen always made a special effort to help every student whether they were white and experts or not. He was so famous that I often felt a little bit nervous when I talked with him. However, he was very nice and always treated students equally.

His influence was crucial in terms of my artistic creation. He made many famous artworks such as *Founding Ceremony* (1953). However, I believed that the best artworks he did were oil paintings he sketched on the road when he visited Tibet three times, although some people referred to them as “Chinese oil paintings”. These oil paintings totally expressed his inner feelings, wishes and urges. They also reflected the Tibetan lifestyle and the Chinese aesthetic. He did many landscapes and portraits of Tibetans. In those years, artists worried if their oil paintings were called “Chinese oil painting” because many people believed that the style of Russian grey

tone was the standard for oil painting. Otherwise (for example, if they were colorful) they were not real oil paintings.

He never isolated his teaching in the classroom. In fact, we were more interested in his teaching that was not included in the teaching plan. I often went to his house with a few other students. He had a studio with a dormer, and there were a bed, an easel and art supplies. On the wall, there was a print of an oil painting by EI GRECO (1541-1641), with dark green tone, a clouded over sky, full of mystery. He loved it very much. He also had a piece of his own hanging on the wall, made when he was young and one that he considered as one of his best works.

At that time, the whole country was in a difficult period, and we did not have enough food to eat. When we went for a visit, he often put some candy or cookies on the table. He often showed us his artworks and his printed collections of Western artists, in an informal and relaxed atmosphere, and we were able to interrupt him with questions. However, in our classroom, he was often cautious about discussing art and modern art.

We were required to hand in sketches and drafts of artwork every two weeks at the Central Academy. Therefore, we were always able to sketch a lot and draft plans of the ideas we had for our artworks. Teachers commented on them one by one. Once, I drew a classmate's facial profile using lines. Then and there, our teacher, Wei Qi Mei, showed this sketch in our class, and said that this sketch using line was beautiful. This comment inspired me virtually. Since then, many of my sketches have been done using line.

I was studying oil painting, but because the university did not offer us classes in traditional Chinese line drawing, I began to study it on my own. I copied the drawings made by

Cheng Lao Lian (a Ming dynasty master), as well as doing Chinese painting in my spare time. My classmates were not as interested in using line as I was. I was inspired by it because, as a boy, the seed had been planted in my mind and that the seed had germinated in my heart.

When I was a little boy, I copied images of characters from cigarette packages. These images were created with line. In addition, my grandfather's house had many books with traditional thread bindings. As a little boy, I was really interested in looking at the illustrations in these books. These illustrations were often called embroidered portraits and were drawn using line. Lastly, as a child, I always drew using line because I didn't understand how to shade using a pencil. In the Central Academy of Fine Art, teachers showed us what was considered to be good and bad taste in drawing. The teacher's praise for my sketch not only made me happy but also had a profound influence on my drawing.

After graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I often visited another teacher Huan Yong Yu, who was seen as 'black painter' during the Cultural Revolution (his more modern style was not accepted the artistic community), encouraged me to depict things using line, and immerse myself into everyday life to collect visual images. In the university, I learned to represent things using shades, but now I felt it was necessary to use line to represent things. Following his advice I continued to explore line, although my oil paintings used traditional techniques. However, my oil paintings also included the linear elements such as outlines. I used color to enrich the linear elements in my paintings. Lines are like a human skeleton. When a person has bones, all their muscles are given a coherent form.

The year 1959, when I was in my third year at university, was the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Republic People of China. The students were called upon to make artworks for

this event as an offering to the country. The university provided money and the time for students to go anywhere they wanted to experience the “new” China. I went to Da Yu Island in Shang Dong Province. I stayed there for two months and went fishing with fishermen and fisherwomen of the island.

Because of influence of impressionism, my subject matter was already focused on sunlight and the arrangement of color. My painting represented a group of fisherman and fisherwomen who were carrying fishing nets and sails on their shoulders, walking towards their boats and the rising sun. In fact, it was a group of people without any important scenario. The two main figures were a girl was in red and a fisherman with a dark red face dressed in white. Of course, it also could be interpreted as showing the fishermen and women’s optimism and heroic qualities. When I stayed with these fishermen and fisherwomen, I was always touched by this kind of scene. I painted the scene also because of the vibrant colors of the Island moved me. I did not paint it from a political perspective. This artwork was about 250 cm and 120 cm.

At the same time, I also made a painting of young southern girl who was embroidering.

Both of my paintings were selected to be part of this tenth anniversary exhibition of the founding of our new country. At that time, it was peerless achievement for a student who was studying in university.

After being shown in the Chinese Fine Arts Museum, these two oil paintings were displayed all over the country, but I never saw them again after this exhibition. Then, there were no ideas about copyright and intellectual property. Even if I wanted to get them back, I wouldn’t know where or who to ask. I was young then, and felt that it was very good to have an opportunity to participate the national exhibition. Although I often thought about these two oil

paintings, I did not think about how to get them back.

For the tenth anniversary competition, most of my classmates focused on political subjects such as the Nan Chang Uprising, oil workers and so on. Although my paintings were shown in the national exhibition, they were not published. One of my classmates painted Chairman Mao swimming across the Changjiang River. It created a stirring reaction all over the country. The newspapers and magazines published it one after another. However, my artwork of the fisherman was only shown in fine arts magazines in black and white.

During my fourth year, at the end of the Great Leap Forward, I cooperated with a few my classmates to make a oil painting of a commune in the countryside to reflect this period. Later, we also could not find this painting.

When I was preparing my artistic creation for the graduating exhibition, I went back to Da Yu Island because the local people had been very nice to me. My graduating piece was a painting of a fisherman, with a boatman holding the helm of a boat full of fish. In fact, this painting was part of the national exhibition in 1961, and the same thing happened, my painting disappeared. As a result, a few years ago, when I took part in a conference, I met with the curator of the CAF museum. He told me there was one of my artworks at their museum. I asked him to describe this painting and I knew it was mine. Then, I asked them whether I could take it back or not, he said it was okay, but I had to fill out a receipt to borrow the painting in order to “repair” it. Therefore, I was able to take it out of the university. Finally, I got this artwork back.

When I studied in the Academy, my father’s salary was ¥42 each month. My mother was a housewife. Therefore, our life was very thrifty and simple. My mother only bought meat on Saturdays and made dumplings because my father and I came home only on the weekend. It took

one and a half hours to walk back home from university each Saturday. However, my family always ensured that I had enough art supplies to do artwork and to practice.

When I was in my fifth and final year, I started my artistic creation for my graduation. In the first semester, Mr. Dong Xi Wen brought us to Duen Huang in order to copy Buddhist frescos and to concentrate on learning ‘national’ art (Chinese art). Mr. Dong did research for three years there during the Japanese occupation. He gave us lectures about Buddhism, and analyzed the styles and ideas of these frescoes. I tried to copy them using oil paint. During this trip, we saw many cultural relics and antiques. I thought the frescoes were good, but I wasn’t sure how to use some of their methods and ideas in my own artistic creation or how to understand them deeply, because I had been involved in oil painting for a long time and the work I created was in oil. What I learned and experienced in Dun Huang was based on a kind of knowledge and culture (different from what was prominent in China at the time, socialist realism). It didn’t appear in my artwork instantly, but it influenced me later. I really liked the representational way of breaking the spatiotemporal relationship in these frescos.

The Chinese artists should form themselves styles expressing Chinese aesthetic view and Chinese characters using oil painting instead of imitating Western oil paintings totally. This is Prof. Deng’s dream and also my pursuing.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience you had and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

We graduated from university in 1961 and we were sent to different areas of the country. In those years, the government arranged jobs for all students. My friend who graduated from

CAF a few years before and who was working in the China Nationality University told me that his university needed art teachers. I contacted them on my own initiative. Therefore, I went to the university to teach after graduating. I taught as I continued to paint. Sometimes, I sketched the models with students in the studio. I continued to go to my teacher Dong Xi Wen's home and showed him my work. Each time, he was very happy to see me and gave me a lot of suggestions. His artistic ability and quality all were very good. However, during the Cultural Revolution, he was criticized and he died when he was 58 years old. His experience always hovers in the back of my mind. I really regret he did not have time and opportunities to pursue his dream of creating a school of Chinese nationalist oil painting. This makes me sad every time I think about it.

In those years, intellectuals were often sent to remote areas to receive re-education. According to the Chinese government's dictate, students who just graduated from university had to go to countryside for one year in order to be re-educated. I was sent to the Liang Shang Mountain⁽⁴⁾ to receive re-education in 1963. This area was where the Yu minority lived. They lived in high and rugged mountains and led hard and difficult lives. We only had potatoes to eat. My job was to deliver the news and government files between the town's government office and the villages located in the mountains, as well as taking part in peasant labor. I was not able to speak the Yu language, but I learned a little bit after staying there. I did not have even a few opportunities to talk with people. I often walked all day in the mountains in order to deliver the messages or the government's files, and rarely met anyone. I also often worried that I would get caught up in the political campaigns.

At that time, as a young teacher, my girlfriend was in her fourth year at the same university. They also came to the Liang Shang Mountain to experience Yu people's way of

customs and way of life for two months. We were able to meet with each other when we got together to report our thoughts to our fellow classmates and teachers, but we both did not dare to talk with each other and only met secretly few times for short periods of time. This was because that there was regulation that university teacher was not allowed to have a girlfriend or boyfriend with their students. This was seen as immoral behavior.

In China, going to the Liang Shang Mountain and using the Yu Minority as a subject was popular, and many artists created very interesting artwork using them as inspiration. However, I rarely drew or painted even though I stayed there for one year. This was because both my heart and my life suffered very much from the difficult political and physical conditions, and I lost the impulse to draw and paint.

During the Cultural Revolution, we often went to the countryside or schools dedicated to the study of Mao's thought and revolutionary ideology through labor, in order to receive re-education, as well as taking part in different political activities and campaigns. Some times, I was selected to paint the political propaganda posters. Fortunately, teachers who worked in Fine Arts Department were allowed to go to anywhere they wanted to experience the life of the masses and collect source material for artwork once every seven years. During these year-long periods, I visited Xingjian Province, I really liked to paint or draw the Kurds because the men were heroic and women's costumes were very beautiful.

In the Cultural Revolution, I also painted two oil paintings of Tibetans. One was of a Tibetan woman joining the communist party and the other was focused on a middle age man at work. I wanted to pursue the prominent wind, but I was not able to follow the revolutionary art. This was because I did not paint using enough red, brightness and light, but instead I used a

palate knife to paint. The leader who was responsible for culture and education in Beijing thought the faces of the figures in my paintings were not flat but in relief, and mixed cold and warm color. He believed that my paintings had some problems and he suggested that my university should investigate my thought and me.

I always stayed in my personal space and tried to build my own atmosphere. It could be said that I often isolated myself from the world. I lived in my own space. The only time I went out into society was when I had something I had to do.

My artworks rarely used 'main stream' subject matter. On the contrary, I have always been interested in formalism. During the eighties, I had some fame, but my artworks always have focused on my interests.

I would like to paint faraway places or figures. My inspiration is on distant things. On the one hand, my career has a relationship to minorities, whose lives are far from Beijing and far away from my own life. On the other hand, I have always been interested in the attitudes and ideas of other regions, although I also painted a few things and figures around me such as my friends' portraits. I thought that my feelings about painting reflect my desire to escape from reality because I really don't know how to comment on society or how to paint the society that surrounds me.

In the Cultural Revolution, we felt at a loss and confused about how make artistic creation. Our professor Huang Yong Yu painted a night owl with one closed eye and the other open eye. This painting was seen as a black painting and he also was criticized as a black painter. In such a difficult situation, he used big brushes to dip water, ink, gouache, gold and silver powder to paint water lilies, bitterns, and landscapes of his hometown on rice paper. As his ex

ex-students, we often went to his small 10 square meter room to see his paintings and chat. Often there were many of us crowded into his small room, often bumping our feet together. At that time, when I saw these paintings, suddenly, it was a breath of fresh air. In 1974, I also began to explore this style. Today, we call this kind painting ink and color painting. In this small room, I had a concept that creating a world that was more important than describing a world.

In 1976, the Cultural Revolution was over. We finally created artwork in comparative freedom. At this time, the artworks I did became influential in art community. This is because during the Cultural Revolution, I insisted on making portraits using oil painting, and painting people I really wanted to paint. I was a peripatetic. I did not take part in political activities. Even though I was selected to paint political propaganda paintings or cartoons, I never gave up painting the things and people touched my heart from real life.

In 1979, my wife and I received a commission to create a mural painting in the Beijing Hotel. It was 175 square meters. At that time, we were excited, at the same time, we also felt nervous. On the one hand, we were excited that we had this good opportunity to put our artistic ability to good use. On the other hand, we really wanted to create an excellent artwork. We did not ask for any assistance, and we did everything by ourselves, from selecting the subject matter to designing the whole mural from the first draft to transferring it to the wall. This is because we both cherished this chance to painting after experiencing the Cultural Revolution. This mural was called *Creating, Harvesting and Happiness*. It included over 70 figures and over one hundred birds and animals. We used line to draw all the outlines. Both of us were familiar with the lives of the minorities in China because we both worked at the Minority University and my wife had stayed in Yunnan Province for many years, producing many paintings based on the different

minorities that live there. The Beijing Hotel gave us a room to stay in. My wife and I always hurried to the Hotel to paint after teaching at the university. We took over two years to finish this artwork and it got the silver medal at the sixth national art exhibition.

Q: Please describe your experience visiting Paris, and how this experience influenced you.

In 1984 and 1985, the Chinese Government sent me to France. In Paris, I met with my professor Huan Yong Yu who said I looked like the local students, just a little bit older. I told him that when I was young I was not able to come to Paris, and it was only now that I was able to come. I really hoped I could come to France when I was young, but that was impossible.

In Paris, an international art city, many countries had their studios, but China did not have one. An artist Lu Xia Guang who was a Chinese-French artist, bought a studio and then contacted the China Art Association in order to help Chinese artists visit Paris. The China Art Association arranged some excellent artists to visit France, but the artists who got the opportunity to visit Paris had to pay their own travel costs. Before visiting France, I sold some of my artwork. I brought \$700 U.S. and 2000 or 3000 francs with me. When I arrived in Paris, I deposited the U.S. money in the bank. I made a living by selling paintings, but it was not easy for me to live this way. We did not have any network, and did not learn French. We were able to draw but we were not good at languages. The purpose of selling paintings was to eat and survive, and to sometimes visit other countries. Sometime, I also painted portraits on the street.

Besides visiting museums, I also went to different studios to paint. When I arrived in Paris, the Quai d'Orsay Museum was not yet built.

Before visiting France, I saw these oil paintings in printed collections. When I had the

opportunity to visit Paris, I tried to see as many of these masterworks as possible. Seeing these works in print as opposed to seeing them in person was a totally different experience. I was deeply touched by them, and was much better able to understand them.

At that time, we Chinese artists had the idea that going to see what was the main stream of contemporary art in the world, and to understand it, would enable us to develop our artistic concepts. This would let us catch up with the main stream of the art world because in those years (from 1949 to the 1980s), China had isolated herself from the world. However, I was really disappointed with contemporary art in Europe. People could say my artistic concept was backward, but I did not want to follow the main stream. Seeing the original European master artworks made me firm in my belief to respect classical art. I would continue to follow go ahead based on my personal artistic beliefs. Contemporary art is not what I have been pursuing. Even if it is the mainstream, I do not want to ‘catch up’ to it.

During my stay in Europe, I tried to visit as many museums as possible. I really liked the impressionist artworks. Each impressionist artist had his or her own style, and they advanced the techniques of oil painting, especially how to deal with color, and how to express the light and color of sunshine. In fact, during my time in art school I painted in an impressionistic way, based on impressionistic works I saw in printed collections in my spare time, and because I was criticized by students and some professors at the university. When I saw the original masterpieces, I had bittersweet feelings mixed with happiness.

When Chinese artists visit other countries, especially European countries, they should experience the Western culture slowly and try to understand its spirit instead of learning superficial techniques such as how to mix colors or how to use a brush. For me, the brushwork of

French artists had a lot of pizzazz. This might be influenced by the French characteristic. It was different from German artwork.

When I was in university, when I did pencil sketch of a plaster cast, I didn't feel any excitement or creativity when drawing. Only when I saw the original sculpture that the plaster cast was based on did I have a unique experience. Before, studying a cast or looking in a book, you weren't able to imagine how big they really were according. You can't imagine the feelings that they have on you until you actually stand in front of them. I felt that the sculptor just lopped off the needless parts from the big piece of marble. It was so elegant and precise. Our Chinese grotto sculptures were tending to be more formulaic.

In Paris, artists' studios were becoming more open to the public. Anybody could visit and buy their artwork. Besides the art Exposition, there were Fall and Spring Salons and many other big exhibitions as well as other exhibitions based on special topics. For example, I got the chance to see Vienna (Schiele, Klimt, etc). This was a very good experience. Like us, students of today always form their aesthetic experiences of oil painting based on looking at printed collections, then fusing this into their own artistic creation. It is not easy for Chinese artists and their painting to reach their potential.

In Paris, some French told me that they thought that my oil painting was good and before they did not think that a Chinese artist could paint such good oil paintings. I felt consoled. Some French were also surprised that Chinese painted in oil. For the last few hundred years, Europe has been the cultural center. We understand French art far better than they understand Chinese art.

After visiting France for two years, and seeing the original artworks of masters', my style and skills have changed somewhat. Before going to Europe, I felt that artists were comparatively

arrogant in China, and I also felt I had already had some achievements. However, after visiting Europe and seeing their artwork, I suddenly realized what a master was. I believe that there is no Chinese master oil painter, but we do have masters of Chinese painting. I think that Chinese oil painting is still in a stage of imitation and learning. Whether we paint in a traditional way or like the young artists in the studios beside me who do contemporary art, all of us are kind of imitating others. We just imitate the style of this or that period. We still cannot escape imitating. We could not have arrived at the present stage of Chinese oil painting relying only Chinese culture. Before going to Europe, my estimate of my artistic ability was not objective and I hoped to be somewhat of a master. However, after arriving Europe I had never thought about this again. What I should do is that I just do my best.

I didn't want to sell some of my paintings. This is because I painted them not in order to please people, but because I liked painting them, and really wanted to paint them. What I paint is not to get awards. I think that drawings and paintings I did from real life are the best artwork. I did not sell these sketches because when you face a model, a landscape or 'real things, your feelings are special and your own. These feelings won't appear in another time and are impossible to duplicate. These feelings create color and brushwork that come from inside of the artist. I could sell paintings that I did using photographs. However, I only begrudge sketches when I am hungry. During my stay in Paris, I was really in a difficult situation, and I could not find any way to support myself. Therefore, I sold over ten of my pen sketches to a Frenchman interested in Chinese culture. After I returned to Beijing, he came to Beijing and wanted to buy more of my sketches, but I wouldn't sell him any because I had food to eat. He asked me why I didn't sell them when I had so many drawings. For me, each pen sketch is a story, and they are

like my dairy. When I was in Xinjiang Province, I drew the things and the people that touched my heart. I still remember those people's names and their lives.

Shang Yang

Shang was born in 1942, Honghu, Hubei Province. Shang Yang has exhibited extensively in China since the 1980s, and has shown internationally at galleries in London, Paris, Tokyo, St. Petersburg and Helsinki. Shang Yang's work often appropriates images from traditional Chinese landscape painting, which are screened onto the canvas by a machine; he then distorts the image with graffiti or obtrusive geometrical designs (Sullivan, 2006). He is a prominent contemporary Chinese painter. He is currently a Professor at the Fine Arts Academy of Capital Normal University.

His grandfather is a Chinese medical doctor, who left his home town and traveled to different places. He also was good at calligraphy. His father was also a Chinese watercolor painter and drew illustrations for students in medical university. His father hoped that he could be an artist.

In 1957, after he graduated from secondary school, he began to study at the Wuhan art teacher training school and in 1958, this school became Hubei Fine Arts College. He studied oil painting at this college for 8 years. After he graduated from university, he worked as a comic book editor in Hubei Publishing House. He painted nothing, not even Chairman Mao's portrait, from 1966 to 1978. 1978, he started his MFA at the Hubei Art Academy. In 1981 he graduated from the Hubei Art Academy, where he then taught for several years.

Interview: Shang Yang in his studio in Beijing during summer, 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in 1942, in Honghu, in the Hubei Province, a small town beside the Changjiang river. The landscape impressed me very much. The Changjiang River was always misty. When I stood on the bank of the river, I was able to see the boundless and misty sky. Beyond the river bank, there were houses with white walls, black tiles, and stone paths. This was a typical Chinese small town, which was bordered by the countryside and had a good dock as well. Therefore, it was pretty quiet, but not too isolated.

When I graduated from the Hubei Academy of Fine Art in 1965, my father wrote to me and told me that now I was an artist and had realized the dream of three generations of my family, and that I would have a bright future. In fact, when I was born, my father hoped I would be an artist in the future.

My grandpa was a doctor of Chinese medicine and he had a varied and rich life experience. When he was a young man, he left his hometown in the Sichuan province and practiced medicine in different cities along the Changjiang River. Besides being a Chinese doctor, he was interested in the martial arts, in archaeology, juggling and brushwork. Influenced by my grandfather, my father also liked brushwork. He was a Chinese painter and painted all his life. He focused on landscape although he also could do figures. Generally, although he learned from his father and a few painters, he was mostly self-taught. Before 1949, my father taught art class

in the local secondary school. When he did not get a job, he sold his paintings in order to make a living. When my mother told me my father went to other cities, I knew he went to sell his paintings. In 1950, when I was seven years old, we moved to Wuhan, the capital of the Hubei province, because my father received a position to make illustrations for teaching material, wall maps and medical illustrations at the Tongji Medical College that was one of the most famous medical colleges in China.

My father really liked to paint landscapes and enjoyed poetic things. However, he had to draw medical wall maps and illustrations in the texts and pamphlets used by students at the college. At that time, there were not projectors or computers. When professors wanted to demonstrate anatomy or pathological changes from disease in classes, they needed to use wall maps to show students. My father often sighed because it was not enjoyable for him to make these medicine illustrations. During summer vacations, he was very happy because he was able to paint what he wanted. However, he gave these paintings to his friends and colleagues instead of selling them. When his friends and colleagues asked him to paint something for them, he always wrote their requests down, and then completed them on summer vacation. My father's only regret was that he did not have an opportunity to be an artist and did not have a solo exhibition, although he also took part in some group exhibitions.

My father could paint figures, landscapes and flowers and birds, but his landscape work was very good. I saw my father paint as soon as I was born. When I was very young, I just saw he put a carpet on the table and I did not know what he was doing because I was too short to see. Gradually, I came to understand what my father was doing and became interested in what he did. At that time, he was an art teacher in the local secondary school and he painted in his spare time.

I remember that he always painted after coming back home.

He was an honest Chinese man. He was a bit deaf in one ear. My father liked to talk with me and we could communicate with each other very well. When I was a little boy, he often went for an outing with me and recited to me literary quotations and stories. During my time in elementary and secondary school, he liked to visit temples and busy bazaars with me. Sometimes, we just went for a walk and he often talked about painting and calligraphy and history. I realized later that sometimes he was not only talking to me, but also thinking aloud about artworks or stories that made him excited. My father was proud that I was an artist. I learned art because of my father's influence.

My mother was not literate, but she was full of wisdom, modesty and kindness. If people needed help, she would not hesitate to help them. In fact, in her life, she helped many people. My mother was the backbone of my family because my father was always too honest and kind. Her gritty character supported my family, and led my two old sisters, a younger sister, a younger brother and me out hardship and helped us get a good education.

When I was five years old, my father sent me to study in a private school. My father carried me on his back to this school everyday. The teacher was an old man and everyday he taught us some traditional Chinese ancient prose. After two years, I transferred to the public school, where I learned math and other subjects.

When I was a child, my father did not have spare cash to buy books, so the books I had to read were limited. However, my father bought a few books about drawing and painting that made me feel that drawing and painting were a vast world and that attracted me more than the real world.

These books my father bought were printed in artotype. Although they were nothing like books printed today, I still found them beautiful. When I had nothing to do or after looking my father's paintings, I liked to page through these books and look at the pictures of the paintings and drawings inside. One book had a lot of watercolor and pencil sketches. One drawing deeply impressed me because it looked like the scene that you could see from my backyard. On the bank of the river, a person was taking an umbrella and walking into the wind and rain. In the background, a small sailboat appeared in the river haze. This was a pencil watercolor painting with light and shade. Although it had different style than traditional Chinese painting, it has a quaint Chinese landscape name: Jian Gan Xing Li, and had the same aesthetic as traditional Chinese painting.

Another book introduced Western artists and their artworks. One of the artworks that made an indelible mark on my life was by Corot. This painting was like a breath of fresh air for me, showing an environment almost like my hometown. It depicted a humid, foggy and gloomy place. The shadows of this painting were lightly shifting, and touched my heart, even my body. After many years, I learned that Corot, a famous French artist, had painted it, though I was not crazy about his style after I became a painter.

Another painting that impressed me a great deal, but in a negative way, was a still life by Van Gogh. I disliked it because it was messy, although I didn't realize who the artist was until later. At that time, I did not even know where France was.

When my father painted, I often noticed how he used both Chinese flower blue and ochre. Both of these colors impressed me very much. Flower blue was not ordinary blue. Using a brush to drop a little bit flower blue into a dish, you then add a tiny bit water. The color is then spread

on rice paper where it is slowly absorbed into the paper. The effect on the paper reminded me of the expanse of the Changjiang River, which was this kind of light blue. When my father put some of the ochre beside the light blue and it bled into the blue, the contrast that appeared touched my heart. Sometime, the ochre would mix a little bit with blue, or a little bit blue run into ochre, producing a subtle warm green. Sometimes, when the ink on the brush dipped into the colors, a delicate, indescribable tone that was not described was created. Many critics said that my style always changes, but I know that there exists something constant in my painting. This is the tone I learned from my father, and my memories of my childhood. In fact, my father was my first art teacher and my most important teacher.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

When I was seven years old, I began to copy the masterpieces of Chinese painting. I often used the same size of rice paper as the original painting. In fact, I just bolted it down. I remembered when I was about ten years old, I was copying the Chinese painting *Traveling in Mountain*. Suddenly, my sister ran into the house and dragged me out. At the moment, all I heard was someone saying, "Fire! Fire!" mixed with a lot of noise and other people yelling. While I went out with my sister, I saw everybody moving anything of value outside. Suddenly, I also ran back into the house to get something. The fire soon went out and everybody took a long breath. Then my older sister and the neighbors all laughed at me because my face and hands were covered in soot, and in one hand was a pillow and in the other was the book with the Chinese painting I was copying. When I studied in the junior college, I learned that it was considered to

be one of the best Chinese paintings in Chinese art.

At home, I also liked to draw things I was interested in. When I was almost ten or eleven years old, during the Korean War, I always listened to the radio and heard about the American imperialists and the Chinese Volunteer Army. One day, suddenly I wanted to draw the Chinese Volunteer Army catching American soldiers. In fact, I never saw any Chinese soldiers or American soldiers, and I never saw the face of an American. I just knew that Americans all had big noses. Based on my imagination, I drew a row of American soldiers with big noses raising their hands. At the same time, a row of Chinese Voluntary soldiers were guarding them with guns. It was very rough drawing but I really liked to draw this kind of narrative subject matter.

My art teacher at my primary school was a very old and nice man. He often saw me as a good example for my classmates. In art class, when the teacher used chalk to draw a broom on the board, my classmates copied what the teacher did. However, because I was taught by my father, I was able to be more artistically creative and imaginative than the teacher. I drew a young pioneer who was sweeping the classroom with a broom, with others cleaning the windows. I was able to draw a part of my classroom and the activities of a group of students. The teacher was surprised and believed that I had the talent to become an artist. I still remembered that in 1954, democratic voting first occurred in China. This was a very the important event in Chinese politics, and of course, it was reflected in schools. My art teacher used a piece of chalk to draw a box, and wrote “ballot box” on the side of the box. I drew a man who was voting in front of the ballot box and other people waiting in their line. My teacher was very happy and thought he was not able to draw this kind of picture. He always gave me full marks. I knew why he gave me full marks because he hoped to encourage me to create more based on his drawings on the board.

This was very useful for me to become interested in creation instead of copying.

My artistic ability was set in stone by my school. At that time, I was a good student, and my drawing was especially outstanding. One afternoon during the fifth grade, the director found me and told me not to go home and to draw something for the school. The school didn't have an easel so the teachers gave me a large board to put my paper on. What I drew was a trellis of grapes and a group teachers and students fixing the broken tables and chairs. I still remember how difficult it was to draw the grape leaves because there were so many. However, the teachers encouraged me and gave me some basic sketching skills. This was the first time for me to sketch from real life with many of my classmates around me watching. That afternoon, I completed almost ten pieces that were the biggest drawings I had ever done. In the evening, the director went out to buy cake for us. I was excited. Later, a few of the pieces I did were displayed in the Wuhan School Board's exhibition of examples of the high standard of educational achievement its students were able to attain. This was the first time I took part in an exhibition. One of my classmate's compositions, which was said to have over ten thousand Chinese characters, was included in this exhibition as well. In fact, my writing was also very good in my school. After I graduated, I entered the Wuhan fifth middle school.

One day, I met one of my classmates from primary school and he told me that my elementary art teacher told his students that they should learn art well. Art was very useful and important. The teacher said that he had an ex-student, called Shang Neng Qian, who was able to draw very well and who now made a lot of money. In fact, at that time, I was only a secondary student and it was impossible to make money. After hearing this, I felt it was amusing and thought he should not have encouraged students to learn and develop good art techniques in this

way.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

After studying in middle school, I missed my primary school classmates very much. I wanted to write and say hello to them and draw something for them. How could I draw a large number of drawings? I used my finger dipped in ink and pressed it on a card, and then I drew the head and legs of an ox, and added the wall of an old city and clouds in the sky in the background. I drew different heads and legs influenced by the different shapes of my finger marks. Therefore, each ox had its personal mannerisms. Some were eating grass and some were turning their heads.

In the 1950s, the people of China were full of hope for a new life. People were full of youthful spirit. However, the campaign against the political right destroyed it.

After school, my classmates and I often liked to go to the Wuhan city library to read books for one and half hours every day. It took 40 minutes to run there, where we stayed and read. I liked to read different kinds of literature and Li Shi Ding, one of my classmates, liked to read books about atomic energy because he wanted to be an atomic scientist. There was an ethos that everybody wanted to do something great and to make one's short life more worthwhile. This was the way to create an ideal to try to achieve. I also had my personal ideal or dream, which was to become an artist. Therefore, I decided to study art in the high school of Fine Art College.

After I formulated my dream, I decided to visit the Middle Southern Fine Art Junior College that I was yearning to study at. At that time I was thirteen years old and was in grade two in secondary school. In the 1950s, there was not the Great Bright Bridge over the Changjiang River. It was an extraordinary thing for me to take a boat to the other side of the Changjiang

River, because the College was on the other side of the river. I was excited as soon as I knew that I would visit this college.

It was a nice day. After crossing the river, I was walking to the college when suddenly, I saw an artist sketching on the street. I often saw my father doing Chinese painting, but it was first time I saw a “real” artist sketching. I walked behind to see how he painted. He was doing a watercolor. I saw that he narrowed his eyes, looked at the scene a little bit, and then looked at his piece. At the end, he swung his brush back and forth and all the colored water of his brush was thrown on my white shirt. I did not care too much about my white shirt, but I was crazy about what he did and admired him very much.

In 1954, when I studied in the Wuhan Fifth Middle School, there was an art teacher named Xu Xu Ming. A graduate of Teacher Training high school, he organized a group of students interested in art to practice in the school. He was a nice and responsible teacher. Most of the time, we drew from still life in a classroom using such things as pots or fruits. Sometimes, we went outside to sketch. He seemed never to tell us how to organize the composition. We just drew what we wanted to draw outside, things that we were interested in. He organized our activities, but sometimes he did not participate in our group activities in the classroom or outside.

In order to pass the entrance exams of fine art colleges, I practiced at home. At that time, my home did not have an electric light and I drew with the light from a coal oil lamp. I often placed a small bowl and onions or a few eggs together and tried to draw in realistic style, or to imitate some good watercolor paintings that I saw in exhibitions or books. I often went to look at exhibitions with my classmates.

In Chinese or biology classes, sometimes I drew things I was interested in just because I wanted to draw. For example, when I saw an old glove with a hole in it on my desk, I was touched by it so I drew a detailed image of it on a piece of paper. At that time, teachers were very nice, they all knew I really liked to draw and they never berated me. When my Chinese teacher saw that I was drawing, he walked close my desk to remind me to pay attention. Sometimes, while I was drawing, I was listening to him as well. Anyway, my hobby did not influence my study.

I often helped my school to draw posters. During the ninetieth birthday of Suen Zhong San, my school wanted to make a poster of him and needed his portrait. Based on a black and white stamp, I drew his portrait using watercolor one night. I felt it was very interesting. The second day, the portrait was put up, and many teachers and students came to look at it. I felt very shy, so I didn't come too close to look at it, although they praised me because it looked like him.

When graduating from the middle school, I thought over taking the entrance exam in order to study at one the high school of fine arts. At that time, it was not easy to pass the entrance exam. There were two fine art high schools in Wuhan. In order to ensure that I could study art, I registered for both of these schools.

The two schools were far away from each other and transportation was not convenient between these schools. As a consequence, after finishing the exam in the Wuhan Teaching Junior College of Fine Art, I tried to go to the Middle South Junior College of Fine Art but the oral exam was already over. I asked for the address of the teacher who organized the oral exam. When I got to his home, it was already 6:00pm.

When the teacher opened his door, he asked me why I had missed the oral exam. I told

him I was late because I just finished the Wuhan Teaching Junior College of Fine Art's exam and when I arrived at his school the exam was over. The teacher maybe was impressed by my honesty and could not help asking me which school I would select if both accepted me. I told him that I would like to study in his school, then he asked me who was my favorite artist and why. Soon, he finished his questions and told me this was the equivalent to the oral exam. In fact, it was not an exam, but I believed that it was at that time, and was very happy. When I recall the past today, I think of how brave I was as an introverted teenager.

In 1957, at the age of fifteen, I studied in the Wuhan Junior College of Teaching Fine Arts, and started my dream to be an artist. In those years, as far as entering this kind of school, the government would arrange our job positions. Even if we joined the army, we could be a lieutenant and still perform art-related jobs.

Q: Please describe the art education you received Wuhan Junior College of Teaching Fine Arts and in university as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had a important influence on you.

This school included high school and junior college courses, and the length of the program was five years. The purpose of this school was training art teachers for primary and secondary schools. In 1958, it became a fine art university. Therefore, I studied art there for a total of eight years and got my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. During graduating year, one day one of my classmates found the pencil sketches and gouache still life drawings that we did when we took the entrance exam. The one sketch that I did for the entrance exam was of a teapot, half finished because I started from one part of the teapot and wasn't able to finish the drawing. The mark was not good. After seeing it I wondered how I could be admitted to this school. If my

students drew this way, I would not let them pass.

As far as studying at this school, I felt that the curriculum was very formal. The teaching method and the school's system followed the Russian system. Our class was separated into two studios and a professor gave lectures and there were two assistants who organized them.

In the beginning, we drew from plaster geometrical forms. Soon, it was more difficult, and we drew suspended sculptures of faces, pots, and a plaster of Voltaire. Color practice was sketching real life using gouache. In the third grade, we sketched using oil painting. At the same time, the school also offered us a Chinese painting class. I practiced using line to describe the object, later sketching real life using line and color. However, the Chinese painting classes were considered less important in comparison to other courses. I also studied anatomy and perspective. Soon, our classes became less frequent and most of our time was devoted to political activities. In fact, from 15 years old to 17 years old, I did not have enough formal art classes and the school focused on political activities. I drew in my spare time and talked with my classmates about how to improve our painting skills. Sometime, we also consulted with teachers. At that time, I was not sure about what art was. I just copied mechanically from real life. If my drawings looked like real objects, I would be very happy.

At that time, I thought I would be able to take formal classes after the political activities were over, but the political activities never ended. Drawing and political activities were two important things in my teen life. My generation grew up in a serious political climate. During the day, we worked with peasants, and at night, we studied political documents regarding political activities. Sometimes, we interviewed poor peasants in order to learn from them. Fortunately, the president of the school was a very good artist and teacher. He asked students to do their artwork

at the end of the political campaigns based on our experience in the countryside in order to help students continue to learn. Of course the subject matter was politically oriented. In 1957, when I entered the school, the Great Campaign against the Political Right started, and unfortunately, my art teacher of the secondary school was deemed to be Rightist, and was banned from teaching. He became a cleaner. After listening to this, as a 15-year-old teen, I did not know how cruel the political struggle was, and went to the secondary school to visit him. In the small loft under the step, I met him. We both sat quietly for a few hours. I really did not know how to comfort him and he also did not know what to say. By 9:00 pm, I had to go back to home because I did not have money to take a bus and it would take me one and a half hours to walk to home. He brought me into the art teacher's office because he was a cleaner and he had all the offices' keys, where there were assignments from all the art classes. In the 1950s, Chinese art classes were formal, and the school provided good quality paper for students. He let me take as many students drawings as I could. He knew that my family was poor, and I could use the back of the assignments to practice.

I took two bundles of the paper, and one of the bundles was as tall as me. Now I really did not know how I was able to take those heavily papers home. During my eight years of studying art in high school and university, I practiced in my spare time using the paper. It was not only me but also my two friends Xu Gon Du and Tang Ming Song who used the paper. We often cut one piece of paper into four or six pieces to sketch on.

During my high school and college studies, I was very poor. Every month, I had only two dollars to buy basic things like toothpaste and soap, along with art supplies. I had to concentrate almost all of my money on classroom art supplies, and I did not have enough art supplies for

practicing in my spare time. If I did not have enough money to buy art material, I could not practice in my spare time, so in order to practice, I tried to find cheap ways to practice. Finally I found a good way to practice that cost little.

I bought a lot of cut-price watercolor pigment that was old or dried up. I got some bottles to use to boil water that I used to dissolve the dry pigment in. Then, I bought a bottle of white gouache, a bottle of paste and glue. In those years, paste or glue were very cheap, five cents would buy a big bottle of either one. I soaked the paper that my art teacher gave me. When paper was almost dry I used sandpaper to make it rough, later, I painted with the watercolor mixed white gouache and paste. In this way, I was able to paint a watercolor with brushwork and it looked like an oil painting. After it dried, I covered it with a thin coat of glue. In this way, I was able to paint an “oil painting”. With this method, I was able to paint many pieces in a day. The smallest piece was just as big as a stamp. My color practice was not hindered even though I couldn't buy oil painting supplies.

On the contrary, I was able to paint boldly and practice a lot because I had cheap material. My marks in my major classes were very good. Today, I really appreciate the experience in those years. Today, I like to create my artwork using integrated materials, and in China, I was seen as one of the earliest artists using mixed media techniques. I feel it is difficult to create if I don't use these techniques. This resulted from my economic situation during my time in high school and university. I constantly explored ways to make art using less money. Today, when I recall those years, I think that those experiments I tried seemed a little bit strange and offbeat but they turned out to be very valuable.

Back then, in the studio, my oil paintings were always thin, and colors were like small as

a chicken's droppings on my palette (there was just a little bit of each color). When I painted a little more thickly, I scraped off a canvas and used it again. I hoped that I could use a little bit of material to do oil paintings with massive visual effects. This forced me to study how to use less oil paint to create a massive visual effect. Today I have enough material, and those dried oil painting pigments on my palette were enough for me to use half the year in those years. Today I still paint very thin, but it looks very massive, because of my experience in the high school and university. This experiment of saving material made me paint thinly and dislike a surface that was too thick with paint. Today most of my oil paintings are thin. Some seem massive but they were painted using many thin flats again and again. Some people believed that my oil paintings must be thick because the colors were mottled and haphazard, but when they look at them closely, they can see the charcoal marks of the original draft of the image.

This experience not only influenced my artistic creation, but also gave me traits: persistence and diligence. This is what being a son from a poor intellectual family fostered in me: to never give up and to always try to make progress.

In fact, a few students in my class were also from poor families and they also were afraid of using too much material. Once, my classmates and I went to the studio and saw one student applying layers of thick brushwork, and he seemed to be using a lot of paint. We thought he must be crazy because the paint that was piled on this painting was enough to paint ten other pieces. However, when looking at it closely, we were surprised because it was very thin, and in order to build that kind of massive effect, he had used a pencil to carefully draw the shadows along the edges of brushwork like in a pencil sketch.

My oil painting class had twelve students. Six of them came from the Wuhan Teaching

Junior College of Fine Art and the other six came from ordinary high schools. In fact, it was the dream of the forty-four students in my class to major in oil painting, and it was competitive to get into this program because in those years, oil painting was popular. In my dormitory, I had three roommates. Gou Tian Ming and I from the College and Xu and Tang were from high school. We liked art very much and often had serious discussions about art.

During my time in university, I did not stop exploring because of my lack of money. In everyday life, I quietly followed the rules, but when I did my artwork, I followed my own ideas and feelings, and often explored some new things. The teachers did not want me to paint like that, but they did not forbid me to do them. For example, in 1961, I painted a nude in the style of Matisse although my classmates thought it was a bit ridiculous. In fact, teachers did not think that I did follow the rules of accepted right art concepts. Sometimes, I put straw and sand into my paint. My classmates believed that I was running wild and laughed at me, but my teacher did not criticize me for doing this and let me fail although he was not happy. This was because the teacher knew I worked hard, and I had been studying in this school since I was fifteen years old. I was cultivated by this school. At that time, teachers liked our parents, and they were very nice and lenient. What I explored later was a kind of continuation of this exploration.

When I began to study at the university, I admired Russian art very much and liked their methods of painting. Indeed, as a university student, I knew quite a lot about Russian art. In those years, there were four important journals in my university. We three students had a good relationship with a librarian and we were able to look at them as soon as they arrived. When we read those journals we felt like we were on holiday. We were able to understand most of the contents although our Russian was not very good.

However, after my second year of university, I started to question Russian art after seeing images of Cezanne and Picasso in these journals. Compared with Russian artwork, I found these were beautiful and they touched my heart. I believed that these artworks were like what I wanted to do, and were full emotion and human feeling, but Russian artwork liked to lecture and was constrained by politics. I really looked forward to reaching more about their artwork, but it was not possible in those years because they were seen as ‘bourgeois’ and could only be seen in Russian art journals. I thought I would paint in this way if I had the opportunity. For me, Russian literature and music are more attractive than its visual art.

In China, fine art colleges just help students develop technique. However, real artists should immerse themselves into everyday life.

The beginning of the 1960s, it was the three years of natural disasters we often didn’t have enough to eat. However, during that time, I painted and drew many pieces. During these three years, the only one thing I did during summer and winter vacation was draw and paint. I painted ceaselessly.

It was very hot in the summer, and sometimes it was 40 C. I immersed myself into the studio, and did pencil sketches. I filled a basin of cool water, and pour water on myself with a towel. When the water became too warm, I got more cold water.

Today, when some young artists mention their difficulties, I always told them that different experiences influence people in different ways. The challenges artists encounter are not bad things, but are valuable in terms of their artistic creation.

During my time at university, I went to countryside for three months every year to do political activities. The university asked students to do artwork for twenty of these days. At the

end of our stay in the countryside, our teachers went to different villages to see students drafts of their paintings, and discuss them with the students in the places where the students lived. We often did big drafts with charcoal. In that year, the leaders of national art association made their rounds in my province in order to prepare for the next year's national art exhibition. After seeing our drafts, they were impressed by my drafts that reflected the spirit of the new peasants and world-shaking change between old and new society. This encouraged me to paint a big oil painting that was selected to be displayed in the national art exhibition. At the time, I just was delighted with it but I was very amazed. I never thought I could keep it and I didn't keep any of the comments from critics in the newspapers. Fortunately, after working in a publishing house, one day I found a slide of it in a stack of paper. This oil painting was supposed to be published in a book on development of the economy of Hubei, but this book was prevented from being published because the director of Hubei province, Wang Ren Zhong had been removed from power. Unbelievably, I found the slide of my artwork after not thinking about it for many years.

In the 1960s, people were pretty naive. I was glad to take part in the national exhibition, but never thought about whom this artwork belonged to and never tried to find and keep it. At that time, I was happy to read comments about my artwork in newspapers, but I didn't think I should keep them.

My father destroyed all the artwork I did at the university. When I took part in political activities in the countryside after graduating from the university, my father wrote to me and asked me what he should do because different political groups would soon search my home, and those artworks would be considered to be bourgeois. He was very worried and hoped I could answer him within three days. My home was very small, and they were not hidden. In fact when

I received my father's letter, twenty days had already passed. I never blamed my father for destroying my artwork.

In high school, I was like a baby and was not mature. In 1958, at my dormitory, we discussed the slogan "Art Should Serve Politics." We all believed that it was better to use slogan: "Art Should Serve the People" instead of it. This idea created a serious debate in my class that lasted a long time, but in the end, we were criticized.

I felt that everything really changed when Den Xiao Ping became premier when he stated in 1977 that "Art Should Serve the People" and not that "Art Should Serve Politics."

In the beginning of the 1960s, when the whole country was in hardship, was also a very hard time for my family. I had used my vest for many years and had now it was full of small holes. It looked like it was made out of lists, but I did not want to throw it away. Once, I found a collection of Russian artists in a second-book store. I asked salesman to keep it for me, and I went back to home immediately to get some money. When I got home, I screwed up my courage and told my father that I wanted to buy this book. He replied that the family was out of money. I was worried that someone else would buy the book and could not help to tearing up. My mother was very sad and quickly borrowed five dollars from a neighbor for me. Five dollars was then a lot of money. Finally, I bought that book.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience you had and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

After graduating from the university, I was assigned to be an art editor in a Hubei

publishing house. I also had an opportunity to be a teacher in a university, but publishing houses often could offer editors a good salary and other benefits. Therefore, I decided to work in the publishing house. However, the job prevented me from painting. I was responsible for editing comic books in addition to organizing illustrators to draw them. I even did one comic book myself.

According to the government policies of the time, people who graduated from a university had to stay in remote area of the country for one year. It was not possible for me to bring any books to the countryside. I put some prints of artwork that I liked on small cards so that I was able to look at them at any moment. At the same time, these cards also were very convenient to carry with me without anyone noticing. Whether working during the day or having meeting at night, I could still look at them when I had a moment. These images provided me with an atmosphere of warmth, and made me very satisfied.

At that time, artists were offered some opportunities to paint Chairman Mao's portrait and artworks that reflected the Cultural Revolution, but my leader did not give me this kind of opportunity and I also did not shoot for it. I just kept my dream of being an artist in my mind. It seemed that at midnight, I saw the other side was bathed in a very bright light, but I did not know how to get there. Then, the idea of becoming famous was seen selfish and wrong, and this idea should exorcise from everybody's mind. I never thought I would be able to freely create art or have my artworks shown. I also thought I would never receive wealth from my art and be called an artist.

In 1977, one day, my friend told me that there was a public meeting to evaluated drafts of artworks in order to prepare artwork for the national exhibition commemorating the 50th

anniversary of the formation of the Peoples Army. I wanted to take part in it. Therefore, I went to this meeting, and fortunately, the organizer was my professor when I studied in the university. I asked him whether I could participate. He told me that I could and it was better to submit a draft to the committee the next day because the committee would choose through a public appraisal the next day. I took all night to prepare a draft of my artwork. It was called *The Sky in the Communist Areas*. I wasn't able to create military life because I didn't have any experience in the army. However, I could do a historical painting. It represented a woman soldier leading a group children reaping the harvest and learning characters on a blackboard, while in the background there was smoke from a distant war. As a result, my draft was selected and I got the opportunity to spend a month painting the piece in a place with beautiful landscape. However, my boss at the publishing house did not allow me to go with the other twenty painters. I was extremely unhappy. After trying to convince him again and again, finally, my boss agreed and I went to this place for half a month.

In the beginning, I felt I was not able to paint because I had not painted in oil for over 14 years. Fortunately, I had a good technical training, and step by step, I finally finished this painting. This piece was displayed in the provincial exhibition.

In 1978, it was first time for the Center Academy of Fine Art to recruit graduate students after the Cultural Revolution. I entered an examination, and the only piece of my artwork in my portfolio was the oil painting of *The Sky in the Communist Areas*, since everything else had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. However, at that time, my daughter was ill and I stayed in hospital and looked after her for two months. For me, helping my daughter get better was very important, and I did not sit this exam. The second year, the Center Academy of Fine Art

did not recruit any graduate students. However, my alma mater, the Hubei Academy of Fine Art was accepting graduate students. When I registered for the entrance exam, I found I did not have any artwork, and I took several weeks to complete some paintings in order to register for the exam. Except for my English, where I received a 7 out of 100, all my subjects were excellent. I had learned six years of Russian and had never learned English. How could I get this seven? In the multiple-choice English exam, I circled the answer that I was the most comfortable with. However, this year, English had become part of the exam while the year before it was not included in exam. When I went to Beijing on business, my colleague encouraged me to talk with people at the reception office of the Ministry of Education. The comrade was a responsible person, and I thought he must be a person with some influence. He called the Hubei Ministry of Education, and hoped that if the Hubei Ministry of Education saw that if a student's professional subjects were excellent, it would re-consider including their English mark as part of the entrance exam.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in your MFA study as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

As a result, I became a graduate student. If I wasn't able to get this chance to study my MFA, I would never have had the opportunity to do it because people older than 38 years of age were not able to take the exam, and the year I was accepted I was 37. If I failed this exam and I would lose the chance to be a graduated student forever.

In 1979, there was only one graduating student in oil painting in the program at this university since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and it was me. I had two supervisors,

Professors Yang Li Guan and Liu Yi Wen. I really hoped to explore some my own ideas that had sprouted in my mind during my studies for my bachelor's degree. However, they did not approve of my idea, and hoped that I didn't depart from the path of realism. However, they also knew that I had my own ideas. I tried to keep communicating with them very smoothly. I always painted things based on my own ideas and talked with them about them. After following this approach, they gradually understood my ideas and started to support my pursuit of them. Of course, during studying my MFA, I paid attention to two things. First, I did my best to fulfill their requirements. The second was I explored my own concepts. Therefore, they recognized I was a good student with strong skills and studied hard. At that time, I was an explorer and had my own ideas as well.

Sometimes, I think it is a good thing that I didn't study at the Central Academy of Fine Art. Different colleges had their own styles. If I enrolled the Central Academy of Fine Art, I would not have been able to follow my own artistic concepts. However, in the Hubei Center Academy of Fine Art, those professors were familiar with me because I stayed there for eight years before the Cultural Revolution. In spite of the fact that they did not approve of my exploring, they tried to understand me. Even though I painted or drew some things that they did not expect, they still asked the school photographer to take photos of the work. During the 1980s and the 1990s, I was seen as a Chinese avant-garde artist because I could daringly paint my ideas and my professors offered me the free soil that enabled me to do it.

In order to finish my MFA and to demonstrate my artistic creation and future areas of artistic exploration, in the spring of 1981 and in the summer of both 1982 and 1983 I went to the northern area of Shanxi to prepare for his graduate exhibition. This area was a rugged, dry and poor area but an area rich with Chinese history and civilization.

There, I did new work in order to form my own style and rid myself of past artistic concepts and methods, including Russian artistic ideas. I found a kind of local lino paper that was very rough. I used it for oil painting in addition to a kind of strong rice paper. The purpose was move away from the depiction of color and space, light and shade volume. If artists pursued the impersonality of object as much as possible, they would ignore or blind their feeling. Therefore, I tried to reduce the relationship between warm and cold colors, and the relationship between space and volume.

Therefore, most pieces that were created in the 1980s did not involve volume and light and shade. On the contrary, I used some traditional methods of Chinese painting. I was working in a misty earth yellow environment. Therefore, I used lot of yellow ochre. I thought if I chose tints of different colors, I would have use complementary colors and the relationships of color, making me go back to the way I used to paint. Finally, I used an extreme way that used tinting. In fact, I used a lot of color and concocted them, and got what I wanted. At that time, critics called it “Shang Yang yellow.” Soon I was not satisfied with it. With this new approach, I got a few gold medals in national exhibitions.

My artwork *Boatman in Yellow River* was my main artwork in my graduated exhibition. “In this lonely place, I really felt the great force of human beings that enable human beings to survive. Overcoming the natural environment was illustrated by the tiny forms of the boatmen’s bodies compared to the vastness of the Yellow River. These people who seem so relaxed and carefree in everyday life became stronger and more imposing in my eyes. Through them we can see the significance of the existence of human beings against a backdrop of the vastness of the natural environment.”

Kong Zi

Kong is a full-time professional painter at the National Painting Institute. She was also a soldier in the army from 1970 until 2005.

Kong was born in Tangshan, Hebei Province, in 1952. Her parents joined the Communist Army in 1946. After graduating from secondary school, she went to a small village to receive re-education with her classmates. As a way to leave the village, she joined the army with her parents' help. There, she worked half of the year as a nurse, and the other half she worked with artists making political propaganda posters, where she was able to develop her painting technique. From 1987 to 1990, she studied at the Military Art Academy. She won four national art awards and several of the army visual art awards in the past 20 years.

Interview: Kong Zi in her studio and her home during summer. 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in Tangshan, Hebei Province, in 1952. I often think whether there are any family members who are good at or like art? I already asked my parents this question. Nobody in my family had a career related to art. However, my great grandfather was a skilful writer and he was able to paint somewhat and was good at calligraphy. My parents were active in the communist party and participated in the revolution when they were young. When they were

teenagers, they joined the army to fight as guerrillas. My family was not a scholarly family. Before I was three or four years old, I was sent to my grandmother and she looked after me in my father's village in Hebei. The life in the countryside was pretty isolated. I grew up the same as other children living in the countryside. I also liked to use a branch to doodle on the ground like other children in the village.

Later, I came back to live with my parents in Tangshan when I was four years old. There was a theatre there, where I watched dramas that sometimes had characters wearing ancient costumes, especially fairies that I felt they were very beautiful. I really liked to draw these fairies back then, with their ancient costume and long cinctures. Sometimes, I also liked to draw flowers, grass or trees, but drawing the fairies was my favorite.

One of my mother's cousins was an associate director general of the Tianjin Culture Department, and later, she became a director general of the Hebei Province Culture Department. When I was four or five years old, she visited my family. After seeing my drawings, she thought they were very good and she told my mother that I drew very well and my parents should train me. After she said, that, my mother bought a book on painting for me, a booklet about Chinese painting called: *A collection of illustrative plates atlas of rock*. This book taught some methods and procedures of how to paint rock and stones, especially using brush and ink. This book was too professional and I did not have a teacher to explain it to me. Therefore, I just read it and I never followed any of the examples in it when I drew. In fact, I didn't like it very much. I still drew what I wanted in my own way. My mother did not understand art education and art. However, she knew how to encourage children do what they like to do. My mother always praised my drawings and told me that I did good job. Therefore, I tried to exert all my strength to

draw.

When I recall my childhood, I always thought that I had stayed in my father's hometown for a long time. In fact, a few times when my parents were chatting with me, my father told me that I stayed in his home village for only a very short time, and when I was two years old, I came back to Tangshan and went back there just in summers. After going to primary school, when I was about seven years old, it wasn't certain if I would continue to visit my Dad's village. Before I had talked to my parents, I always had the impression that I stayed in the village for a long time, because it had impressed me so much. I often wallow in the memory of the landscape of my father's hometown and remember it as being very beautiful. There was a big river behind the village. People liked to fish on the banks that were covered with willows. When spring came, plum trees, apple trees- everything was booming. On the contrary, the perceptions of and feelings about the city were much less vivid. My impression of city life was just my family's house. My perceptions of the village were full of the emotion.

In my grandmother's village, the ladies always made shoes and sometimes embroidered them with flowers or grass. I can't remember those patterns exactly. I can't recall any specific artwork that impressed me. I felt that I grew up in a desert empty of art when I was a child. I especially admire those people who came from art families. However, my family education totally followed Confucianism. When I was a little girl, sometimes speaking too loudly or laughing too heartily, my parents reminded me that girls did not laugh while grinning. My father's hometown was very traditional. If a lady dropped by too often or always chatted, public reaction would be very bad. Gossiping ladies were seen as unprincipled and uncouth rogues.

I remember that my father had two series of classics of Chinese literature, first published

during the Ming Dynasty. The illustrations were woodcuts using line. In the beginning of the each book, there were illustrations of characters and the plots of the stories. For example, in the *all the brothers*, there were images of one hundred and eight characters. Before going to primary school, I really liked to read them and made line drawings to copy some of this figures. However, after starting primary school, I was introduced to different things in my classes, which included an art class. After I started school, I didn't wallow in these stories like I did before. Sometimes, I browsed through them a little bit during the fourth or fifth grade. After starting primary school, I became interested in comic books. I am the oldest child, and I often brought my young sister and two young brothers to comic book stalls to read comics. For two cents, we could rent a comic and read it together. The *Liao Zha* (love stories between ghosts and people) was my most favorite book because the beautiful female characters dressed in ancient Chinese costumes. They were very beautiful. I liked to copy them, while sometimes I also drew from my imagination.

Before going to primary school, I liked to use pencil to draw because I was able to erase it. After studying in primary school, I used crayon to color my drawing in art classes. Soon, I liked to draw images using pencil; then used crayon to color the images. My uncle and aunt bought a box of twenty-four colored pencils for me. All the children were envious of me. In those years, children rarely had such a good art supplies. I thought there were two reasons why they bought this for me. First, they believed that education was import for kids and they knew this kind of material could be useful for kids because they worked in the cultural system of the government. Second, they had relatively good jobs with good salaries. The gifts they gave us always focused towards our studies instead of simple toys. For example, they gave my young brother a puzzle instead of a plastic water gun.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

In 1956, my father went to Tibet to take part in the land reform. At that time, I did not study in primary school and my youngest brother was just a few months old. My mother had to take care of our four kids by herself. All children were sent to kindergarten instead of being sent to my grandmother. At the same time, my mother wanted to do very well at her office and therefore was very busy. It seemed that parents did not have any ideas how to train children in music or art in those years. The only art education that my siblings and I received was at school.

Today, I often think about my primary school with the deepest feelings. It was called the Tang Shan Cadre's Children School, and its educational quality was very good. At that time, the whole city had only one *Xing Hai* piano, and it was at my school. When I went into the music classroom for the first time, I saw a painting of fairies dressed in ancient costumes on the walls and a sculpture of a Chinese traditional wind instrument was at the front of the classroom. I felt it was very beautiful. At that time, I did not have ideas about what art was; I felt the atmosphere was very heavenly. Each classroom had an organ, later all were changed to pianos. There were different after school art groups such as a brass band, a glee club, a dance group, a visual art group. Some of the after school teachers were professional artists. I was a member of children's glee club and dancing group, and during the fourth grade I started to manager the school library. I did not know why I did not take part in the visual art group. I thought that teachers distributed the children to different groups instead of letting the children choose by themselves. However, I especially liked to paint and had some fame in my peer group during the fifth grade. When my

classmates mentioned me, they all knew I was good at drawing small figures. As an excellent student, I also often drew the small figures in the class furtively, especially the fairies.

In 1963, there was a national children art competition. At that time, the school asked me and another boy to take part in this competition. Based on a photograph I saw in a magazine. I drew a woman army reservist on an island, using brush and ink and a bit of watercolor. After sending my artwork to the competition committee, I never got any information about it. I thought that I didn't win any prizes; otherwise the committee would have contacted me.

I remember that my classmate, Xiao Ping, showed two pieces of my work to her whose sister who was studying at the Tangshan Chinaware Art School. Her sister wrote a letter to me. She thought my drawings were very good, and encouraged me to work hard in order to study at the Central Academy of Fine Art in the future. Her letter was the first time that I ever heard of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Although people were very enthusiastic about my drawings, nobody, including my art teacher, ever encouraged me in this way. That a person who was at Fine Art College praised and encouraged me enhanced my confidence and made me feel that I had talent in art. After that, I started thinking about becoming an artist. I am not able to remember her name today, but I remember the first time I ever heard of the Central Academy of Fine Art. However, I never got opportunity to study there. The reason was that intellectual young people had to go to countryside to receive education instead of going to university.

After receiving the letter from Xiao Ping's sister, I started to think I should draw seriously. But I did not know how to draw in a serious way. I just spend a lot of time copying comic books.

In the primary school, we had art classes from the first grade. We always drew a five-pointed star, or an apple following the art teacher instead of using a still life or actual object. It

was very simple. First we used pencil to draw images and then colored them with crayons.

Before the big earthquake, Tang Shan was beautiful and full of a cultural atmosphere even though it was a coal-mining city. In the past, it was a British colonial city, and some of the buildings and districts retained their British character. Later, the Japanese occupied it and built many Japanese style buildings. My family lived in a house that was built by British.

During the fifth grade, when I was almost twelve or thirteen years old, I became too shy to sing or dance in public. Therefore, drawing became my only hobby.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

After graduating from primary school, I entered the Tang Shan second middle school, a good school in Hebei Province. There, I participated in the school's art group. At that time, our art teacher was a well-known Chinese painter Tang Shan. He was born into the family of landlords that had a strong tradition of education and culture. It was first time I had met this kind of people. This was because my parents became active in the communist party early on, and the people around them were revolutionary cadres. Sometimes, members of the art group went to his home to see his painting. His home had an antique flavour, there were wooden carved windows, rosewood furniture, an old fashioned square table for eight people, with plates for mixing colors, the whole atmosphere made uncomfortable and gave me an eerie feeling. The only thing that was pleasing to my eyes and mind was the yard full of grasses and flowers. When I think about it now, however, I understand that he believed that his home should be comfortable, and it was decorated like the home of a Chinese artist.

Instead of teaching us Chinese painting, the teacher taught us watercolor. Using a brush and watercolor, he showed us how to painting trees, rocks and stones. He also asked us to buy Chinese painting art supplies. I forgot whether I bought some or not. At that time, I was not crazy about Chinese painting. I was just interested in drawing small figures. I did not know why I liked oil painting and dislike Chinese painting. It was possible for me to be influenced by politic climate, Russian culture. Therefore, I didn't pay much attention to what he was trying to teach us. I just remember that he was very a humorous person. During the Cultural Revolution, when criticizing Feudalism, Capitalism and Revisionism, some my classmates criticized him because he told students that it was good for artists being hungry because they could draw a baked cake and looking at it could make them feel full. When I knew that this teacher was born in a family of landlords and he was fat, I felt that he was a little bit terrible. Today, when I think about him I recognize that he was nice to us. Anyway, in my first year of secondary school, I had an opportunity to learn Chinese painting, but I was not crazy about it.

I did not finish my first year in e middle school because the Cultural Revolution had just started. In the beginning, I felt that the Cultural Revolution liberated me. The reason was that I was an excellent student in primary school with marks of over ninety-five percent in all my classes. However, after studying in the middle school, I started to learn mathematical equations. Working hard was not enough to make me a good student. My Chinese was okay, but mathematics was a challenge for me. I labored to learn it. I got a very bad grade, a 73, in an important exam. This struck me very hard. Later, whether went to countryside to receive re-education or joined the army, before taking part in any exam, I always dreamed that I was writing the mathematics exam, but I did not know how to finish it. Therefore, when the Cultural

Revolution started and all the classes were stopped, I was very happy. Finally I was liberated studying and I didn't need to write any exams or worry about math problems.

During the early half year of 1966, everything seemed good. Later, my parents started to have some problems because my mother's family was landlords, while my father encountered difficulties in his position as a director of a factory. Therefore, I wasn't able to join the Red Guard. This influenced me deeply. I often thought that my classmates loved Chairman Mao, and I also loved Chairman Mao. At that time, students from black families were not allowed to go to Beijing to see Chairman Mao until Chairman Mao interviewed the Red Guard for the last time in 1967. In fact, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, I had an opportunity to go to Beijing to see Chairman Mao. Three students from my class would go to Beijing, and I was supposed to go to because I was a monitor in my class. However, I gave this opportunity to one of my classmates, a good friend, because her father, as a director of Hebei Province would also be in Tiananmen when Chairman Mao interviewed the Red Guards.

At that time, some students smashed plaster casts at my school, burned pencil sketches of high school students'. When I saw what was destroyed, I found out that my school had both very good facilities and students who produced very good artwork. I had never seen pencil sketches of plaster casts and no one had ever taught us to do that. I admired the students who drew these pencil sketches, and I also felt bad that these insurrectionists destroyed these things and I wouldn't have any opportunity to learn what the other students were able to do. I still remember the sculpture of Venus, which I didn't think was bad. On the contrary, I thought it was beautiful. I did not know there were these kinds of things for teaching at my school because the art group was divided into the secondary school and high school art groups. In the secondary school art

group, the teacher just taught us Chinese painting because that was all he was able to do.

In fact, my art teacher also told us to make pencil sketches. I did one piece that was a portrait of Liu Ying Jing, a soldier and a hero before the Cultural Revolution. He was trying to hold back a mad horse in order to save people's lives, which led him to lose his life. He was a good example for us to learn from. Newspapers published his photo all over the country. At this point I didn't know what was pencil sketch was and my art teacher didn't tell me, and just told us to use a pencil to copy a photograph. I did not dare to draw the communist leaders' portraits because I worried that the portraits wouldn't look like them. I chose to copy the photo of a hero, Liu, published in the newspaper. This was because that even if I weren't able to copy his photograph well, I would not have any problem. Secondly, he was handsome. My classmates thought my pencil sketch looked like him.

By the end of the 1967, the students whose families had been considered as politically 'problematic' were seen as being more a part of society, and were allowed to participate to political campaigns. Therefore, although I still was not a Red Guard I took part in one of the school Red Guard's organizations, *Red Painting Soldiers*. There were some students from high school; some were from the second and the third grade of middle school, while two others and I were from the first grade of middle school. Those older students were our teachers, and a few of them were students' leaders. They arranged our work. These students painted large oil or gouache portraits of Chairman Mao on the walls in the school. They stood on a scaffold and used grids to magnify the portraits. We helped them wash dishes and hand them paint while they worked. Some times, I also helped them to set the type and mimeograph the newspaper. For example, when Chairman Mao pronounced or wrote his ideas or 'prescriptions' for China, the

older students set up the type and drew Chairman Mao's portrait on the masthead of the newspaper, we were responsible for printing and mimeographing the newspaper. Gradually, they gave us some important jobs. During purge of Liu Shao Qi, the Vice Chairman of China, they let me do a woodprint of a head of a dog, symbolizing of Liu. This was the first time I did an image by myself.

My first propaganda drawing was a copy of *Chairman Mao and Six People from Command Headquarters*, done by a professor from the Central Academy of Fine Art. The older students assigned me to draw the portraits of Jian Qing and Kang Sheng. Later, both were purged. The whole drawing was almost 3 meters wide and 3 meters high, which was carried by students on parade. I didn't think that they would let me draw it. Therefore I was very excited. What I drew was okay and did not need others' help. We used charcoal to make the sketch. I did not take part in the parade because I still was not a Red Guard. However, I saw the parade and our drawing on the street. I felt proud of it and it showed my parents that I was good at drawing.

During the Cultural Revolution, many artists had to receive education in the countryside and lost the opportunity to draw or paint. Therefore, many propaganda drawings and paintings had to be done by children. In the *Red Painting Brush (Red Painting Soldiers)*, there was not a relationship between masters and apprentices. The students who were good at drawing drew the important parts of a drawing, while those who couldn't were left with the less important parts. Anyway, the more able people did more of the work. When students who were able to draw very well drew, we just watched how they did it, we rarely taught each other.

During working in the *Red Painting Brush*, I learned many things. For example, I learned that there were different kinds of art forms such as Chinese painting, oil painting, gouache, print,

and sculpture, and the difference between a sketch and a pencil sketch.

Although I was not a Red Guard, I felt I took part in the political activities through drawing or painting following Chairman Mao's prescriptions and I did my best. I felt happy.

At that time, there were big problems in society. Because I was the only Red Guard at home, my parents respected me very much and believed that I belonged to the advance guard. It seemed like that in 1985, when the New Star art group appeared in China and made many old artists feel at loose ends, and older artists believed that the new generation of artists were more important while they were behind the times. When I went back home, my parents often stopped what they were doing and inquired about what happened in my school. They were always interested in listening to what I said. At that time, I was about 14, or 15 years old and my parents were over forty years old. Today, I feel confused why people looked up to and deferred to youth so much.

In fact, at that time, my two young brothers and one younger sister stayed at home because school stopped classes to further the revolution. I had never thought that it was necessary for me to teach them or play with them at home. In school, I drew or painted propaganda pieces everyday. However, I did not think that I was drawing or painting, I believed I was taking part in political activity.

In 1968, Chairman Mao published his ideas about intellectual youth going to the countryside. Soon, I went to countryside in the suburbs of Tang Shan. In fact, in the beginning, I hoped to go to the border areas, but Tang Shan's government did not arrange for younger students to go to border areas. .

Before going to the countryside, I visited my father who was a director of a big munitions

factory after being let out from the “Cowshed.” I was about sixteen years old. One of the leaders of the factory, Uncle Ma (a colleague of my father) said that the factory door had two big spaces and he hoped to have two paintings to decorate the door, the subject matter was: Defending the Motherland against Invasion. My father asked Uncle Ma to please let me do it because I was good at painting. My father did not understand art. He believed that I was able to paint well because he had seen me draw a portrait of Chairman Mao. Of course, at that time, the factory did not have people with artistic ability. Therefore, Uncle Ma agreed that I should do it. In fact, I had never painted this kind of propaganda by myself. However, in the Red Painting Brush, I had seen how older students paint big wall paintings. I also imitated the procedures they followed. I asked the factory to make two boards and I bought the paint. I painted the board with white oil paint. Then according a propaganda painting, first, I gridded and drew the outline of the images; then I made a draft using brown; third, I painted the dark parts; then the lighter parts, at the end I added the highlights. After painting for half a month, finally, I finished it. Each piece was almost two meters by three meters.

I wasn't afraid that I was not able to finish them. I just felt that I could copy what the printed painting was. If it was red I just mixed the same red color, and if it was yellow, I mixed the yellow and put it on my painting. I did think that it was difficult.

This was the first time for me to paint such a big painting and this also made my father very happy. It gave me confidence and a feeling that I could do many different things. When workers went to the factory or went back to home, they enjoyed looking at them, and the two paintings existed on the door for many years.

Q: Please describe your experiences of art-making in the countryside and any experiences and events that impressed you.

After going to the countryside, we were ambitious although we had to do labor. This was because we believed that we were reconstructing the globe and we were contributing to the world revolution. In the beginning we often went to other villages to take part in the political discussions that were organized by older students and I was always encouraged by their ideas. According to Chairman Mao's idea that if a person wants to teach people, he has to get education first. We believed that the purpose of going to the countryside was to get educated by the peasants, and then take this knowledge to educate these peasants in the future. For us, learning planting was not our purpose, but to learn to be more natural and diligent like the peasantry. Indeed, in the beginning, we thought we were higher than peasants, and believed that learning from them was in order to educate them in the future, but soon, we had to face the reality of our life in the countryside.

The village where I stayed was very poor. The country offered a one-year grain ration to us because we were intellectuals, however, local peasants were on short rations. Before I believed that political revolution was very important, but now I thought about what was the purpose of someone's life when I saw that the peasants did not have enough to eat.

After working in the field, I had the chance to read some foreign novels. I really enjoyed them. The older students, who had secretly taken these books home from school libraries that had been closed (during the Cultural Revolution), took them to the countryside with them. I sometimes thought that I should also take a plaster cast home too, because otherwise they would all be destroyed. I really liked these plaster casts.

The cultural activities in the countryside were pretty poor. The only thing that was going on was in a big village over ten miles away from the one where I lived in, where people could watch movies in the summer. Local peasants were very happy, but for us, coming from cities, felt very sad. In the city, we were able to go to the cinema anytime, but in the countryside, we could go only a few times a year.

The second year I was there, my parents decided to help me to transfer to my father's hometown, a small village where I lived when I was two or three years old. There, some relatives could look after me a little bit. If there was an opportunity to go there, I might get it because I would be the only the intellectual youth in the whole village. (She moved there soon after.)

One of my distant cousins came back to the village from army and brought a few books about how to draw on black boards. I thought when he was in the army, he must have been active in drawing on black boards. He gave them to me and I thought of them as my treasure. I brought a piece of the Chairman Mao's portrait that I did with me to the village. After all, I did get formal art training, but I didn't continue to draw when I was in the countryside. At the same time, the labor was very hard, and I didn't want to do anything after a day of labor. When I read some articles written by intellectual youth from the middle school of the Central Academy of Fine Art, they all mentioned they insisted on sketching and painting when they were in the countryside. I thought that this was because they had received formal art training and knew how to teach themselves.

After 1970, my parents' situation became better and they began to think about how to help me get back to the city. Joining the army was a good way for the intellectual youth to return to the city. In 1971, the army was only recruiting young people who were good at singing,

dancing and painting. Although I got some training in singing and dancing when I was a kid, I was not a professional. And at that time, I was so shy that I felt embarrassed when I went swimming. I felt that using my drawing ability to get in the army was a possibility for me. The army recruited soldiers who were able to paint scenic backgrounds. I took part in an exam and I succeeded. I thought that I was recruited not only because of my artistic ability but also because of my parents' help.

Q: Please describe your experiences of art-making in the army and your subject matter.

When I joined the army, it was preparing *Circumvent the Tiger Mountain* for the Beijing Opera. At the time, a student from the CAFA was sent to the countryside near where my troop was stationed because he was seen to have political 'problems'. Our troop borrowed him to help us make a stage backdrop. I learned many techniques and knowledge about art from him. I knew how to basically paint a scene, but not how to create fine details like in an oil painting. A strong visual effect was important for painting the scene; big brushwork would create good effects. We used gouache to paint on the cloth. For example, if we needed to make a stump, we would first use wood to make a stand; then we used cloth to wrap it. Finally, we painted the bark and the texture of wood on it. When it was lit by a lamp, the stump looked very nice and looked like the real thing. When our opera was performed in a theater, people thought that our stage scene was the best one in the whole city. As an assistant I worked very hard because this was a good opportunity to learn.

However, after finishing the opera, I was transferred to the troop hospital to learn to become a nurse, although I really liked life in the troop. The main reason was that it recruited

three art designers, including me. One was not only good at painting but was also an electrician. The other had experience working in a county theatre troupe as an art designer. Compared them, I did not have professional training, and I was a female so that some jobs were not suitable for me.

Anyway, after joining the army, I began to receive training and paint formally. In those years, Chairman Mao's wife Jiang Qing was responsible for culture and art and the Chinese army considered art as an important element in the superstructure of Marxist theory. Learning Art Classes were held each year in the unit. In 1970, our troop had a one and a half month class that pooled the techniques of soldiers who liked painting or making artwork to create artwork. One day, I was working in the hospital, and a cadre from the troop's propaganda department called me and told me that I could take part in the art class, but the class had already been running for over a month and there was only 15 days left. I decided to go. Many of them had already finished their artistic creation. When I started, I was told that the subject matter could only be the "army" life around me. Then, the director asked me what kind painting I would like to do. I had never made any individual artwork except for the two oil paintings I did in my father's factory. Therefore, I said that I would like to do oil paintings. They all believed that my artistic ability was so good that I would be able to paint in oil. In fact, they did not know I did not have any experience to finish a painting using other art materials. I used gouache on the stage set in troop, but I didn't paint the whole tree by myself. My job was that when they told me to put some olive green on the tree, I just did it.

I did an oil painting, which was 2 x 1.5 meters within half a month. I did my draft using two figures from an army magazine, and a big mountain from the back cover. Later, I added an

old man with a bamboo basket. I called this painting *Going to Mountain to Pick up Herbs*. Three generations, a youth, a middle-age person and a senior were working together. It was somewhat of political concept artwork.

At that time, I really liked to paint. I just slept two or three hour everyday. It was because I was young I did not feel tired. I got up when I heard the reveille, and went to my dormitory after 2:00 or 3:00 am. Soldiers had to go to sleep at 9:00 pm, but I was able to go to sleep late because I was transferred to paint. I flung myself into painting. I still remember many interesting things. One the morning, I took my quilt outside to bask in the sun. When I went back to my dormitory that night, in the middle of the night, I saw a quilt outside. I wondered who didn't take her quilt back inside. After getting back to my dormitory, I realized that it was my quilt. When I painted I forgot everything.

A call from the cadre working in the Propaganda Department changed my life. Otherwise, I would have studied medicine. Then in the army, the best jobs for women were in the medical field. Now when I think about it, I feel that I was somewhat talented in art. There were over ten people in our art class, but two pieces were selected for the provincial troop exhibition. In order to take part in the Beijing troop's exhibition, I had to participate in the art class in the Provincial troop. There, I read many printed collections on art, and most of them were about Russian artists. I got instruction from professional artists and continued to improve my piece *Going to Mountain to Pick up Herbs*. Although my art skill was not good, my subject matter was interesting. I adjusted the images of the painting, and I just showed a grandfather showing a young female soldier how to pick herbs. Fortunately, my painting was selected to Beijing troop exhibition. Again, I got an opportunity to take part in the artistic creation group in the Beijing troop.

Their art cadre, who graduated from the CAF high school, believed that it would be better for me to use Chinese painting to express *Going to Mountain* instead of oil paint. Furthermore, he thought that a soldier's allowance of six dollars per month was not enough to buy art supplies, since a tube of paint cost ten or twenty cents, and I also needed to buy canvas and erasers. However, Chinese painting was very practical for soldiers because you just needed a brush, a small carpet, some ink and rice paper, basically. I disliked Chinese painting and wanted to paint in oil. However, in the army, when an officer told soldiers to do something, it meant as an order, and soldiers were supposed to obey. Although I cried for a few days, I started painting using the Chinese Gongbi Style, and I changed my painting's name to *Warm*, which showed a young female surgeon was giving Chinese herbs to an old woman with a few children watching them from outside through the door. It was exhibited in the Beijing troop art exhibition and published.

In 1972, there was an army-wide art exhibition and I participated in an artistic creation group. In those years, most of the time, artistic creation tended to be a collective effort. My subject matter was *I Also Want to be a Soldier in the Future*. In order to follow the political climate of the time, the leader of the group suggested that I change the subject matter to *I Also Want to Go to the Countryside in the Future*, and the soldier became a young intellectual. The draft of this painting was made by a Saturday night soldier. This small draft was drawn with line. It described a few children who were outside were looking at a soldier with a big red flower on his chest. The Art Creation group let me paint it, and it was my second Chinese painting. I still used the meticulous method that I used in the first painting. The Cadre Yang, who was responsible for instructing us, suggested that painting it more roughly would improve the work. Then, people did not care about 'ownership' of things or ideas and did not care about becoming

famous. For it to be a good propaganda painting, everybody in the group had to contribute to it, even though at the end, only the first painter generally signed his name. People with good technique helped others with less ability, and they in turn learned from those with more ability. Cadre Yang used more rough lines to redo the figure of the intellectual youth's in my painting, showing that my artistic ability still needed more developed. Therefore, I felt that the painting I did before was better than the painting Cadre Yang adjusted. I was really dissatisfied with his changes. However, this painting was approved and I copied it again the original, paying special attention to Cadre Yang's rough brushwork. I used my own method to do the face and used Cadre Yang's technique to paint the clothes. Later, this painting was recommended by Cadre Yang and was published by the People Art publishing House.

At the time, I didn't know why I insisted on signing the names of the "Saturday night soldier," Cadre Yang's, and my name together. In fact, the subject matter had changed and the content had changed. When thinking about it now, I think would feel peaceful in my heart if I signed their names according to traditional Chinese culture. I did not know it had been published and nobody told me. How was I able to know it? It was because that in 1974, I went to Beijing on business, and I went to the Downtown Bookstore to buy books and I saw it in the shop window. Immediately, I called the troop's propaganda department. They told me that it was published and the publishing house had saved you two printed reproductions, which I went and picked up.

In the same year, the national army started an artistic creation class, the first since the start of the Cultural Revolution. Each provincial army sent two people to the class. In the beginning, I didn't get this chance. Fortunately, one girl was too busy to go, and after a half a

month, I received a call asking if I would like to go or not. Of course, I wanted to go and I went to Beijing by myself. At the time, I really wanted to learn and improve myself. There were six girls among more than sixty students. It was first time for me to see some original modern Chinese painting. We few girls made a good relationship with the person who kept these original paintings. Therefore, after supper, we sometimes got the chance to quietly trace these originals. First, we used pencil and rice paper to trace the painting, and on the second day we used ink brushes to draw according to the pencil tracing. I began to like to Xieyi Style and painted a few following the style of Xieyi.

I made two paintings and one of them was selected for the Beijing troop's exhibition. It was my first Xieyi style painting. For that time on, I started to like Xieyi style. Most Xieyi artists learn technique from painting flowers and birds. However, I started with the figure and I didn't try any flowers and birds because, then, paintings with flowers and birds were related to feudalism, capitalism and revisionism, along with those who painted them. In fact, I also rarely wore the cloth with flowers or beautiful colors. Therefore I learned using difficult subject matter and created work before I had any time to practice technique. In this class, the teachers taught us how to use a brush and how to paint the face and drapery in clothes. When a teacher demonstrated how to paint, we gathered around him to watch what he did. I felt that studying in the class was useful for me to develop my artistic ability. However, after this class was over, Jiang Qing, the wife of the Chairman Mao criticized it. She believed that the purpose of this class was to train experts, and it helped soldiers to become 'white' experts. It departed the revolutionary path that art should serve the masses because it only focused on the technique and ignored artistic creation.

After finishing this class, I was able to follow my own artistic path. I was not only able to pursue my own way, but I was also able to help others. I began again to practice Chinese calligraphy. I finished the painting *Coming to Countryside in Spring*. Although sometimes I encountered difficulties, I was able to take the time to deal with them myself. For example, when I was having trouble painting a hand, I asked somebody to pose so I could sketch it, and in the end, I always could do it.

From 1972 to 1976, our troop had artistic creation class. I did artistic creation for half the year and the other half I worked in the army hospital. When I was in the class, I wrote a letter to my hospital to update them about my artwork and creative progression twice a month.

In 1976, after the Tang Shan earthquake, we went to the earthquake areas to experience life and I did some woodprints. This was the second time for me to do wood prints after doing the dog head of Liu Shao Qi. Wood printing was a relatively quick and easy procedure, and could be published in newspapers in a short period of time.

Later, I was transferred to another troop hospital because the army started to reorganize and disarm. There, I rarely got the opportunity being released from my work there to pursue my other duty, which was to create art.

I worked as a nurse, and I always liked the night shift because I was able to paint during the day. At that time, painting was an important part of my life. In my hospital, I designed, wrote and painted all the posters. I copied many modern Chinese paintings even though I did not know much about art theory and aesthetics.

I almost wanted to give up painting for a year because my parents hoped I would go to university, and my troop recommended me to go to the First Chinese Medical University. I

immediately decided that I did not want to paint anymore and wanted to study in university. Soon after, however, the university entrance exam for was reinstated in 1977, so I didn't get the opportunity to go to medical school.

Later, I got married and was transferred to Beijing. I still worked in preventative medicine. Promoting public health was a part of my job, and I had the skill to paint propaganda posters. I often used gouache to paint and I also did video such as how to control and eliminate rats and how to prevent and cure disease. I tried to exert my artistic ability. The video I made got an award from the army.

Now, I became crazy about painting again. Except for going to the office and looking after my son and family, I invested all my time on painting. I was able to participate in the artistic creation class for two months each year.

At that time, I still wanted to study in university, and my husband also encouraged me to realize my dream as well as the leaders of my hospital who also support me to go. I took the entrance exam, but I didn't pass the exam. My ability of painting was good, but my knowledge about art history and aesthetical theories wasn't so strong. The People Liberation Army Academy of Fine Art was part of the People's Army. Only once, in 1977, were students recruited from outside the army. After that year, it only accepted soldiers.

In 1985, I convinced my superiors at the hospital to allow me to pursue advanced studies at the Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou, and the hospital gave me five hundred Yuan extra. At the time my parents or my husband's parents looked after my three years old son in order to be able to concentrate on my study. I studied there from 1985 September to 86 July.

I saw many famous artists there. This was entirely different circumstance than being with

troops. There were many exhibitions at the campus. In 1985, the New art group appeared, and students held many different ideas or thoughts about art. Many artists from other universities and from overseas gave presentations. I had classes from Monday to Saturday. Around this time, ideas about art marketing had not yet appeared, and teachers there did not sell their paintings. They always took a lot of time in classroom to help students, and it was easy for students to ask them for a painting as a teaching method. In my class, most of my classmates were art teachers from other universities. I was the only person who hadn't received professional training in fine arts. I was shy to show them my artwork because people pursued new artistic concepts; they had a negative view of the Cultural Revolution, in addition to the fact that I didn't receive a formal art education.

Therefore there was big contrast when I came to this art community from the more orthodox environment of the army. I saw a great deal of avant-garde art for the first time. However, I did not reject it, on the contrary I was curious about it. I also bought philosophy books by authors like Nietzsche, then popular at Chinese universities. Generally, I enjoyed studying this kind of thing.

My major project was in a class called the Chinese Figure Painting class. There were over ten professors and teachers who gave us lectures. One teacher instructed us one or two months and focused on representing the figure. At that time, everyone wanted to pursue and explore new things. All tried to exaggerate and distort the images. In the beginning, I was not very good. However, near the end of the class some my paintings were hung up in the classroom as examples of good work. At that time, my art concept underwent a big change and I began to look forward to being a professional artist. I invested all my time on study. Even if our campus was

close to West Lake, a famous park in China, I just went there twice, once when my class had our graduating photos taken and the other was when my class went there to take photographs with our teachers.

At the end of the program, I did two pieces of Chinese painting for the graduating exhibition. At the time, I had tried exaggeration and distortion in my art, as well as pursuing formalism. Before starting our work, we went to the Zhou Shan archipelago to experience life. Therefore two artworks I reflected the lives of fishermen. Before studying at the Zhe Jiang Academy, when I did my first artistic creation I wasn't able to paint in a realistic style, but still I tried to pursue it. However, after studying in the Academy, I started to have a comparatively new concept of art, and I started to like expressionism. Therefore, although my realistic techniques were pretty good, I tried to exaggerate and distort, and I also recognized that it was not easy to successfully distort the figure.

In 1987, when I was 34 years old, I passed the entrance exam and I was recruited by The People Liberation Army Academy of Fine Art. I studied there for two years and I re-digested what I learned in Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Art. When I started my artistic creation, my art concept was influenced by the idea that art should serve politics and the masses, that life was a source of creation, and that my artwork should be encouraging to people. However, I saw and experienced different artistic groups in the Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Art, and I often took part in the different workshops and exhibitions. Suddenly, I had my ideas straightened out, and my subject matter started to be involved with trivia from everyday life.

My artwork in the graduating exhibition was quite original, and the art community gave were quite positive about them. Before doing the work for my graduate exhibition, I went to Da

Lian Mountain where the Yu people's lived and experienced life. I was attracted to their traditional clothing and their way of life, and my artwork in the graduating exhibition represent that. In fact, the Yu people were just a way to express my ideas and experience of life. My classmate thought the color in my painting was kind of oppressive, even though the colors were very bright. I did not deliberately try to represent any ideas. At the time, I was middle aged and was busy looking after my family and leaning art. My artwork expressed my feelings instead of trying to lecture. This was a milestone for my artistic creation, but I did not continue to develop it. This was because I still worked in army and my subject matter had to focus on the army. Yet my subject matter involved not only life in the army, but also the lives of people living in towns, and of romantic images of women in traditional costume as well doing comic books. When I had the chance to talk with other oil painters, I often thought that I also could paint in oil and integrate some of the techniques and concepts I learned from Chinese painting into them.

After graduating, I went back to the army, and I started to win some national awards. I was the prime of life, and my ambition in art was great. However, I had to teach art class in the Senior University because my troop did not have posts for professional artists. Teaching art was my job and making artwork was my hobby so that I didn't feel free. Now, I had achieved some fame in the national art community, but in my troop, nobody knew it. I really wanted to go a professional artistic unit such as a university or an art academy. When I was 18 years old, I joined the army and after I was over 50 years old, I left the army to work in the art community. It was the army that gave me my artistic training.

Cao Ming Qiu

Cao was born in Shuang Feng County, a very small and poor county in Hunan Province, in 1954. Because of his grandfather's bourgeois background, his parents did not have full-time jobs, and this caused him and his brothers to live difficult lives. He improved his artistic ability by drawing political propaganda posters for his hometown. In 1980, he passed the entrance exam and was admitted to the Hunan Industrial College. In 1992, he studied in the 2-year Chinese painting program at the Guanzhuo Fine Art Academy. Today, he works at the Futian Art Center as a professional artist in ShenZhen, and has won some awards in the art community.

Interview: Cao Ming Qiu in his studio in Beijing during summer, 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in a small town in Shuang Feng County, Fu Nan Province. My county was very poor, but for those who lived there, due to the influence of traditional Chinese culture, scholarship and academics were always of primary importance.

I had three brothers. My parents did not have full time jobs and they did not do things related to art. After 1949, my parents eventually found themselves at the bottom of society because my grandfather was a civil servant in the Guo Ming Dang government before liberation in 1949. My family's situation as part of the lower classes meant that life for my brothers and me was very hard. I started to help my parents do housework when I was very young. Nobody knew why I really liked to write Chinese characters even when I was six years old. Nobody taught,

supervised or encouraged me. After studying in the primary school, I was interested in writing characters and took a lot of time to practice them. Therefore, my handwriting was very good and I was able to teach myself many different styles. I remember the only art material we used was pencil because every child had a pencil to write. I also often used pencil to copy some images, but I did not have too many opportunities to see any kind of pictures in this small town. My hometown is in a beautiful area, so sometimes I also sketched the landscape.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

I did not have any art class in primary school.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary and high school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

I went to the local middle school that also did not have an art class. When I was 14 years old, we got a new teacher, Wang Yuan Xian, who was transferred to my hometown from Changsha. She studied children's pedagogy in college. I thought that she was good at everything, such as music, sports, and painting. She not only had literary or artistic talent, but also was also beautiful. When I studied in the first grade, she taught us. The school had given her the task to make posters on the blackboard, and sometimes, if she was busy, she asked me to help her write information or an essay on it. She believed that I was talented in art, and told me she would like to teach me drawing if I would like to learn from her. At that time, I thought drawing was a very magnificent thing and admired people who were able to do it. She taught me color sketching and pencil sketching. If I hadn't met her, I might have ended up a peasant like my brothers.

For me, the first artwork I ever saw was her painting. I admired her. Her artworks

included gouache painting, watercolor, and oil painting. The subject matter she focused on was still life, landscape and figures. Today, when I recall her artwork, I believe that she must have received professional training. She taught me color and pencil sketching. In my small town, it was not easy to buy paper for drawing or painting. In fact, even if there was that kind of paper to buy, I wouldn't have been able to pay for it. She gave me some paper to draw on. The paper was newsprint paper that she got from Hunan Daily. At that time, I always sketched my classmates and landscape. I was crazy about it. Teacher Wang also brought many books and magazines on drawing and painting from Changsha. Sometimes, she let me copy some pencil sketches from them. We did not have a scheduled time to have our art class. After school was over, and when she and I both had time, she instructed me a little bit. I spent a lot of my spare time practicing and applying what she taught me. At home, after doing the housework, I also drew. My parents supported me practicing art, but not before I had finished my chores at home.

I thought I had a little bit of talent in art. I was fifteen years old and I had been learning sketching from Teacher Wang for almost a year when our small town organized a revolutionary education exhibition and it needed somebody to draw Chairman Mao's six relatives who died for the Chinese Revolution. The local revolutionary committee could not find anyone to do it, so Teacher Wang recommended me, saying that I drew very well and I was successfully able to finish it. Using very small photos, I did six pencil sketches. Each piece was 1 meter high and 0.7 meters wide. They were exhibited everywhere in my hometown. I really was proud of myself. Teacher Wang also believed that I was very talented in art.

Q: Please describe your experiences of art-making and any experiences and events that impressed you after you graduated from high school.

After going to high school, I taught myself art because Teacher Wang still worked in the secondary school. When I studied in high school, the town revolutionary committee asked me whether I was able to do Chairman Mao's portrait in oil. I felt I could do it although I had never tried before. Then, oil paint available was only what was used to paint furniture or buildings. The portrait, using this kind of paint, was six meters high and almost 4 meters in width. Using a grid, I showed Chairman Mao and Lin Biao interviewing Red Guards.

I was really interested in doing it and I felt I was expected to do this kind of thing. Of course, if the Revolutionary Committee could have found someone else to do it they would have, because my family background was bad (bourgeois and Guo Ming Dang affiliation).

Generally, I did not have any art class in primary school, middle school and high school. I learned art from Teacher Wang in my spare time during secondary school. At that time, because of my family background and their struggle to survive, my parents made us do little else than help the family with chores. Eating our fill was good enough. I practiced handwriting because I loved to. I often did it by the light of a coal oil lamp. I got the opportunity to learn art because Teacher Wang recognized my artistic ability from my handwriting.

In middle school, I was responsible for writing and drawing the school's poster on the blackboard. At the top of the blackboard were Chairman Mao's quotations, and the rest was students' or teacher's articles. In the empty spaces I often drew some flowers or figures. However, I never thought about being an artist.

In 1972, after I graduated from high school, I did different part-time jobs. In the beginning, I was a jinricksha. Then, I worked in a fertilizer factory to pack fertilizer. Generally, we packed fifty kilograms in each bag; sometimes there could be 49 or 51 kilos. If there was less

than 49 or more than 51 kilos in a bag, we had to add or subtract fertilizer to keep the weight between 49 and 51 kilograms. I was the only person able to pack 50 almost every time and never needed to weigh the bag. I think this is why I was able to become an artist, because my ability to observe is very exact.

Although life was very hard, I never gave up drawing and painting. I did a lot of gouache. Especially when I was a packer, I helped people to paint or draw in my spare time in order to make some money. Sometimes I felt that I was able to draw anything, but sometimes I felt I was not able to draw or paint. I liked to paint propaganda paintings because the towns or villages paid me money to do them, sometimes almost ten dollars a day. This was a great thing for me because I got only ¥1.20 for eight hours of work in the factory.

Later, my father asked me to learn carpentry. One of my mother's brothers was a skilled carpenter. My older brother had learned from him and was able to do a bit better than if he had another job. Therefore I started to learn from my old brother. In my hometown, carpenters not only made furniture but also built houses and buildings. This kind of experience can only be described with one word: hard. But this job continued to train my eyes. I made some furniture for people as well as for my family. I still have a few pieces because some of my furniture's design was original.

Being a carpenter was too hard, but I could make a little bit of money painting propaganda paintings, more money than building buildings, so I quit my part-time job as a carpenter and focused on painting. Painting was a way to survive. At the time, I painted what people wanted. The subject matter focused on images of workers, peasants, and soldiers. For example, some paintings had them working in fields full of green vivid plants, while others

showed peasants harvesting their crops. Sometimes, I painted Chairman Mao's portrait with one of his quotations. I painted 20 or 30 of these propaganda paintings. Each piece often was 5 x 6 meters. This kind of work was a very useful practice. Later, when I studied in university, I was able to paint movie posters very fast and I was able to do a few pieces in a day while people who got professional training were often not able to do it.

I painted in order to make a living and I had never thought about being an artist. However, I always insisted on drawing and painting in my spare time. Even if I did not have good enough food to eat, I wanted to save money to buy some art supplies to be able to do art in my spare time.

In 1976, the Cultural Revolution was over and universities restarted recruiting students in 1977. However, the remote towns were always a few steps slower than big cities. People in the big cities started to take entrance exams for university. I did not think about sitting the university entrance exam until 1978. At the time, I didn't have any information about how to prepare for the entrance exam for the fine art academies in China. I wanted to study at the Guan Zhou Academy of Fine Art. Therefore, in order to register for the entrance exam, I made a sculpture and sent it to the Academy. However, I wasn't allowed to take the exam and the Academy did not return my sculpture. In 1980 I was able to write and pass the exam and I was recruited by the Hu Nan Industrial College. I studied there for three years. This college was not a fine art academy, but had two majors related to art, fashion design and industrial design. I really wanted to study fashion, but, at the time, people believed that it was only suitable for women, designing clothes was not a man's job. In the end I had to learn industrial design.

Q: Please describe your experience studying art in college, and how this experience influenced you.

During my studies at the college, I started to dream of becoming an artist. I had courses in Chinese Gongbi painting and these courses were very useful for me when I later became an artist. At the time, my department believed that the Chinese Gongbi painting was useful for students because they could use elements and images in their designs. Therefore, each semester, we went out to make line sketches of plants, and sometimes we went to another province to sketch peonies for a week or two. Using these sketches, we went back to our college and created Chinese paintings. I was interested in these Chinese painting courses. One of my Gongbi style paintings was collected by the Chinese Art Museum.

While studying in college, I always tried to do part-time jobs to make money because of my family's difficulties. I got a contract with the Masses Cinema to paint movie posters. In those years, university students rarely had part-time jobs. Indeed, my artistic ability helped me make a living although there was not an art market in China.

Q: Please describe your experience studying after graduated from college, and how this experience influenced you.

In those years, all the universities in China recruited students through national university entrance exams all over the country and the government gave graduates jobs. I got a job in the design studio in my county's printing factory. However, when I registered for my job at the factory, the leader told me that they did not need any designer. The factory would pay me a salary as a designer, but I had to work as a worker instead. This was not what I expected. In those years, there rarely were university graduates in China, and I was proud that I was a university man and I was used to lead a free life. At that time, there were a few people who graduated from university in my hometown. Therefore, I refused to register for this factory and gave up the full

time job. I started my own small business. Using today's words to describe it, I could be called a professional artist. I opened a studio, called Ji Mei, "gather beautiful things". In fact, I just hung a wooden sign outside the room I lived in and went to the local government office to apply for a license. The things I did were related to art and helped me make some money. I did portraits, painted advertisements, and designed brands and logos. I designed many logos for individual businesses, stores or factories.

After being in business for three years, in 1987 the human resource department of the Hunan provincial government published a government file to my county and required my county government to arrange for me a full time job. At that time, I was only the person that had graduated from university with a major in art who didn't have a full time job. This was seen as a waste of an able person by the county. Soon, the county government sent me to the first middle school to be an art teacher. I was very happy. The printing factory was gathering a lot of laborers and did not have too much cultural life. However, this middle school was very famous and gathered people with good education. I was proud of being an art teacher.

I worked in art education for almost five years. In the beginning, I taught art class in the school. Soon, I was transferred to the county education department to supervise art education. However, I still wanted to be an artist and improve my artistic ability. In 1992, I persuaded my leader to let me take the exam for the two year Chinese painting program at the Guangzhou Fine Art Academy, and I was accepted. There, I received a real and strict art training at the Fine arts Academy. I really cherished this opportunity. I copied a lot of master's pieces. When I had the chance to study painting, I focused all my effort to paint, like a terribly thirsty person hell-bent on drinking when he finds a fountain. In order to paint my peonies, I went to Zhengzhou and

Heze to sketch peonies three times. After two years, my five pieces were included in the graduating exhibition and three of them were collected by the Academy.

These two years of study were very important because these teachers gave their many years of experience of artistic creation and skills of doing art to their students. The program let students take a straight road of leaning art instead of crooked road. If I did not get this formal training I would have been able to achieve the level I have reached today, but I would have taken more time.

My earlier experience of making art helped me resist the conventions that Chinese art education emphasizes, while I developed skills from the teachers. At the time, I copied many masters' original Chinese paintings in the academy. This was very useful in fostering my aesthetic views. I practiced Chinese calligraphy everyday in order to create lines with strong visual effects like those of the masters. When I had the chance to see masters' pieces, I started to know what kind of artwork I wanted to do.

I started painting figures. Later, my teacher suggested that I focus on flowers and birds, and not to involve too many subjects, because a person's energy is very limited.

My personality is suitable to do Xieyi Style Chinese paintings, although I had been doing Gongbi style painting. I had practiced Gongbi since studying in the college. In my college, students from my major were offered course of Gongbi painting because the College believed that this course could help us to collect the materials to design in the future. However, practicing the Gongbi style was very useful for me, enabling me to study and become familiar with different objects (like birds and flowers), and to feel like they are living in my heart. I could paint what I wanted to express myself instead of copying pictures or other masters' styles and

ways of doing things. For example, in order to paint a peony, I had gone to sketch and observe peony at Luo Yang and He Zhe many times during and after my university studies. I really like this plant, and for me, the peony is a symbol to express my feeling.

After finishing the MFA courses, I went to Loudi City and worked in the local Art Research Institute. Facing the Chinese economical reform, I would like to be involved into this reform and soon, I transferred to the Shengzheng that is the earliest open city in China. I work in the Futian Art Center as a professional artist. I started to focus on my artistic creation.

I never restrict myself to one medium. I tried to attempt different media as much as possible, due to my past experience. I had a real different experience from many artists. Sometimes, it seems hard for me, but it is very useful for me to have open ideas about art.

In 1994, a master of making cheongsam from Taiwan visited me and wanted me to draw a Peony on his cheongsam. I was very excited. I introduced my concept of art and improvements to the cheongsam (a traditional Chinese woman's dress) and we started to try to improve the cheongsam. I designed the packaging for our new product. We also opened a company together.

But I was not easily satisfied. So, in 2003 I started to work on my own designs, and participated in some competitions.

I began to win a number of awards. I have been collecting a kind hand-made cloth from the rural places of my hometown, and people call it Blue Print Cloth. I grew up in a small town in Hunan. When I was young, due to economic conditions, the people in my neighborhood all weaved, and dyed the cloth by themselves. The patterns of this kind of cloth are blue and white traditional flowers and birds. It is very beautiful. This local folk art made a great impression on me. Some patterns have white and blue flowers and birds on a white background, and the others

are blue flowers and birds on a blue background.

However, in my hometown, there are few people who weave cloth like that today. Finally, someone told me that a workshop was able to produce the cloth in Jiangsu Province so I started to design my own fabric.

In 2007, I used the blue Print Cloth to design clothes and I received the national award of fashion design.

In 2004, I began oil painting. When I paint a subject to a certain extent, I hope to change. At that time, my Chinese painting of a Peony was collected by the National Art Museum. I am the third artist whose painting of a peony has been collected by the National Art museum since it was built in 1949. I had already reached my personal peak; if I did not change, it was possible for me to paint in this style for the rest of my life. There are many of these examples in the history of Chinese painting. However, it was not easy for an artist to change his style or give up the some things he is good at in a short time. Therefore, I started to try other materials to express this subject, the peony. In fact, it was that experience of Chinese painting that I used to create my oil paintings. My experiment has been successful both in the art community and the art market. At the same time, the experience of making oil paintings made me better understand how to deal with colors and how to use new ways to create Chinese paintings.

I tried different materials and methods; traditional Chinese painting, oil painting, porcelain, acrylic, and elements from fashion design, but I really think that Chinese painting is the most suitable outlet for my artistic expression. Chinese painting is better suited to this land (China). Critics think that my Chinese painting is more thick or heavy than other Chinese painters. This is because I had some time to do oil painting. Because I tried different kinds of

media, my Chinese painting can boldly break through some of the concepts of traditional ink painting, particularly in terms of color.

Today many artists are making a living by selling paintings in China. At the end of my 80s, I started to sell my artworks, and in the 1990's, my work began to attract the attention of collectors. This experience made me become more sensitive and it also broadened my concept of art. It is true, the art market is chaotic today, but it is a new thing in China and it needs time to develop. However, the emergence of the art market is very good for artists. I think that I am lucky to be living during this good era. Some of my new ideas have come from collectors.

The National Art Museum of China had collected a total of six of my ceramics. Why I did I do ceramics? A collector who collected some my Chinese paintings asked me if I could help him design some ceramics. Therefore, I started trying to make and paint on ceramics. I contacted a factory in Jingdezhen to learn how to make ceramics. There, I did all the work myself. In terms of creating work, I believe that it is very important for an artist to start something with interest and complete it with perseverance

The Chinese art education system is based on the idea that all students should be masters. However, the method that universities follow is just to study the skills and ideas of the master's. But it is not possible to train masters. Why had I made ceramics for just two years, and then had them collected by the National Art Museum? This is because I have an open vision. My education is not limited to the details of technique. My experiences from folk art and making different art enable me to form my own porcelain style instead of imitating those of masters'. If you are interested in something, you just do it even you don't have professional training. Even if you do, you also can learn something by yourself.

When I painted cinema posters, I learned skills when I needed to. I have never thought that I couldn't do something because I had never learned how to before.

People are very lucky to study art in university, but it just offers you a scaffold that you have to draw on to climb your mountain by yourself. If you could not get a scaffold, you still can arrive at your peak, but you have to take more time to do it.

Wu Ming Zhong

Wu was born in Hebei province China in 1963. Today, he is a M.F.A. Associate Professor and Director of the Oil Painting Research Office, Capital Normal University. He was a visiting scholar at the Repin State Academic Institute of Painting Sculpture and Architecture in Russia in 2003, and Buffalo State College in the United States in 2005. Since he took part in The Academic Exhibition of Beijing Youth Oil Painters, Art Gallery of Beijing International Art Palace in 1998, he has participated and had solo exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, Russia, the USA, Germany and Korea.

Interview: Wu Ming Zhong in his studio in summer, 2009

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that you saw, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to do art at that time.

I was born in Zhu Lu county, Hebei province, China, in 1963. In my family, there was nobody who worked in art or an art related field. My grandfather was a Protestant clergyman.

My family lived in a church that was originally built by a Norwegian missionary. We had three rooms there and one of them was connected to the alter of the church. I was born in the church. There were some sheep that had been left at the church, which produced many offspring over the years. I still remember drinking sheep milk and playing with the lambs. However, I don't have any strong impressions of what the church looked like, and then, there wasn't any religious activity at the church. I lived there for three years at the most. Soon, a political campaign started, and a residential committee was formed, and my family moved to another yard.

In the 1980's, in China, churches were able to become active again. At the time, my grandfather died when I was studying in university. One of my grandfather's friends, Grandfather Zhang, re-organized the Christians in the area and rebuilt the church. He asked me to paint an oil portrait of Jesus for their church.

I never received baptism, but I read the Bible. Today, when I go to other countries, I also like to visit the churches. When I go to Buddhist temples, I also like to pray as a show of courtesy. This doesn't mean that I believe in all gods. For me, different cultures have different gods. Essentially, they are the common expression of human sensibility. I am full of esteem for gods and those who believe in them.

My father was a Chinese medical doctor. My mother was good at mending clothing. Her hands were very artful. When I was a young boy, I really liked to draw. Sometimes, I liked to copy the images from the dictionary, like animals, and other times I liked to copy comic books.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

As far as my art class in primary school was concerned, we did not have a professional

art teacher, and I just remember that I drew the red flags and Tiananmen Square. I remember that I drew Tiananmen and red flags on my art assignment notebook. I do not have any memory of later art classes.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary and high school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some events and experiences that impressed you.

After studying in secondary school, I saw my friends doing a Chinese landscape painting, and I also did one. At the time, we didn't have an art teacher to instruct us. There were only a few good friends who drew together. I was almost ten years old. A few of my friends all liked to draw and paint. The oldest among us was able to draw very well. Therefore, after seeing what he painted, I went home and imitated what he did. In those years, comic books were very interesting. I used the brushes and watercolor to copy the comic book characters. For example, I used black ink to copy the four scrolls of the Monkey King, Pig Monk, Tang Monk and Sha Monk in the Travel West series. Then I used watercolor to color them. It was very interesting. I liked to draw with pencil and brush. At the time, there was no rice paper so we used a kind of paper that was used in windows instead. This kind of paper could produce the same visual effects as rice paper. After finishing my paintings I always mounted them on paper; then hung them on the wall. Even the adults liked them.

One day, a friend of my father visited my home. When he saw a crane that I drew, which stood on one leg with the other bent, he felt that my drawing was very good. He told my parent I was talented in drawing and that I should be encouraged to develop it. My mother went to the county cultural center and found an art teacher for me. This teacher was a Chinese painter. I went

to visit him with my drawings and paintings and he instructed me somewhat.

In those years, the artworks I saw were mostly political propaganda paintings or political cartoons such as Defending Treasure Island or Beat Down Liu Shao Qi. I did not see any professional artwork. At the time, in my hometown, it was fashionable to use glass paintings to decorate rooms. Orchids, birds, landscape, or fairies were painted on the glass of the cabinets and on individual glasses. The content was from Chinese painting, creating a new form of folk art.

Q: Please describe the art education you received after graduating from high school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some events and experiences that impressed you.

After studying in high school, I started to do Chinese painting. When I saw my art teacher making the glass paintings, I felt that they were very beautiful. Therefore, I began to make them too. I made glass paintings for all my family. Soon, my neighbors asked me to do glass paintings for them. They bought glasses and I painted on these according to what they wanted. First, I used Chinese ink to draw the shapes of mountains, water and trees; then, using my finger to mix colors with furniture paint. I patted the colors on the glass. The trees were green, and the sky was blue. It was also possible to use a brush to paint on the glass. This kind of painting had radiant color and it was beautiful. In those years, art supplies were in short supply and their quality was also poor. I still remember that crayons scarcely colored the paper.

When I studied in high school, I really wanted to study in the fine art academy to become an artist in the future. However, at the time, the methods of painting and drawing I did were not formal and no fine art academy found them acceptable. In addition, where I had been living was very isolated and I did not know about the outside world. When I drew a pencil sketch, it was of

a cup, a bowl, an inkbottle or a book. I worked hard. My mother called me to get up at five o'clock every morning to draw. In winter I often did pencil sketches at home. When the weather was better, I went out to sketch before the sun rose. Afterwards, I went to school. I dove into drawing with fervor. However, my art teacher was not able to instruct me on how to do more than a pencil sketch because he was a Chinese painter. So, at the same time as I studied with my first teacher, I learned pencil sketching from another. In fact, this teacher did not receive the formal art training. I also took time to practice calligraphy and copy the *jian zi yua*.

I should mention that I started to receive a relatively formal art education after I graduated from high school. I graduated in 1979, and I was able to get opportunity to study in the fine art academy. However, I really wanted to study art in university. Although my family did not have a lot of money, they paid for me to audit art class in a training school in another county. However, the art teacher just taught watercolor there and he only did watercolor by himself. Nobody told me that color sketches had to be in gouache for the university entrance exam. I also did not know what standards were required for pencil and color sketches exam and for the artistic creation exam, in order to be accepted as an undergraduate student.

Therefore, when I took the exam, I used oil paint instead of gouache. In those years, students should first send their artworks to the university for which they wanted to register. The university decided whether they were acceptable or not. In fact, I had never got the opportunity to go to university to take the university entrance exam and I did not know which standard I should follow. I had some part-time jobs and prepared for the drawing and painting exam. In 1981, I got a full time job in a factory as a maintenance worker. I liked to work at night so that I could practice drawing during the day. In order to get a professional art teacher to see my

artworks and to give me some suggestions, I took a three hour bus trip to Zhangjiakou City once every week or so. This art teacher was working in the Exhibition Center and had received a formal art training, graduating from the Tian Jin Fine Art Academy. His instruction was very important for me.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in university as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had a important influence on you.

In 1983, a good thing happened. The Fine Art Department of the Hebei Normal University changed their way of recruiting students. As long as students were registered in this department, they were allowed to take the departmental entrance exam for the university. This gave me the opportunity to see what kind of drawings and paintings were needed to pass the exam. Therefore, after practicing one more year, I passed the exam and was admitted to the university. That year, the entire Fine Art Department recruited only fifteen students. I was twenty-one years old, about in the middle of the class in terms of age. The oldest was three years older than I, and the youngest was four years younger. After the Cultural Revolution and when universities started to recruit students, fine art students were a mix of young and ‘older’. Especially in the Fine Art Department there was a big difference in the ages of students because the Fine Art Department was more competitive. It was said that the difference was more than ten years of age.

I had wanted to be an artist in high school. After graduating with an MFA and having painted for many years, step by step, I found how hard it was to be an artist. My university life was enriching. In the beginning, I was not the best student because I did not have good basic

techniques. However, because of hard work, when I graduated from the university, I was already able to paint relatively well. At school, I copied many master works by Rembrandt, Ingres, the Impressionist, and Picasso in my spare time. After doing these kinds of studies, I sketched from real life in the same way. I explored different methods of painting. In those days, teachers were familiar with Russian art and its realistic style, and taught students using Russian teaching methods. However, they rarely had experience in classical oil painting and were not familiar with these methods. Therefore, I had to explore by myself. In order to paint a classical portrait using classical methods, I persuaded a girl, dressed in flowing clothes and jewelry, to be my model. At the time, my university had a Music Department and it was easy to find a model because the girls from the department really liked to have somebody paint them.

At the time, I also thought about using oil paint to represent some elements of form and the spirit of Chinese painting. But I did not put this idea into practice.

In the classes, I also tried to use different methods to do pencil sketches. In those years, most students did not know what they should paint, in what ways. Most of the time, they just followed the teachers' ideas. I remember that when we did a pencil sketch of a man in the nude, I really wanted to use the classical technique instead of the Russian method. In those years the teachers were not like teachers today: they did not encourage students to use new, individual, or novel ways to make art. When the teacher was in the studio, I did my pencil sketch according to what the teacher wanted. After he left, I did my pencil sketch using the classical method instead of the Russian method. I drew two pieces at the same time. Once, the teacher saw my two pieces and he thought that both were good. After that I did not need to draw secretly. I also tried to do pencil sketch using Degas' way of using carbon sticks, charcoals and eraser. This could

produce a strong visual effect.

At the time, I felt that I didn't have enough knowledge. The cultural circumstances in which I grew up were poor. Sometimes, I found that I did not know certain aspects of art history, and it was very interesting and new when I read about them. I helped myself make up for my missed lessons. I made a schedule to read the history of Chinese philosophy and the history of Western philosophy. I read them by myself and I really wanted to understand them. I still remember that I read the book *Art and Visual Perception* by Arnheim several times. In the beginning, I did not understand what he said, but I forced myself to read it. I would read it a few times if I did not understand it, and after that, I finally understood what he said. Ideas and concepts like those of Gestalt's were very strange for me. When I was studying in university, the academic environment was relatively open, especially during the Trend of Thought movement in 1985. We had many chances to explore Western philosophy and aesthetics. We even saw some things about post-modernism. In fact, I wasn't so clear about what post modernism was, but I was interested in it.

During the first and second year, we did not choose our majors. Instead, we studied pencil and color sketching together. In our third year, we started to decide our own majors (oil painting, Chinese painting and wood block printing); and in the fourth year, we began to prepare our artistic creations for the graduating exhibition. Most of the time, students just focused on sketching; only when students were close to graduation did they begin their artistic creations. Therefore, we encountered big challenges when we started to prepare for our graduating show. It wasn't possible for us to explore a subject in depth, and many of us imitated the work of others. Before graduating, I was interested in religion. My artwork represented an ancient fairy from a

legend, but I don't think that it succeeded.

I worked extremely hard in university for two reasons. First, I changed my fate by taking the university entrance exam, changing from a worker to a university student. Therefore, I knew that doing my best was my only choice. Second, I really had a special feeling for art. I was eager to know more about art. I never thought that good artwork meant that images should look real and reflect technical skill. I always wanted to explore something that was blurred or illegible and not easy to express in one draft.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience you had and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

After graduating, I taught in my department. I felt that being a university teacher was good, but I still wanted to paint some of my own things. However, the artistic environment in Hebei Province wasn't very good. In addition, I did not dare to give up my permanent teaching position to be a "freelance artist" in Beijing. Therefore, I decided to take the graduate exam in Beijing. Even if I couldn't paint the things I wanted in Beijing, I still wouldn't regret it because I would have at least tried my best. In 1994, when my daughter was already four or five years old, I was admitted to study my MFA at the Capital Normal University. Today I think it is the right way for people to continue to develop and change. At the time, my supervisor, Dai Ke Jian, liked the realistic style. I was good at realism and I practiced sometimes. I passed the exam and started my MFA studies. In fact, before the exam, I had been painting in a nonrepresentational style, rarely doing realistic things. I had been doing a lot of thinking, experimenting, exploring in my own language and expressing my ideas.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience in your MFA study and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

When I was studying for my MFA, I did not have a salary and life was pretty hard. I continued to explore what I wanted to express. However, I still was thinking. At the time, Chinese society underwent a big change. During this period of rapid change, I was still painting from my experience.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience after finishing your MFA and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

In 1997, after graduating, I taught in the Capital Normal University. During this time, China became a commercial society. This was very good for people, but I was not able to participate in this new ‘consumer’ society. I was stuck in my situation. Suddenly, I became interested in bar codes. I expressed some aspects of my ‘situation’ in paintings that combined bar codes with figures with gaping mouths. I continued to explore this concept, hoping to express the situation of people in society.

After one year, I focused on political subject matter. I was aware of political things because politics played a very important role in my life growing up. If I had grown up in a period like today, I would not be interested in or sensitive to politics. I remember that when I was in elementary school, I watched a documentary and saw a tall and large Chairman Mao; I felt my body became feverish and I felt nervous. It was a different feeling than when I saw statues of Chairman Mao. In 1976, when he passed away, we felt that it seemed as if the sky was falling

down. In fact, at the time, the whole of my family was in ‘grey’ because my grandfather was a Christian missionary. Our life was very hard, and the things we owned and the food we ate were poor. However, we revered Chairman Mao so much. The environment that we grew up in had fostered these kinds of ideas. During the Cultural Revolution, we had to sing the song *The Sun is Red* each morning at school. In 1977, I started to learn English in high school and the first sentence I learned was “Chairman Mao, Long Life,” even though he had passed away.

The subject of my artworks was based on themes about press conferences and international negotiations. The figures were realistic except for their heads, which I represented as eggs. It was a kind of a formulaic image. I called it the *Egg Series*. This was what I understood about the politicians’ role in society and expressed my attitude about politicians. I did not trust them. In the paintings, people’s bodies were true, but their heads were eggs. However, this was not enough to represent my ideas because I was concerned with the common situation of people in society. My first painting of glass people with political moral and implicit significance was called, *taking photos as many as possible*. This piece represented delegates from two countries signing an agreement together after negotiating with each other. However, perhaps they will tear up the agreement because of some accidents. I started to considerate that frangibility of relationships between countries, groups or people. When 9/11 happened and the two skyscrapers instantly collapsed and disappeared into dust, this inspired me to do glass people. In 2002, I painted people that were chatting in a big cardboard box, like we are doing today, but we really don’t know the dangers existing outside of the box. This artwork’s name was *Friends, Please Beware of Moving*. I wanted to remind politicians to be careful.

When I painted my glass people, suddenly, my skills, my personal concepts and

experiences synthesized. I had already used the glass people to express my inner experiences and feelings. By this time, I was 39 years old. Generally, many artists succeed by the age of 30.

Artistic creation or making art should start with expressing. If the expression comes from personal aspects of artists' lives, they will not find any ready-made artistic language or style to represent their ideas. They have to explore their artistic languages and styles by experimenting: then, artistic creation comes. Frangibility and fragility were what I wanted to express. However, what way could I use to express such an idea? In the beginning, I used the balloon figures because they would break as if they were pricked. However, after the balloon figures were inflated with air and blown up, the shape of people was not clear, and I wanted to have a visual figure with identifiable characteristics. Later, I thought about the texture of glass. Glass has rigidity, but is easily broken. Using glass to represent the frangibility of people had never been applied before in art history. I did nothing else but explore this by myself. I did experiments using small sized paintings. I practiced and at the outset, I could not paint what I wanted to. I slowly established some methods for painting these glass people, then, started to paint big pieces.

In 2003, I went to Russia and studied at the Repin State Academic Institute of Painting Sculpture and Architecture for one year. This was a project of the Chinese National Fund for studying abroad. I continued working on my glass people that year. I studied in the studio. I showed my artwork to the supervisor of the studio, and after seeing all my artwork, the only thing he said was, "You should paint in this style (the style being the Russian 'realistic' style)." I had to paint in his studio's style. They turned a blind eye to contemporary art. They believed that their art was the best in the world. In fact, like my generation, we received education that influenced us favorably towards Russian art, such as the work of Repin. Our art teachers in

China appreciated Russian art. Going to Russia and studying art was something I had hoped to do.

Many years before, Repin had taught in this studio, and it still practiced the teaching methods he established. I drew a few pencil sketch pieces and painted some oil paintings, including nudes and portraits. There, we drew pencil sketch from 9 o'clock to 11 o'clock, painted the oil paintings from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm, and again, from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm we drew pencil sketches. This schedule was determined by the Russian weather. This was because sunlight was short during the winter and there often was natural light between 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Students did their color sketches in natural light and their pencil sketches in artificial light. I felt that the Repin State Academic Institute of Painting Sculpture and Architecture had a strong magnetic field. When I painted my glass people there, I was not able to paint in my own way at all. I always felt I was not right and I was making mistakes. However, I was not passionate about making art in this way, and I still wanted to do my glass people. Later, I rented a two-bedroom apartment near the subway station, which was far away from the State Academic Institute. I painted my glass people at home and rarely went to the studio. My early experience of learning art was a process of pursuing a realistic style. However, when I painted in the studio, I felt that their artwork focused on techniques although their teachers and students saw their artwork as a good art and did it passionately.

I focused on my own artistic creation and I did not ask the teachers to look at it. In the classes, when they talked to me, I felt that they were not interested in what I was doing. When I drew or painted in the studio, I totally followed their style. When there were some contemporary art exhibitions in St. Petersburg, I went to see them but my teachers and my fellow students were

not interested in them. In our studio, there were four teachers. They all had very good technique and were very responsible for students. If artists wanted to learn realistic style, they should certainly study there.

When was in Beijing, I had been teaching and was not able to totally focus on my artistic creation. After going to Russia, I did not need to teach for a year; so I immersed myself in painting, and I experienced a very pure state of artistic creation. It was wonderful for me. In 2004, after coming back to Beijing, I felt that I could do my glass people better and wanted to develop this theme more deeply. What I did belonged to contemporary art, but I worked and lived in a relatively closed system. I felt that it still was not a good situation and I wanted to look for my own stage. I wanted to enter the locale of contemporary art.

In the winter of 2004, a graduate student in my department rented a studio in the Shuo Jia Village, and he wanted to find somebody to share it with him. By sharing the studio with him, I entered the contemporary art community. Since then I have participated in some contemporary art activities and communicated with other contemporary artists. Soon, I had opportunities to take part in exhibitions. My fame rose so quickly. In fact, I did not expect success to come so fast. Before going to the Shuo Jia Village, I knew very little about contemporary art community. After moving there, I felt it was really wonderful.

After one year, the Shuo Jia Village was demolished for new development and I moved to Alcohol factory building. In June of 2006, an Italian art professor, who taught at the University of Rome, came to China and gave presentations in Beijing when his book was published in China. I visited him with my artwork. He told me that I should do bigger formats. Before the biggest piece of my artwork was 3 by 3 meters. Based on his advice, I started a piece 6x6 meters

found that my studio was too small. I rented a bigger studio again. In two years, I moved to three different studios.

Some people thought I became successful very quickly. In fact, when I studied in university, I had been looking for my personal way to express myself. It was very hard because I worked in a relatively traditional environment and what I pursuing was Avant-garde.

Wang Yan Yu

Wang is a "freelance artists" artist in the Song Zhuang Artist Village in Beijing. He was born in 1962 in Qingdao and is self-taught in oil painting. For six years, he took the National Art Entrance Examination but was unable to pass. In 1991 he was laid-off from his factory and began to sell arts and crafts in order to make a living. Gradually, he developed the skills of a professional artist. He has had his solo exhibition three times.

The Song Zhuang Artist Village, located in the Tong Zhou District (eastern suburbs of Beijing), is the most famous and biggest artist community in Beijing today. There are now nearly 600 artists living there, who are painters, sculptors, photographers and film makers of varying styles; ranging from the avant-garde to the academic. In the early 1990s, freelance artists from all over China began to come and settle there and most of them in the village have been avant-garde painters. Though painters come from different places and have different backgrounds, when they arrive at the Song Zhuang, they all become "freelance artists." Innumerable young painters view

the Song Zhuang as a holy land. It seems that living at Song Zhuang will offer them more chances to succeed in art.

Interview: Wang Yan Yu in his studio during summer, 2009:

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in city of Qing Dao, Shandong Province in 1962. Qing Dao is a very interesting seaside city. I had two older brothers and one older sister. When I was six years old, my father passed away. It was like a big tree falling down for my family. For me, the love from my father was zero. As long as my father died, my family income became zero and my mother had to support my family by herself. My mother just had a little bit education. In my family, nobody's career was related to art. My oldest brother was talented in music and he was able to teach himself to play a few musical instruments. However, he did not live during a good time to pursue his dream of art. In those years (before the 1990), he didn't have any opportunity to pursue music. He was a worker and played music in his spare time.

When I was young, my family lived in the area between the city and the suburbs. I really liked to perform. I took part in a community folk art team to perform Yang Ge, as well as singing songs from the Beijing Opera when I was six or seven years old. I liked to use a stick, a stone or a chalk to draw or carve on the walls, the ground - anywhere I could to create my images.

At the time, my favorite movies were cartoons, and I liked to draw pictures of the characters. Today, I have the cabinet that my parents got when they were married, and on the

back there is a drawing that I did when I was young. When I was over six years old, I got some chalk and drew a rooster on the back of the cabinet along with a few big Chinese characters that read: Chairman Mao Long Life. In those days, because people often said that a golden rooster heralded the break of day, I drew the rooster. After my mother saw it, she told me that this rooster could not produce eggs because it didn't look like a hen. My mother was very busy and she already did not have the time and energy to take care me. Therefore, if I did not make trouble, she wouldn't have to take the time to give me a lecture. She did her work in her way, and I played in my way. I often went out with my peers to a field or to the seashore, and we played games that children in the village played. Today when I think about these games, I still feel they are very interesting and my subject matter focuses on my experience of playing these games back then.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art and learning art in your spare time and some experience and things that impressed you.

I studied in primary school when I was seven years old. In those years, there were not many books to read. The books that I read were mostly comic books. Sometimes, I also imitated the images from these books. In school, we had art class. We sometimes drew a young red guard working, other times we drew sunflowers, peanuts, or pigs and chickens. I liked to draw a smoky big chimney, thinking it was very lovely. Today we see it as pollution, but at the time, it was a symbol for modern society. When I thought about what represented 'modern society', I always thought of it as an image full of smoking chimneys. At school, I also learned how to make a pencil sketch of an egg a few times. My art teacher demonstrated how to draw a pig; then we

followed his instructions to draw it. He always used lines to draw this stuff, and then color them with crayon. I often picked the ends of crayon that my classmates gave away to color my images because my family was too poor to buy crayons for me. In a class of sixty children, I was part of a group who were able to draw very well.

I think that our art teacher was not professional, but he was nice person, and I learned how to draw a pig or rooster from her. After school was over, I often liked to draw a little bit, such things like a cup or a tree. I especially liked to draw chickens. To make a living, my family raised some hens, roosters and chickens. Sometimes, I helped my mother to feed the hens and chickens. I always drew what I saw and showed my mother what I drew. She did not understand, but often said that it was interesting. I didn't know what was a good drawing or a bad drawing, but I just drew everyday. My Chinese and math textbooks were always full of chickens and dogs. In the first grade math textbook, there was a formula for $2+2=4$, so I drew two chickens under the number two, and four chickens under the number four. Sometimes, I also drew images from comic books like my friends were doing. When the images I drew looked like the image that I copied, I was very happy.

When I was twelve or thirteen years old, I started to like propaganda paintings from the Cultural Revolution very much. The young people were always full of idealism and were not afraid of big storms. It encouraged people. I felt they were honorable and optimistic. However, I had never thought whether they were artwork or not. It seemed that I didn't have any idea about art. Either I liked something or I didn't. If I liked some drawings or paintings, I could not help looking at them again and again.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary and high school as well

as your experience of making art and learning art in your spare time and some events and experiences that impressed you.

After studying in secondary school, I was responsible for drawing and writing the posters that were on the blackboard in my classroom. My art class was very good, but other subjects were so-so. The art class was my favorite class. In my school, it was a very formal class with a special art classroom. I believe that my art teacher had received professional training. In the class, we often drew an old grandfather or a Red guard. Although it was the end of the Cultural Revolution and society was in disorder, I was a child, and didn't feel any of the negative effects of the time influence and how poor my family was. Anyway, I was always having a good time. The art teacher was very nice. Children who liked to draw all were able to go to the classroom to draw after class was over. Some older children were able to draw pencil sketches very well, and I admired them and their skill very much. I often watched what they did, and then I followed what they did to make my own pencil sketch. Using this method during middle school, I developed my own techniques to make pencil sketches that were very useful as I continued to learn art.

In the middle school, I liked to go to the bookstore to look at books related to drawing or painting in order to learn more. I really liked the printed collections of Wang Shu Hui's *Gongbi* style illustrations for the classical Chinese novel *Red Building dreams*, written during the Qing Dynasty. It was the first time for me to see this kind painting and I wondered how there could there be such beautiful paintings in the world, and I went to see them again and again. Another artist's artwork: the *Monkey King* (he could not remember the artist's name) was also one of my favorites. His painting was published on a calendar that my family had. I often copied his paintings from this calendar. Later, after my family's economic situation was a little bit better

than before, I was able to pay for watercolor and ink. I went to vegetable store to buy paper to use for Chinese painting. With this paper I could create special visual effects similar to those an artist could achieve using rice paper, watercolor and ink.

Q: Please describe your experience of learning and making art in your spare time after the secondary school as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or some people had an important influence on you becoming a professional artist.

In 1977, after graduating from secondary school, I discontinued my studies. At that time, my mother was seriously ill, and I helped her do housework. In 1979, at the age of the seventeen, I became a worker in a rubber factory. Now, I think that it was a very awful job. Pollution was serious and I worked in these conditions for over ten years. In those years, it was not easy, and I did not know how I survived it.

In 1979, one of my friends, who started at the factory the same time as me, passed the national university entrance exam and went to study at the Fine Art University in my province. I was competitive. When other people were better than me, I felt I had to work hard and become better than them in the future. Therefore, except for working in the factory, I drew or painted everyday. My color practice and pencil sketches got better and better. I selected the night shift in order to have the time to draw or paint during the day. A few of us went to the Cultural Center to learn art. There, art teachers were professional and we paid just a little bit for instruction. I invested myself into practicing because I really wanted to escape this hard job and to study in university. We practiced pencil and color sketches and sometimes went out sketching.

From 1980 to 1983, I sketched from real life everyday. My hometown was a seaside city.

In summer, we went to beach to sketch the bathers because we did not have enough money to rent a model. I also went to sketch people and animals in the parks and at the zoo. The city of Qingdao was a tourist city with many tourists. In summer, I liked to sketch those travelers and I had a lot of fun to do it. Generally, I was able to recognize the great amount of progress I made over those three years.

At that time, I wanted to learn industrial design because this was a popular major and it was easy to get a good job with it. Therefore, except for practicing pencil and color sketches, my artistic practice was focused on designing. I often practiced gradual color changes, or designed cookie packages.

I took the national entrance exam for university five times, but I was unable to pass it. Because of my family's economic difficulties and my mother's illness, I did not go to high school, and my Chinese, English and mathematics were not good. I passed the drawing techniques exam twice, but I wasn't able to pass the exams in Chinese, English or Mathematics. I still have the letters from that university telling me I passed the art techniques examinations.

If a person wanted to study in a fine art department, they had to take two exams. One, called a professional exam, concentrated on professional techniques and was offered by the university. The other was the national entrance exam, and focused on Chinese, English, Math, and Politics. Each year, I took as many professional exams as possible from different universities such as the Shang Done Academy of Fine Art, Jing De Zhen Pottery Porcelain Art College, the Central Drama College, and the Beijing Cinema College. After the age of twenty-five, I was no longer able to register for the entrance exam for university. This was because that, in those days, if a person was older than 25, he wasn't allowed to take the university entrance exam. If he still

wanted to learn, he had to study in a night university.

Between 1982 and 1989, I focused all my energy to draw and paint in order to pass the entrance exam for university and became an undergraduate student. I didn't the chance, but I have been able to survive in the Song Zhuang now because of my work practicing techniques at that time. Even if I was not qualified to take the university entrance exam after 1986, I still painted a lot. The reason why I was able to continue to practice and work hard was because of one person, Hai Yun Lan, who was a professor at the Central College of Drama. She was the most influential person in my life and she changed my fortune. One day in 1982, I went to Lao Shan Mountain to sketch and I happened to meet a group of undergraduate students and their teacher, who were sketching. This female teacher was very beautiful and elegant. She was wearing a red school badge while her students had white school badges. I was really impressed by her, and I found the courage to ask her to have a look my sketches. She didn't say no, and she felt that my sketches were pretty good and encouraged me keeping to keep going. I also hoped to draw with them. I took the night shift so I was able to go to sketch with them during the day. In the beginning, I drew with her students. Later, her students went back to Beijing, and she stayed behind in Qing Dao because she wanted to work on her art practice there for a few days.

Every morning, I went to the hotel to meet her, and carried her board and painting tools. Then, we drew outside. After finishing some pieces, she saw them and gave me some instruction and demonstrated some methods to me. She also told me what art supplies would be suitable for me such as brushes, pencils, paper and so on. At that time, Teacher Hai often used brushes and rice paper to sketch real life. Sometimes, she painted on the same rice paper again and again. I wasn't always able to totally understand what she said and what she painted, but I liked to listen

to what she said.

In just a week, I increased my knowledge and insight, and I drew many pieces. I asked different questions. I especially remember that she stayed in the best hotel in my hometown, and each morning I had delicious steamed breads that I had eaten before. I felt I was very happy.

This chance meeting with Teacher Hai had a great influence on me. I started to have a longing to be an artist. Teacher Hai was like a light giving me direction. Once every two months, I sent my color and pencil sketches to her in Beijing. She gave me step-by-step instructions by mail. Each time, she always wrote four pages to me. I hanged my pencil and color sketches on the walls at home, then, according to her suggestions, I compared to my pieces to each other. The correspondence helped me improve. My salary was twenty dollars each month, and I often took five dollars to buy art supplies. Once a year, I went to Beijing to see her and show her my paintings. Sometimes, she was so busy that I could only stay one hour with her.

I continued to take the entrance exam for university, but I was not able to pass it. 1985 was the last year I would be able to register for it because I would be 25 years old. Teacher Hai agreed to give me some instruction in Beijing before taking the exam. I still remember that her family lived in the apartment in the CAF. One morning, after her husband had gone to his office and her daughter to school, she found me a corner in her daughter's room and set up a life for me paint. She also gave me the subject, the 'city in the morning', to draw. Then she left for the university to her busy job as the dean of stage design department. I was the only one in their apartment. At noon, her husband, Liu Bo Shu, a vice-president of the Central Academy of Fine Art and a famous artist, came back home. He had only met me a few times. I knew a lot about him, but he had no real impression of me. He very seriously told me that I should leave. To him,

I am sure I looked like a real bad guy. Anyway, it was the first time that I had been given a lecture by a man. I was scared and went to down stairs to wait for teacher Hai. In the afternoon, she came back home, and I told her what happened. Teacher Hai was upset and told her husband that it was not easy for me to travel to Beijing in order to learn art. After only a few sentences, she showed him that he was wrong. President Liu has been nice to me ever since. The second day, she took some time from her busy schedule to instruct me, showing me how to use color to express my feeling and so on.

In 1986, I was no longer able to take the entrance exam for university. Therefore, I didn't practice pencil sketches. I just did some artistic creation and color sketching. I spent half a year doing artwork; then I spent some time cleaning them up. I selected some pieces I was satisfied with and mailed them to her. She wrote me with her thoughts about my artwork. She told me which parts were good, and what parts needed to improve. I still sketched outside like the impressionists. Most sketches were gouache and a few were oil paintings. I went out to paint or draw in bad weather or good.

At that time, there was no art marketing, and I often gave my paintings to friends as gifts. Although my job was hard, the salary was pretty good and I was able to buy art supplies. When I sketched landscape, I also copied the impressionists' artworks, such as Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, and Mameet. I learned how to use color from impressionism. We had a group that consisted of people who liked art. We often communicated with each other. My family did not care what I did. Each month, except for eating and buying art supplies, I gave all my money to my mother. My mother really appreciated the money because she was very poor. When I gave money to my mother, I always tried to exchange a one hundred dollar bill into ten dollars bills,

and then I gave them to my mother. She felt very happy when she counted the money, like I did when I painted or drew.

1989, I married and soon, I had a son. I did not have time to paint and did not know what to do with the paintings I had done.

In 1995, the circumstances in China had changed a lot. My factory started to lay off workers. I was laid off because I was not able to get along with my leaders. This was a terrible thing for me. From my first day working there, I never thought that I would lose my job. Now I had no job and I had to think about how to make a living on my own. I was scared.

I was able to paint, and I sold a few paintings and a painting generally sold for between \$40 and \$80. People rarely bought paintings. Mostly, I made crafts to make a living. I had many good ideas. There were many cobbles on the seashore in Qing Dao. I used cobbles to do many different things. For example, I glued the cobbles on the porcelain plates; then I drew the legs and some water plants. This was a crab. I bought many plates. First I glued sea sand on the plate; then pasted tree bark on the plate as rocks. I designed many landscape of Qingdao using the sand and bark. The biggest plate was over one meter. There was also a lot of bamboo in the city, so I used it to make craft pieces, such as pencil vases decorated with drawings or carved figures. My arts and crafts had a great deal of variety. I invested just a little bit money and was able to produce them. Soon, I had small shop to sell my art and crafts. My wife looked after the shop and I made art and crafts at home. However, we still were under some pressure because my wife was a peasant and we did not have another income.

Making wood sculpture offered me the chance to exhibit my wood artworks in the Beijing Art Exhibition and led me from being a worker making arts and crafts to become an artist.

One day, when my wife was coming home on her bike with things she had bought for the Spring Festival, she put a piece of wood on the back of her bike to help her carry more stuff. The wood was a really good color. I used the wood to create a copy of an African sculpture I found in a book. Then, I put it in my small shop and the same day, a man bought it for over one hundred dollars. I was very happy. If I made one sculpture a day I could make three thousand dollars a month, and I could make a great deal of money. Therefore, I started to copy African wood sculptures. One of my friends, who had a high level of artistic ability, persuaded me to make my own artwork instead of copying. I tried to make my wood sculptures by myself. My business was okay. Later, some of my friends took part in the annual exhibition in Beijing and made some money. He advised me to go to Beijing to try it. I felt that my artwork was better than his. I took one year to carve over twenty wood sculptures, including basso-relievo, and sculptures. In 2001, I participated in the Beijing Art Exhibition and the result was much better than what I expected. Except for the entry fee, I made some money. This encouraged me. Suddenly, there were many exhibitions in China, and the opportunities of learning and succeeding expanded overnight.

When my artwork first sold at the Exhibition, I was excited. It was called Don Quixote and I got one thousand dollars for it. It was in Beijing where I first sold a painting this way! This was my artwork. Before this, all my sculptures were art and crafts pieces for sale in my small shop. Now, the booths around me belonged to artists or university teachers, some of whom were written about in books. I was selling my artwork with them. Sometimes, there were more people around my booth than theirs.

After the exhibition, I returned home and I worked energetically and prepared almost forty wood sculptures. I took part in the 2002 Beijing China Art Exhibition. A gallery boss took a

fancy to my artworks and bought all my sculptures. I made the biggest money in my life. My sculptures represented the dissolute relationships between men and women. In a wood I carved some distorted nudes. Since this exhibition, I got some commissions and I did not need worry about how to make a living too much. Step by step, I became a sculptor.

In 2006, the art market was booming in China, and influenced by my friends, who made good money selling their paintings, I decided to try too. Originally, I painted, drew and practiced in order to pass the entrance exam for university. However, I started making wood sculpture by chance. The experience of making wood sculpture was very helpful, helping me give my paintings more spatial depth.

In the beginning, I painted some landscapes and abstracts. Soon, my painting focused on political subjects, following the popular trends of other artists. Although I sold some, they were not mature. Once when I was reading the journal *Chinese Photography*, a photo of two boys from the countryside waiting for their mother to give them cake, touched my heart deeply, especially their laughing faces. I was able to experience their mood because my family was poor when I was a child. They were very cute. This inspired me to represent paint.

The original model for the kids in my paintings was my son. My son was a fat baby with two small eyes, like my eyes. When he laughed, he was very lovely. The original shapes of the parents in my paintings were my father and mother in law, who were peasants and were very natural. Being their son-in-law, I was very familiar with them. I now started to create artwork using my own ideas and my own artistic language. I no longer followed the artistic currents and imitated the styles that were sold easily. What I painted focused on my childhood experience and the games I often played when I was a child. I think that today each family had only child.

Whether in the countryside or in the city, parents shelter and hover over and spoil children too much. When I was a child I liked my childhood very much. Although I had a poor life, it was a natural life.

In the beginning, I mainly represented the relationship between the kid and his parents, especially the kid and his mother. Although my skills of painting needed to improve, what I represented was lifelike and vivid. I used the palate knife to paint instead of brushes. I felt comfortable to use palate knife because of the habits and skills I had developed through carving wood. I used my artwork to tell the stories or interesting things that I did with my peers. I was familiar with things I represented so that I felt that it was easy and natural for me to paint them. Today, people my age are familiar those children's games and experiences, and most of the people who buy my paintings are almost the same age.

I felt that one saying is true: art is from life. Indeed, artistic creation should not try to catch up with the tidal current (of what is popular in art). The artwork I did let me know who I am and let me feel happy. I used my own way to describe my narrative experience. Now, my oil paintings and my wood sculptures are focused on children and their everyday life. I had the chance and tried to made artwork based on political satire because it sold well. Although I was able to sell some, I felt I labored to do it and I also did not enjoy it.

The images of kids I drew were simple: drawing two circles. The way I used to draw figures was what I learned when I was a child.

Today, I do not care whether my artwork whether is contemporary or not. I just paint what I want. In fact, people like my artwork.

In 2005, seven or eight my artists' friends from Qingdao started to paint in the Song

Zhuang Beijing. I yearned to be there after talking with them. Qingdao is a tourist city and the culture and art scene was less developed than in Beijing. When my financial situation was good enough, I made up my mind to come here to do artwork. The Song Zhuang is the Holy Land for artists. It was like Yan'an during the revolutionary years, when supporters of the Revolution wanted to move to Yan'an to become communists. Here, it was easy to see different artistic trends and communicate and interact with other artists. There were over 30 art supply stores, some art galleries, over a few hundred artists and cheap rent. In the first year I moved to the Song Zhuang, I had my first solo exhibition. After my exhibition, I started to sell my paintings and one of pieces went for ten thousand. This income was more than what I expected. These artists, as me, like to stay here very much.

If person did not experience the storm, he would not have opportunities to see rainbow. My experience of becoming an artist was the same thing. I had been eager to study art and have a career related to art for many years, but I was not lucky. After I was laid off and had to make a living by myself, I had to survive drawing on the little bit of artistic ability I had. At that time, I was afraid and felt great pressure. It was a terrible thing for me in the beginning, but seeing it in the long term, it was a good thing for me to be laid off. If I knew I had this artistic ability, I would have given up my job and made artwork earlier. However, if I had done this earlier, it would have been during a time when the circumstances in China made this impossible. I was lucky guy to start and prosper during these good times.

A few important events pointed me in the direction to become an artist. First, in order to make a living, I tried to do crafts and sculptures with my a little bit artistic ability. Then, I took part in the art exposition in Beijing and my crafts became artwork there. My work was displayed

in the big hall with other artists instead of at the small booths. It was especially important that I got different ideas from the audience and from what other artists did, which helped me understand what I should do. The level of my artwork now is based on these experiences. Staying in the Song Zhuang Beijing with a few hundred artists gave me the confidence and the ambition to become a success as an artist.

Chen Shu Xia

Chen is an associate professor in the Art Education Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Born in 1963, in Zhejiang Province, she left her hometown in 1978 to study at the High School of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, passing the competitive entrance exam when she was just fifteen years old. After graduating in 1987, she taught at the High School of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. She takes the complexities, joys and sorrows of everyday life and converts them into serene visual images of common objects and everyday activities. Since 2003, she has taught at CAF as an Associate professor.

Interview: Cheng Shu Xia in her studio in Beijing, summer, 2009

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in Wen Zhou, Zhejian Province, which is a commercial port city in the southern area of China, and one of the first places that became more open after the Cultural

Revolution. In my family, there was no one pursuing a career related to art. My grandparents and my parents all were business people. In fact, except for me, all my brothers and sisters are business people. My hometown has been traditionally a city of trade and commerce.

However, because of my family's involvement in business, my mother believed that boys could become businessmen, while it was good for girls to get a good education and to become a professional. If girls were not so good at their studies and were unable to continue pursuing higher education, they could go into business. According to my mother, children could learn anything they wanted, but they should learn nonetheless. My mother supported my older sister who studied music even though my family was not rich.

My parents were strict with children. Young kids had to study and work hard and weren't always allowed to play outside. We had to sit and study at home. Sometimes it was very boring. At that time, as long as I sat down at the table, I could always draw what I saw. When my parents saw me sitting at the table, they thought I was studying, even though I was drawing, and they didn't criticize me.

During my childhood, there were many comic books children could read, and I often copied the images in them. I was always copying pictures, and if I couldn't find something to copy I drew anything I could, such as cups or plates. When my mother realized how much I loved to draw, she found an art teacher for me.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

When I was ten or eleven, I started to receive formal art training. I always tried to finish all my homework at school in order to have more time to draw at home, When I drew, I never

felt tired.

In fact, at that time, I had two art teachers. One was a Chinese painter and the other was an oil painter. Both of them graduated from Fine Art College in Beijing and received art training influenced by the Soviet school method. They taught me using the same methods. My first art teacher was a traditional Chinese painter, following the Gongbi style and focusing on flowers and birds. Both he and my parents believed that if I wanted to be a professional artist, it would be necessary for me to receive formal training at a fine art college. It was about 1977, when universities began to recruit students again after the Cultural Revolution. If young people wanted to study at university, they had to pass the national entrance exam. For entry into a college of fine art, the national entrance exam included a pencil and color sketch, based on what are considered the traditional techniques, and skills used by Western artists; furthermore, it included a ‘creation’ (an artwork created from a given subject matter), in addition to testing the student’s knowledge about politics, mathematics, Chinese, and English. This Chinese painter was a very responsible teacher, and he asked an oil painter to teach me pencil sketching and color training in order to help me prepare for the exam. Learning art is different than self-expression through art. The process of learning art is often accompanied by boredom, but self-expression always makes people happy.

For me, it was very useful to learn both Chinese painting and the basic skills of Western painting together. Based on my experience of learning from Chinese painter and oil painter, I believe that during the process of learning art, it is necessary to be involved in different styles and different kinds of visual art, and one should not be limited to one kind of style or visual art form. Today, when I teach students at Center Academy of Fine Arts, I always emphasize that it is

important for students who are studying in Fine Art department to touch different visual art forms instead of being limited to one kind of style or art form.

Mostly, I drew on weekends and holidays. Sometimes, I also drew a little bit after school. At that time, we did not need to pay art teachers, and sometimes, they bought us art supplies. For art teachers, teaching art was something enjoyable. They were respected for teaching children and they took it very seriously. My teacher was interested in instructing me and I was also interested in learning. Sometimes, when he painted, he also told me, today I would paint and you could come to see. He always used the same procedure, first using brown to draw outline, then, drawing value using different tones. At the time, in the 1970's, there was no art market in China. As artists, my art teachers made their living by working at full time jobs. They painted just because they wanted to.

In those days, my art teachers thought the purpose of teaching art was to help students develop a realistic style, to be able to paint and draw real objects or figures as they appear in real life. In fact, today, my teacher, who taught me oil painting, also sketches from still life. His artwork is based on sketching still life and figures, and his subject matter has never changed. My Chinese painting teacher, who I started with in 1977, still focuses on flowers and birds. Although, today, Chinese society has changed greatly, it seems not to have any relationships with my two teachers. When I was a young, I really admired their artwork. However, I believe that an artist is able to close the studio door and enjoy his own artwork, but as a member of society, he should not isolate himself from the society and should be a little bit sensitive to these changes. Today, in China, we have different concepts of art. I think the Wenzhou (a city for artists) where they live is too small and has a limited cultural life. They do not have enough opportunities to

communicate or visit different exhibitions as artists living in Beijing. Today, when I sent my printed collection to them, they said they really do not understand my artwork. They believe that I can paint this way because I already have some fame.

When I was a child, I didn't have the opportunity to see artwork. At home, there were no art books. Therefore, I really liked any images in the newspaper, and I always took the time to look at them. When I was a little girl, people from my hometown focused on business. There, people could not buy any books regarding painting or drawing, even in a bookstore. Despite this, I hoped to be an artist and most time I enjoyed drawing and painting. When I drew, I was able to sit for a few hours and concentrate on what I was doing. However, with other things, I couldn't even focus on them an hour.

At that time, it was not easy to borrow a plaster cast for drawing in the city. If my oil painting teacher was able to borrow one, he organized other students to come to my apartment to draw together. My home was like an art classroom. Although it was not big, my parents welcomed other young children to draw there. Each time, there always were four or five children at my home to draw the plaster cast.

When the teacher evaluated our pencil sketch, he always compared our pencil sketches and selected one as being an example of what makes a good pencil sketch. He always chose my sketches as good examples to show to the other students, and he often praised me. Therefore I was encouraged to draw more and became more interested in it.

My oil painting teacher always encouraged me to sketch from real life. Sometime he asked me and the other four children to go outside to sketch. We often went to parks to sketch people or the landscapes. In the southern provinces of China, people often enjoy the cool breezes

outside in summer. Therefore, I also drew figures outdoors. As I sketched outside my door, I often felt shy because many people would come near to evaluate my pieces. They always commented that this “looked real” while “that man” didn’t look anything like the picture I drew. When people thought my drawing was accurate I was very happy, but when they said it didn’t look real I was frustrated.

I used to dream of becoming an artist. But then I had a different concept of what “art” was. Then, I believed that any image was art. It was difficult for me to understand things from everyday life also could be artwork. The artworks I saw were comic books, revolutionary dramas and films, and political propaganda posters. For me, if I was able to draw or paint things or figures realistically, I considered them to be works of art. Although my oil painting teacher sometimes showed me Russian paintings and pencil sketches, my hometown was remote and I had few opportunities to come into contact with art during the 1970s. In my hometown of Wen Zhou, the cultural life was so limited that it was even difficult to see a movie.

I often pinned my drawings and paintings on wall at my home, not to decorate my walls, but just to let me compare the piece that I just finished with the other pieces that I had done before. After my two art teachers analyzed a work, I always thought them over carefully, comparing them to the other pieces I had done. I asked myself if the new pieces were better than the older ones; if they weren’t, I felt I had wasted my time.

My parents were very busy, and they did not understand drawing or painting at all. In fact, they also did not care what I drew or painted. They just listened to my art teacher’s ideas. If my art teachers told them I made progress again, they would be very happy.

I regret that my parents did not keep those drawings and paintings I did. After my parents

moved, all my stuff was gone. So far, I just have a few pieces that I submitted to CAF for the entrance exam. After I passed the exam the school returned them to me. In fact, I also do not have many photos of my family and me because at that time, my parents did not feel they were important. Now, photographs are important to me. I often photographed my daughter when she was growing up, and I also kept most of the drawings she made when she was young. Right now, maybe she does not recognize it, but in the future, she will understand how important they are.

When I was young I learned from both my teachers at the same time, meaning that I learned Chinese painting and pencil sketching and gouache together. Because my Chinese painting teacher focused on Gong Bi style, I practiced using line to represent flowers or birds. During summer vacation, I went my to Chinese painting teacher's office at the Wen Zhou Art Research Institute, to draw. I practiced a lot and I was able to using three brushes to dye colors at the same time. Now, I can only use two brushes to dye because I haven't practiced for a long time.

When I was twelve years old, I took part in the national children's drawing and painting exhibition in the China Fine Art Museum. Although only two of my drawings were displayed, the city was stirred by this news. One of my drawings represented the cloth counter in the department store. At that time, the cloth counters in department stores, combined with the different patterns' of clothes hanging behind the counter created very beautiful images. In the beginning, I went to the store to sketch, and then used them to create the piece. The other was like a political poster, titled 'Study Group'. There were four or five children studying together at a table. In 2007, one of my students who studied how Chinese prints of children artwork influence children's creation, found a published collection of this exhibition's artwork. I used to

have the book, but my parents did not keep it for me after I left to study in Beijing.

At the time, my oil painting teacher told me that if you wanted to create artwork, you should read newspapers. According to him, creation was always related to politics. Creation should have a significant subject matter. My two drawings were recommended by the Wen Zhou After School Center. It was a good place for children and they liked to go there after school to study. Schools selected a few talented children to study there. In the beginning, I really wanted to study there, but my elementary art teacher did not select me to go and chose another student. However, my oil painting teacher was a member in local art group and he had some relationships with the teachers at the Center. He recommended me to study there and they admitted me. But my art teacher in the elementary school complained that I got in through the back door.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

In the secondary school, I had a professional art teacher and art class. In the art class, the art teacher drew an image, such as a ship, red flag, five angles star and so on, then students followed the teacher's example. Pencil and paper were mainly material in art classes.

Sometimes, I also went to studio there, where the teacher gave each student a piece of paper, a pencil and students shared some oil pastel. After finishing their work, students handed their drawings to the art teacher. The teacher graded them and returned them to the students the next class. In fact, I can't remember what I drew during these classes.

During my time in secondary school, I had a Chinese painting teacher and oil painting teacher who were both interested in teaching me. The oil painting teacher taught me to sketch from real life using pencil or gouache, while I copied paintings from ancient Chinese masters for

my Chinese painting teacher.

In secondary school, I was responsible for drawing the school's poster board, which was very important for providing information to students, such as international and national news, some important national policies, and school news. This poster board was a black board, and we used chalk to write and draw on it. Every few weeks the content on the board was changed. In southern China, it often rains, and after a rain, everything on the board was gone. Therefore I had to draw new images or posters in chalk on the blackboard; based on articles, important news, stories or events, almost every week. Besides finishing homework, I wanted to have some time to practice drawing; therefore, I always tried to finish them as soon as possible. Those three years drawing on blackboard helped me to be able to design and draw quickly.

I also took part in an art group that organized talented students in art to practice after school. The art teacher put my name first on the art group list, but I often didn't take part in the activities because I felt that I couldn't learn anything new there. The teacher did not teach much, and I had to teach other students because I could draw better than them. However, I was not interested in teaching and I just wanted to learn more. In the art group, we often drew or painted from still life, such as fruits, pots and cloth.

When I was fifteen years old and I took the entrance exam for the Center Academy of Fine Arts (CAF), my ability to draw and paint realistically was strong. For Chinese art education, it meant that I had very good basic skills. Here is an example. When I was fourteen years old, I went to my oil painting teacher's house to paint. There was a small room close to the kitchen, where I always went to draw or paint, and when he was free, he would come to give me some suggestions. There were some kitchen tools in this room, and once, I painted a boiler in gouache.

After finishing it, I hung it on the wall of this room and later, when my teacher's wife came in to get a boiler to use for cooking, she reached for the painting, thinking it was the real thing.

At that time, I did not know how difficult it was to pass the entrance exam to study in the high school of CAF. If I had known how competitive it was to get accepted, I wouldn't have been able to draw well enough to get accepted. In fact, I did not know the school. In 1978, some students from Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Arts came to Wen Zhou to sketch from real life. One of them saw my drawings and he felt they were pretty good. Therefore he advised me to study in the high school of Zhe Jiang Academy of Fine Arts. He remembered me and was impressed and we sometimes wrote each other to keep in touch. When I graduated from the secondary school in 1979, the high school of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts was not recruiting students. He told me that the high school of CFA would recruit students first time after the Cultural Revolution, and he send me information on how to plan and prepare for applying to the school. At that time, there was no internet, and it was not easy to get that kind information.

I took the entrance exam in the Capital of the Zhejiang province, Hang Zhou. At that time, for me, I would continue to study in the local high school if I was not able to pass the entrance exam. However, I really hoped to pass this exam and receive formal training. At the same time, I also wanted to see the outside world. It is first time for me to leave my hometown for another city. I found how big the outside world was. My mother accompanied me to Hangzhou to take this exam. We stayed Hangzhou for three days. I took an art exam, which was called a professional exam and a literature exam (which included mathematics, Chinese, politics and English). The professional exam included pencil sketching, color, sketching and creation. I still remember the subject matter of the 'creation' section of the exam: My Sunday. I painted a girl

helping her mother to mop the floor on Sunday.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in the high school of CAFA as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had a important influence on you.

In 1979, it was first time for the CAF high school to recruit students after it had been closed during Cultural Revolution, and at that time, it was comparatively less strict concerning the age of students. Many young people from 15 to 18 years old took the exam. Fortunately, I became one of forty students studying in this school. There were nine girls. I was one of the youngest students and I was the shortest student so that I got the nickname “Xiao Bu Dian”

During my time at the high school of CAF, what I learned was more important than what I learned at university. We received the Russian fine art training. Although I was young, I started when I was fifteen and finished at nineteen, I learned what the teachers taught and built a solid base. When I studied in CAF, I did not need to spend time on basic skills.

In my hometown, I was a kid with some fame. However, after being in Beijing, everything changed. I had to work very hard but I was able to do comparatively well. Most students in my class were from Beijing, and some of these students' parents were teachers in CAF or their jobs were related to art. At the time I was not able to speak Mandarin very well, sometime I really felt nervous to talk with people and my ability to take care of myself wasn't very good. It was because my parents wanted me to concentrate on my studies so that they tried to do everything for me and they never thought to let me do some things to develop my survival skills. For example, they never let me help family buy some things because they worried that this would waste my time. I did not know how to spend money properly.

Recognizing this weakness inspired me to work hard. I tried to arrange my life well. In fact, I didn't always succeed in organizing my life, but I did all my best and tried to adapt to the new life. Then, the only one important thing was study. The school curriculum was intensive. Each morning I studied art and in the afternoon, I learned Chinese, mathematics, English and politics. Each year was divided into different stages. Each stage respectively focused on pencil sketching, color practice, creation and experiencing life and sketching in the countryside.

At that time, we always admired the classmates who were able to draw or paint images of figures or objects like real people and things. Teachers also liked this kind student because their teaching purpose was to help students develop the ability to draw or paint realistically.

I practiced a lot in my spare time because I hoped to get a good grade. Basic skills need time to practice. Making artwork is different. If I have a good idea, I can create good artwork quickly.

In the high school in CAF, I was a good student because I tried to follow what teachers wanted and worked seriously on my assignments. I came to Beijing from a small city. Therefore everything interested me. I had many opportunities to watch experimental drama because my school was close to a drama college.

When experiencing rural life or sketching in the countryside, we always went to remote areas. During those years, Chinese art educators had this thought that students should go to remote and less developed areas to live in the peasant's homes and experience their lives, in addition to receiving re-education.

When we went to countryside the school our teachers were very responsible. Teachers worried about students becoming sick so that the school's chef went with us. Although we lived

in peasants' homes, the food was cooked by the chef. However, the conditions were poor. I still remember that once I thought I saw black sesame on bread, but when I moved towards it the sesame seeds flew away. We weren't required to take part in peasant labor so we just observed their lives and drew and painted. We were required to make many drawings each day. Everyday we sketched four pieces landscape using gouache. This was because during the day, the light was always changing, affecting color as the day progressed. We had to draw in morning, at noon, in afternoon and in the evening. Before and after doing these gouache pieces, we tried to sketch from real life.

Today, as an art teacher, I think this kind curriculum design, which was divided dependently into four parts color practice, pencil sketching, sketching real life and creation, has problems. Now, when I teach students, I always encourage them to put them together to practice. In fact, there are many disadvantages separating the practice of basic skills from the creation of art. When I studied in the high school of CAF, I did not recognize this problem. Later, when I made artwork, I found this kind teaching method was a waste of students' time. This method encouraged students to passively imitate objects. It means that the images students drew looked like what the objects looked like. Students would lose their feeling and drew and painted passively. In fact, it is necessary for students to draw or paint in creative way when they develop skills.

Artwork should reflect some ideas or meanings. Art should strive to be beyond real life instead of imitating it. For example, the composition and color of a drawing should be organized and given up or kept based on artist's creative intention. However, in the high school of CAF, teachers encouraged us to reproduce intact real life on the paper. In my opinion, it is better for

teachers to see the process of practice as the process of creation and to help students to express their ideas. I was good at sketching. In grade of three and four, we did a few sculptures in order to understand dimensional relationships. In classes, we focused on long time assignments and we had to take a few weeks to complete a pencil sketch or color sketch. We often practiced in our spare time because the practice in our classes were not enough for us to reach what the school expected. At that time we had to submit twenty sketches each week. Our teachers often brought their artworks and published collections of Russian artists to the studio. It hardly saw published collections of American or French artists.

In 1983, I began to study in Folk Art Department at CAF. In my class, there were seven men and only one woman -me. By then, China had started to communicate with other countries more and more, and I had more chances to see published collections of foreign artists. Those art books mostly focused on artists before impressionism and I did not have any idea about contemporary art. However, foreign movies offered a window for me to feel that the concept of Western art was different than the concepts of Chinese art. At that time, there were movie weeks featuring films from places like France or Switzerland. Sometimes my classmates and me liked to go by bicycle to watch these movies, because we became eager to know about the foreign world. Suddenly, I seemed to lose interest drawing and painting and became interested in photography and printmaking.

At that time, in CAF, there were five departments. The Folk Art Department was different than other departments. It was divided into two majors, folk art and comic book art. My major was comic book drawing and design. After 1949, this was an important art form in China. I studied it because I had strong ability to draw or paint realistically and I was able to draw figures

or stories quickly. At the time people liked that very much. I remember that there were many stores that rented comic books to children or adults.

I was lucky to be able to use different kinds of art forms to tell stories because my major was comic book drawing and design. This gave me the opportunity to use different kinds media and art forms. In China, at the Fine Art College, the students' majors were quite limited. For example, for an oil painting major, there were different studios. Generally, they included realism and expressionism. If in the beginning, students enrolled in the realism studio, for the next four years they had to study there until they graduated. It was impossible for them to try different studios. It was the same when students studied in the Chinese painting department, where they had two majors to choose from, the Xieyi or Gongbi studios.

During my time as a student majoring in painting and drawing at the Center Academy of Fine Art, I became very interested in photography. At that time, all courses were required courses and we were not offered elective courses. If the university arranged the courses, you should take all of them. For students, if they were interested in one of them, they could continue to study it, and if they were not interested in it, this course was over for them after received a credit. I was interested in a photography course and I took a lot time to continue studying it after finishing the course. This was reflected by the work I presented for the graduating students show that was photographs, not paintings or drawings. The work was called *There was a man and there is not a man*. A man is reading a newspaper in a room, and the first three pieces are the same picture, but the fourth photo is the same as the first three except the man has disappeared.

The other artwork was of me looking into a mirror. The first three photos are the same, I am looking into mirror, and the last photo is the same photo, but reflection in the mirror is not

my face the back of her head. I hoped this artwork would show people that people are not able to understand themselves completely and should try to see themselves from different perspectives.

Q: Please describe the artistic experience you had and your subject matter after graduating and some experience and events that impressed you or influenced your artistic creation.

In 1987, when I graduated from CAF, the economy had started to develop quickly in China but there was not any art marketing and artists made a living by their full time jobs. Many of my classmates chose to be businessmen after graduating from the university instead of pursuing a career related to art. I chose to be art teacher at the high school of the CAF. At that time, although the salary was low and life was hard, I really liked to paint and draw. However, over the last few years, the Chinese art market has developed quickly and is now very good. Some of the graduates who chose to be businessmen or follow other careers have rented studios and have begun to paint again. However, just when they created some art to exhibit, the economic crisis that started in 2007 pushed the art market down.

The Sichuan' earthquake really affected me. Human beings are insignificant in the natural environment. The artwork with the highest price is not always the best artwork. In 1987, because there was not an art market in China, many of my classmates went into business. I married my husband as soon as I graduated. My husband continued to study for a MFA in Chinese painting at CAF. I taught in the high school of CAF. We were not rich but we had enough. With the art market developing, I had the opportunity to sell my painting to make some money. My life and work conditions improved, I could rent a big studio. As far as my artistic creation is concerned, I think that the changes in the style of my artwork were based on changes in Chinese society and

not based on catering to the art market. Changes in society cannot be blocked and it is necessary for artists to be sensitive to them.

I am interested in everyday life and my subject matter focused on the details of everyday life. In China, artistic creation should concern significant subject matter. As far as Chinese art education is concerned, it is always reflects how people should battle the natural environment and strive to push civilization upward toward positive ideas, taming angry floodwaters or overcoming the devastation of earthquakes. However, for me, I do not know if I am too passive because I believe that human beings are a very small part of the natural world. Nature is much more powerful than humans, and we are just able to adapt and defer to it. With that kind important subject matter, it is possible to inspire people to have a positive outlook despite the many challenges and difficulties in life. However, everyday life does not reflect important philosophical questions or the challenges that people face, most things related with everyday life often are trivial and insignificant. There are many seemingly mundane details of everyday life, from getting up in the morning to going to bed in the evening. Yet, they too are important. After getting up, people should breathe fresh air and eat healthy food. For me, eating an apple after getting up is as important and significant as fighting against a flood. I believe that significant things consist of trivial things. People live in this world in order to enjoy nature instead of fighting with it. Seeing sky and sea, you know how insignificant a human being is.

Recalling the subject matter of my artwork before graduating, my creation involved different subject matter because this process was one of learning. After graduating from university, however, my subject matter has not changed much. It is always related with my interest and I like all the details of everyday life. In the beginning, I painted my room, my friends

and my family. It was completely focused around my everyday life. Later, I painted many still lifes, especially fruit. For me, a fruit is a life. For example, an apple grows on the tree that starts from a bud, and the apple evolves from a flower in the tree, and a small apple, then develops into a mature apple that we eventually eat. At the same time, I also painted figures that were my friends. These figures were not very realistic because I hoped to express their inner, true nature and did not want their outer appearance to influence how I portrayed that. Recently, I painted some landscapes based on my idea of relationship between people and nature. The development of contemporary society is destroying nature. Of course, my artwork is also influenced by the concepts of Chinese landscape painting.

My major, however, was comic book art. I experimented with different kinds of printmaking, including, silk screen-printing, wood prints and copper printing. I was interested in color, and I really liked silk screen-printing and did many. I was able to create beautiful colors. However, after doing this for some time, I found color was too thin and weak and I couldn't express myself fully. After taking a photography course I turned to photography, I became crazy about it and developed a super realistic style. Today, it is very easy to do photos using a computer. However, during the middle 1980's, everything was done in the darkroom. I also made some surrealistic photos using film. I thought that people had already seen these kinds of realistic objects and I did not need to repeat them again. What I needed to do was to express my own special feelings and thoughts. I hoped that the audiences would be able to experience my feelings and I would be able to influence them. I believe that realistic things cannot express my emotions.

After discovering photography at CAF and after graduation, I was crazy about it. In the

beginning, I used an ordinary camera, later I used Nikon that was a very good camera at that time. In the beginning, I used an enlargement filter that was made in China, later I used one made in Japan. Photography needs a lot of facilities, which is different than painting. Even if a painter's materials are poor, a painter can still compensate through the use of color and brushwork to create something impressive. However, when a photographer's skills improve, they need better quality equipment and facilities. Once an artist uses high quality film paper and liquid, then using ordinary film paper, they always feel that they can't bear looking at the finished result. At that time, I just graduated from the university and my salary was low. I found that I could not deal with the cost and slowly gave up, and returned to oil painting. Compared to photography, I could afford to paint. Of course, today many effects can be created using computers instead of at the studio, and the cost is much less. For me, if I was interested in an artistic path and I was able to do it, I would do it. If I were interested in going in a certain direction but not able to afford it, I would find another way to aesthetically express myself. Painting is a very direct form of artistic expression, and I am able to express my feelings and thoughts through this charming and unique medium. Photography is a process; from taking the photo, developing the film, did and so on. Painting, on the other hand, is very direct and simple. If I have some feelings and thoughts, I am able to do it immediately.

In fact, there were many challenges during the time when I wanted to apply surrealistic elements to realistic images. An example was the series of photographs I did for my graduating show in 1982. There are three photos of a man reading a newspaper, but in the fourth, everything is the same except the man has disappeared from the image. Even his shadow is still in the photo. I had to remove the man without any marks and give the impression that he had actually

vanished. When I took the photos, I had to take two photos, one of the rooms with a man reading the newspaper and another of the room with the man reading the paper. In the fourth photo, I had to combine the photo without the man with the shadow of the man from the other photographs. For this I had to work in dark room for a few days and develop many photos and selected one from them to use for the fourth image. Today, it is very easy to do using computers and people are able to create all sorts of images using different kinds of software. At that time, because of the challenge, I was very interested in it. Now, because it is very easy to do - anyone can do it, so now I am not interested in it.

At the beginning of the 90's, I focused on oil painting. I felt that any other materials could not substitute massiveness and color of oil painting.

Materials are only a kind of tool. Artists can achieve their concepts and ideas using it. In fact, artists' ideas are very important, while their artistic tools are less important. Different materials have different characteristics. Artists are able use to any material to express their ideas. Any kind of material has its advantages as well as its disadvantages.

For a good artist, his artistic style should be rigid because audiences like it. Contemporary Chinese society has had a great impact on me. I hope that I am able to remain calm while Chinese society is rapidly developing and people become increasingly stressed with the rapid change.

Professional artists should make their living by selling their artwork. However, my career is as a teacher. I have kept my career for two reasons. First, I don't want my artistic creation to be influenced by economic burdens. If all my money came from my artistic creation, I would feel pressure and I would be always thinking which kind of style would be popular and be easy to sell.

I want to have a steady salary and be able to make artwork without any burdens. Therefore, I don't need to paint this style if it is easy to sell one year and paint another in another style when it is popular a different year. I put my artistic creation (my artistic aesthetic) first. Secondly, I like to communicate with students. Students are always openhearted. When I stay with them, I am able to learn and experience many new things.

Today I do not pursue money through the sale of my painting, but most of my earnings come from my artwork. As a professor working in a university, the salary is not enough.

From 1987 to the middle of the 1990s, there was not really an art market, and my salary was low, but I did not give up painting because of my rough life. I taught art in the high school in CAF as well as painting while painting many pieces. After 2000, the art market suddenly started to boom suddenly, and I made a fortune.

When you are interested in something, you just do it. If you are able to get a return from it, that is perfect. Even if you don't profit from it, you still enjoy doing it. One shouldn't be too greedy.

Whether the art market exists or not, my artistic creation has not been influenced by it. In fact, I tried to avoid being influenced by it. I slowed down my artistic production while the art market was booming. As far as I am concerned, I think that the Chinese art market is not healthy and it is in a primary stage of development, because in the late 1990s it was booming too suddenly and too fast. If anything develops too fast, it must be accompanied by negative elements. At the beginning of the 2000s in China, people wanted to buy any kind of art whether it was good or bad. As an artist, it is necessary to clam down and think about what is good. I think good artwork is can stand the test of time. Based on my long experience in creating art, I

believe that nothing but a calm heart can help an artist to do create good art.

Sometimes I suffered a lot when I couldn't paint as well as I wanted. However, this process of painting is always a kind of hankering for a way to express myself. Generally, this kind hankering enriches me. If somebody told me that he was inane, I want to sympathize with him and understand why he lives such an empty life.

Huang Huan

Huang Huan, born in Beijing in 1977, is a Manchu woman. She is a lecturer in the Department of Fine Art in Beijing Institute of Fashion. As a famous child painter, when she was 10 years old, she published her first book of figure sketches, and she received some gold medals in the World Children's Painting Competition. After graduating from secondary school, she entered the high school of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Generally some art educators believed that her development in art was the most successful of the other famous child artists who appeared in the same period. In 1996, she studied in the Central Academy of Fine Arts. In 2000, she graduated from the Chinese Painting Department in the Central Academy of Fine Arts with a bachelor's degree. In 2003 she received an MFA from the Chinese Painting Department Central Academy of Fine Arts. In 2007 she entered the doctoral program of Chinese painting, which was the first doctorate of painting in China. She participated in domestic and international art exhibitions and received some awards. Her artworks were collected by the Museum of Modern Art in Chengdu, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and the Today Art Museum in Beijing.

**Interview: Huang Huan at Huang's Studio in Da Shang Zi, Beijing in summer, 2009,
three times**

Q: Please introduce your personal experience of doing art when you were a child, any artworks that your family had, your family members' careers whether were related to art or not, along with activities that you consider to have influenced your artistic expression and creation, or impressed you. What material you used to use to do art at the time?

I was born in Beijing in 1977. I am Manchu because my mother is Manchu. I was the only child in my family. My parents all are intellectuals and they both worked in art field. My mother was a professor who taught oil painting at a university and my father was a musical editor at CCTV. My father often took me to different concerts and listened to different musicals. He liked to explain different musical styles to me.

In those years, each Sunday, many of my mother's students brought their oil paintings to my home to get my mother's instructions. When I was two years old, one of my mother's students was showing his oil painting to my mother. I walked up and pointed at some dots of color on the painting and said that they were people. After hearing what I said, my mother was very surprised and she also wondered why a two-years old child would think that those color dots were human. She thought I possibly had very good visual perception. Therefore, she started to encourage me to draw or to paint based on my memory or my imagination. My mother had never minded whether what I drew looked like real objects or figures. She just wanted me to be able too express my personal experience and feeling. When I was over three years old, my mom encouraged to me draw what I saw. During winter and summer holidays, she always brought me to other cities to sketch and experience different environments, which were different from

Beijing's. After traveling, I also drew some things based on my memory. When I was four years old, I started sketching people. If there were guests visiting my family, I often did their portraits. I was not really a diligent kid and I just sketched them when I felt that guests had some special characters. Many guests of my family were also artists. Sometimes, when I drew their portraits, they also would have liked to draw a portrait for me. It was possibly my earliest communicational activities through art.

When I was three years old, I started to draw with pens instead of pencils. This was because my mom hoped that I would draw daringly and confidently, and not erase or correct drawings to imitate the artwork of adults. She believed that when children were beginning to do art, their ability to generalize and to have confidence should be fostered.

When I was five years old, I started to do many sketches such as when my mom was ill and when my dad was reading the newspaper, and so on. These drawings were taken to professors of fine art Academies. They thought my drawings were like Matisse and Picasso's. I did not know who Matisse or Picasso was, and I did not care if my drawings looked like those drawings.

In those years, a lot of my Mom's paintings and drawings were hanging at home and my family also had many collected books of artists. When I was very young, I had already gone to see art exhibitions although there weren't as many as there are today. Anyway, my life was full of artwork. However, there were three events greatly influenced me.

First, when I was seven or eight years old, my Mom borrowed a printed collection of Matisse that explored the subject of peace and war, published by a foreign publishing house. I asked my Mom why she did not borrow it earlier to show me. I was excited. His artwork was

able to stir a kind of inner passion in me. It seemed that his artworks could touch a raw nerve, which had never been touched before. I asked for some paper and hurriedly copied his drawings until went to bed. I liked his drawings not only because other people said that they looked like his drawings, but also because I really liked them. Yet I could see that his drawings were a lot better than mine.

The second event was an African tapestry exhibition at the Chinese National Art Museum. A Bird of Kingdom, which was knitted using flowery and radiantly colored wool, touched my heart deeply. This tapestry was large and it was a few meters high. The whole tapestry was of the bird, and it looked like a peacock. At that time, I was excited and asked my Mom for paper and copied it. In those years, cameras were not common. Therefore, I drew things I liked in order to preserve the image. Drawing helped me not forget them.

The third important event in my life was when I went to see the Henan (province) folk art exhibition with my Mom. In those years, there were fewer of these kinds of exhibitions because the art community was not so interested in folk art. I drew every clay dog in the exhibition. When I was a kid, I disliked realistic artwork, but I really liked those exaggerated things.

Although the art training my mom had received was based on realism, she provided me with a very open artistic environment. She claimed that I should draw my ideas and experiences and opposed to copying adults' artworks. In my childhood, I received many international or national awards. Why I was able to win these awards was because all my artworks were based on my experiences or my sketches.

One of the awards was given by the Japanese TV Net. The subject matter was: *What would you do if you were a leader of our world?* When I was a little girl, I read "The Little

Match Girl,” written by Hans Christian Andersen. The little girl didn’t have home to live and died outside. Inspired by the story, I painted a big Chinese traditional wooden building, and the buildings surrounding it were not as big and beautiful. Poor children who were characters in children’s stories from around the world were craning their necks out the windows. I won the gold medal.

I also painted my own life. Once, in elementary school, my group wanted to have a meaningful young pioneer’s day. Therefore, we decided to do something benefiting the environment. We cleaned up the bosket around my school and collected bottles and sold them. Then we donated the money to a countryside school. I painted this experience of cleaning up the grove of trees. In my painting, there are many trees and some of us are sweeping and others are picking up bottles. This painting also got an award. I still keep the painting and the sketch of this activity.

When I took part in competitions, I generally used Chinese ink, watercolor and rice paper. First, I used a pen to draw the outline of my image; then I colored it using Chinese ink and watercolor.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in elementary as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and some experience and events that impressed you.

When I studied in elementary school, I drew a lot of figures, and I also liked to go to the Beijing Zoo to draw animals. Animals were always moving and it was a little bit difficult to draw them. However, it was very easy to draw people because they always had to sit down when they were my models. Therefore, my Mom brought me to the zoo to draw animal once a month.

We had art class in elementary school, but I am not able to remember what I had learned.

I only remember that once my art teacher taught us using compasses to do a big circle as a head and did other small circles as eyes. I got an A+. After going back home, I showed my drawing to my Mom. She told me that she disliked me drawing in this way. Sometimes, we also used a ruler to draw a red flag, or a television. In those years, school art textbooks had these kinds of exercises. But I liked the way my Mom taught me.

It seemed that there was an art group in my school, but I did not take part in it. In my class, I was responsible to draw and write my class' poster on the blackboard. But it was not interesting.

When I was almost ten years old, an editor of Si Chuang Art Publishing House visited my family. When she saw my drawings, she said that they were great and her publishing house could publish a book of my work. Soon, I received my printed collection of my sketches. At the time, I thought that those drawings I did were not good enough and believed that I could do better in the future. However, today, I felt those sketches were really very good and were better than drawings I do today.

When I was nine years old, I went to Germany with four other Chinese children to participate an international children's communication project as a child's artist. I stayed in Germany for one month and visited Italy and Austria. I drew many sketches, filling a few sketchbooks. I felt that Germany was an ocean of cars and China was an ocean of people. There I saw many masterpieces, and I liked Miro's artwork very much. However, I felt uneasy during this trip because we often moved from home to home in order to visited different cities. This was why I did not want to study abroad.

Before the 1990s in China, when newspapers published pictures of scenery, they rarely

used photographs, and preferred to use artist's sketches. When my mom received a commission from a newspaper, my Mom always took me when she traveled in order to create the pieces. When I was eight years old, once, my Mom took my Dad and me when she went to the Lu Mountains to do a series of sketches for a China Daily. She sketched, and I sketched too. After going back to Beijing, the editor came to my home to pick Mom's sketches up. He thought my sketches were very good too, and could be published with my mom's pieces. Therefore, in an article about the Lu Mountains, two of my sketches were published.

After 1982, my Mom was an editor of the elementary and secondary school art textbooks. Sometimes, when she was not able to find suitable children artworks, she made contracts with me to draw for her textbooks. When I studied in university, a few of my classmates asked me whether the student examples in those textbooks were mine when they saw my name, Huang Huan.

When I was young, I rarely copied others' artwork. I wanted to keep images I liked so I copied them. In fact, my Mom did not encourage me to copy. Before studying in secondary school, I had never made any pencil sketches, and I just used lines to create an image.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in secondary school as well as your experience of making art in your spare time and experience or things that impressed you.

In 1989, after graduating from elementary school, I entered a good middle school, Beijing's Eighth Middle School. I was able to study in this school because of my artistic ability. The president of this school liked art very much and he believed that art education was very important. Furthermore, at this year, there was an international children's artwork competition, and he hoped that students from his school could win an award. He knew about my achievements

from the newspaper and he broke rules to recruit me from the fifth grade of elementary school, not requiring me to write an entrance exam. In fact, Chinese students have to study in elementary school for six years. If he hadn't broken the rules, I would have had to study in an ordinary middle school near my home or I would have had to work hard to pass the exams for good schools. Therefore I had to repeat the first grade in middle school once because I didn't study the final grade of elementary school.

That year, I did two pieces to take part in the international art competition. One represented the bottom of the sea. Everybody was living in the sea and some of us were communicating with sea creatures. I won two gold medals. My school principal encouraged me to take part in different competitions. He believed that they would expand my horizons and make me open.

In middle school, I participated in the school art group, which had over twenty students. The art teacher often asked us to draw still life. I was not interested in doing it. In fact, I did not know how to do it and I really did not want to do it. I was continuing to focus on my line sketching

When I was thirteen, my school helped me to hold a solo art exhibition in school. The works included my paintings, sketches and a tapestry using wool thread sown on a blanket. All the pieces reflected my experience and my life. For example, one represented my Mom painting, and another represented a holiday, with some of my classmates making Chinese dumplings on the playground while others were cooking them in the hole they dug.

We had art class in the first and second grade. We often copied the examples from art textbooks. Sometimes we copied pencil sketches or watercolors.

At the time, I made artwork not only using Chinese rice paper, Chinese ink and watercolor but also using acrylic. When my Mom did her big pieces, I asked for a small wood board and painted on it. These materials were not what students used at school, but we had them at home so it was easy for me to do things like paint in oil, gouache, watercolor or acrylic, or do Chinese style painting.

In 1989, when I was 12 years old, I was awarded the National Hopeful Star because of my artistic ability; there were only ten middle school students in China who got this award. It was not easy for a student to get this honor. Because of the award, I received over 20 letters from students all over the country, most of them wanted to become friends with me because I was good at drawing and painting. In the beginning, I answered their letters, but, later, there were too many letters, and I did not have enough time to deal with it.

As students' representatives, the Major of Beijing, Chen Xi Tong, met with the ten students who were awarded National Hopeful Stars. I gave to him a present, a painting. In the same year, a Russian women's magazine organized an international children paintings' competition, the subject was what I expected for the future of my homeland. When I visited Germany when I was nine years old, I found that in Germany, there were flowers everywhere. Each home had flowers and along the roads there were many flowers. How beautiful it was. It was the beginning of 90's and the economy of China started to develop. I hoped that Beijing would be as beautiful as Germany was. I thought that every home in our Beijing would be a sea of flowers like Germany. I represented a traditional Chinese wooden building, surround by peonies as big as trees, where flowers were growing in the water, and flowers grew in the trees surrounding it. On the roof of the building, a man was playing the flute. It was very poetic. I

made a small copy for the Major, and I told him my ideas about the flowers for Beijing. I hoped that he could develop a beautiful Beijing in a sea of flowers. This was what we children expected for a Major. He was very happy and told me that our Beijing would become as beautiful as this was because I had this hope. On the second day, we made a tour of the whole city. This wasn't part of the original schedule. However, he wanted us to see Beijing and arranged the tour because I gave him this painting

Because of the painting, I got the gold medal that year and went to Moscow without either of my parents. Part of the trip involved cultural exchanges with other children from other countries. I made friends with children from Germany and India. We visited museums and experienced some of the everyday life of people in Moscow, and went to events like the circus and the opera. I visited museums, galleries and saw street artists. As far as I was concerned, I felt Russian art was pretty heavy. It was different than the art in Germany and France.

I was not crazy about Russian art, and I often browsed through museum because the artwork had no relationship to my own life. I liked German and French art more than Russian art. However, my Mom really liked Russian artwork because the art training she received was from Russian system. I liked to watch street artists' creating their work. They were able to paint a portrait in public. At the time, I was only able to draw portraits using line and did know how to use color to make a portrait quickly. I really admired these streets artists. In those years, there were not any streets' artists in China. When I studied in middle school, I liked oil painting more than Chinese painting, because I felt that all Chinese paintings were grey.

After graduating from secondary school, I went to the in the high school at the Central Fine Art Academy. Why did I choose to study in the high school at the Central Fine Art Academy?

There were some reasons.

After studying in the second grade in secondary school, the ranking of the students' credits was posted in class after each exam. I felt very pressured. At the same time, my teacher also believed that all my grades should be excellent because (as a 'famous' child artist) I was interviewed by many newspapers as a young painter. Although I worked hard, the teacher did not think it was good enough.

One of my Mom's friends was the principal of the high school of the Central Fine Art Academy. He advised me to take the entrance exam for the school. At this school, each morning, students studied different subjects, such as English, Chinese, history, math and so on, but in the afternoon, they concentrated on studying art. The best thing for me was that they had never ranked students according their marks. However, teachers of the school had never cared about whether you got awards or not. They disliked children painters because they believed their fame as just because of people 'crowing' about their ability. Therefore, I had to pass the exam through my own efforts. We had to take exams in six subjects, such as Chinese, English and so on. At the same time, we also had to take five exams in art such as in color sketching, pencil sketching, sketching, artistic creation and an oral exam. However, I had never studied color and pencil sketch before, even though I was a famous child painter. Therefore, after the end of the second grade, I started to prepare for my entrance exam for the Central Fine Art Academy high school. At the time, I had no idea how to do a pencil sketch because what I had learned was to use single lines to represent the image, and it was planar. I had to learn to pencil sketch to deal with the exam.

At the time, a student who graduated from Central Fine Art Academy was renting an

eight square meter room to offer art classes to students who wanted to take the entrance exam for the CAF high school. I took the class; it was from 6:00pm to 10:00pm. The teacher hired a peasant grandfather as a model. We did a pencil sketch portrait everyday. After school was over at 5:00pm, I ate a baked Chinese cake, then rode to this small classroom to practice pencil sketching. After finishing the class, I rode home and started to do my homework, often going to bed after 1:00 am. At 4:00 am, my Mom called me to get up to review the subjects that would be tested that day. There was an exam everyday in the Beijing Eighth Middle School because this school stressed academic achievement. I did not have enough time to prepare for my exams because I had to practice pencil sketching. I fell behind with my studies a little bit. My teacher talked with me about this, but wasn't satisfied with my response and asked my Mom to come to school to confront her about my academic situation. But she was quite affected when my Mom told her about my study schedule and that I was preparing to take the entrance exam for the CAF high school. The teacher ended up giving me an open schedule. For example, the entrance exam did not include physics, and the teacher wrote a note to the physics teacher so I didn't need to go to physics class. Two or three months before taking the exam, I stopped going to classes and just concentrated on my practice. At the time, my mom was teaching the pencil sketch course for freshman in the fine art department. Therefore I was able to practice pencil sketch with my older sisters and old brothers of my mother's class. Soon, my pencil sketches were as good as theirs.

Today, if we recall my experience of learning pencil sketch, we would find I made a great deal of progress in a short time. This was because I had experience sketching as a child and this gave a strong ability to reproduce images of objects and figures in a short time. If the method of art training was right, it would be very easy for students to develop technique. However, artistic

sensitivity needs to be fostered early, and it is not easy when students are adults.

However, at the time, I suffered. I thought all my experiences of drawing were nothing, and believed that all the methods that I used to draw and paint in the past were wrong. The High School of the Central Fine Art Academy had a set of standards for pencil sketch, quick sketch and color sketch (Russian realistic style). For example, a quick sketch required using repeated lines, drawn again and again, and the student should keep the correct proportions and structure of the object or figure. If students did not follow the school's standards, their artworks would be criticized. Therefore, we should practice drawing and painting according to the methods and style of the school. I had used single lines to draw since I was a child. After following the school's way of quick sketch for a period of time, I started to think I didn't know how to draw. Today, when I think about it, I think how silly everything was.

In order to help me to practice quick sketch, my Mom tried to find some Chinese painters' sketches for me because they tended to use line to represent their images, and this was closer to my method of sketching. This was very important for me to practice. I was very lucky to have my Mom. She also told me that I did not need to learn Russian pencil sketching of light and shadow, and I could learn from European sketches, especially German artists' pencil sketches because they often used lines to create their work. The method of using lines was similar to my method of sketching. I tried to use this method to do my quick sketch although the style was not to everybody's liking.

The pencil sketch and color sketch exams respectively lasted three hours, while the artistic creation exam; along with the quick sketch exam were both two hours long. When taking exams I was nervous. I often drew the face or profile of plaster casts. However, the day, seating

positions of the exams were decided by lot and I was not lucky. I got a bad seating position for the pencil sketch exam, sitting right in front of the face. I had to look up at the plaster cast. I did not practice too much color sketch. However, in our first class in the high school, the teacher of high school said that one of piece was very good because it had beautiful color, which people were able to see blue and red in black tone, and in a red color, people were able to find cold red and warm red although the bottle volume wasn't very strong. This piece was mine. When I was a little girl, my Mom often showed me how to observe local color and subjective colors. For example, when she took me to play snowball in winter, she asked me what color the shadows of trees. After I told her that it was the purple, she again asked me what colors were able to produce this purple after mixing. I told her that rose color, yellow and blue. However, although most my classmates were able to make strong volume, they often used black and grey, or just local colors, and rarely used subjective color. My subject matter was: Spring Day or Holiday.

At the time, over two thousand people took the entrance exam of the high school. Only thirty students were recruited by the high school. I ranked sixth in the class. My mark of the quick sketch exam was very bad. In fact, I had practiced quick sketch since I was a little child. However, at the time, I felt that I was not able to sketch because I wanted to use the method of the high school to sketch and this method was different with the method I used to use. Today, I think that I was possibly to get a good mark if I took the way that I used when I was a child.

Q: Please describe the art education you received Art high school of the CAFA and in university as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

There, our course included the pencil sketch and color sketch, which belonged to basic

courses to improve our techniques, along with the courses that the majors of Central Fine Art Academy were involved in, such as design, printmaking, folk art and so on.

I was good at depicting correct proportion and characteristics of the images in short time because I had used line to sketch real life, animals and figures since I was a little five years. However, many students had to analyze the proportion of images.

In 1992, I started to study in the Central Fine Art of Academy high school. After studying in the high school, I had to make up some lessons. Some of my classmates' parents were artists and they had drawn pencil sketch since they were young. At that time, I thought that what the high school taught belonged to art, but the things I had done since I was a child did not compare to them.

In my class, many of my classmates were able to do pencil sketch better than I was able to do. They could depict the objects or figures correctly. Some of their pencil sketch looked like a black and white photo. However, my pencil sketch was like a drawing, which my images were not as correct as theirs, and the tones of the light and dark were not as close to the objects or figures as theirs. They really had experiences and methods to represent the objects in the realistic style. Although, the teachers never said whose pieces were good or not, the end of the each semester all students' pieces were displayed in the classroom. It was very obvious to know who was able to draw very well because marks the teacher gave were on them. After school, I had to study in studio to practice pencil sketch. My pencil sketch was not very good because I just practiced pencil sketch half of a year using the standard method of the school.

In the first semester of the grade two in the high school, my pencil sketch improved and I became the number one student in my class because I took a sculpture course. I had the concept

of the plastic space through making a sculpture. This experience let me believe that it was not always possible for a student to make a good pencil sketch even though he had done one hundred pencil sketches. However, it was possible for him to make a good pencil sketch through doing a sculpture.

Our teacher of sculpture was a very good female sculptor. In the beginning, we copied a Grecian plaster casting---Big Pocked Portrait, which was a female's portrait and looked like Venus's head. We called her this name because her face had some pocks. The head sculpture was placed on the rotating table. Each of us had a rotating table to surround it and we copied it using clay.

First, I modeled her face. When I felt that my sculpture looked like the face of the big pocked portrait, I turned the profile to me and I set out modeling her ear. The face began not to look like the face while I made the profile like hers. I adjusted the face again. However, when the face looked like the sculpture, the profile was not like hers again. I started to think how to model it and made it looked like the sculpture from the face and the profile. When I did pencil sketch, I had never cared about the back of the part I was drawing because the paper was two-dimensional.

According to the teacher's suggestion, after class, I stood on a stool, looking down this sculpture, and this was a three-dimensional sphere with some characters. Then I squatted under it and lightly turned this sphere, looking up each sides of it and gradually, I had a concept of plastic space. After this course, when I did pencil sketch, I was able to keep the whole volume of an object in my mind, not like before I just drew what I saw and never cared about the parts I could not see. My pencil sketch became more three-dimensional than before I did.

In the third grade, I went to the Xiangxi County with Mom and her students between the

age of seven years and twelve years (My Mom ran a children art school in her spare time). When I saw these children sketch real life or landscape using lines because my Mom taught them using the same way she taught me, I felt empathy with them and found a feeling of doing art in my childhood. Therefore, I tried to draw female portraits of Miao People and Tu Jia People using very thin single lines, which I used to draw when I was a child. I hadn't drawn in this way since entering the high school.

In the beginning of the new semester, I exhibited the sketches in the school and my exhibition was very influential. Some my teachers admired me that I was able to use single lines to draw the figures exactly. I thought that this because students from the Central Fine Arts Academy high school and the CAF only used groups lines to create value with pencils. Sometimes, they adjusted their images with erasers.

Generally, in the fourth of grade of CAF high school, students had to decide which majors they wanted to study and prepared for the university entrance exam. In CAF, majors of oil painting and Chinese painting had different exams' contents. In the high school, oil painting was thought the best major and was preferred. All the students believed that the best students were able to pass the entrance exam to study in the oil painting department in CAF. I chose oil painting as my major. After studying this major for almost one month, when I saw the students studying Chinese painting were drawing the figures with lines, I felt it was easy for me to do it. I was able to draw the images with lines directly using brush. After coming back to home at the weekend, I talked with my Mom about this thing and I had an idea to transfer to Chinese painting major. She thought I could choose any majors if I liked it. She thought I had more advantages in learning Chinese painting because I had used lines to draw since I was a little girl. In additional,

studying Chinese painting in China could let students understand the elite of Chinese painting. Oil painting was a Western art form. If I wanted to study it, it would be the best way to study in Russia or France and it wouldn't be necessary to study in China.

At the time, although I had learned Chinese painting, I was not crazy about it. I felt that Chinese painting looked very old, like taken from an old chest. However, my mom and I thought that this major was suitable for me. I decided to study it. After studying for some time, I found that Chinese painting wasn't only using lines to represent as I imagined. This was like some people thought that artists of Chinese painting always had a long hair and were in the Chinese tradition wearing, painted in public with strong passion. But it was not true.

The high school Chinese painting teacher helped me develop a very good habit of doing Chinese painting when starting to reach Chinese painting. Chinese art was a kind of edifying personalities, and meditation. In the first class, the teacher did not teach us techniques. Instead, he told us what kind of mood a Chinese painter should have and some anecdotes of Chinese scholar painters. He required that each student had to wash the floor with a mop four times before class starting everyday. There were ten students in my class, and our floor of classroom was wiped forty times everyday. The floor was as bright as a mirror was. He asked students to pick up even though there was a needle or a hair on the floor. This was not to the act of exacting, but it was a kind of feeling of the environment painters had, which the painters synchronized themselves with the environment. However, this was not to pursue wave in the wind of smoke and fragrance, but pursue artistic conception. He also told us what kind of line was beautiful and what kind was not good. He did not teach us many techniques, and he edified us as if we were three years of age children. Today, I felt what he taught was more important than the techniques.

In 1996, I got admission to study in the CAFA. In the university, I came to like Chinese painting more and more based on more knowledge and techniques I develop. At the time, I recognized that it was not easy to create good Chinese paintings.

In CAFA, pencil sketch was seen as a basic technique, and every student whether studying oil painting or Chinese painting must learn. However, in my department teachers had many controversies about how to teach pencil sketch to students studying Chinese painting. Method of teaching pencil sketch in Chinese painting department was different with oil painting and other departments. The basic of Chinese painting was lines so pencil sketch should emphasize using line to create shape.

Wen Guo Zhang, our pencil sketch teacher, was over sixty years old, but his concept of teaching pencil sketch to students learning Chinese painting was very fresh. He distinguished himself by study in landscape of Chinese painting. He used the principles of drawing landscape of Chinese painting to teach us how to observe the objects and how to express it. I profited from him. He believed that Chinese painting did not only draw the dark parts but also light parts, while Western pencil sketch only drew the dark parts to pop out light parts to let it become three-dimensional. Chinese painting expressed a partial three-dimensional, and did not aim for representing the whole relationship of an object in the same time. Chinese painting represented the relationships between parts and parts, ignoring the perspective. Therefore, how did the students in Chinese painting department make a pencil sketch? He thought that they just needed to concentrate on the aesthetic feeling of black, grey and white created by the line, and it was not necessary to create a three dimensional visual effect.

Furthermore, his teaching method was renovated as well. Before we did pencil sketch, he

let us to sketch the poses and shapes of model using rice paper and a brush, ignoring the details such as eyes, nose. We sketched the model from different positions over ten pieces. He emphasized how to use line to create the space instead of using light and shadow. After sketching the model from different positions, we could find a position that we liked to sit down and started to draw. My pencil sketch created in this class, *Grandfather Liu*, was collected by the museum of CAF and won a silver medal in my academy.

At the time, we predominantly practiced traditional basics of Chinese painting, including calligraphy, seal cutting, painting flowers and birds, and painting the landscape. (In training of Chinese painting, the beginner often started from painting flowers and birds, and painting the landscape).

Some of my classmates had painted Chinese painting since they were very young. Their taste in Chinese painting was better than mine. I rarely did Chinese painting before I studied this major. Therefore I had to work hard in order to I was able to get a good achievement. I did a seal on a stone before going to bed almost everyday in my first and second year. How to organize all of the elements on a small space helped me to develop skills of organizing my painting's composition. Using a knife to carve on a stone also helped me to consider how to use lines. This helped me to draw strong lines.

During my studies at the university, I felt that going countryside or factories to experience life was very crucial, which offered me to reach different people who I possibly had never communicate with them if I hadn't these chances. This kind of experience let me think over some questions before I had never thought about them such as what use did my paintings have.

I remember that we went to An Shan Steel Company to experience life for a month, and drew the steelworkers and their lives. When we were tired, we sat on the pile of coal to chat with them. Sometimes, they asked us what usage did your drawing and painting have? This question confused me and I really did not know how to answer. If we thought about it carefully, these drawings did not have any usage. They often said how much did a kilo of the Qi Bai Shi's shrimps cost and how much did a donkey of Huang Zhou cost. At the time, you had to compare how much would a kilo of shrimps cost and a donkey cost? Suddenly, I felt that my drawings were nothing, and it possibly didn't have any usage in the future. This let me reflect artists' states in the society, and tried to re-see the art from a non-artist's version, and even thought about what Qi Bai Shi's life was like. After coming back to university, I started to read his biography. When he was seventy years old, he said that he was finally able to raised the whole family after he had painted over thirty years. This meant that he was not able to support his family through selling his artworks before seventy years old. In fact, as a Chinese painting master, he had to provide his family the necessities of life through exchanging his artworks, like a worker smelts steel and a rural grandmother sitting on the ground to strip walnut a day in order to make money. Whether artists or workers, did the same things in society.

It made me reflect on the artists' role in society, and thought over what kind of state they were. Previously, I always thought the artists were higher than all the people, and they were perfect and enviable. However, after experiencing these rural and factory life, I thought that artists were also real workers and producers. If no one understood what artists did, and no one had been affected by their artworks, the artworks would lose their meaning. I hoped that my artwork would have some significance, and were not sold to make somewhat money. I didn't

want that my artwork was a fuss about nothing.

In 2007 and 2008, the art market was very blooming in China. Many artists just wanted to make a great deal of money practically. A very popular artist told me that that considering the purpose of painting was outdated. This was like that Impressionism was out of date, compared with Contemporary Art. Contemporary art was engaged in something of a novelty before no one did, to produce a good effect on the market. My other friend told me that he was now very busy because his paintings were selling well, and he had to make them quickly, and sell in hurry. In the future, once this wave of good selling had gone, any artwork you did would be useless. By then, he had to look for other effects and forms. It made me so shocked. I grew up in this kind of background that art was believed as a spiritual product. If you could do paintings like Michelangelo's works, this meant that you were successful. But now, I was told that this kind of art does not make sense. So, sometimes, I felt confused.

In the beginning studying in university, I didn't have any plan to go to graduate school. I gave myself the extra lessons in order to understand traditional Chinese painting and developed the techniques. Before graduating, I did not know what I could use Chinese painting tools to express. If students were learning painting, sculpture at the university, it possible for them to enter into a creative state. But the Chinese painting was very different. Unless a student had practiced Chinese painting since his childhood, like me, beginning to do traditional Chinese painting in Academy, was not possible to make a successful painting. The particularity of Chinese painting decided that a young student could not develop enough skills to express himself in four years. Chinese painting tools determined that learners needed a long time to understand or feel the means of Chinese painting. If people could not draw a good line on rice paper, then it

could not possibly for them create good pieces. So I decided to pursue my graduate study and continued to learn.

When I was doing my graduated exhibition in 2000, I had to show what techniques I had developed in the four years in my artwork. So I could only borrow artistic language from other my favorite artists. I liked Nie Ou's artwork and borrowed her artistic language to do a series of my artworks. My subject focused on Tibet. Before graduating, I went to Tibet for several months, and did a few hundred of sketches. The relationship between human and natural environment impressed on me. There, people had been interweaved with the nature.

My artworks were created with Chinese ink and Rice paper, and they were black and white. My classmates thought the techniques of my paintings were better than the artist's works which I borrowed artistic language from. However, I didn't have my personality because my works were like other peoples. At the time, I had already admitted to study my MFA, and my supervisor was Li Shao Wen. Once, I showed him these paintings and asked his opinions. He said there were only two kinds of works were successful, the ugly and beauty, and people could remember them. Failed artworks didn't impressed people. Art should tell others what you think. In my paintings, I only considered showing off the skills I had developed in the four years, and did not consider the issue of art. So, after studying graduate school, I worked very hard to make people like me. But, for me the art was a very natural thing, and I disliked that some contemporary artists deliberately created disgusting things.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in your MFA study as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

In 2000, I started my MFA. My supervisor Li Shao Wen was a real artist. He did not care what material the students used to create their artwork. He told me that although my major was Chinese Xieyi figure, if I liked to do sculpture for three years, he wouldn't have any disagreement. In the first year, I did printmaking in printed studio. As long as my supervisor wrote a note to the studio teacher, I could work at any time in the studio.

Printmaking teachers basically did not give students lectures in this studio, and students did their printmaking by themselves. In graduate school, I began to make art based on my own interest instead of doing artwork according to teacher's requirements. When I was 23 years old, I became very interested in marriage. At that time, I did not have a boyfriend, and felt very lonely. I had always observed married people. Many couples looked like each other. I found it was very interesting. There was not a blood relationship between these husbands and their wives. But why they were like each other. This was because the people always were narcissistic. Hence, they liked those people looked like themselves. I would like to explore the relationship between husbands and wives, or between lovers. Therefore, I created a series of artworks, *Lover Comrades* in the printmaking studio.

I bought a lot of wood board, and I painted different colors. I drew on the board with a brush and Chinese ink directly. If it was very good, I kept it. If I felt that it was not perfect, I used knife carving it. If I felt that it still was not enough to express my thoughts, I would print some paintings. Therefore, some of my artworks were the wooden board, some part of half painted and half carving.

In the second year, then, my teacher advised me to go to the city of Jingdezhen, to make ceramics. I used Chinese painting methods to paint on a three-dimensional ceramics. I also went

to Anhui to make rice paper. I made my own rice paper and know the principles of how to make Chinese rice paper.

In the mean time, I did another project. I drew portraits of teachers, students and workers in my academy. This was because I felt that our academy was liked a society with sub-grade. Great professors were held in great respect by students, and young teachers were talked of casually and maliciously by students. Students who were able to paint well felt they were upper class, but it was not easy for students who could not draw well to make friends. Workers, plumbers and cleaners were all invisible groups. In other places, these workers were more likely to be concerned about. For me, whether a professor or a worker was also a human being. I did over twenty big portraits, and I exaggerated their features a little bit. Then, I used the computer to re-combine the eyes, noses and mouths of them. I would like to use this method to interfere with people's identity. All people had strengths and weaknesses. When they died, everybody, whether a great professor or a plumber, was the same.

I remember that in the Academy, if I did a portrait for Prof. Guan Jun, everybody would have been surprised that I had done Mr. Guan Jun's portrait. However, the cleaners everyday cleaned our buildings, but we often turned our blind eyes. When I put the professor's eyes and a mouth of cleaners together, the status had changed. Why did I have the idea? At the time, I did not have enough money, and only could rent a basement as my studio, picking up all the furniture outside. Compared with rich people they lived in my upstairs, I felt very hard, but after seeing the different people coming and going in this building, I recognized whether being rich or being poor, everyone had his own happiness and unhappiness.

In graduate school, I started to develop some my own art concept through studying. I

used to ask people to be my models when I went to countryside. They often had to deliberately sit down and pose for me. I felt very stiff. I didn't ask anybody to be my model, and I would chat with him or her, and let him or her not think that I was a painter. They could continue doing what they were doing such as feeding chickens, and knitting while talking to me. I naturally sketched them as I talked with them. My sketches reflected them in their real life contexts.

In 2001, I stayed in a village in Gui Zhou province one month, which did not have electric power. People's life was simple and natural. These people of my sketches looked a bit like monkeys. Local people were more thin and agile. There, sheep, dogs, and chickens had their own characteristics. For example, roosters had very nice cock feathers, and could fly a short distance. When you thought that people were like monkeys, you would reflect on people's living conditions. I thought that human beings were very evil. While they created a civilization that other creatures could not do, they also deprived the natural life state of other creatures and destroyed harmony of the nature. Human civilization had been out of natural pace that it should have.

Based on my experience and feeling in the countryside, I created four artworks as a series using Chinese painting: Tomorrow would be longer. In the unromantic and long days, women were on the boat. When people stayed in boats, the change of life was unknowable for them. Boats might turn, or met the storm. The women living in mountain would like to calmly accept their unromantic life, but urban women were always looking forward to more exciting tomorrow. Before living with these women, I always felt unfair and complained why I did not have this or have that. This was because people living cities desired for too much. These women's attitude about life shocked me and moved me very much.

When I was excited for these women living in mountain, I also had to face my own life. In 2002, Chinese Spring Festival, I went to the studio the second day of New Year, while most Chinese people stayed to celebrate Chinese New Year at home because I suffered very much. At the time, when I affiliated with my friends, classmates, teachers, and people from the art community, I encountered a lot of difficulties. I doubted whether there existed mutual trust and help between people. I was in anguish. This anguish result from that I did not find way to cure my pain and overcome my difficulties. However, I had to solve it by myself. I used making art to solve it in my studio where I had to use lamps during the day because it was a basement. I stayed there to paint for 10 days, not being out of the basement to the ground, and eating instant noodles to survive. It seemed that I was publishing myself. Each painting was my own reflections on these things. I discussed relationship between woman and man, woman and woman.

My subject often focused on women, but the images of these women I did whether sketches or painting, did not have strong female characters. I always thought that women were more human, while men were more animals. I wanted to paint women to express something of human natures. In my artworks, women always were at ease and they did not have sexy body and beautiful long hairs. The first painting represent a figure, and his pose let audiences felt very lonely, or thought about something. The other figure next her was seemed not to have any relationship with her. Birds and animals were in a natural state. Nothing can help her. She did not know whom could she fall back on? The last painting, a woman was walking forward, and a sheep was following her. Here, the sheep was on behalf of a male. The relationship between women and sheep was the relationship between women and men. I thought they had a mutually dependent relationship, but no communication.

In the end, I did eleven pieces as a series. I called them: the series of I Do not want to fly. I solved my own problem through making art to explore my difficulties. I knew how to get along with men and women. At the time, many people advised me that I finally found such a style, why not repeated it because I had a few hundreds sketches of the human body. Furthermore, if I always changed my styles, many collectors would worry that I would not have drawn this style. I disliked that my artistic creation influenced by those collectors and curators. I only expressed my experience and feelings.

After studying my PhD, I was still interested in representing women. I did a series of artworks that depicted relationships between woman and woman, and woman and man. I did over ten pieces as a series. For example, in a painting, woman was sitting on a cattle and she moved with the cattle, which was a symbol of man. This woman's toes were tight, just ran into another woman's toes. I did not know whether other people had this feeling. When my foot inadvertently touched the foot of another person I could felt a very strong feeling, like an electric shock, and it was very unexpected, I couldn't describe it clearly. I wanted to express such a kind of feeling.

In 2003, I finished my MFA. Mom and I traveled to Europe. Michelangelo's artworks impressed me deeply. In the Sistine Chapel, I cried. Before I only felt that his technology was good when seeing his representations. However, there were full of original paintings from ceiling to walls. That let me forget the real world, forget the poverty or wealth, and find some things could touch people and an exciting thing. I laid down and cried. Good art was not only having good technology, but also being able to touch people. Therefore, an artist should be a boycott of

pressure from commercial society, and to pursue real art. When I saw Ray East, I was crying too. He painted some flowers, or anything like Ghost, soon took my soul away. At the time, I was especially nostalgic for the life. I bought his printed collection book, but when I look at pictures, I hadn't had this feeling.

At that time in China, we were able to buy printed collection books of artists published by foreign printing house, but the representations and original paintings had different effects. Based on the books, I imagined colors of impressionism were strong, very restless. In fact, I felt that Impressionism was very quiet when I saw the original artworks.

Q: Please describe the art education you received in your Ph.D. study as well as the subject matter of your artwork, and some events and experiences that impressed you or had an important influence on you.

In 2003, I started to study my PhD program, which was the first PhD program for visual art in China. In 2006, I taught students the one of the traditional Chinese painting in university, Line Drawing. Before, I always paint color ink. In the class, I had to study line drawing deeply, and this let me reflect on how to paint a Chinese painting.

Based on the small draft, I used Chinese ink and a brush to draw it directly. A growing flower was attracting many birds into her inside, and when birds came out from the flowers, they had had hands and feet, and became a bird human. A bird deity whose hands were poking the skin of her bird's face and her human face was exposing closed to the flower. When I went to Dunhuang and Tibet, Gods had many hands so that I gave my bird deity many hands. I did my own story.

In 2007, I developed my story of bird and human. I wanted to express a combination of people and birds. I thought that human dream about flying because of two reasons. One was

human's desire, which people always pursued what they did have. Another was that the bird's flight brought a kind feeling of freedom. A girl would like to become a bird, and birds hoped to be a girl. Hence, they decided to exchange with each other. To find a way to help them realize their dream, the bird carried this girl to fly a lot of places. After overcoming many hardships, they found it. However, in the exchange process, the girl turned into a person's body and bird's head, and the bird's head turned into the girl's but the body was still a bird's. They did not meet their aspirations. Desire was only a kind of imagination. I used tools of Chinese painting to create some artworks based on this story. These artworks were thought to be sweet.

My creation was connected with my state of life deeply. I had a boyfriend and my life was very sweet. My artworks were also very sweet, although sometimes I felt tired about this kind sweet artwork. I often believed that the good works should be created in a suffering condition.

In fact, I also planned to make animation of this story. I had designed some their cloths of characters, images, and some landscapes, but I needed some fund to finish it. The paintings were some moments of my story. I was always looking forward to the day when I would be able to display these artworks with my animation in a gallery. In the hall, some people wearing clothes I designed for the bird's human walked around. My Chinese paintings were created based on my sketches. Development of my sketches really reflected my art concept and my artistic language develop. When I was a little girl, I started to use line to sketch what I saw, and I became a famous child's artists.

In 1999, the biggest impacted on me was the study Dun Huang art. I was very touched by Buddhist paintings, which had very beautiful lines, and expressed a kind of religious piety.

Frescoes, which were painted in different dynasties, reflected the very different aesthetic tastes and art languages. I liked it and I did my best to copy them using lines. In fact, I did not think about what was used when I copied them, but I was so excited that I would not be reassured. I became confident to use lines to explore. When I was a little girl, I started to use lines to create, but it was instinct. The experience let me to be able to decide the style my sketches and role of lines in my artwork.

Then we went to the rural and small towns around Dunhuang. When I draw the local peasants, the style of my sketch totally changed, using the lines to represent instead of using groups lines to create three-dimensional images. Because of the Dunhuang feelings and experience of using lines, returned to my studio and my way of drawing nudes also had changed. I encouraged the model walk to freely, not to pose deliberately for me. I wanted that the model was a comfortable natural statue. I did not care about the model's identity. Based on inspiration from some parts of the models' action, I would follow it and develop it. I tried to look for a relaxed feeling. In the end, I painted a state of my mind, not to paint their actions. Although some of my images were not very reasonable, some feelings were enhanced. Artists were able to control the matter on the surface of things.

Picasso and Matisse method could strengthen their self-expression, and classical painters, Angel and Michelangelo did the same thing, exaggerating based on the model. It wasn't to draw larger or smaller parts of images than a model's, but they strengthened or changed an action to create a special atmosphere.

I always drew nudes in the studio if I was in the university between 2001 and 2002, and later, I felt more relaxed. I felt when I drew, as if I had done my great effort to break through the

clouds and arrive heaven, and being doing comfortable things. I felt very happy. I felt that my classmates and me were in different worlds to draw although we were in the same studio. What I feared most was that my pieces were too oily. This was because my drawings were based on half of my imagination and experience, and half of models; I needed to let my lines a little bit crude.

APPENDIX B: The artists' education background

Artist	Primary School	Secondary School	High School			University
			Ordinary High school	Teacher training	Art high school	
Jin Zhi Lin born in 1928	1934 - 1940	1940 - 1943	-----	1945 - 1947	-----	1947 - 1950
He Yun Lan born in 1937	1944 - 1949	1950 - 1953	-----	-----	1953 - 1957	1957-1961
Liu Bing Jiang born in 1937	1944 - 1950	1950 - 1953	1953-1956	-----	-----	1956-1961
Shang Yang born in 1942	1949 - 1954	1954 - 1957	-----	-----	1957 - 1961	1961-1965
Kong Zi born in 1952	1959-1965	1965 - 1966	-----	-----	-----	1987
Cao Ming Qiu born in 1954	1958 - 1964	1965-1968	1968-1970	-----	-----	1980
Chen Shu Xia born in 1962	1971 - 1975	1976-1979	-----	-----	1979 - 1983	-----
Wu Ming Zhong born in 1963	1969 - 1974	1974 - 1977	1977 - 1979	-----	-----	1984
Wang Yan Yu born in 1962	1969 - 1974	1974 - 1977	-----	-----	-----	-----
Huang Huan born in 1977	1984 - 1989	1989 - 1992	-----	-----	1992 - 1996	-----

APPENDIX C: Chronology of Historic Art Events, Art Education, and Political

Events:

1852	The Tu Shang Studio that taught Western art was built in Shanghai by Joannes Ferrer (1819-1856)
1902	Qing Dynasty proposed that schools should offer art classes
1904	The Qing Dynasty government published the <i>School Rule</i> . School art education appeared for the first time in China.
1917	The Republic of China was created. The feudal system ended
1915	Chai Yuan Pai published his article: Aesthetic Education Replacing Religion
1918	Beijing Art School was built
1928	Because of the influence of scholars' ideas, such as Chai Yuan Pei, Guo Min Party government published the <i>Elementary and Secondary Schools Temporary Teaching Plan</i> .
1937	The Japanese army attacked China
1945	The second war ended
1949	The People's Republic of China was established
1950	The Korean War began
1952	People's Daily publishes the editorial Learn From Soviet

	Artists
1954	The journal <i>Fine Art</i> was founded in Beijing
1955	The Soviet oil painter Konstantin Maksimov started to teach in CAFA (Central Academy of Fine Arts)
1957	Anti-Right campaign started across the nation
1958	
1960	The China-Soviet split became public. The U.S.S.R. suspended China-Soviet agreements and pacts, and withdrew all Soviet specialists from China.
1963	“A Memorial Exhibition of Xu Bei Hong’s Works on the Tenth Anniversary of His Death” was held in Beijing
1966	The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution started.
1966	Mao Zedong advocated “the four big rights”: speak out freely, to express one’s views fully, to write big character posters, to hold great debates.
1967	The Communist Party Central committee issued a notice, calling on students and teachers to “return to the class and carry on the revolution.”
1976	Mao Zedong (1983-1976) died. Jian Qing, Zhang Chun Qiao, Wang Hong We, and Yao Wen Yuan (the Gang of four) were arrested.

	The Cultural Revolution ended.
1977	The Chinese Government decided to resume both the entrance examination system and the recruiting of graduate students for institutions of higher education.
1978	The Ministry of Culture issued a notice permitting the use of human models in studios

Appendix D: Glossary

The Hu Xian Peasants' Paintings were the most well-known pieces of artwork created by amateur peasant painters from Hu Xiang County, Shangxi, China, during the Cultural Revolution. In 1958, the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts organized a peasant art training class for local Hu Xian peasants. Based on their everyday life, the peasant painters used the painting medium to compliment those things considered to be good, and to criticize those things considered to be bad, including behaviors. In the beginning, the style of the paintings tended to be flat, single-dimensional figures. However, later (particularly during the Cultural Revolution), some of paintings were created with the assistance and advice of professional artists. The style began to feature three-dimensional figures, and greatly utilized perspective. Between 1974 and 1976, the Hu Xian Peasants' Paintings were exhibited in Japan, the United States, Great Britain, France, Denmark and other countries. Their experience of Hu Xian Peasants creating art was promoted throughout the countryside in China. Today, the Hu Xian Peasants Paintings are still featured in the art market.

Jie Zi Garden Model Painting Book is a comprehensive series of flower, tree and rock figures along with other motifs compiled and printed for student artists. It was edited approximately 300 years ago. Li Yu, a famous writer, supported his friend Wang in finishing the compilation. Accordingly, when the book was published, it was named after Li Yu's garden in Nanjing, Jie Zi Garden. This book introduces the basic techniques of Chinese painting and is often referred to as China's painting textbook. Many famous artists first learned Chinese painting technique from this book. Its outstanding value and contribution to art is thought to be as foremost amongst works of its kind in Chinese painting history.

The **Beijing Art School** was built in 1918 in Beijing China. This was the first national academy of fine arts in China that was open to the public. The goals of school included training art teachers and industrial designers, and promoting aesthetics education. In 1922, it was called Beijing Art Special Major School, and had three departments: Chinese Painting, Oil Painting and Pattern Design. During the Japanese army invasion, it was transferred to Si Chuang. In 1950, it was merged with the Department of Fine Arts of Hua Bei United University in Yan'an, and called CAFA.

Yan'an was in the northern part of Shaanxi Province in China, on the Yen River. From 1936 to 1947, and from 1948 to 1949, it was a Chinese Communist Party-controlled area, and they established arsenals, several colleges, and a military academy there. It is considered to be a hallowed site of the revolution in China.

Konstantin Maksimov (1913-1993) was a Professor of Oil Painting at the Surikov Art Academy in the former Soviet Union, and a recipient of the Stalin Prize in arts. In 1955, the Soviet government sent him to China as a consultant at the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA). He taught socialist realism in the Oil-Painting Training course at the CAFA for two years, and assisted the CAFA's Department of Oil Painting in formulating a teaching plan. The Oil-Painting Training course trained some of the most famous of Chinese oil painters. Both the art style he taught (socialist realism) and his teaching method has influenced the development of the Chinese art community and art educational practice in the past century.

Qi Bai Shi (1863-1957), also known as Qi Huang or Qi Wei Qing, was a native of Xiangtan County, Hunan Province. He was a woodcarver in his early youth. During this same phase of life, he taught himself painting, poetry, calligraphy and seal carving in his spare time.

Both experiences helped him to improve his art concept and skills. He started painting when he was over thirty years old. In 1918, he moved to Beijing. In 1926, he was invited to teach at the Beijing Art School. Qi experimented with new forms of art based in the traditional art and folk art aesthetics, and by doing so extended the subject of traditional art. He was one of the greatest Chinese painters of modern art.

Xu Bei Hong (1895-1953) was a native of Yi Xing, Zhe Jian, China. He started to learn Chinese painting and calligraphy from his father when he was young. In 1919, Xu went to Paris and studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, where he studied oil painting and drawing. He returned to China in 1927. He is primarily known for his Chinese paintings featuring horses and birds. His art concept has greatly influenced the Chinese art community. He believed that Chinese painting needed to reflect a new and modern China, at the beginning of the 20th century. He is not only seen as an outstanding Chinese artist who was good at Chinese painting and oil painting, but also as an esteemed educator of the fine arts in history of Chinese art.

Dong Xi Wen (1914-1973) was a native of Shao Xing, Zhejiang Province, and was one of the most celebrated artists in his time. From 1934 to 1937, he was a student at the Hong Zhuo National College of Art. In 1939, he went to Vienna to learn art at a French art school. He also spent three years studying Buddhist frescos in Dun Huang. He was recognized to have contributed greatly by doing Chinese oil painting, instead of following the Western oil painting style. In 1946, he became an instructor at the National Bei Ping Academy of Art. In 1952, he created the painting the *Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. Mao Zedong was reported to have praised this painting as having “a unique national style.”

Wei Qi Mei (1923-2009) was a native of An Qing, Anhui, China. He learned Chinese painting when he was young. He taught at the Beijing Art School in 1947, after graduating from the Fine Arts Department of Center University. His early oil paintings tended more to realism, where later he tended more to expressionism. He was well-known as an oil painter and caricaturist.

Wang Shi Kuo (1911-1973) was native of Yue Xian, Shangdong, China. In his youth, he learned art. In 1936, he went to Japan to study art. In 1937, he returned to China in order to aid China in defending against occupation by the Japanese army. He painted posters to aid in fighting back against the Japanese invasion. In the beginning of the 1940s, he went to Yan'an and taught at the Lu Xun University of Fine Arts. He was well known as a realist artist.

Huang Yong Yu (1924-) is a native of Fenghuang County, Hunan Province. Although Huang never went to a regular art school, he had talent and worked hard. He studied art and literature on his own and also learned from friends, society and life. When he was young, Huang was famous for his prints. From 1953, he taught in the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA). The period from the late 1950s to the middle 1960s marked the golden age of his woodcuts. During the Cultural Revolution, he was criticized as a “black painter.” Later on, he focused on Chinese painting and broadened the scope of traditional Chinese painting skills and materials.

Wu Chang Shuo (1844-1927) was a native of Xiao Feng County, Zhe Jiang Province. He received a traditional Chinese education featuring calligraphy, stone carving and literature from his family. He pursued becoming a scholar officer. After the age of fifty-five, he started to give up on the idea of being an officer and started to be a painter. He described himself as one who “learned to write poems at the age of thirty, and learned to paint at the age of fifty.” His

great achievements in Chinese painting, calligraphy and stone carving can be regarded as the artistic expression of the Chinese nation's spirit. He was a famous painter in modern China, and the pioneering character behind the "Shanghai School" of art.

Ren Bo Nian (1840-1896), also known as Ren Yi, was a native of Xiao Shang, Zhe Jiang Province. He was a son of a rice merchant and a painter who supplemented his income by doing portraits. Influenced by traditional Chinese painting, Western art, and Chinese folk art, he developed his own style that merchants liked. He was noted for his bold brushstrokes and use of color. In Shanghai he became a member of the Shanghai School, which fused popular and traditional styles.

Huang Bin Hong (1865-1955) was a native of Jin Hua in Zhe Jiang Province. He started to practice Chinese painting at the age of 6. In 1937, he moved to live in Beijing. In 1946, he taught Chinese painting at the Beijing Art School. After 1949, he taught at the Zhe Jian Academy of Fine Art. After the age of fifty, his style tended to be more realistic, and by the time he was eighty, he had formed his own unique landscape style. He was noted as a Chinese painter, art educator and a researcher on art history. He was awarded the Chinese Outstanding Artist award at the age of ninety.