

2010

Realist painting and its relationship to my creative practice

Xuning Wang
Edith Cowan University

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Realist painting and its relationship to my creative practice

Xuning Wang

M.V.A. The Australian National University

This thesis is presented for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education and Arts, Edith Cowan University
March 2010

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines the realist art movement from its origins in France in the 1840s to its development in China in the 20th century and its impact on the author as an artist.

The thesis reviews the development of realism in France, and traces its impact on Chinese conceptions of realism in the 20th century. The contemporary debates surrounding realism in China are examined and contextualised within the recent history of realism in China.

Finally the thesis looks at the impact of realism on the author's creative practice and a case is argued for the development of realist ideas in a globalised culture and its value as a cross- cultural visual language.

Declaration

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Xuning Wang

05 APR 2010

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**Realist painting and its
relationship
to my creative practice**

Introduction

My motivation to examine Realism is a personal one; it is necessary, and thus healthy, for my creative psychology. Why does Realism, an old idea for visual art, so intrigue me, especially having renounced it on my departure from China, and having worked as an abstract painter during the past eight years of life in Australia. I have slowly come to realize the cultural localization and limits of the Abstract as a visual language; especially when I became aware of my culturally hybrid position. I soon found that emotionally and intellectually I needed to be closer to a depiction of everyday life, and needed a more suitable visual language to communicate this need to an audience with different and complex cultural backgrounds. I began to ask myself, “am I a realist now?” and “what is realism?” I needed an answer to be able to continue my practice productively.

I began to realize that every time I had been stimulated by a particular event and wanted to represent it in painting, I found my work using a kind of ‘Realist’ style or ‘Realist’ visual language. This style occurred not because of a consciously specific creative idea, but seemed to be driven unconsciously by a deep intuitive process. What most worried me was not whether the style of Realism would be popular, but whether I was experiencing a continuing impact from the Chinese art education of Realism in which I was trained that involved a strong but narrow political purpose. I finally believed that to understand Realism through studying the meaning of it historically

and cross-culturally would help me to decide whether to discard Realism, or to go a step further and embrace it, practice it, and develop it. Or, alternatively, I could consciously choose to take some parts of its elements to use, rather than find myself adopting it instinctively.

Another reason to study Realism is that the concept of Realism has not died. Although its highlight was in the 19th century in Europe, in the 20th century in the socialist world some artists were still using elements of Realist principles to work even though they had been pushed aside from the ‘high art’ of the Modern Art movement in the Western world. In addition, Realism was important enough to cause art revolutions outside of Western countries, such as in Mexico and in China in the 20th century. In particular, I began to be aware that by the time Modernism showed its weariness at the end of 20th century, there were more and more voices calling for Realism. The writer, John Fowles, said at the turn of the century: “ I’d say more realism, not more fantasy, sci-fi and all the rest is what is needed in the twenty-first” (1996, p. 20). I wish to suggest that by revisiting the significance of Realism in art at a new level, a new fulcrum in art for a new generation of practice and practitioners is possible.

A study of the Realist movement in China also enhances and enriches knowledge of Chinese culture and art in English texts, and will help to close the gap in the study of Chinese Realist art. In the past, Chinese Realism was known superficially as political propaganda, a product of the Cold War. It was probably true as a generality, but not true for every Realist artist whoever worked in China and such an assumption devalues much significant work. Research and analyses of the occurrence, development and the present situation of Chinese Realist art will construct a valuable ‘window’ through which to understand modern Chinese culture and its artists. In addition, this study provides an overview of how the vitality of an idea of art has been sustained through different cultures, different eras, and different regions; and by studying how it has changed and developed, it might suggest a new way of creative thinking, both personally and collectively.

This thesis is the theoretical part of my creative research. The studio component is focused on practising painting and has been presented as a solo exhibition in Perth in 2009, and in two group exhibitions; one in Guangzhou in 2007, and one in Fremantle in 2008. This writing is an analysis and discussion of the concept and the term ‘Realism’ in art with the purpose of enriching my creative practice. This thesis is based on the central hypothesis that philosophical thought is important to artistic creativity. This thesis aims to:

- Introduce and analyse the historical meaning, the foundational idea, and the characteristics of the Realist art movement in 19th century Europe.
- Examine its transfer into China, its development in 20th century, and its continual practice in today’s China.
- Through this examination, develop a new personal understanding of Realism and develop a new hypothesis for my further creative work, in which the concept of Realism occupies a central position.
- Summarise the concept of Realism, and take it from a historically exclusive idea and reposition it as more inclusive one for today’s complex cultural situation.

This thesis does not intend to present a history of Realism, although, a kind of archaeological investigation of the term’s usage will be presented. In addition, I do not intend to create a new normative definition for Realism, though it will be discussed in general terms. I will examine the ambiguity of the term, and examine the quality that enables it to continually accrue new meanings in response to changing cultural and historical conditions.

My strategy is to put aside the arguments concerned with abstract terms of definition and through the examination of typical examples of art work, try to find both a

common ground and identify the differences in its elements, and to then link these elements with their complicated cultural and political surroundings. An important expectation of this research is to meet artists' creative experiences and their attitude to life. Any new understandings from this research will be part of a synchronous response to the process of my creative practices; therefore the basic methodology of this research is a reflexive praxis that unites theory and practice. A vital advantage of this methodology for art is that it lets personal tacit and intuitive knowledge be experienced, acknowledged and then be made manifest in a form accessible to others. Thomas S. Kuhn has suggested: "It seems entirely appropriate to apply to the practice of art the idea of the development of tacit or intuitive knowledge through the way in which 'nature and words are learned together' in the context of exemplars and symbolic generalizations" (Harrison, 1984, p. 231).

My ultimate aim is to question and find the appropriate role for Realism in my creative practice today. I am interested in Realism because I wish to reflect on my special relationship with Realist ideas and practice. This is because these ideas were at the centre of the creative practice in the political and art environment in which I was raised and those ideas constructed my sense of the purpose and aesthetics of painting. I wish to use my painting to examine the role of the visual as a means by which ordinary people can challenge and interrogate dominant cultural ideologies. I expect to gain a new concept that supports my new hypothesis to link my life and others, link my art with other lives, and link my thought and the everyday world together, to start a new art practice for me that is relevant to the new cultural environment that surrounds all of us.

I hope that the significance of this research is to make creative issues clearer to myself, and in the potential of these ideas to develop or enrich contemporary painting practice and to help to open the closed circle of the contemporary visual arts.

This thesis has four chapters. The first brief chapter explains the methodology used for

this research. In the second chapter, I research and define the social and aesthetic meanings of the characteristic elements of Realist painting created by the French artists in the 19th century; and in the third I examine the social and aesthetic meanings of the introduction to, and transformation of Realist art in China in the 20th century. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I explain my arguments about Realism's importance, and explain my purpose in using the Realist elements in my creative practice.

Chapter 1

Methodologies

I will be using mixed methodologies that are best suited to creative practice. I will be using reflexivity as a way of determining my individual position in relation to the creative forces and institutions that have moulded me, and praxis as a way of linking my historical and theoretical study to my creative practice. My historical method is a reflexive qualitative one of comparison and contrast that uses both secondary and primary sources. My creative methods sit within the usual practices of Western painting.

My historical method involves the identification of key texts that relate to my reflexively established position of a painter who is examining the historical circumstances that framed his view of painting. I have followed Busha and Harter's steps for conducting historical research (1980, p. 91). The most useful steps to me have been points three, five and six.

1. The recognition of a historical problem or the identification of a need for certain historical knowledge.
2. The gathering of as much relevant information about the problem or topic as possible.
3. If appropriate, the forming of hypotheses that tentatively explain relationships between historical factors.
4. The rigorous collection and organization of evidence, and the verification of the authenticity and veracity of information and its sources.
5. The selection, organization, and analysis of the most pertinent collected evidence, and the drawing of conclusions.

6. The recording of conclusions in a meaningful narrative.

I have drawn from secondary sources to establish the general reference points by which the historical evolution of Realism can be established, and I use primary interpretive texts in the form of recent Chinese conference papers to identify the specific instances that have framed the evolution of Realism in China and thus my own practice. This historical evaluation has helped to establish a personal theorisation of Realism and its potential.

The concept of reflexivity comes from Giddens' views that if personal identity is constructed by institutional values then we also have the potential to make our own identity if we understand the process of cultural construction.

Self-identity, then, is not a set of traits or observable characteristics. It is a person's own reflexive understanding of their biography. Self-identity has continuity - that is, it cannot easily be completely changed at will - but that continuity is only a product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography (Giddens, 1991, p. 53).

The reflexive process is a component part of placing my creative work within an institutional framework.

Praxis has its origins in the classical European understanding of making where the thing that is made has to be first conceived, but having been made then acts upon the world again. Praxis can be defined as relationship between theory and practice. In modernity its use is derived from Antonio Gramsci, who used the expression in his *Prison Notebooks* (1971), (cited by Oliga, 1996, p. 217). In his 'philosophy of praxis', he talks about it as "the unification of critical theory and revolutionary practice" (p. 217). Praxis is a useful way of thinking for me as creative person who also thinks that art has a function to act upon the world. Crouch says;

When the creative practitioner adopts praxis, it encourages the act of reflecting upon, and reconstructing the constructed world. Adopting

praxis assumes a process of meaning making, and that meaning and its processes are contingent upon a cultural and social environment. (2007, p. 113).

I am using a reflexive praxis, as reflexive praxis offers a way of understanding how I may, as a creative researcher, create a balance between the individual and social influences that have constructed myself and my painting, and also apply a theoretical perspective and draw new conclusions. I think my painting has the potential to raise questions that may have influence on viewers as they reflect upon their own life influences and prejudices. Therefore by applying reflexive praxis by “reflecting upon, and reconstructing the constructed world” the creative artist constantly analyses the propositions being made with their work and allows me to understand what it is I am doing when I paint and how those paintings might communicate to others .

As Barbara Bolt in *Heidegger, Handlability and Praxical Knowledge* suggests:

The two-way action or mutual reflection between practice and theory, in what has become termed praxis, becomes central to my rethinking of the relationship of theory and practice in creativity. Following this logic, I would argue that art can be seen to emerge in the involvement with materials, methods, tools and ideas of practice. It is not just the representation of an already formed idea. (Bolt, 2004)

Bolt says that “the work of art is the particular understanding that is realised through our concernful dealings with ideas, tools and materials of production”. The idea of “concernful dealings” relates to the impact the artist may have with their creative practice. The combination of theory and practice is integral to my research as the one informs the other. I will discuss this in more detail in the concluding part of my thesis when I discuss my own work in light of my research.

Chapter 2

What Is Realism?

Introduction

From my reflexive perspective there have been two significant pieces of research into Realism in the visual art realm in the last 60 years: Sidney Finkelstein's *Realism in Art* (1954), and Linda Nochlin's *Realism: Style and Civilization* (1971). Finkelstein, an American Marxist, whose book has had only limited influence in the West, proposes that as a significant creative concept, the Realistic elements evident in art did not start in the 19th century with the Realist movement in Paris, but far earlier than that. In *Realism in Art*, paralleling the work of Ernst Fischer, he demonstrated the development of Realism from primitive art as a beginning, and the continuation of Realism in art until the 1950s. His research was carried out in the USA during the 1950s when 'Modernism' became the dominant model for art in the Western world. He wrote with a strong voice from a Marxist perspective, protesting against the art establishment's policy which inhibited Realism but supported the kind of modern "art bereft of the content of thought about life" (Finkelstein, 1954, p. 179). Although Finkelstein's research is now fifty years old, what he experienced was a period when art was rapidly changing from the idea of Realism to Modernism in the US and Europe, and which has echoes in the contemporary experience of the Chinese Realist movement. I would argue from my position therefore that his research was able to take, with a deeper and fresher perspective (because it was that of the revolutionary outsider) a closer look at the Realist movements around the world. I consider his arguments and suggestions are still important today. In particular, his research widely examined the concept and the knowledge of Realist art, and it has become useful in my research.

Nochlin's research focused on the 19th century Realism movement in art in Europe,

mostly in France. Her book is of seminal interest as it discusses the nature of Realist works and their complicated European social environment. The information about 19th century Realism I am using is mostly borrowed from her book because of its central role in defining realism in Western terms. To examine Realist art in Western culture, 19th century Realism is the right point to begin my study. That is because in this particular movement, Realism as a term and notion was clearly defined by contemporary practitioners and a series of paradigms of Realist works with prominent characteristics were created. Other than the two previously mentioned books, Rosen and Zerner's *Romanticism and Realism: the Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art* (1984), Nochlin's, *Courbet* (2007), and Clark's *Image of the People: Custave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (1973), all enhanced my knowledge of the 19th century European Realism Movement.

There is, as yet, no standard literature as a result of research into Chinese Realist art. My own art studies and creative experience of more than 20 years in China is important in my reflexive examination of Chinese Realism. However for this thesis I have endeavoured where ever possible to use existing literature rather than personal knowledge. Therefore, widely reading and appraising data and arguments in a large range of related literature is needed. The most important amongst which are Sullivan's *Art and Artists of Twentieth - Century China* (1996), Andrews's *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China* (1994), Bush's *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (1971), Chang's *Painting in the People's Republic of China: The Politics of Style*(1980), Clark's *Modern Asian Art* (1998), Galikowski's *Art and Politics in China 1949-1984* (1998), Gao's *the Century's Utopia: the Trends of Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Art* (2001), Li and Wan's *The History of Modern Chinese Painting* (2003), Liu's *History of Chinese Oil painting (中国油画史)* (2005), Rowley's *Principles of Chinese Painting* (1970), Wang's *Detailed Biography of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿年谱长编)* (2006), and Xie's *The Foundation of Modern Chinese Realist Painting: Xu Beihong (中国近代写实绘画的奠基人—徐悲鸿)* (1977), etc. They all provided significant support for this research project.

Besides the literature on visual art, some of the literature studies involving Realism in novels also were important for this research. For example, Grant's *Realism* (1981), which analyzes the complicated meaning of the concept of Realism in literature, Anderson's *The Limits of Realism* (1990) and Cui's *The Fortune of Realism in Contemporary China* (现实主义的当代中国命运) (2005) historically analyzes the development of the idea of Realism in Chinese novels in the early 20th century. They outline their understandings of Realism from varying points of view, and this has provided the researcher with some important historical data and theoretical suggestions.

Significantly, some literature provided the academic theoretical foundation for this thesis, such as Bell's *What is Painting? Representation and Modern Art* (1999), Crouch's *Modernism: in Art, Design & Architecture* (1999), Harrison's (Ed.) *Modernism, Criticism, Realism* (1984), and Hughes's *The Shock of The New: Art and the Century of Change* (1980). These texts, in different degrees, established my underpinning theoretical understanding of the role of Modernity in Western culture and how this has links and profound differences with that of modern Chinese cultural practices.

In addition, a large amount of information has been taken from other books, websites, or other media. These are referenced throughout this thesis.

A Definition of Realism

Although there is much literature on Realism, finding a definitive definition of Realism from it is difficult. In other words, they all manage to show is that it is very difficult to find a working definition of Realism. For example, Harvey says: "I do not

want to get bogged down in definitions of the word *realism*” (cited in Grant, 1981, p. 2). Also, Gregor et al remind us that “‘Realism’ is a notoriously treacherous concept” (cited in Grant, 1981, p. 2). George Levine in his book on English Realism cited Thomas Hardy’s opinion that “Realism is an unfortunate, an ambiguous word, which has been taken up by literary society like a view-halloo” (cited in Levine, 1981, p. 3).

However, Finkelstein tried to write a working definition of Realism. He has probably written the most explicit definition of the term Realism in visual art that I have encountered:

Realistic art is not simply art that portrays recognizable people and objects from nature. It reveals both the individuality of human beings and their similarity to masses of other human beings who, for all their widely different appearance and background, lead similar lives and face the same problems. It awakens people to the beauty of nature and also to the beauty of human beings. It portrays the social relationships in which people are engaged, the forces that injure them and the ties that bind them together. By its choice of subjects, it shows how the world is changing, and what is new, stirring and rising among people in society. Thus realism may be said to reflect the history of its times. It gives people a consciousness of the broader fabric of society of which they are a part. It shows how widely their problems are shared by others, and so creates a sense of kinship among people with common lives and problems. It replaces nameless hopes and fears with a knowledge of the real forces both fostering and stifling the development of people. Thus it acts as an operative force upon history. Realistic art is educative art. (Finkelstein, 1954, p. 7)

Finkelstein’s definition can be seen as a pertinent one, but this complicated description can not make the notion of Realism clear and easy to understand. Rather, he advances an artistic and ideological attitude or a direction for artists, but not a strict definition of a term. We can not simply use it to draw a line between Realism and non-Realism, because this definition has so many shared ideas or characters with Romanticism, Naturalism, or even Classicism. For example, Finkelstein suggests that Realism “awakens people to the beauty of nature and also to the beauty of human beings”, and shows that “what is new, stirring and rising among people in society”. These words might more aptly characterise Romanticism. He defines Realism as that

which “portrays the social relationships in which people are engaged”. This is also the strong suit of Naturalism and Classicalism. Finally, he summarizes Realism: “Realistic art is educative art”, associating it with the central aim of Classicalism. Ultimately, Finkelstein’s definition is still vague and reflects a strongly ideological opinion.

Nochlin points out that Realism’s “aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life” (1971 p. 13). She accepts that this definition determined the direction of her study, but with that she says “it inevitably raises a number of questions” (p.13). Nochlin saw that as a term Realism presents “some of the problems arising out of the different and sometimes diametrically opposed senses in which the term can be used” (p.13). Therefore Nochlin’s strategy is not to fasten onto the definition of Realism, but to isolate the peculiar implications of it, studying it as an “historical, stylistic movement or direction in the art” (p.13).

Realism in China, with its great vitality, became the greatest art movement of the 20th century in China, but it has not created a better definition. Lu Xun (鲁迅), who was known as the most significant Realist creative writer in the early 20th century, criticized Chinese critics for introducing many terms without explaining them. Indeed, Lu Xun made a very simple definition of Realism, comparing it with other terms in a sarcastic tone:

... everyone interprets these terms as he pleases. To write a good deal about yourself is expressionism. To write largely about others is realism. To write poems on a girl’s leg is romanticism. To ban poems on a girl’s leg is classicism. (cited in Anderson, 1990, p. 1)

This not only shows Lu Xun’s attitude to a definition to be not very strict, but also implies that the creative practitioner has his own way to understand Realism without a definition that has to be contributed to by texts. This attitude is a representative one. Most of the artists have shown that they are not much concerned about a definition in

words for their work; rather they bring attention to other elements of their art, such as the subject, the form or the taste etc.

According to Riat, who published *Gustave Courbet* in 1906:

The painter Courbet set the words ‘Du Realism’ over the door of the exhibition of his rejected paintings in 1855, but explained that the title realist had been applied to him just as the title romantic had been applied to the men of 1830, and declined to comment on the appropriateness of a designation which nobody, he had hoped, took very seriously (cited in Grant, 1981, p. 20)

The first Chinese Realist painter, Xu Beihong, had a similar attitude to Courbet’s regarding definitions. Xu often talked about his idea of Realism publicly, and announced that he was creating a Realist art school, but he never defined the concept of Realism in words.

It is understandable that artists did not need to make a strict definition that would restrict their creativity. On the other hand, they did, and still do claim to be Realist artists. That brings forth the question: What are the particular meanings or aims of the artists when they are practising their Realist arts? What really makes them distinguish themselves as Realists from other kinds of art? Answering these questions, will be the main aim of this chapter.

I could not find a satisfactory definition for Realism, but I found some answers to help me. That is, in Grant’s words; “...the word realismmust surely be the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of critical terms” (1981, p. 1). Anderson also says:

...for it [realism] is the ambiguity of the term, its protean quality, that accords it durability and power, enabling it to continually accrue new meanings in response to changing cultural and historical conditions. To explore the new connotations the term accumulated as the Chinese took it up will reveal as much about the presuppositions and limitations of

realism itself as about modern Chinese literature. (1990, p. 6)

Anderson discusses literature, but his point of view can also be brought in as a reference to look at visual art.

The Realist Movement in Painting in the 19th Century

Although Finkelstein has demonstrated that the quality of Realist painting can be found in works 20,000 years ago, such as in “the painting of a bison in the Altamira caves in Spain” (1954. p.14). He also demonstrated that since then, Realism has largely been the preserve of Western civilization. A significant highpoint in the history of Realist painting appeared in the 19th century. Grant notes that it was: “...the emergence of the idea of realism in nineteenth-century France, where it received a local habitation and a name, and its gradual qualification in the wider republic of letters” (1981, p. 19) that made Realism legitimate. Therefore, whether searching for Realism in earlier times or, identifying it in later years, such as in Chinese art or in Western contemporary art, the 19th century Realism movement can always be seen as the significant paradigm to link with and compare with.

In examining the significant characteristics of 19th century Realism there are three significant characteristics to be found, based on the information from the literature that has been noted. First of all, it is about the discovery of ‘truth’; which was the main claim and the main idea of the French Realist. Secondly, it is in its ‘subject matter’; this is an important sign to distinguish Realist art from other types. Thirdly, it is the idea of aesthetic ‘taste’; this is an unavoidable question for art, especially in Chinese culture, where it is seen as the first test of a painting.

The truth of Realism

Truth is the central value of Realist art. “The premium placed on that most controversial of all entities – truth – rose dramatically towards the middle of the 19th century, and the word ‘sincerity’ became a Realist battle-cry” (Nochlin, 1971 pp. 35-36). Nochlin explained that Realist artists reject a commentary moral on issues in their work, but indeed their whole attitude towards their practice implied an ethical commitment to the values of truth, honesty and sincerity. Realists also reject idealising, reject elevating or embellishing their subjects, but direct their dedication to objective, impartial description and analysis as their Realist ethical stance. For Nochlin, “Never before had the qualities of sincerity and truthfulness been asserted so forcefully as the basis of artistic achievement” (p.36). “The beautiful, the true and the good is a fine slogan and yet it is specious. If I had a slogan it would be the true, the true alone” wrote Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) (cited by Nochlin, 1971 p. 36).

Although Realists claim ‘truth to life’ as their formula and achieve a dramatic level of representing contemporary social life, there are always confusions or arguments over how to define what the ‘truth’ is. This is probably because understanding the question – “what is the truth” - is a complicated, arguable, and never-ending process. Even a very general knowledge of truth for different cultures, different eras, different religions, different social classes, different ages or genders, and different areas shows that truth is a concept that is difficult to pin down (Field, 2001, Garcia-Carpintero & Kolbel, 2008). To gain knowledge from the varying fields of human endeavour is a continuous process. It never allows the concept of truth or reality to stabilize, or the word to offer a convenient mould of meaning. Nochlin points out that this is the reason for making a confusion of the notion of Realism. She says, “a basic cause of

the confusion bedevilling the notion of Realism is its ambiguous relationship to the highly problematical concept of reality” (Nochlin, 1971 p. 13). However, in her research, she examines the particular meaning of ‘reality’ for the 19th century Realist artists, and draws a soft line on the changes of meaning of ‘reality’ by the Realists in the late 19th century.

First of all, Nochlin points out that, since the time of Plato, in the long philosophical tradition that is part of the mainstream of Western thought, there is a central concept that opposes ‘true reality’ to ‘mere appearance’. She quotes the 16th century theologian, Sebastian Franck, who declared that “all things have two faces ... because God decided to oppose himself to the world, to leave appearances to the latter and to take the truth and the essence of things for himself” (1971 p. 13). Nochlin believes this was an extreme statement of a notion which has echoed down through aesthetic theory particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries, and argues that true reality lies beyond immediate sensation and the objects we see every day. She refers to Hegel’s words:

Only what exists in itself is real....Art digs an abyss between the appearance and illusion of this bad and perishable world, on the one hand, and the true content of events on the other, to re-clothe these events and phenomena with a higher reality, born of the mind....Far from being simple appearances and illustrations of ordinary reality, the manifestations of art possess a higher reality and a truer existence. (cited in Nochlin, 1971 p. 14)

With this understanding, depictions of biblical holy stories, which are most often seen in the antiquated neo-classical paintings in Western culture, can be seen as a representation of a ‘higher reality’, but to paint an object we see every day is to represent the ‘bad and perishable world’, which ‘opposes’ the truth.

Living in the early 19th century, Courbet certainly understood the meaning of truth in the philosophical tradition. However, in opposition to the traditional value of truth, when Courbet called himself a Realist, he meant the desire to be truthful to visual

reality' and rejected ideas of a higher reality'. He said apocryphally and with disdain: "I cannot paint an angel because I have never seen one".

Courbet's Realism can be seen as a challenge to the definition of the truth in the philosophical tradition. According to Bornecque and Cogny (cited in Grant, 1981, p.25) 19th century Realism began with the impulse for the need for truth. Grant refers to "the impulse of realism as 'un sursaut du besoin de vérité' [a sudden start in the need for truth]" (1981, p. 25). Referring to this contemporary paragraph, below Feuerbach's words might clearly uncover the need to reassess the truth in philosophy and society in the 19th century:

It is a question today, you say, no longer of the existence or non-existence of God, but of the existence or non-existence of man; not whether God is a creature whose nature is the same as ours, but whether we human being are to be equal among ourselves; not whether and how we can partake of the body of the Lord by eating bread, but whether we have enough bread for our own bodies; not whether we render unto God what is God's and unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but whether we finally render unto man what is man's; not whether we are Christians or heathens, theists or atheists, but whether we are or can become men, healthy in soul and body, free, active and full of vitality. *Concedo*, gentlemen! That is what I want, too. He who says no more of me than that I am an atheist, says and knows nothing of me. The question as to the existence or non-existence of God, the opposition between theism and atheism, belongs to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but not to the nineteenth. I deny God. But that means for me that I deny the negation of man. In place of the illusory, fantastic, heavenly position of man which in actual life necessarily leads to the degradation of man, I substitute the tangible, actual, and consequently also the political and social position of mankind. The question concerning the existence or non-existence of God is for me nothing but the question concerning the existence or non-existence of man. (cited in Nochlin. 1971 p.101)

Courbet's painting represents almost a similar meaning of Feuerbach's writing. At the same time as he rejected creating a sanctified 'higher truth', he substantiates the existence of human lives. In particular, he seriously represented the real life of the working people; and this stance was attacked on the grounds that it sacrificed a higher

and more permanent reality for a commoner, more mundane reality.

Bell states that, “if I call a painting ‘realistic’, I probably mean ‘It shows things in the way that I want to assure you they exist’” (Bell, 1999, p. 62). Courbet painted ordinary people in the same way usually used for aristocrats. In his work not only has the existence of man has been substituted for the existence of God; but also the artist, the ordinary and the poor have been substituted for the aristocratic class. This showed the strong voice of democratisation and socialism that was evident in the middle of 19th century Paris. Louis Peisse, a sensitive critic at that time, exclaimed in 1851: “The nation is in danger....His [Courbet’s] painting is an engine of revolution” (cited by Clark, 1973 p. 69). However, in the face of the attacks in the salon, Courbet never hid his social posture. He declared: “I am not only a socialist, but also a democrat and a republican – that is to say, a supporter of every revolution; and moreover a sheer realist, which means a loyal adherent to the *vérité vraie*” (cited in Finkelstein, 1954, p. 127).

Thus, the target of truth for Courbet was a new way to see the reality of life, the circumstances of the people and the relationship between humans and the idea of God. His attention was focused on society, and to use Crouch’s words, his practice can be identified as the “depiction of social truth” (Crouch, 1999, p. 112).

Courbet’s art experimentation, as seen as a social challenge, has a great social foundation. His ideas were widely linked with the revolutionary movements in the areas of philosophy, sociology, literature, science, and the social revolutions of the period.

According to Nochlin, the scientific revolution had the most powerful impact on 19th century France. Its new discoveries often directly subverted traditional ideology or provided concepts and methodologies valuable to movements in other realms. Famous scholars in the 19th century - such as Comte, Taine, Zola, and Renan all embraced science.

Nochlin summarises Taine's position as holding that science provided a direct knowledge of reality itself, and thus, as a corollary, reality was only what science could know – and nothing else, she then raises the observation that a scientific tone was practiced throughout Realist art observing that Castagnary, the critic, for example, in the 1863 Salon, described the naturalist (i.e. Realist) school as “ ‘truth bringing itself into equilibrium with science’ ” (1971, pp.41-42).

The tendency to look towards science in Realist art was pushed to an extreme point in the 1870s by the so called Impressionists. Nochlin points out that to Realist writers and artists, the natural sciences seemed to offer a model by which to remove theoretical illusions away from objective reality, and expose the falsehoods of the spiritual. (Nochlin, 1971 p. 42)

Impressionist artists adopted approximately scientific experimental methods for art making. They suggested that to paint out of doors therefore meant to paint with an objective examination the subject of nature. The impartial and objective aspirations of the scientist also become those of the artist. According to their goal and their attitude, the truth that the Impressionists depicted could be called ‘scientific truth’, even if they might not actually proceed by the methods of natural science, or even if they failed to understand its goals adequately. It was an experiment in which artist trying to match artistic truth with that of scientific truth (Wright, 1927, pp. 164-167)

By the last quarter of the 19th century, the Realist value of truth was again transformed by the Realist artists in Europe. Pictorial truth in flatness became the new value of truth in Realist painting. For Nochlin, this transformation was probably the most interesting, and significant, of all the variations of Realist values. She explains this transformation of the Realist with the concept of “truth or honesty, meaning truth or honesty to one's perception of the external physical or social world, to mean truth or honesty either to the nature of the material – i.e. to the nature of the flat surface – and/or to the demands of one's inner ‘subjective’ feelings or imagination rather than

to some external reality” (p.236). The theory for this transformation suggested that, for a flat painting to stress the existence of three-dimensional forms in a believable space was a way of ‘deception’ and ‘dishonesty’. Gauguin was one of the significant artists of this transformation, as he and his circle who stressed the visual honesty of the picture plane. The concept of ‘truth to flatness’ can still be seen as the continuing of seeking for the values of truth by Realist painters, but it can also be seen as the preparation for symbolism and abstractionism (Larson, 1989).

In summary, after Courbet asserted the Realist case in the painting field the implication of the ‘real’ or the ‘truth’ in Realism changed from the idea of ‘social truth’ to ‘scientific truth’, then turned to ‘truth to flatness’. It can be observed that as the form of visually representing truth changes it also represents a different understanding - or emphasis on ‘truth’ - by people who see things from other perspectives. An acknowledgement of this point will help to understand my examination of the intents and practices of Chinese Realism later in this thesis. Nochlin explained these changes in focus by discussing artists’ individual creativities and by demonstrating the influence from other art areas such as literature and the decorative arts. On the other hand Finkelstein discussed those changes from a social or political view. His book creates a historical line of the development of realism and criticizes those artists in Western countries who have been departing from it, step by step, after the raising and development of significant social issues in the 19th century.

Subject matter

Do every kind of worn object...corsets which have just been taken off...series on instruments and instrumentalists...for example, puffing out and hollowing of the cheek of bassoons, oboes, etc.... On the bakery, the bread: series on journeyman bakers, seen in the cellar itself or through the air vents from the street....No one has ever done monuments or houses from below, from beneath, up close, as one sees them going by in the streets.

----- Edgar Degas (cited by Nochlin, 1971 p. 19)

Although the necessity of subject matter is arguable in today's modern art, it was a principal issue and a remarkable characteristic for 19th century Realism. As I have previously stated, truth was the central goal that Realists intended to achieve. I discussed in the last section that the truth for the Realist was a complex of 'truth to society', 'truth to material', and 'truth to flatness'. The question that faces me now, as a visual artist, is what kind of image will I choose to represent the philosophy of truth? Realist artists tend to find their own particular subjects to work with and to create their individual interpretation of the truth of it. According to Nochlin (1971), Clark (1973), and Callen (1980), the subject matter of 19th century Realist practice was a historically significant process that liberated the subject matter in art. Some of the traditional subjects had been re-evaluated by a much more objective process. At the same time, new subjects in boundless realms were opened up to art by the Realists. Subjects such as ordinary people, workmen, peasants, petit bourgeois, or 'every kind of worn object' as Degas mentioned. For the first time in history they became significant subjects in a painting. Furthermore, the individuals' rights to choose subject matter had been defined by the emphasis on their "self-reality" and "self-consciousness" in Realist theory. The Realist notion and attitude to the subject matter, in the largest sense, was based on the notion of the moral, epistemological, and aesthetic primacy of the concrete particulars in experience; its key terms were honesty, and relevance.

Realism seems to not reject traditional subject matter completely. Indeed traditional subjects such as a funeral ceremony, a nude woman, an animal, and even the subject of religion often appeared in the 19th century Realist paintings. What Realism did to these traditional subjects was to tear away the protective covering of conventional or artifice from their reality and to represent them in a contemporary environment, however this process was often seen as an overthrow, or mockery of the traditional convention depicted.

When Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* [plate 01] first appeared in the 1850-51 Salon, it created a furore among Parisian critics and the public. That was because, for the Salon critic with expectations of a conventional representation of the world, Courbet, with

his painting the painting *A Burial at Ornans*, caused despondency. The painting did not show a central spiritual meaning; instead it showed a long cortege of figures, all life-size, that had been posed horizontally in the front and almost filled up the large canvas. These figures were painted as equal portraiture without a theatrical conflict or holy overtone. This lack of customary hierarchy of values, of generalization, of selectivity and hence of conventional emotional or dramatic significance, meant the picture was meaningless for a conventional audience in 19th century Paris. It was literally unreadable.

According to Nochlin, what Courbet intended was:

...an arbitrary segment of what might indeed be an inexhaustible reality, since its boundaries are contingent and not set by any meaning, explicit or implicit – against the grey rock above the graveyard on the outskirts of Ornans. Courbet's painting is thus not an 'irreligious' treatment of a religious subject, but rather an affirmation of quite different values which it established as worthy of large-scale, serious pictorial treatment (Nochlin, 1971 p. 81).

Such instances in addressing a solemn or holy subject naturalistically were relatively common in the Realist paintings of the mid 19th century, and can be seen as the culmination of a long debate in European painting (Sliver, 1962).

Other than religious subjects, nudes were also a traditional subject represented in the 19th century Realist painting. As Baudelaire said, the modern artist should find contemporary situations for representing the nude, which he pointed out, "...was a factor in modern life as it had been in antiquity, different though the appropriate situation and the ideal of beauty might be" (Nochlin, 1971 p. 203). When examining the Realist nude, such as Manet's *Olympia*, [plate 02] Degas's, *The Morning Bath*, [plate 03] or Courbet's *The Bathers* [plate 04], *Sleep* (1866) [plate 05], or *The Origin of the World* [plate 06], they are all very different from the "romanticised or idealised" nudes of the "distant or recent past" (Nochlin, 1971).

Of course, besides withdrawing a little or choosing the complete opposite to the romanticised or idealised subjects used in Romanticism, there were individual meanings implied by each artist or by the particular subject. Manet's *Olympia*, as an

example, represented the courtesan's life in an objective penetrating sense; it indeed touches a much deeper social issue for the 19th century bourgeoisie. Whereas Degas in his *The Morning Bath*, painted the purely accidental attitude of the human figure, seen in an awkward yet 'natural moment' (Klein, 1996, p. 988). Courbet in his painting *Sleep*, represented the fashionable theme of lesbian love, and it can be seen as a visible challenge to the morals of the 19th century Europe.

They all, in some way, subvert the acceptable 19th century imagery of the female nude as conventionally, beautiful, resigned, and pious. However, it has been disputed that the painting *The Origin of the World* [plate 06], which Courbet painted in 1866, would have been a shock for the bourgeois audience at that time.

In Courbet's *Origin of the World*, the subject is clearly a female nude without feet and without a head, but her sexual organs are accurately represented in the realistic sense. This image was completely different to the classic or academic aesthetic and moral judgement in 19th century Paris. However, we have description of this work by Maxime du Camp in his *Les Convulsions De Paris*, written ten years after the fact:

Courbet...painted a portrait of a woman which is difficult to describe. In the dressing room of this foreign personage one sees a small picture hidden under a green veil. When one draws aside the veil one remains stupefied to perceive a woman, life-size, seen from the front, moved and convulsed, remarkably executed, reproduced *con amore*, as the Italians say, providing the last word in realism. But, by some inconceivable forgetfulness, the artist, who copied his model from nature, had neglected to represent the feet, the legs, the thighs, the stomach, the hips, the chest, the hands, the arms, the shoulders, the neck, and the head"(Nochlin, 2007, p. 148)

When a critic discusses an artwork, the particular value or ideas of contemporary society are often inevitably engaged. Neil Hertz, in another article, attempted to establish the authoritative originality of *The Origin of the World*:

The darkness of the paint combines with the pull of erotic fascination to draw the eye of that central patch, but this centripetal movement is impeded, if not entirely checked, by the substantiality of the figure's thighs and torso, by details like the almost-uncovered breast ... and by what I take to be (judging from black-and-white reproductions) Courbet's characteristic care in representing the

surfaces of his model's body – the care, at once painterly and mimetic, that can be observed in his rendering of the rocks surrounding the cave of the Loue. *The Origin of the World* ... explores a powerfully invested set of differences – the difference between paint and flesh, between a male artist and his female model, between sexual desire and the will to representation (Hertz, 1983)

Nochlin also contributed her view of Courbet's *Origin of the World*, which for me appears to be closely engaged with feminism. "...Courbet's *Origin*, this ultimate-meaning-to-be-penetrated might be considered the 'reality' of woman herself, the truth of the ultimate Other" (2007, p. 145). Nochlin continues:

The subject represented in *The Origin* [*of the World*] is the female sex organ – the cunt – forbidden site of specularly and ultimate object of male desire; repressed or displaced in the classical scene of castration anxiety, it has also been constructed as the very source of artistic creation itself. (2007, p. 145)

Therefore, in a sense, Courbet's *Origin of the World* relates to feminism and can be seen as an early support for female liberation. However, in using nudes as a traditional subject, Courbet's *Origin of the World* in fact subverts, and transforms the traditional cultural value of the subject of nudity, into a modern Realist, visual value and in doing it in the way he did he initiated new subject matter into painting.

As a socialist, Courbet, had a clear stand in politics during his life, and it naturally engaged his Realist thought in art (T. Clark, 1973; Rubin, 1980). Evidence of this can be seen in Courbet's art and in his attitude to the ordinary, poor, or working-class people. In relation to this, Courbet gave a simple statement in his 1850 letter to Wey, that "My sympathies are with the people; I must speak to it directly, draw my knowledge from it, live by it" (T. Clark, 1973, p. 113). For this cause, Courbet (ironically) says "Yes,...art must be dragged in the gutter" (p. 69).

In Courbet's work, there are significant paintings showing this subject matter clearly. Examples are *The Stonebreakers*, [plate 07] *The Grain Sifters* [plate 08] and *A Beggar's Alms* [plate 09]. In these pictures, the working class and the poor are significantly represented on a large scale and in the central role for the first time in painting. In *The Stonebreakers*, Courbet pointed out the real existence of the

disenfranchisement and class pressure in contemporary French society; and in *The Grain Sifters* and *A Beggar's*, the personalities of poor people, their beauty, goodness and even humour are represented.

The representation of workers or peasants can also be seen in other 19th century Realists' paintings. The typical ones are J.-F. Millet's *The Sower* [plate 10], *The Gleaners* [plate 11], *The Man with the Hoe* [plate 12], Jules Breton's *The Return of the Gleaners* [plate 13], W. Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal* [plate 14], H. von Herkomer's *On Strike* [plate 15], and F. Maxdox Brown's *Work* [plate 16]. They show the workers or peasants' life in their different circumstances. These paintings not only represented the poverty or the hopelessness of workers and peasants, but also portray the intention to observe the 'ordinary' by the Realists. Nochlin calls this 'the heroism of modern life'; it "was the idea that there was in fact an epic side to modern life itself, a grandeur as innate to modern times as the heroism of antiquity had been to its own epoch" (1971, p. 179). This trend can be seen as running parallel with Marxism, which strongly influenced Chinese Realism later in the early 20th century, a point that I will discuss this in more detail later.

During the industrial revolution rapid urban development caused a significant change in French life in 19th century. Taking 'truth to society' as their aim, many Realists also blazed a new trail by representing urban life and the working environment in their subject matter. According to Nochlin, Daumier created his remarkable contribution by representing 19th century urban life:

In the visual arts, it is perhaps Daumier who most fully investigated the human dimensions of urban life, creating a *comédie humaine* as rich, variegated and insightful into the new realities of individual and class existence in the contemporary metropolis as did Balzac in his *Comédie Humaine* or Zola in his Rougon-Macquart cycle. (1971, p. 151)

Daumier recorded the great transformation of the visage of Paris by representing, with his researched observation: the urban middle class, the theatre, the boulevard, the lawyer, the art-dealer, the Salon visitor, the butcher, the laundress, as well as the railway and its passengers [plate 17].

During the late 19th century, Manet and his circle (Monet, Renoir, Morisot, and Degas) sensitively recorded the changing life-style of Modern Paris and it became a new consciousness for this stage of Realism. “That Subtle Feeling for Modern Life”, as Alan Krell pointed out “...was a preoccupation with modern life and a determination to find suitable means of representing it”(Krell, 1996, p. 129). In this way, these artists paid attention to the most typical images from the social transformation of modern Paris. Public places such as the theatre, picnics, the beach, the cafe, the boulevard, and the railway station became frequent subjects in painting. These subjects themselves were not all necessarily new to the 19th century Parisian, but they were represented in a new vision by some new visual angle or techniques. For example, Manet painted large numbers of paintings in the 1860s and 70s that were essentially, if ‘uninsistently’, urban (Nochlin, 1971, p.160) . Nochlin describes his *Concert in Tuileries* [plate 18]:

...the contrast between the stark black accents of the top-hatted artists and writers and the random awkwardness of the roughly-brushed green trees that rise from their midst, relieved by the flower-like accents of chairs, women and children, creates new and modern urban imagery of concrete and distinct contemporaneity in a specifically Parisian, immediately identified setting, free of the anecdotal trivia, the ‘meaningful’ incident that usually marks such representation. (1971, p. 160)

Similar subjects to this, which depicted outside activity of urban life with a new fresh modern feeling in paint, can also be seen in Manet’s and his followers’; the significant ones are Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur L’herbe* (1863), Monet’s *Le Déjeuner sur L’herbe* (1865-6) and *La grenouillere* (1869), and Renoir’s *La Grenouillere* (1869). They represented a new life style of the urban bourgeois

Manet also painted working-women to represent the character of that era, such as the famous *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-82), and *The Street Singer* [plate 19]. In the painting *The Street Singer*, Manet captured a different segment of the 19th century urban experience in a single figure. In another example, Degas, by emphasising movement and emphasising artificial lighting represented his contemporary world and developed a new kind of technique and a new taste in the form of painting. In his *The Ballet Scene from Robert le Diable* (1876) [plate 20], he depicted the audience, the

musicians, and the dancers as subjects. All the figures, no matter whether they were far or close, were treated with a similar degree of attention, and they were all painted with a slap-dash way with easy soft brush strokes and charcoal marks. It was considered an unfinished piece in the traditional sense. What Degas was interested in was the artificial lights and the momentary movement. He said:

To work a great deal at evening effects, lamps, candles, etc. The fascinating thing is not to show the source of light, but the effect of light. That side of art today could become immense – is it possible not to see?
(Barnes, 1990)

Degas intended to catch his subject in its ordinary natural life and in a certain movement moment. In his way, he caught a particular segment of life that was carried out with an instantaneous feeling in painting that had never been seen in the past. By catching and representing snippet of everyday life, Degas endowed ordinary life with a cultural value, and at the same time, endowed his painting with a contemporary vision. As he said about his work *Woman Leaving her Bath* [plat 24]: “See how different the times are for us; two centuries ago, I would have painted ‘Susannah Bathing’, now I just paint ‘Woman in a Tub’” (Barnes, 1990, p. 42).

In reviewing the subject matter of 19th century Realism, it is clear there was a revolution that liberated the subject in art. The range of valuable subjects widened distracting artistic attention from the great, graceful, or fantasy, to an ordinary, factual life. It seems like a rule for the Realists, articulated by Daumier, that “*il faut être de son temps*” (p. 103). Whilst it can be seen that this was meant to be the main concept of the idea of Realism it was not a concrete rule to limit their subject matter, for despite Courbet’s view on angels Manet painted them in his *The Dead Christ with Angels* in 1864, and Gauguin painted an angel in *Vision after the Sermon* in 1888. Additionally the subject of Christ appears in Manet’s *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers* (1865), in Trubner’s *The Dead Christ* (1874), and Gauguin’s *The Yellow Christ* (1889). This contradiction in Realist painting can be explained in the following way: Realists rejected representing religious and historical ideology, and their mainstream social values. Realists did not want to work for the continuation of those values in their contemporary environment, but they did not mind using a contemporary

‘Realistic’ concept or sensibility to review religious or historical subject matters’ values, especially if those values were still current in everyday life. This argument is not just relevant to mainstream 19th century European Realism, but is also a key point when judging 20th Chinese Realism.

By examining the subject matter of 19th century Realism, it can be demonstrated that: the significance of subject matter in Realism is initially a crucial element that becomes less so. Courbet’s era was significant as it began the revolutionary liberation of subject matter, presenting characters of working class origin and this made Realism different to other genres. But, Realism did not make itself a ‘working class voice’. As time went on, especially when working class subjects were increasingly accepted as a sentimental subject matter, Realists found themselves in a more flexible position. Artists such as Manet and Degas relaxed Courbet’s or Daumier’s strictures on subject matter. They saw culture turn from a socialist trend, to an existentialist trend. In the last 20 years of the 19th century, the subject matter for a Realist painter was mostly of no concern. Although contemporariness was still insisted upon for Manet and Degas, the painted subject was anything; from Jesus to “corsets which have just been taken off”.

Nochlin (1971) and Clark (1985) have demonstrated that what Manet and his followers were interested in was Modernity. From Nochlin’s Realism, a concept can be deduced that to “translate the customs and appearances of their epoch” was always the Realists’ ‘intention’ (Nochlin, 1972, p.50). That intention can be defined in the broad sense of a choosing an appropriate ‘subject’. On the other side, Clark prefers to approach art from a sociologist’s view, and suggests painting with a pronounced value judgement was ‘the sign of an ideology’ (T. Clark, 1985, p. 8). Therefore, the broader result of Realism can also be seen as creating a new ‘sign’ for the new ‘ideology’, and therefore it also can be convincingly identified as a broad cultural goal, though this needs qualifying as to whether Manet and his followers really thought about the ‘sign of an ideology’ as they were painting!

The aesthetic taste of Realism

In Chinese visual culture, ‘taste’ has always been an important element to evaluate painting since the commencement of scholars’ painting; the key book in art theory on this subject is *Yi Zhou Ming Hua Lu* (Yizhou painting record) written by Huang Xiufu (黄修复) in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) which established the central issue of scholars’ painting ‘taste’.

Why an analysis of Chinese art theory about taste? There are two reasons. First, it is a question that comes from out of my studio practice, which is the creative part of this research; I had an intuitive need to understand what kind of taste was needed to give direction to my painting. I believe that, as a Realist painter, not only the truth and the subject matter are important, but a sense of taste also needs to be understood. Second, analysing the taste of Realism will help to explain the historical point when Realism was imported to China, and what role it played in Chinese visual culture when ‘taste’ was a first and foremost issue in the art world.

According to Chen Chuanqi (2000, pp. 172-179), having good taste as an important aim for art can be seen in Chinese scholar painting from as early as the end of the Han Dynasty (the end of the 1st century). In ancient China, the scholar painter devoted his mind to some kind of literary taste and sensibility rather than let his paintings serve religious or ‘utilitarian’ functions. This kind of attitude to art was significantly developed during the Song dynasty (960-1279). Since then, scholar painting has become the mainstream style of Chinese painting. The literati taste was organised into four kinds by the art theorist Huang Xiufu in the Song Dynasty (Fan, 2006, p. 56) .

Since the Song Dynasty, scholar painters have recognised that aesthetic taste is the main issue of painting; this idea impacted on and shaped visual cultural judgements in

China. In the last thousand years, the literati painter have developed a particular exquisite 'literate taste', as well as establishing their mainstream status in Chinese art; until it was challenged by Western art in the early 20th century. The idea of Chinese scholars' painting intended to edify the literate spirit only. Artists concentrated on depicting an image of the literate spirit with good taste. The whole process, though often influenced by philosophies such as Taoism and Zen, was an independent creativity that differed from religious paintings. Any elements in painting, if too close to social life or a religious story, would be considered utilitarian, and would be excluded as they were considered to debase art. In other words, the 'meaning' or the 'subject', which is often important in Western art, never mattered to the literati painters. They could simply repeat and repeat a single subject, because for them the subject was only borrowed in order to represent an abstract taste. If a subject had a meaning, then this meaning only existed as a by-product of the taste in the painting, not the other way around. When Western painting was imported to China in the 19th century, the reason to quarrel with it was not its meaning, not its subject, but its aesthetic taste.

Courbet and his followers had clear motivation to be anti-classicist and anti-romanticist, and both Rubin (1980) and Nochlin (1971) have demonstrated that the reason for this comes from Courbet's idea of socialism and 'individual liberty'. I have already discussed how this shift the 'truth' and to subject matter. However, a particular sense of taste appears to be demonstrated as well. The taste evident in Realists' works both subverted the classicist concinnity, and the tweekness of the romanticist. In Rosen's words, "The three enemies of Realist painting were the sentimental, the picturesque, and the anecdotal" (1984, p. 164).

Three characteristics of Realist painting can be considered in the following way. Firstly, a feeling of toughness, of being down to earth or even awkward, was expressed in the early Realist painting of Courbet and Millet. This is evident in Courbet's *The Stonebreakers* [plate 07] and Millet's *The Sower* [plate 10]. Without

covering up any ‘ugliness’ or without any prettification, Realists through their straightforward representation of ordinary life, created a powerful, convincing, but ‘down to earth’ quality in their paintings. “The portrait of the worker in his smock is certainly worth as much as the portrait of a prince in his golden robes” declared the brilliant left-wing critic Théophile Thoré (cited by Nochlin, 1971, p. 33). In addition Duranty declared: “In reality nothing is shocking; in the sun, rags are as good as imperial vestments”. He continued:

Claude Lantier, Zola’s Realist artist-hero, preferred a pile of cabbages to all the picturesque medievalism of the Romantics and proclaimed that a bunch of carrots, directly observed and naïvely painted on the spot was worth all the eternal confections of the *éclectique* – “the day is coming when a single original carrot will be pregnant with revolution”. (cited by Nochlin, 1971, p.33)

Here we can see how a single carrot could carry the purpose of challenging the aristocratic taste of restraint and elegance.

Secondly, Realist painters developed a casual style for their paintings. A casual effect is not only provided by the composition but also by the Realists’ casual brush strokes and palette-knife marks in their painting. Courbet started to use big brushes and a palette-knife to paint and he left the marks on the canvas without embellishing them. This trend was seen as ‘looseness of touch’, and was carried forward by the later Realists. It was dramatized by Manet. Examples can be seen in his *On the Beach, Trouville* [plate 21] and *Swallows* [plate 22], in which he developed a much more casual and careless style with his free unfixed brush strokes. First of all, this looseness of touch in 19th century France was seen as a moral challenge to the traditions of art where a relaxed touch seems to have been seen as a lack of moral integrity.

Ingres also criticized the ‘unfinished’ texture of such works and wrote that “the brush stroke, as accomplished as it may be, should not be visible: otherwise it prevents the illusion, immobilizes everything. Instead of the object represented, it calls attention to

the process: instead of the thought it betrays the hand” (cited by Rosen, 1984, p.229).

A particular instance that shows how the looseness of painting collided with the conservative critics in 19th century Western culture, can be seen in the argument and lawsuit between James Whistler and John Ruskin during 1877-1879. In criticizing Whistler’s informal and expressive painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, Ruskin wrote that he “never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face”(cited by Munhall, 1995, p. 17).

From these descriptions it is evident that looseness, casualness, or an ‘unfinished’ surface to a painting was a daring confrontation to tradition in that time. Linking technique with moral issues was not exceptional in the visual culture of Western art. Therefore it is clear that there was a meaning of defiance in the looseness of mark making. Interestingly, looking at taste as a valuable criterion in Chinese traditional art, ‘looseness of touch’, casualness, in Chinese words ‘*yi be cao cao*’, was highly valued by scholar painters as a Chinese tradition. It followed that neat or strict styles were debased as craft or simply puerile.

Just as it is evident in Whistler’s works, the casual marks or strokes of realist painting also contributed towards an abstract trend for Western painting. By analysing Courbet’s *A Burial at Ornans* and Manet’s “large and visible sketch like brush strokes [which] follow the shape of the objects represented”, Rosen demonstrates that “the Realist movement in painting from Courbet to the Impressionists appears as an initial move toward abstract art” (Rosen, 1984, p. 150). Rosen quotes Richard Brettel’s definition of Impressionism, that it “has been considered by some to be an extension of realism” (Rosen, 1984, p. 150).

The concept of classical ‘finish’ moved to an informal, casual style, and Realism re-evaluated the concept of a sketch or a finished painting. Baudelaire defended this shift by differentiating between ‘finished’ and ‘complete’. This formulation,

conceived in his discussion of Corot's landscapes in the Salon of 1845, shows at least the endeavour to blur the boundary between the 'finished painting' and the 'sketched', and established that there was technique in the informal, casual style. Thus a new aesthetic taste developed in modern Western society.

Thirdly, a sense of 'coldness', or 'lack of feeling' or 'sense of detachment' can also be seen as a particular aesthetic taste of Realism. It probably was the inevitable result of emphasising objectivity and an un-idealised representation of the world by the Realist painter. It differs from classical art's intentions to idealise, and opposes Romanticism's representation of feelings. In particular Courbet and Manet's works have a cold detachment about them.

This characteristic is particularly clear in Courbet's *The Stonebreakers*. Nochlin quotes the conservative critic Charles Perrier observation that "nobody could deny that a stone-breaker is as worthy a subject in art as a prince or any other individual....But, at least, let your stone-breaker not be an object as insignificant as the stone he is breaking" (Nochlin, 1971, p.35). On the other hand, Callen contrasts Courbet's view of labour with that of Millet's *Roadbuilders of Montmartre*, and says that "Courbet confronted the issue directly, without sentiment or pathos to diminish its impact." He values Courbet's achievement in concentrating on the act of labour and not sentimentalising the individual (cited by Callen, 1980, p. 22).

Nochlin compared Manet's *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* [plate 23] with Goya's *The Third of May, 1814* [plate 24] as they both represented the terror of executions. She pointed out that by using light, colour, and gestures of the figures, Goya structured a dramatic scene of picture. It shows an "underlying moral conviction of the senselessness and bestiality of such events":

For Goya, meaning unfolds, ... in time and space, progressing from the grey undifferentiated background of 'before' to the stark, light-revealed climax of the men being executed – 'now' – to the lumpish,

blood-encrusted fallen figures at the very boundary of the pictorial world – ‘afterwards’....The intimation that we are confronted by the same group of victims in three stages of their agony intensifies its pathos and our sense of its inevitability and hopelessness. There is more than a little reminiscence of the Stations of the Cross in these anonymous figures, as is hinted at by the open-armed gesture of the man in the centre. The rebels of Madrid, struck down by their grey, faceless executioners, are assimilated to a humanized up-dating of Christ’s Passion. The contrast between light and shade, between human disorder and mechanized regularity, from left to right, intensify the moral and metaphysical impact of Goya’s masterpiece. (1971, p. 32)

In contrast, Manet’s *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* is empty of any emotional or moral expression. What he provided is a calm statement of the event; and because the event depicted an act of terror, its detachment from it might appear as coldness or hardheartedness. Through this comparison Nochlin indeed demonstrated the sense of coldness of Realist painting in detail. The cold taste of Realism not only fits well with subjects that are ugly or violent, but can also be integrated with subjects traditionally accepted as beautiful. In Manet’s *Olympia*, as Rosen points out,

Most disturbing for a nineteenth-century audience, we suspect, must have been Manet’s detached attitude to his *Olympia* – his refusal to moralize, to pass judgment – all the more so because the prostitute was very much a favourite nineteenth-century subject, and one that, precisely because it opened the door to all kinds of fantasies, demanded a clearly defined moral attitude – humane pity, indignation, or whatever. Simple acceptance, the Realist attitude, was hard to swallow. (Rosen, 1984, p.171)

In Rosen’s view, Manet’s objective and impersonal style revealed “the hypocrisies covered by the artistic conventions of the female nude that he deliberately abandoned” (p.172). Nochlin observes that the realist painter treated his subjects equally, objectively and unemotionally in a “starkly factual and unidealized, almost brutal conception” (Nochlin, 1971, p.58). The Realist gave no judgement on the great, the divine, the poetic, or the moral, but laid things bare for judgement from the audience.

Finally, Realist coldness can also be seen through Chinese culture as tinged with

sarcasm (leng chao). In Manet's *The Dead Christ with Angels*, the usually sublime religious passion has vanished. The depiction of Jesus' heavy corporeality expresses an attitude that suggests a disinterest in the divine. At the time it must have been read by some as a dispassionate, almost sarcastic observation about religious society in the 19th century; in Nochlin's words again, unidealized, and almost brutal (p.58). Sarcasm does not often appear overtly in the 19th century realist paintings but it does enrich its expressive force and aesthetic taste, and increased the critical potency of Realism. This sardonic attitude was to develop and became an important characteristic in Chinese Realist art after the 1980s.

Conclusion

Finkelstein provided a concept to review Realism in Western art. To express the 'truth' in art had traditionally been the main value targeted by artists during the past thousand years in art. However, the understanding of and the aspects concerning the 'truth' by people were changing (or developing), while in art, the 'truth' was expressed differently. For example, in ancient times, artists created a religious epistemological 'truth'; in the 19th century, Realists such as Courbet created a 'social truth' which reflected the revolution of humanistic study; as well, in the 20th century Modern Art movement, 'material truth' became an important value or target.

The significance of the 19th century Realist painting movement has been fully affirmed in most related literature, including Nochlin's *Realism: Style and Civilization* and Finkelstein's *Realism in Art*. When Realism was first named an art, this movement altered the focus or interest from God's 'truth' in Classicism, and the fantasy of Romanticism in art, into the reality of contemporary human society. In this

way, 19th century Realists did not simply bring subjects from life to their paintings, but also created a new kind of taste for art that was seen as confrontingly 'awkward', 'cold', or 'unfinished'.

Nochlin described the further transition of focus from 'social' to 'material' and 'surface' during the Modern Art movement in the 20th century without criticism, but for Finkelstein, it was not an independent art movement but one strongly affected by governmental power. Finkelstein suggested that it was the 'new academy' – "the main center of which is the Museum of Modern Art in New York" using funding and propaganda to support 'Modernism' that then dwarfed and marginalized Realism (Finkelstein, 1954, pp.172-179). Finkelstein's opinion can be further validated by Serge Gilbaut's *How New York stole the idea of modern art* (1985) and by Frances Stonor Saunders's book, the *Cultural Cold War: the CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (2000a), in which abundant details illuminate this idea that powerful state actions supported abstract art and expressed ideological hostility towards Realism in the West was a significant cultural policy administered by the CIA after World War II.

Chapter 3

Chinese Realism in the 20th Century

The aim of this chapter is, through a broad literature review, to analyse the history and essentially summarize the movement of Realism in 20th century China. It is not intended to portray a detailed history of Chinese realism, but to analyse the representative artists and works of the period. In addition, this section will unscramble the political meaning and the internal logic used during the development of realistic images in modern Chinese culture. To do so, not only broad literature resources are employed, but also as a tool for analysis, iconographical concepts and methods are employed. “Why was it created?” or “Why was it created just so?”, which are iconological questions about art works (Staten, 1994, p. 4), are also addressed.

Realism, as an historical movement in the visual arts and in literature, “was the dominant movement from about 1840 until 1870-80” (Nochlin, 1971 p. 13) in Europe; and, it has also been a dominant movement in China since the 1920s and in a sense it continues today. Examining the movement of Chinese Realism in painting, the characteristics are both visibly influenced from and different to 19th century European Realism; although it is changing dramatically with time and with different painters. After a wide review and a close examination of the art movement in 20th century China, I would like to categorise this movement according to its visible transitions and discuss it in three sections, using different periods and different artists as examples.

Introducing Realism into China

According to most Chinese literature, in particular Xie Lifa and Jian Xun's (谢里法 蒋勳) book *The Foundation of Modern Chinese Realist Painting: Xu Beihong*, (Xie & Jiang, 1977), there is no doubt that the movement of Chinese Realist painting was started by Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿) at the end of the 1920s. The same interpretation was made by the contemporary theoretician Zhong Han: "Xu Beihong (1895 – 1953) was the first exploiter of 20th century Chinese Realism" (2000, p. 2). However, there are more or less different views implied in the literature by Western scholars. Although Sullivan, in his book *Art and Artists of Twentieth – Century China*, points out that by the 1940s Xu Beihong was "the acknowledged master among the Realists", he mostly ignored the concept of Realism in his discussion of Xu. Sullivan, rather, assesses Xu as "a man of principle, an idealist, a romantic, who gave his students a high example in artistic technique and seriousness of purpose" (1996, p. 72). In Andrews's book, Xu's painting is commented on as it "emphasized a synthesis between Chinese tradition and classical Western art" (1994, p. 29). Sullivan's and Andrews's silence on Xu's Realism can be seen as their being unsure whether the description of Realism is right for Xu. But why has Xu's work been called 'Realist' in China? Was it a misreading by Chinese people or by Xu Beihong? Or, can we see it as a reformation of Realism in Chinese culture? Although these are not the central questions for this research, answers will be suggested at the end of this paper. What is more important to focus on is to understand what Xu Beihong did and what it meant to China.

Xu Beihong was born in 1895, during the late Qing dynasty, at Ji-Ting-Qiao (岷亭桥), a village in Jiangsu Province. This was the year that the famed progressive Kang Youwei (康有为) convened one thousand three hundred scholars to sign a petition,

‘the Ten Thousand Words letter’, to the emperor of Qing, asking to reform the government from the absolute monarchy to a constitutionally limited monarchy. It opened a new page of reformation and revolution for modern China. From this year, the severity of conflict between the ‘Revolutionary’ and ‘Conservative’ parties became a significant character in China. This conflict did not only rise in the political field, but was widely experienced in every field of society. It caused civil wars, as well as causing a long-term conflict in Chinese literature, art, and education until 1949. According to Xie and Jiang (Xie & Jiang, 1977), by the time Beihong was five, Zou Rong’s(鄒容) *Revolutionary Army*, the first magazine for ideas of revolution, was published in Shanghai. Whilst in his teens, Beihong watched numerous significant revolutionary events, such as the deaths of heroes Qiu Jin, Xu Xilin, and many martyrs at Huang Hua Gang, and watched the Wuchan Insurgence, and the foundation of the Republic. These might be the reason that Xu had his “new view and breath to the new era” (Xie & Jiang, 1977, p. 79).

Beihong’s father, Xu Dazhang, was a small farmer and self-taught painter. According to Wang Zhen (王震), Beihong continually studied traditional Chinese painting under his father, from the age of 9 until he left home (2006, p. 4). The first time he left home for Shanghai was when he was 17. The reason for going to Shanghai, according to Beihong’s writing, was “to study the Western painting, but did not find [it], then [I came] back home after a few months” (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 6; translated by the researcher); but Xie posted another reason that, “17 year old Xu Beihong disputed his parents’ arrangement of his marriage, so left home, but was finally brought back by his father and married” (1977, p.79-80; translated by the researcher).

When his father died in 1914, Xu Beihong set off to seek his fortune in Shanghai again. By 1915 he enrolled in the Université Aurore (Zhendan University) to learn French. While studying in Shanghai, Xu also worked as a painter for Silas A. Hardoon, who was an opium dealer and city councillor, and who supported scholarly projects and hosted gatherings of Chinese artists and connoisseurs. By entering into the social

circle of the Harpoons, Xu met Kang Youwei (Sullivan, 1996, p. 68).

Kang Youwei is a significant figure in Chinese modern history. He was not only a political leader who convened one thousand three hundred scholars to launch the reform movement by 'the Ten Thousand Words letter' (gong che shang shu) in 1895 (Q. Gao, 1988, p. 124), he also arranged the first constitutionally limited monarchy government reform in 1898. However, this government only worked for one hundred and three days then failed because of the coup by the queen mother (p.236). He also was one of the most authoritative theoreticians of art in his time. In his writing, it was the first time that the authoritative tradition of literati painting was severely criticized, and it was the first time that Western painting had been introduced with theoretical discussion by a Chinese scholar. It was also the first time that the concept of Realist painting had been positively discussed in China.

Before Western painting had been introduced in China, the mainstream of Chinese traditional painting was the scholar's painting. Chen's book, *The History of Chinese Aesthetics on Painting* (2000), frames scholar's painting as a three thousand year old tradition that achieved a high point during the Song dynasty (960 - 1279), and whose practice has continued until today. For Chen, the characteristic of Chinese scholar's painting can be summarized as a kind of painting not for representing things in the world, but for enjoyment by educated people. Its aim was, through the enjoyment of art works, to taste a way of natural life (shen ren zhi dao). Hua Haijing's summary of its style is: "the abstract of brush and ink, conscious form, and poetical artistic conception", and he deems that these are the 'genes of Chinese Painting' (2005, p. 110). These characteristics of Chinese painting did not change during the late Qing dynasty; and even at the turn of the twentieth century the vogue was for the 'simple', often with only 'few brush marks', upholding a subtle taste which is 'unromantic' or 'leisurely', while carrying an ancient-feeling.

With an understanding of this traditional philosophy of Chinese art, Kang Youwei

nevertheless criticized from a contemporary pragmatic view: “How can those who paint just for fun in their spare time capture the true character of all things on earth? It is totally wrong to regard the literati spirit as the orthodox school of painting” (cited by Sullivan, 1996, p.28). He said more emphatically:

If we adhere to the old way without change, Chinese painting will become extinct. Now, at the historic moment, it is up to those who are up to the challenge to arise. They must begin a new era by combining Chinese and Western art. (cited by Sullivan, 1996, p. 28)

According to Shui Tianzhong, Western painting was introduced into China by Western missionaries in 1601, but it was treated as craft. The scholar valued it “not at all for the techniques of brush or ink, though it is delicate but kitsch, therefore not in the taste of painting” (Shui, 1987, p. 58; translated by the researcher). This concept was redressed by Kang’s writing. In *Travels in Eleven European Countries*, Kang vividly assessed European paintings for his Chinese readers. For example, he used the Chinese aesthetic concept of taste to judge Raffaello Sanzo’s (1483~1520) work as ‘leisurely with yummy brush marks’, ‘delicate and metrical’, ‘really heavenly work’(Kang, 1985, p. 132). ‘Heavenly’ (shen pin) is one of the terms describing taste in traditional Chinese painting. More interestingly, Kang argued that the aesthetic value of Raffaello’s work was similar to Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy, Li Bai’s poems and Su Dongpo’s prose (1985 p.133). Kang evaluated Raffaello’s work in China, identifying the ‘wrongness’ of contemporary traditional painters.

According to Wang Zhen, Xu Beihong was well cared for by Kang after they met. Xu resided in Kang’s house in 1917, and during this time Xu painted portraits for Kang’s family, read Kang’s collection of paintings and books, and learned literature and calligraphy from Kang. More importantly, Xu had listened to and discussed the new art theory and philosophy, “for the concept of art, he got great insights from Kang” (Z. Wang, 2006, p. 18; translated by the researcher).

At this time in Shanghai, Xu met his future second wife, Jiang Biwei. They went to

Japan in May – November 1917. At the end of this year, with Kang's recommendation, Xu and Jiang went to Beijing. Cai Yuanpei, the chancellor of Beijing University, appointed Xu Beihong as a teacher in the Painting Methods Research Society.

From December 1917 to January 1919, Xu lived in Beijing. Xie emphasized that this was an important experience for Xu Beihong and it was when he formed his strategic concept of 'reform Chinese art' (Xie & Jiang, 1977, pp. 84-85). If Kang gave Xu the theory and personal inspiration, then travel to Japan let him see a model of alternative cultural practices. However, in Beijing he saw and felt that the city was just getting into the great 'New Culture Movement'. The New Culture Movement called for a revision of Confucian values and an adoption of Western cultural practices, in particular scientific and political studies. According to Xie, Hu Shi published his Discussion on *Cultural Reform* in the magazine *New Youth* in 1917, putting forward that "the 'content' of cultural thinking and social life has changed, therefore the 'form' that needs to express them has to change too" (cited by Xie, 1977 p.84; translated by the researcher). Beijing became the cradle and centre of the national New Culture Movement. What was Xu's attitude to the New Culture Movement? He did not mince his words in his article published in the university's art journal. In the article, he urged artists to: "Preserve those traditional methods which are good, revive those which are moribund, change those which are bad, strengthen those which are weak, and amalgamate those elements of Western painting which can be adopted" (cited by Sullivan, 1996, p.69). This shows that Xu knowingly linked the idea of reforming Chinese art to the New Culture Movement; as well as showing in his work the embodiment of Kang's ideas of political and artistic reform. One can also see that Xu's idea of reforming tradition was not absolute. Rather, Xu intended to opt for a middle road between revolution and reformation.

Xu and his wife Jiang went to Paris to learn about Western art in March 1919, carrying with him his pre-existing idea for reform, and continuing his relationship

with Kang and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培). Xu was different to other Chinese overseas art students. He had a clear understanding about what he wanted to learn; he thought knew exactly what China needed, and he continually received communications from Kang and Cai, whose opinions were important to him in his personal project of modernisation.

In Europe from 1919 to 1927, Xu studied at the Académie Julian and later at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, and also visited Geneva, Berlin, and Italy. During his time in Paris Xu disregarded all evidence of the Modern movement. What he “focused on was the middle 19th century French Realist painting”, and “he especially was inclined to Courbet’s naturalistic Realist realistic style” (Xie & Jiang, 1977, p. 89). Andrews’ comments on Xu’s achievement in Europe as a period of “mastering an exquisitely detailed style of drawing and a highly romantic style of oil painting” (1998, p. 177)

Xu Beihong returned to China in September 1927. In the eight years Xu was in Europe, two significant events had occurred in his motherland, the May Fourth Movement in May 1919, and the establishment of the Communist Party in July 1921. At the time Xu arrived home, the tussles between new and old, between the revolutionary and anti-revolutionary, were more and more drastic and beginning to spread across the nation. A decisive war was brewing. The most obvious artistic response to these social conditions was the rising tidal wave in the literary movement that started in 1917. According to Zhao Fusheng (1992), this period was the time which is reckoned as the beginning of Modern Chinese literature, and the point of conception of Realism in the new literature of China. He says, “In the first ten years (1917-1927) of the development of Chinese literature, undoubtedly the Realist ideas in literature had the loudest voices and had the most influence on thought in general” (1992, p. 40; translated by the researcher). In the early stages of Chinese Realist literature, the most significant figures were Lu Xun (鲁迅) and Mao Dun (茅盾). Lu Xun in his powerfully realist novels, prose and poetry and Mao Dun in his

translations of foreign Realist literature into Chinese. More importantly perhaps, he ruminated over and theorised about the artistic idea of Realism. He was the first theorist of Realism in China in the early 1920s.

As the elite critic of the Literature Research Society, Mao Dun was naturally also one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party in the early 20s (Baidu, 2008). His idea of Realism was closely linked with his political revolutionary ideas or plan. As Zhao stated “Mao Dun first of all was a revolutionary, then a litterateur; firstly he was a theorist of literature, then a creator of literature” (Zhao, 1992, p. 59; translated by the researcher). According to Zhao, the purpose for Mao Dun to introduce Realism into China was not simply for art’s sake, but for a deep political purpose. Zhao observes that “there was urgent need for a Chinese New Culture Movement” (p.59; translated by the researcher) and that “although [Mao Dun] clearly knew ...Western literature had developed from Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, to New-Romanticism (via. Modernism)” (p.59), he thought that Realism was the correct and only style for a proletarian Revolution. Mao Dun’s favourite Realists were Honore de Balzac (1799-1850) and the Russians V.G. Belinskiy (1811-1848), and Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskiy (Николай Гаврилович Чернышевский) (1828—1889). Similarly as with European Realism, Mao Dun stressed the idea of ‘Truth’ in his theory; for Zhao, there is an aim that to “adopt the truth of Realism is to repel the fakeness of feudalism reactionism” (p. 43; translated by the researcher). However, Mao Dun’s theory of Realism, which was revised for China, privileged its communist ideology. Zhao pointed out that Mao Dun’s idea of Realism did not intend to be ‘even-handed’, take an ‘impersonal’ view to represent this society, nor to “take a position as ‘third person’ to create art work” (p.46); but by creating art from real life would direct people to a particular understanding of everyday life. “The social responsibility of literature is not only to show up the darkness and villainy of the old system, it should also, even must, stand out ‘for a belief of the unborn lights’, let new thought and new belief fill people’s hearts” Mao wrote in 1925 (cited by Zhao, 1992, p. 62; translated by the researcher).

In Chinese culture, the relationship between literature and painting are almost inseparable and they influence each other. Xu Beihong's Realist paintings could no doubt be accepted as Realism, not only because of what he claimed, but because of his ideas and practice, which matched Mao Dun's thoughts about Realism. Xu's ideas and style of painting filled the needs of the New Culture Movement which was a part of the political revolution. To show how close he was to the revolution that Mao Dun argued for, Xu even wrote Revolutionary poems. Some of them were published as *The Four Chapters of Revolutionary Poems* in The Central News on 2nd February 1928 (Z. Wang, 2006, p. 58). Xu was one of the Chinese artists who had a close relationship with the social revolutionary activists in the early days.

In the first half of 1928, Xu had two jobs: the Head of the Painting Department of Nanguo Arts Academy in Shanghai, and Professor of Fine Arts of the Central University in Nanjin. He mostly travelled once a month between the two cities. On 3rd May 1928, there was a massacre in the north of China by the Japanese army. The Japanese army took military control of Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province. On the 3rd, the Japanese army ostentatiously killed the envoy Cai Gongshi and his sixteen colleagues, who had been sent by the Chinese government from Nanjing to negotiate with them. This incident is called the 'Jinan Massacre' or the 'Third of May Massacre' in Chinese history (Q. Gao, 1988, p. 576). Shocked with grief and indignation, Xu painted this subject in oil, using a larger canvas (1500 x 3500 cm) than he had ever painted before and he exhibited it in the July of the same year. This painting, titled *Cai Gongshi's Martyrdom in Jinan*, represented the moment when Cai was arguing with the Japanese military officers. It "was renowned at that time when it was hanging in the Xihu Ziwei Hall in Fushou [Cai's hometown]" (Z. Wang, 2006, p. 65; translated by the researcher). It was also an important painting which established Xu's realist status, especially by the 'judges'; a group of critics who believed in Mao Dun's idea of Realism. When Xu joined the First Exhibition of the Shanghai Art Society in October 1928, the critic Lu Erqiang forthwith introduced Xu as a Realist painter in his article, the reason for this being that "Xu Beihong studied art in France

for many years...and learned Gustave Courbet's Realism"(cite by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 69; translated by the researcher).

Xu did not write a manifesto of Realism and initially did not fully explain his idea of Realism, but he frequently spoke about 'Realism' after he returned to China. In his *Beihong's Self Narration* (Beihong zi shu) published in 1927, he said "I have come back for this art movement which is a movement for truth, a sapiential art, ...one that begins with Realism". He criticized tradition: "I say that the Four Wangs' [all four painters were called Wang, and are representative of a generic literati style] paintings of mountains and water in China are 'conventional' art, not paintings with true feeling" (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 51; translated by the researcher). In March 1928, in his speech at the Central University, he "requested students to attach importance to the training in charcoal drawing, and emphasized and insisted on the Realist path" (p.59; translated by the researcher). When he was resigning from his job at the Nanguo Arts Academy in June 1928, he said, "I will teach some students who will be able to practise Realism", and recommended that his favourite student Jiang Zhaohe take a teaching position in the Central University, thereby "confirming Jiang Zhaohe's realist direction" (p.65; translated by the researcher).

Strangely, during the war years of 1928 until 1949 in China (the civil wars and Japanese war), Xu Beihong did not represent contemporary life or events but used his substantial energy in creating Chinese historical and allegorical paintings in large sizes, such as *The Five Hundred Retainers of Tian Heng* [plate 25] in 1930, *Jiu Fang Gao* 九方皋 in 1931, *Xi Wo Hou* in 1933, and *Yu Gong Removes the Mountain* [plate 26] in 1940. The meaning in those paintings was clear; Xu intended to bring back the ancient national spirit to fire up a united fighting consciousness against the Japanese. He was not interested in devotedly recording 'desperate times'. Because of that, Xu was criticized by Yang Jihao in 1935 (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 156; translated by the researcher) as "sending the deep feeling of grief into ancient history....imagine if he used his high technical skills to paint the factories and the new roads of the city, the

war flames in the battlefields, the life in the slums, and the destroyed remnants of villages”. Another criticism was by Tian Han (田 汉): “Beihong is flaunting Realism, but he really is a kind of ‘Idealist’; he is inebriated by a sweet vision of the bourgeoisie.” Tian also pointed out that he painted “what his ‘truth’ is, he only noticed the depiction of exterior truth, and neglected contemporary real life, escaping into an idealistic or emotional world” (cited by Wang, p. 61; translated by the researcher). Xu did not give any response to this criticism that his historical painting was escaping from contemporary life at the time. However, his central subject matter had changed by 1949.

After the Japanese War, Xu was appointed as the head of the National Beijing College of Art (Guoli Beijing Meishu Xuexiao) by the Guomindang government and therefore he returned to Beijing after July 1946. Shortly after another civil war between Guomindang and the Communists started from the north to the south of China. When Xu gave his inaugural speech to his school he said: “I am determined to make this school a *left* school” (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 280). Once again, he declared himself for the Communist Party, even though at the time Beijing was governed under the Guomindang government.

Beijing was liberated by the Communists in January of 1949. During the time that the Communist army advanced close to Beijing, Xu refused the Guomindang’s advice to leave for Nanjing (the capital city of Guomindang’s government in the south of China). Instead, Xu communicated with the Communist party and kept his school running peacefully, waiting for its liberation. He kept this position as the principal at the school until he died. However, his painting dramatically changed in subject matter, and his version of Realism developed and was to spread nationwide. The subject of his paintings turned back to contemporary events, especially to representing the life of workers, farmers, and soldiers, although he did not change his idealist mind. This changing of subject was an early incarnation of the Maoist concept of “work for the people” in which Xu firmly believed.

“Working for the people is perfectly justified”, Xu wrote in 1951 (cited by Wang, 2006, p. 334; translated by the researcher). He explained it further: “In the past, painting was working for the scholars and poets; today, it is turning toward working for the people” (p.334). He reflected that “although I have championed Realism for more than 20 years, I have not been close to the toiling peasant; indeed there was no way to be close to them, in that unconscionable society; labourers were insulated from art” (cited by Wang, 2006, p. 314; translated by the researcher). In April 1949, he was sent with a Chinese cultural delegation to the International Congress on World Peace in Prague. While he was in Prague he heard the news that Nanjing (the capital city of China at the time) was liberated. He could not sleep for the whole night because of his excitement. He later represented this experience in an oil painting and titled it *Hearing of Nanjing’s Liberation at the International Congress on World Peace*.

In the spring of 1951, Xu spent two months living in a water diversion work site to taste the worker’s life and work experience in Shandong. During this time, he sketched many portraits and working scenes of the workers who worked to change the course of the Yi River. In a letter to his wife he wrote:

I love life, love the labouring and wise people, here in full swing, the dragons are moving and tigers are gambolling - these are the right words to describe it....Now I am in an intense mind for creating; I am conceiving a *New Yu Gong Removes the Mountain: the Yi River guiding project*; therefore I am grasping the occasion to sketch. (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, pp. 335-336; translated by the researcher)

About this time after 1949, Xu often went with students to the countryside to experience and represent the new rustic life. By the middle of 1951 he had sketched more than 20 pieces showing in preparation of his large painting of the *New Yu Gong Removes the Mountain*. He explained:

Previously, I had painted the *Yu Gong Removes the Mountain* from an old story. However, when I actually saw the great Project of the New Yi River Water Diversion, I experienced it more closely and

more vividly. For the scenery, the atmosphere, and its significance for reality, certainly the original *Yu Gong Removes the Mountain* is not comparable. (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 337; translated by the researcher)

Xu Beihong did not complete his *New Yu Gong Removes the Mountain*. He suffered a stroke and became paralysed in the July of 1951. His health did not improve enough for a large work and he died in the Beijing Hospital on the 26th September 1953. In his last days in hospital, he painted horses in ink on paper for the soldiers who were in the Korean War, and in his letter to the soldiers he wrote: “I feel infinite glory for serving you” (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 346; translated by the researcher). For his graduates who came to say good bye, he exhorted them “you must continue Realism, fight with Formalism. I was fighting it on my own in the past, but it is different now, we have the Communist Party to support us!” (cited by Z. Wang, 2006, p. 346; translated by the researcher).

To take a comprehensive view of Xu’s realism, even though his subjects changed from historical ones to contemporary ones and his attitude of work from classical literati to the working class, a kind of romantic or idealist taste was always there in his paintings. For example, even in his most realist piece, *Cai Gongshi’s Martyrdom in Jinan* this subject can be seen as very close to Manet’s *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* and Goya’s *The Third of May, 1814*. Although Xu’s painting was soon destroyed by the Japanese War, a written description was kept. It described that in this painting “Cai Gongshi is standing by a desk and arguing with Japanese military officers, his face resolute, stern, and inviolable” (2006, p. 65). Nochlin’s comparison between Manet’s *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* and Goya’s *The Third of May, 1814*, highlighted the differences between Romantic and Realism. (This comparison made by Nochlin between Realism and Romanticism was discussed in the previous section). If we take Xu’s painting of *Cai Gongshi’s Martyrdom in Jinan*, it is unquestionable that Xu’s work is closer to Goya’s than to Manet’s. Nochlin’s comparison has inevitably influenced our way of categorising Xu’s work as to whether it is Realist or Romantic.

However, why do the Chinese, and Xu himself, think his work was Realism and not Romanticism or Idealism? There are two dominant reasons to explain why Xu can be categorised as a Realist; the theoretical background in 20th century China and the new form Xu practised. There is also a third possible reason; it's purpose. First, theory: Xu's works does not seem to match Courbet's theory of Realism, certainly not the one interpreted by Nochlin. Instead, Xu's work matches the Realist theory interpreted by Mao Dun and his comrades, such as Hu Feng (胡 风) and Guo Moruo (郭沫若), the Chinese left-wing writers. Mao Dun and his comrades were the first to introduce the concept of Realism but translated it along with their own ideas into Chinese, and this theory was used to evaluate literature and painting at that time in China. Mao Dun's theory of Realism does not expressly exclude Idealism and Romanticism because he thought that Realist art should not only represent the situation of life, but "to point out the light on the road to confused people, and to let a new belief and new ideal light up their hearts" (cited by Cui, 2005, p. 118; translated by the researcher). With this purpose in mind, Chinese Realism did not exclude Idealism. Moreover, Idealism was a significant and necessary art theory according to Hu Feng's Realist theory. For Hu, "a cold attitude is insupportable"; he observed "cold emotion consequentially becomes disingenuous"(cited by Cui, 2005, p. 150; translated by the researcher). Hu Feng emphasized a conception of Realism as "a subjective spirit from the artist" (p.151); and what this truth should include was: "the author's life force and his true feeling, and verity with full of activity" (p.150; translated by the researcher). Therefore, in the Chinese view, a purely objective Realist work shows that the artist's real feeling is lacking or cold; but a good Realist work should always show the truthful emotions of the artist. Generally, these emotions could be categorised as Idealist or Romantic elements, but these are not contradictory in Realism.

Second, Xu's work obviously breached the form of traditional art by means of his 'realistic' representation. In terms of the background of Chinese visual culture, this breach was obviously and historically significant, not only to art, but also to the changing of ideology of China. Li Yang (李 杨) has fully demonstrated that the

radical 'ideology of form' was Realism in China. It was a political index of revolution and modernity in China. "The form" said Li "was understood also as the content of its ideologies" (1993, p. 3; translated by the researcher; Y Li, 1993). To challenge scholar's painting, and to achieve the dream that Kang Youwei had called for European Realism, the most important strategy for Xu was to paint both the subject matter and the form in a way that more closely allied them to everyday life. However, his achievement in form has been better regarded by Chinese critics than his subject matter or the meaning of the content of his work. This is because Xu's style was not only new, but that the regenerating of form was important in representing the new ideology of the nation. With a view to the trends shown in form, compared with the abstract trend of the scholar's painting, the title of Realist for Xu was never questioned in China.

Third, is the purpose of Xu's realism. In 19th century France, the principal opposition for Courbet was a historical and idealised Romanticism, and he wished to distinguish himself from the mainstream visual languages. Xu's opposition was different. In the early 20th century China, the principal opposition to Realism was traditional scholars' painting, a 'conventional' art without 'true feeling'. Xu had no need to distinguish himself from a dominant European model of representation and had studied mainstream painting styles and had seen them as a liberating new form. What he had was a clear political purpose and intent to represent subject matter realistically. This purpose started up the trend towards Realism as Chinese art. The beginning of Chinese Realist in painting was started by Xu. His concept of Realism was developed or changed by other artists afterward, and that will be discussed in the next section.

In summary, it can be observed that the Realist painting movement in China was started by Xu Beihong in the end of 1920s. It is generally seen as a part of the New Culture Movement in that time in China. Xu's painting started with the intention of reforming Chinese painting, and introduced traditional European techniques that finally created a uniquely Chinese Realist painting style. Xu's Realism has differences

with the 19th century French Realism that has to be considered in the field of modern Chinese historical and visual cultural contexts. By using a naturalistic representational technique, and supported by political and cultural revolutionaries, Xu successfully toppled the dominion of the traditional scholar's painting in the art field. At the same time, whether he intended to or not, he created an 'ideology of form' for the communist revolution. Even as the idea of revolution has faded Realism is still its visual symbol, which the communist movement continues to use as a tool for propaganda.

The Development of Chinese Realism (1949 – 1980)

Xu Beihong was the first Chinese artist who practised, taught and championed Realist painting after 1927 in China. Although Kang Youwei can be seen as the first Chinese scholar who evaluated and introduced Western Realist painting through his writing at the end of 19th century, and Mao Dun was the first scholar who founded the theory of Realism with a Chinese conception in literature in the early 1920s, it was Xu Beihong who was the first Realist painter in China. After those three people's contribution, 'Realism' in Chinese painting developed rapidly and can be seen as a significant art movement that started at the end of 1920s and continually developed through the remaining years of the 20th century in China. During the period 1950s to 1970s particularly, the idea of Realism became the canonical mainstream in Chinese arts. Post Xu Beihong in the 1950s '60s and 70s there were many second and third generations of Chinese Realist artists. Examples include Jiang Zhaohe, Dong Xiwen, Hou Yimin, Zhan Jianjun, Tang Xiaohe, Chen Yanning, Cheng Yifei, and Luo

Zhongli. Of these artists, the most important figure was Jiang Zhaohe (蒋兆和). His most important contribution was that he made the Chinese Realism of his creative practice much closer to the real life experience of the workers. He also made Realism more of a Chinese style by using traditional Chinese techniques. This was (and still is) valuable in terms of taste to the Chinese people. “If Xu Beihong was the founder of Realist painting, then Jiang Zhaohe achieved it at a high level, and developed it to become a pioneer’s cry for the era” (X. Wang, 2005, p. 149; translated by the researcher). This remains how Chinese critics see Jiang and his art today.

Jiang Zhaohe, the son of a poor scholar and teacher, was born in 1904 in Luxian, Sichuan. When he was eleven, his father was a jobless opium-smoker, and his mother committed suicide. Talented at catching a likeness, Zhaohe started to make portraits for two to five dollars each. When he had saved up eighty dollars he left for Shanghai to seek his fortune (Sullivan, 1996, p. 108). Jiang met Xu Beihong in 1927 and they became ‘sworn friends’(Z. Wang, 2006, p. 54). For Jiang, “Xu was my good teacher and a helpful friend, and my decisive supporter” (cited by X. Wang, 2005, p. 149). According to Wu, Jiang was strongly influenced by Xu, and Xu encouraged Jiang’s Realism when they first met: “we must pursue the pathway of Realism together, and teach numerous talented Realist artists in China” said Xu (cited by Wu, 1998, p. 15; translated by the researcher). At that time in Shanghai, Jiang survived by making advertisements and portraits, while at the same time, his skill in oil painting increased. He taught at the National Central University and taught drawing at the Shanghai Arts School. He moved to Beijing in 1935 where he was to spend most of the rest of his career.

Encouraged by Xu, Jiang strongly emphasised the veracity of representing things in his painting, and also managed both Western techniques in oil and Chinese techniques in ink on paper. The differences between them were that Jiang had a much less romantic taste in painting than Xu, and Jiang’s work was very close ideologically to the poor people, and often his work directly represented low class life. As he

explained about himself and his concerns, in 1941:

Those who know me are not many, those who love me are few, those who understand my paintings are the poor, and those with whom I sympathise are the people who starve to death on the streets ... Unfortunately, the victims of disaster are everywhere, roaming from place to place. The old and the weak, in particular, suffer most bitterly from poverty and sickness, but no one cares about them. Since they cannot earn a living, how can they know that there can be paradise and happiness on earth? (cited by Sullivan, 1996, p. 109)

From this perspective, Jiang took the poor, the sick, and all kinds of suffering in life as his subjects. His *Poor Woman with Children* [Plate 27], and *the Old Man Selling Snacks* [Plate 28] can be seen as typical examples of his works in this period. Although Jiang's paintings often display a kind of austere beauty, they do not support idealism or heroism, and therefore he did not completely please the Chinese critics of his time. Even in 2006 some of the critics , still thought it was a pity that in comparison with the Soviet 'heroic oil paintings', Jiang's paintings seemed to "lack both the formative language and the power of the subjects" (Mao, 2006, p. 25; translated by the researcher).

Perhaps the most significant work of Jiang was the piece *Refugees* [Plate 29], painted during the time that Beijing was under Japanese military government control. He intended to record the sufferings of people caused by the Japanese war in an ambitious work. He spent two and a half years including researching and collecting the data from Beijing and Shanghai, until finally he completed the painting in September 1943. It was a huge scroll, around two meters high and twenty-six meters long, and contained over a hundred life sized figures. This painting was first put on show in the Imperial Ancestral Temple in Beijing on 29th of October in 1941. Within a few hours, Japanese soldiers burst in and closed the exhibition. Because it was so truthful an image of life under the Occupation, the painting was deemed offensive to the occupying power. In the next summer, this painting was exhibited in the French

Concession in Shanghai. A week later, it was 'borrowed' by the Japanese. It then disappeared until 1953, when it was found in a warehouse in Shanghai. The painting was badly damaged and half of it was destroyed (X. Liu, 1998) (Sullivan, 1996, pp. 109-110).

1949 was an important year for Chinese modern history. The Communist Party, the final victor of the civil war, founded the People's Republic of China in October; this ended the wars and all the unequal treaties under foreign imperialist countries that had endured for the first half of the century. After having suffered for a long time, people in China were satisfied and enjoyed the belated peace, which they had to fight for since 1840 in the Opium War. For most of them, it was the first time they could hope for justice in their country's future. In particular, the Chinese new government declared that they would make the country a proletarian country, a country of equal opportunity for all workers. At that point, workers and peasants became the masters of China. The Communist party gained great support from the Chinese majority who turned with new affirmative views and attitudes towards their life. Even after 50 years, when dissident Li Zhenzhi recollected his experience in 1949 in Beijing, it was full of heartfelt feelings for the 'unparalleled dulcet tones of Communism' (S Li, 2000, p. 2), and he quoted the poet, Hu Feng's word "the Time is Started!" to describe the majority's feelings for those days (p.2).

As part of the great and dramatic changes, Xu Beihong, as recounted earlier, became more interested and engaged in the world of the contemporary workers rather than historic subjects; and Jiang, who had always worked for the poor, still worked for them, but his attitudes changed. There was no suffering in his paintings any more; instead, a kind of gladness more or less flowed in his works after 1949. For example, in his *A Flute Blowing and Thousand Doors Singing* [Plate 30], he painted a shepherdess with an able-body, strong hands and arms, walking in the field in bare feet; these all were the new signs for the working class. The interesting thing is that she is also blowing her flute with a smiling face. Many things are implied in this. The

people are healthy and happy, working is enjoyable; and arts, as the flute in her hands suggested, are no longer for the bourgeoisie only, but for the workers today. It is outside my discussion here to question the veracity of his observations, but it is the case that his pictures illustrated the intentions of the political class. The critic Mao Rongrong, an admirer of Soviet heroic oil painting, highly valued this change of Jiang's. "In the history of modern arts, Mr Jiang Zhaohe was a key figure. He not only summed up an era, but opened an era". She also says: "Mr Jiang Zhaohe made himself a middle-man. If the painting field was without this middle-man, Realism would not have had such a strong foreground" (2006, p. 25; translated by the researcher). Mao Rongrong's point of view is representative in China. She saw the lightness, happiness and the development of techniques in Jiang and other artists' paintings, but she did not see that this was also the beginning point where artists started to miss their independent judgement in a collectivistic utopianism. 1949 was the pivotal point of crisis for China. While the country was being re-established the proletarian revolutionary class turned to the new government and the Realist artists became its official painters. This might be seen as the result of a triumph of the Revolution in both the social and the artistic field.

Dong Xiwen's painting, *The Ceremony Declaring the People's China* [Plate 31], was the historic symbol of this resolution of the past cultural crisis, both of the Communist Revolution and the new trend in Chinese Realism. Born in 1914 in Shaoxing of Zhejiang Province, Dong's education and art training ended with the experience of drifting from place to place, living a homeless and miserable life during the wars. He graduated from the National Art School in 1939. He was appointed by Xu Beihong to teach at the National Art School in Beijing from 1946 until his death in 1973 (F. Gao, 2007, p. 171). According to Gao Fei, Dong had been part of a series of 'culturally progressive activities' since the 1940s, and became a Communist in 1950 (2007, p. 171). This is probably the main reason why his art always displays a political sensitivity, and shows the clear connection to his communist beliefs. His huge painting (230 x 405 cm), *The Ceremony Declaring the People's China*, completed in

1953, was recognized as the “model work of Revolutionary Realism” (Z. Li & Wan, 2003, p. 9 book 3), and a most ‘monumental’ work (Yao, 1994, p. 13).

The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China was, and still is, a symbolic picture that is packed full of cultural and political meanings. Based on the Western techniques of oil painting, Dong tried to integrate Chinese aesthetic elements into Western techniques creating an ‘oil painting in the Chinese style’ (Yao, 1994, p. 13). The subject of this painting was based on the ceremony which declared the People’s Republic from Tiananmen, which happened on the 1st October, 1949. However, Dong did not simply pick one moment in this ceremony to depict, but exquisitely rearranged those details with political strategy. As Gao Fei pointed out, Mao Zedong, the head of the new country, is standing in the middle of the painting, and other important leaders of the party are positioned in two lines behind Mao, indicating the hard core of leadership in the Chinese Communist Party. Representations of ‘democratic’ figures and other representative figures in the painting are symbols of the solidarity of the whole country; it is a visual explanation of the political structure of the new China. The colour red is used conspicuously and over large areas. This indicates both the Communist revolution, and ‘happiness’ in Chinese culture. Dong reduced all of the shadows, reduced the contrast between light and dark to match traditional Chinese taste, but did not spoil the basic realist premise. Moreover, he emphasized the patterns on the carpet, the red lanterns, pillars, and the stone balustrade; all these images making subtle references to Chinese traditional culture. This painting has been described as a “model of revolutionary Realism with its ideal art form” (F. Gao, 2007, p. 171). Dong Xiwen clarified a new goal for Realism, that of continually matching Communist policy and seeking a form with Chinese cultural elements; he called it ‘oil painting in the Chinese style’ (Yao, 1994, p. 13). This goal of Realism is still strongly valued in Chinese Communist policy today.

According to Liu Chun (C. Liu, 2005), once *The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China* was completed, it became a widely known painting and was acquired by the

National Museum. Over 20,000,000 print copies were published in the 1950s; but because the political figures in the painting were changing positions in the political tussle of their everyday lives, the painting was revised four times between the 1950s and 1979. The first revision was in 1954 when the ‘Gao & Yao anti-Party event’ occurred. This event caused Gao Gang to be dismissed from his position of Vice-Chairman of the Central People’s Government. Dong managed to delete Gao’s figure in his painting in 1956. The second time was because Liu Shaoqi, the chairman of the Central People’s Government, lost power during the Cultural Revolution. In 1972, Dong was asked to paint out Liu Shaoqi from his painting. Dong did this job during an illness, and then he died of cancer the next year. However, in 1979, six years after Dong’s death, the leadership of the National Museum considered that it was wrong to continue revising a painting to match the changing politics. They wanted to get it back to the original version of *The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China*. Jin Shangyi, a famous oil painter, was asked to repaint it, converting it to its original version. However, being too busy for this, Jin suggested Yan Zhenzhe and Yie Wulin to repaint this painting on a new canvas. Now, a painting of the ‘original’ version of *The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China* is hanging in the National Museum with Gao Gang and Liu Shaoqi once again restored to the founding ceremony, but it is a copy painted by Yan and Yie. The original painting that had been repainted many times by Dong Xiwen is now in the museum’s storage.

Dong’s title as the ‘Model of the Revolutionary Realist’ given by Chinese art historians has so far not wavered, but based on his own intellectual life history, doubts can easily be cast. Such as: What was meaning of his reality? How did he see reality? Should he have been honest to the historical instead of following and matching the changing of political powers at their behest? Furthermore, in particular, in the significant painting *The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China*, who is the real author? Dong? Or Yan and Yie (who did the final work)? Or, perhaps more importantly, should we add the name of the political institution who powerfully directed the project? There is no doubt about Dong Xiwen’s painting skills and his

creative fervour in the first place, but there was definitely an invisible hand that controlled what he could and could not paint. As a typical example of Chinese Realism during the 1950s to 1970s, *The Ceremony Declaring the People's China* is an extreme example that the political party's propagandizing purpose had reined in painters' ideas. It was not an unusual phenomenon, but prevalent in China expressly in that time. *Individuality* is an accepted human value in Western culture, but one not often raised in the long history of Chinese civilization. Moreover, along with the developing of modernisation and the needs of the revolution, a spirit of collectivism had been preached and then established in broader society by industrial and political groups. Artists in this cultural atmosphere generally do not often acknowledge that 'individuality' or 'independence' is an important value not only for artists but for every human being. Dong Xiwen, as a member of the Communist Party, needed to be true to his party rather than any observed 'truth'. This sentiment could be widely understood in 20th century China.

Realism, as discussed earlier, was a concept introduced to China for a politically revolutionary purpose. The concurrence of Realism in art with Communism in politics has often been seen as the 'double revolution' in China (Pan, Y, 2004). It was because of the victory of the Communist revolution, that the Realists in China seemed to be celebrating their revolutionary victory, rather than developing their independent critical ability. Dong's work shows that, after Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe, a new generation of the Realist underwent a new trend, one that revealed more idealistic elements and that was much closer to the communistic ideology. This trend of Chinese Realist art from the early 1950s has been defined as 'Utopian Realism' in Gao Minglu's theorising. He also comments that it inherently accorded with the leader of Chinese Communist Mao Zedong's idea for the arts (M. Gao, 2001, pp. 30-31).

Since the nation was re-founded in 1949, Mao Zedong's theory in arts soon became the significant philosophy in art creativity and art criticism. Most of the modern Chinese art scholars, such as Chang Arnold were convinced that Mao's *Talks at the*

Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art, “exerted a greater influence upon the art and artists of twentieth century China than any other written document” (Chang, 1980, p. 5). In these talks, Mao proposed that the new art should serve the ‘popular masses’, that is, “workers, peasants, soldiers, and the petite bourgeoisie” (McDougall, 1980, p. 65). He criticized artists “who cling to individualism ...[and] cannot genuinely serve the revolutionary masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers” (p.90). He also lodged the famous ‘two criteria’ for artists and critics: “the political and the artistic” (p.78). He explained, “What we demand, therefore, is a unity of politics and art, a unity of content and form, a unity of revolutionary political content and the highest artistic form possible” (p.78).

With Mao’s art theory of ‘two criteria’ and the Communists’ official support, the development of Realist practice soon showed two evident characteristics. Firstly, it took a great deal of care in constructing ‘political’ meanings. In general, this meant that artists should follow the party’s policy carefully and be good at finding the right image from life to match and express communist ideas. Secondly, the particular skills and techniques required to be competent for this goal had continuously developed. Xu Beihong brought these skills from France in the early stages, then Russian experts came to China, and students went to the Soviet Union in the 1950s. A number of artists and their paintings were significantly typical during the period of 1950 to 1980. In addition to Dong Xiwen and his *The Ceremony Declaring the People’s China*, several others have been identified as Realist painters along with their works. The following artists and their works can be seen as representative of this conception of realism: Wang Shikuo and *The Bloody Shirt* (c.1959), Jin Shangyi and *Chairman Mao at the December Conference* (1961) [plate 32], and *With You in Charge, I Feel at Ease* (1977), Hou Yimin and *Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Coal Miners* (1961), Chen Yanning and *the New Doctor at Harbour* (1973) [plate 33], Xiao Feng and Song Ren and *Doctor Norman Bethune* (1974) [plate 34], Chen Yifei and Wei Jingshan and *Overturning the Dynasty of Chiang Kaishek* (1977).

I wish to examine Chen Yanning's *The New Doctor at Harbour* [Plate 33], which has been a well known painting in China since it was shown in the National Exhibition of 1974. Chen Yanning painted a robust barefoot girl carrying a medical box and a tea bucket. It implies that she is working at a fishing harbour. At the first viewing, it seems to be a representation of a glimpse of a mariner's working milieu, and the working girl on the jetty looks natural and vivacious. It is in a way similar to Manet's *The Street Singer* - both of the figures naturally suit the surroundings, and both subjects are ordinary and common in their lives. However, Chen Yanning constructed multilayered social and political meanings in his work by using seemingly un-aesthetic and naturalistically observed surroundings. First of all, by using the material of simple fishing industrial surroundings with related fishing gear, and the figures of the workers, he created a picture with a deliberately bright, happy, and relaxed atmosphere. It does not show the suffering or the darkness that Jiang Zhaohe represented from the labourers' life during the 1930s and 40s, which in reality is always present in the background of any physically demanding labour. His selective vision of what it is to labour implies that there was a new life-style and bright working conditions in the newly successfully established communist nation. All the figures appearing in this picture, including the main figure and a few other workers in the background, are healthy, happy and relaxed. By developing Western naturalistic techniques, Chen painted his figures and their surroundings to look physically natural, and therefore implying the ideological vision of labour too was believable.

This is a good example of the new achievement of Chinese Realism, to use a developed technique, called by Xu Beihong the 'scientific technique', and to paint depictions of the popular masses. The 'scientific technique' for them meant a Western method of painting based on using visual illusion to represent the subject on canvas with a 'realistic look'. In addition, as the strategy of the artists was to please the popular masses, they preferred to use bright and warm colours with little shadows; and usually, a happy feeling or a positive atmosphere was essential. Generally, these have been seen as the basic characteristics of Chinese Realism in Mao's time. The impact

of Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* on this cultural development is undeniable.

However, Chen not only achieved those political characteristics. On top of this, his distinct contribution was that his *The New Doctor at the Harbour* created a 'new taste in women's beauty'. This was an innovation in art for the working classes, equally for modern Chinese art; and it was thought to have a profound impact on Chinese aesthetic culture. Pierre Bourdieu in his *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* has demonstrated that every sort of aesthetic taste is "the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of condition of existence" (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 56). If this theory is agreed with, then what Chen reached was a widely accepted new aesthetic taste for the Chinese working class. That is (in this painting), the main figure of the young girl becomes a symbol of female labour in her simple and practical work clothes, with her neutered shape and pretty, smart face, with slightly magnified hands and feet she becomes masculinised. She is not in a boudoir and she does not have a seductive body, fine hands and little feet as these features always appeared in traditional Chinese painting. Nor is she in bed or in a park, destined by her gender to be a naturalised sex object as was so often the case in the 19th century French painterly stereotype. Instead, she is acting like a man would, in an industrial environment and doing a socially important job.

Moreover, in Chen's vision of 'proletarian' female beauty, there are two political agendas which are easily identified. Firstly, it suggested and supported the idea of sexual equality that was newly advocated by the new government in China. Secondly, the particular details - such as the medical box and the sign of the Red Cross on the tea pail in her hand, as well as the title of this painting are related to one point; the denotation of a particular new reason for what this girl was doing there – she is a 'barefoot doctor'. This was also a political outcome of Mao Zedong's policies during the Cultural Revolution.

The term ‘barefoot doctors’ first appeared in the newspapers and magazines in the summer of 1968. A report, *From the Growing of ‘Barefoot Doctors’: See the Medical Educational Revolution*, was published in *Wenhui News* in Shanghai. Then the *Red Flag* magazine, the voice of the central Communist Party, republished it in its third issue of 1968, and *People’s Daily* republished it on the 14th of September. This report described how the ‘Barefoot Doctors’ were working in the country side of Shanghai. About 28 people who were living and working as part-time farmers and part-time medical doctors had been called ‘Barefoot Doctors’ by the locals since 1965. Mao Zedong thought this could be a solution to the serious medical shortage in all the rural areas of the nation. He commented on this report in the *People’s Daily* on the 14th of September 1968: “barefoot Doctors are unequivocally good”. For the following twenty years or so, Mao pushed the Chinese government to train 1,460,000 barefoot doctors from and for the farming or fishing communities. They “were providing the most basic medical treatment service for the six hundred million people living in the rural areas”(Y. Li, 2008, p. 1; translated by the researcher).

When Chen Yanning created *The New Doctor at the Harbour* in 1973, the Barefoot Doctors Movement was running at its highest point. On the one hand, the number of barefoot doctors was growing fast and it really was an effective medical service for the people who resided far from the city. On the other hand, it sparked political disputes against the ‘old capitalistic’ medical system and became one of the main political issues during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, Chen’s *The New Doctor at the Harbour*, under the name of Realist Art supported and beautified this new conception of the barefoot doctor and therefore became involved in this sensitive and contentious contemporary political point. Similar to many other important pieces during the Cultural Revolution, *The New Doctor at the Harbour* was widely known at the time, but after the Cultural Revolution, it seemed to have been forgotten and now remains in the storage rooms of the National Art Museum. By 1985, the government program of training barefoot doctors and the usage of the title ‘Barefoot Doctor’ had been stopped by the Department of Health of the Central Government (Y. Li, 2008, p.

9).

By comparing the artists and their works with related social data, the trends and the characteristics of the development of Chinese Realism are clear. The core of Realist works show that the Realist painters were deeply embedded in the political concerns between 1949 and the 1980s. They did represent subjects from contemporary life, but framed by the communistic ideals they believed in. This belief gave rise to artists seeing things and representing things not objectively or dispassionately, but with abundant emotions and with clear political intentions. These characteristics reached a high point and became the model of practice when Mao Zedong summed it up in 1958 as “Revolutionary Realism integrated with Revolutionary Romanticism” (cited by M. Gao, 2001, p. 39).

Mao’s call established Romanticism to a still more notable level in Chinese Realism. Having mentioned earlier that Chinese Realism did not refuse Romanticism in its first stages, I should also point out that the idea of Realism integrated with Romanticism was not simply a government cultural strategy, but was one of the central issues all along in the development of Chinese Realism. This has been historically demonstrated in Cui Zhiyuan’s monograph, *Realism in Contemporary China* (Cui, 2005). This book establishes the relationship between Realism, Idealism and Romanticism and how it has been discussed in art theory in China since it started, and as it now continues. It was discussed by Mao Dun in the 1920s, raised again by Hu Feng in the 1930s to 1950s, and was later re-evoked by Tian Han and Guo Muruo after the 1950s. However, there is an opinion common to all their conclusions: Realism is in no natural conflict with Idealism or Romanticism. Idealism and Romanticism might extend, stretch or liberate the concept of Realism, but what Realism was mainly opposed to from its inception - traditional scholars’ painting - changed to an opposition to Formalism during the 1950s. A definition of Formalism in China included the traditional Scholars’ painting and Western Modern paintings.

Under this trend, the Realist artists' political notions and aesthetic taste was unified or matched by a greater all encompassing ideology. Their works show that these artists seemed happy to share the collective, communist revolutionary idea, rather than express their own individual opinion. This situation can be seen as Realist art married to communist policy in China. For the realist painter, for the purpose of making images believable and understandable, it was important to carry on, and thus to continually develop a kind of naturalistic descriptive skill. This development can be seen from Xu Beihong's work to Chen Yanning's work. It shows, in particular, how the structure of space in paintings becomes more naturalistically complex, and the figures are painted more precisely and vividly.

During this period, any artists who had visions of other directions for art were not welcomed; they were put under pressure or even persecuted. For example, an important competitor, the 'eclectic expressionism' artist and art educator, Lin Fengmian, who had strongly influenced modern Chinese art movements since 1926, was purged from his school in 1951 (S. Liu, 1989).

However, these political social conditions did not last long. By the end of the 1980s, the idea of Communism was widely called into question in China. The concept of Realism in the arts area also had been challenged by artists with different styles or concepts which either identified with Modernism or Chinese traditionalism. The question of how Realism performs in the new conditions today will be reviewed in the next section.

Today's Chinese Realism

For most Chinese people, their thoughts and the way they see things have been widely and deeply changed during the last three decades. These changes may be seen as being caused by a series of significant events both inside and outside the nation since the 1980s. First of all, the aborted Proletarian Cultural Revolution did not achieve the more equal and more democratic society that most Chinese people expected. Instead of this, the restored bureaucracy has been betraying the proletarians, making China a singularly autocratic-capitalist society governed as a one party state. The conflict between the government and the common people led to a massacre in Beijing on the 4th June 1989, during which hundreds of students died demonstrating against their government. Outside of China, the Soviet Union was disbanded, the Berlin Wall demolished, and all the communist countries in Eastern Europe have changed their political system. These international changes provided a new frame of reference for today's Chinese people. This time in China has been called "the post-totalitarian era" (Li, 2006) by Li Shenzhi, a senior, but 'honest', communist theorist. He observed of this era that,

...no one can understand how deep the pain was that Chinese people had: The tanks on 4th June not only killed innumerable inculpable lives, but also killed the sprout of Chinese democracy. Since then, the Chinese intellectuals who 'have always taken the world as their responsibility' are voiceless and have disappeared. (Li, 2000, p. 4)

Li proposes that the belief in communism is mostly lost in today's China, but the system is still running in its original mould simply by its momentum. In contemporary Chinese society "consumerism is becoming more and more prevalent, and corruption

is more and more serious. Society became cold and inhumane, but at the centre of power, is still the centre of truth”. (Li, 2006, p. 21; translated by the researcher)

Li observes that in art ‘the main spring of the revolution has been loosened’ (Sh Li, 2006, p. 21; translated by the researcher), and by way of expressing their disdain of the party apparatus many artists moved away from ideas of Realism and practised all kinds of other pictorial styles. There are very few artists however who have found their own individual styles, most of the styles have been taken from Western practices, and often out of context. However, during this same time, Chinese traditional painting also revived. Though prolific works in many styles appeared in a short time, a common thread was seen. That is, they ostensibly clearly refused to engage with politics, or escaped from politics, unless one could see political activities in their notable absence. Li calls this the ‘ Politics of Anti-Politics’ (Li, 2006).

However, for Realist styles, the encouragement from government has not decreased but has increased. In the art schools, Realism as a way of training is still dominating all the art schools throughout the nation and an education in the Realist system is larger than ever. Prevalent in art journals are theoretical articles that affirm or encourage Realists to continually take on ‘significant subjects’. Moreover, all levels of educational institutes organize conferences about Realism. To develop this financial support from the government is growing.

One of the most important recent conferences has been the National Conference of Contemporary Chinese Realist Oil Painting. Together with another conference, the National Conference of Creative Art Projects, they were held in Beijing in April 2006. More than seventy figures who are national artists and theorists came from the main art journals, museums, universities, academies and the Cultural Department of China, and they presented papers at the two conferences (Mu, 2006). The analysis of the two joint conferences will be a key to understanding the main accepted concept of Realism in China today.

The first conference discussed Realism with the purpose, as stated by Zhan Jianjun, the chairman of the conference, “to direct the Chinese Realist painting to develop healthily today” (Suo, 2006). Although ‘Realism’ is an old topic for contemporary Chinese artists, there were some new or notable opinions about the definition of Realism, the history of Realism, and the problem of Realism in China today. These opinions can be found in the major conference papers, such as Zhong Han’s and Shui Tianzhong’s papers, which were the most representative of the debate.

After discussing how disorderly and difficult it is to give Realism a definition, Zhong still thought it was necessary to try to define it in clear sentences:

As we are used to analysing art in terms of form and content, we might as well consider that one of the meaning in regards to form is that, ‘Realistic’ is ‘Figurative’ and ‘Representative’; another of the meanings is about content; which is about representing real life with a spirit of respect for life. Using these terms in this way, then who can identify ‘Realism’. (Zhong, 2006, p. 1; translated by the researcher)

This concept of Realism is not new; Zhong presented it to remind today’s Realist painters that for him they were losing quality in the content of their paintings. I will discuss this point in more detail later.

Zhong reviewed the history of Realism. He pointed out that Rembrandt and Velasquez “can be seen as the dazzling starting point of modern Realist painting” in the 17th century; but he emphasized that “‘authentic’, ‘typical’ Realism was represented in and led by France, and Courbet was the head” (Zhong, 2006, p. 4). He demonstrated that Realism in 20th century China and Soviet Russia had an ideological role; that “it was a mirror to understand capitalist society, and speak for the labourers”. He argued against the proposition that “this phenomenon was a result of politics, and showed how Chinese and Soviet Realism was culturally behind”, saying this proposition was a “political warp” (p.5; translated by the researcher). He did not clearly identify who he was arguing with.

For Zhong, the relationship between “impersonality and subjectivity” is always the “essential issue” for Realism. What he suggested that a Realist should achieve is “the unification of impersonal representation and subjective expression”. In support of his opinion, he cited the 19th century Realist theorist Champfleury, “representation, inevitably, is a kind of annotation”. Zhong furthermore linked this point with Mao’s idea from *Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art* of “representing life with the author’s spirit”; and he reaffirmed Mao’s opinion that artist should “unite Realism and Romanticism” (p.7; translated by the researcher).

In contrast, Shui Tianzhong sharply criticized Mao’s idea on art in his paper titled *Chinese Oil Paintings and Realism*. “How they impact on the painting’s creativity is that it lets the ‘ideal’ rein in ‘reality’, it lets the policy of propaganda replace thinking about life”. He continued, “this tendency in painting has showed that the idea was to categorise by sweetening life with a feeling something like a stage-performance ...”(Shui, 2006, p. 2; translated by the researcher).

All the attendees in this conference expressed discontent with what Realist painters are doing today. Zhong especially pointed out that today’s “realist” paintings are declining in “spirit and taste”, and are “not deeply detecting life” whilst the “profane or kitsch vogue is rising”. Zhong thought one of the important reasons that has caused the quality of paintings to drop was the “transforming power of marketing”. It has caused “social values to be unbalanced, concepts are confused”, “marketing drives overpower what humans really seek” said Zhong (2006, p. 12; translated by the researcher).

Shui also criticized most of today’s Realist painters who have taken the form of ‘Realism’ simply as a means to paint naturalistic banalities. “The marketing of painting has made realistic painting flourish. These years, many oil paintings are popular in the market. These works are good at exquisiteness in form, but are in keen-edged contrast with Realism in subject and mentality”(Shui, 2006, p. 3;

translated by the researcher).

The second conference of NCCAP was not only a meeting to discuss the subjects of national historical importance in theory, but also discuss a large number of particular art jobs which had been specifically offered to Realist painters. It seamlessly linked with the first conference, which pointed out to painters a theoretically 'healthy' way to develop. The second NCCAP conference discussed how historical subjects have been handled in oil painting and what those paintings meant for China in the past and today, but they also had a more practical task to discuss how to manage the new Cultural Projects which had been decided by the central government. Before the meeting, as a National Project, a list of one hundred historical topics and over a hundred million yuan of funding was organised by the Cultural Department of the Central Chinese Government (He, 2006, p. 40).

In the major paper of the NCCAP, Tan Tian, the chairman of the Chinese Oil Painting Association and Professor of the Guangdong Art Academy, summarized the achievement of numerous revolutionary historical paintings produced by the Chinese Realists since 1949. He also analysed and stressed the significance and pivotal aspects of this Project. Two points were emphasized and explained. Firstly, he clarified the sense of 'Nation', and stated it should be the major aspect of painting for to be working on now, instead of the Revolutionary sense that had been the focus previously. Secondly, he reminded artists of the meaning of the concept of 'Project'. His explanation ran thus:

According to the dictionary, [project] is a work or process under a particular plan with regard to manufacturing, building and mining.... Translate this concept into art creative projects today ... this inevitably resulted in a movement from the 'centre of class struggle' to the 'centre of economic development'. Therefore, the relationship between the Cultural Department and the artist is also translated from the relationship of leader and follower, to a business contractual relationship between A and B. (Tan, 2006, p. 8; translated by the researcher)

Whether this explanation is an absurdity or not, because of the key position of Chairman that Professor Tan holds his speech accurately expressed the government's authoritative notion. Equally it is a good explanation of the policy of the propaganda role these projects hold. The explanation is significant in several ways. Placing this central message together with the conferences themselves, important political signals were indicated.

First, the two conferences together denoted a strong call to those still painting in the realist manner. The conferences beckoned the Realists back into mainstream of politics, which still needs them even though its original aim and objectives have been newly 'translated'. As a way of mobilizing artists, arguing the justness and trustworthiness of the Revolution was given up, and was replaced by Nationalist rhetoric and financial inducements. Second, both conferences were aimed at today's Realist works and their lack of spiritual content, which Zhong and Shui had pointed out. As a solution, the authorities intend to infuse them with a spirit of Nationalism. Third, the large-scale project of recreating historical paintings can be seen as part of the propaganda tool for slowly shifting the emphasis of the main ideology of the Communist Party. In attempting to dampen the tone of the Revolution, it implied that whilst the Party had started instigating the spirit of Revolution, it has slowly changed its approach to prevent further disruptive social revolution. Fourth, the new ideology with financial support would move art making towards a free market.

These conferences finished two years ago. According to the plan of the Project that Tan provided in his paper, the result of the Project should be seen after three years. Furthermore, Tan (2006, p. 8) predicted a 'sheep affect' where many provinces are expected to follow the central lead, making their own local creative art projects. However, how exactly Chinese Realist paintings have been impacted upon by the conferences and the National Project are not visibly showing yet. To put the conference discussion into context, it is necessary to examine the practice of today's Realist painting in China. For this, Jin Shangyi's and Fang Lijun's works are good

examples. Different though they are to each other, both are typical representatives of realism today.

Jin Shangyi, born in Jiaozuo Henan Province in 1934, is one of the most senior and canonical leaders of Chinese Realist painters. He graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 1953, where he experienced the strictest Realist training in China. In addition, he spent two years in the special painting training studio that was run by the Soviet expert K.M. Maksimov (Максимов К.М.) from 1955 to 1957. After that, he taught and directed at the Central Academy of Art in Beijing. He is also well known as one of the best Chinese oil painters. During the 1960-70s, his works showed that he was interested in and sensitive to contemporary political issues. Zhang Zuying, a contemporary painting researcher, pointed out “Jin Shangyi’s painting can be seen to have begun with revolutionary historical paintings, and his reputation was started by his revolutionary paintings” (Zhang, 1994, p. 1; translated by the researcher). Jin’s revolutionary works started with *Muztagata Climbed*, painted in 1957, he then created *Chairman Mao at the December Conference* (1961) [plate 32], *The Long March*, and *Our Friends All Over the World* etc in the following 20 years. These works had (and still have) significant revolutionary meanings. A dramatic change came only after 1980. Jin seemed to lose interest in political issues, and turned his attention to the pretty things in life, and particularly to young nudes [plate 35], which became his special subject from 1980 until today. He painted his nudes exquisitely, realistically, and with a touch of classical flavour, but not necessarily with a European sensibility. These were the characteristics that Zhong and Shui criticized at the conferences as being a marketing trend. In addition, not only did Jin do this himself, he also influenced other academics. As Zhang has pointed out, he “raised a movement that large numbers of artists in our nation turned to imbibe nutrients from classicism by the middle of 1980s” (Zhang, 1994, p. 6; translated by the researcher). This kind of painting sometimes has been called Academic Realism by contemporary Chinese critics.

Jin Shangyi is a typical artist who works within the government system of institutions, which has been called 'inside of the system'; it generally means individual creative endeavours are legitimated by institutional standards, the institutionalised individual is considered authoritative and thus his professional continuity and his living is ensured. In contrast, Fang Lijun works 'outside of the system' in Beijing, and lives on the income he gains from selling his paintings.

Born in 1963, Fang Lijun graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing at the end of 1989. That was the year the Tiananmen massacre occurred in the town where he was studying and living. How much Fang took part in the political demonstration is not clear. We know he was a university student in Beijing and therefore more or less witnessed its bloody reality. According to Li Shenzhi's view, even a senior communist's heart could be broken by viewing this massacre, even one loyal to the government party (S Li, 2000). In this social political context, Fang's work was not a confrontation to the terrorist government though; it represented, under a despotic rule, the people's idea-less, spirit-less and individual-less life today. A characteristic of Fang's representation is a sarcastic attitude. "We would rather be incompetent, clueless, confused, untrustworthy, cynical, and boring than be deceived any more" (Yake, 2007, p. 1; translated by the researcher) said Fang in 1990. He soon has been called a 'Cynical Realist' (Fibicher, 2006, p. 142) in the 1990s. Fang's contribution is that he created metaphorical images for today's Chinese life, such as the bald-headed man with a yawning or fatuously smiling face, brightly coloured children and flowers, which were repeated in his paintings after the 1980s [Plate 36]. Fang's paintings are easy to sell at a good price in the Chinese market, but there are not many theoretical discussions about his works in China. When artist statements are needed at his shows, they do not relate to politics, but rather they are situated as commercial paintings with obscure meanings. In a published article for the opening of his exhibition it was even proposed that "Fang Lijun does not mean to refer to any politics", he "reflects life and therefore takes a form of 'non-violent civil disobedience'" wrote Jinri Gallery (Jinri, 2006, p. 2; translated by the researcher).

What Fang painted were:

the shadows that the real world has projected to his heart. The countless bald headed men that he has painted, they are living in the contradiction that between the poor and the upstarts, the mainstream and the brink, the freedom and the control, the individual and the collectivity. (Jinri, 2006, p. 2; translated by the researcher)

However when an exhibition, Mahjong – Contemporary Chinese Art, from the Sigg Collection opened at Kunstmuseum, Bern, in Switzerland in 2005, a deeper and contemporary universal meaning of Fang's painting was pointed out by Christoph Heinrich in the exhibition catalogue. This is that:

His anguished head pictures can thus be interpreted as the desperate expression of the individual faced with stereotypes and cloned masses, but at the same time as a protest against the tyranny of Western industrial products that subsume all individuality into standardized formulae. (Fibicher, 2005, p. 142)

Jin Shangyi and Fang Lijun are representatives of the two different trends with the different statuses of 'inside' or 'outside' of the system of governmental institutes. Artists working inside the System tend to practice their art with political safety, but correspondingly with an institutional dependence. Jin's practice is to try to meld the Western classical and the Chinese traditional tastes and thereby to influence today's life with a culturally 'high' and 'new' taste. This seems to be (loosely) based on the idea that was advanced by Cai Yuanpei in the 1920s. That is, an aesthetic action that crosses cultures and crosses political modalities permits a fundamental humanism to be transmitted. Because of the generally accepted notion that Jin is the inheritor of Chinese Realism, and that his paintings can be contrasted with the Chinese tradition or Western Modernism, and that his central idea is still based on representing images from life it is the case that critics still call this kind of work Realist. On the other hand this trend has also been worried about and criticized by many critics, such as Shui and Zhong in the conference discussed earlier. However, if Jin's work is compared with

early Chinese Realism or today's Fang Lijun's work, the reality of its meaning could be interpreted so; it refracts the emptiness and paleness of mentality and ideology in the Chinese institutional world today.

In contrast, Fang and other artists who are working outside the System have more freedom to be individual artists, and have more opportunities to experience and, unprejudiced, see ordinary social life. Fang's art, although it has exaggerated shapes and colours, is nevertheless deeply connected with ordinary people's lives and sentiments. This connection makes his art strong, rich and real.

Conclusion

The practice of Realism in painting produced a very different, oppositional, kind of vision in Western culture in the past; now if contemporary Chinese Realist painting is included in this vision, the whole global picture of Realism seems much more complicated. However, in review, a clue to the key value or the main role of Realism can still be found in artists and writers in Western countries and in China. To understand Realism's central vitality, that might provide an inspiration for today, is more important for the author than arguing for a complete definition for the practice.

Finkelstein believed that "there was realistic art long before there was a movement that called itself 'realism'" (1954, p. 87). By saying that, Finkelstein, on the one hand, pointed out that Realist art is inherent in human culture. On the other hand, he explained that the 'quality' of Realism is always "Realism limited ...by how much could be known of the real world" (p.17). He admitted that "Realism involves always a body of ideas as to what is new, and how the world has been changed or better

understood” (p.17), but he argued against the idea of being ‘truth for material’ and ‘truth for flatness’ in painting practice. He simply did not think of these ideas as Realism. In his writing, an “interest solely in ‘space’, materials, and surfaces, and the ‘subjective’ nightmare symbols” are all “non-realistic trends” (p. 175). For Finkelstein, the Realist artist has to be a “thinker about life” (p. 59). He pointed out that Courbet’s work is “genuine realism, embodying profound thinking about society” (p. 128). Evidently, what Finkelstein encouraged is social Realism; it is “the product of thought about life” (p. 19).

The changing meaning of ‘truth or honesty’ from ‘truth or honesty in the social world’ to mean truth or honesty in the ‘material’ or on the ‘flat surface’ is presented in Nochlin’s book. However, it is only discussed under the Chapter of “Whatever Happened to Realism?” and in the section “Breakdowns and Changes”, and discussed in regards to the ‘transformation’ of Realism (Nochlin, 1971 pp. 235-247). The central values and the main issues in her book focus on Realist artists and their works which were the dominant Realist movement from about 1840 until 1870-80. Nochlin affirmed this movement: “its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life” (p. 13).

‘Truth to material’ or ‘truth to flat surface’ was a part of the main theory driving the dominant movement from Realism to Abstraction during the Modern Art movement. In the 20th century, it can be safely said that after the World War II, modernism in all its forms has ruled the Western world of visual art. A significant impetus that ensured its continuance in the USA was government funding of abstract art and a funding that was covert and insincere.

In China, Realism carried out a revolution in Chinese visual art in the early 20th century. In a visual culture in which ‘taste’ was the first value for a painting, Xu Beihong introduced a seemingly ‘vulgar’ (or kitsch) style into Chinese art and the art

education system. Realism at first was seen as a style of painting with Western techniques distinct from, and challenging to, the traditional aesthetic and practices of Chinese Scholars' painting. A visible characteristic of Realist painting, compared with Chinese 'scholar painting', is that it has a resemblance to the reality of the visual world.

The Realist movement in China encouraged and educated a great number of Realist artists. Amongst them, Jiang Zhaohe can be seen as the one whose work is closest to the 19th century exponents of Realism. His work, mostly produced between 1929 and the 1950s, represented contemporary ordinary life with portraits in his casual, strong but accurate brush strokes. Jiang's work not only challenged the notion of 'scholar painting', but also challenged the authoritative traditional ideology. It was the highlight of Chinese Realism.

The key of Realism is the truth, and its opposite is sham. For an artist, Realism means a serious attitude in exploring the truth. When or where social issues became important for people, Realism focused on discussing the 'social truth', for which, the 19th century Realism made the outstanding starting point for Realist art. I see Courbet's achievement still as the highest point in the history of Realist art; after him, Realist artists in the West were increasingly turning their attention to a private world, and to me, in China, only the young Jiang Zhaohe matched Courbet's work. At the start of this project I wondered whether social issues were considered to no longer be worth discussion in art? I thought that the effective way to answer this question was to put it into an experimental practice – to make art and test how far I could go. Although I realized that to examine the issues of social truth might cross over the safe academic institutional circle, and into, and maybe touch a nerve, of society; I resolved to undertake this exciting practice. In next chapter, I will further examine how I proceeded in this practice, and how I see the initial results of this engagement with social realism.

Chapter 4

The Inspiration and Impacts of Realism on My Own Creative Practice

This chapter will examine the theories that have impacted on me and I will present a personal art hypothesis I am working on, based on my own cross-cultural experience and what I consider my identity.

I was born in China. When I started to paint seriously, I undertook a training in the ‘Realist’ model (I now see it was a ‘distortion’ of Realism). In China since the 1950s, the Realist model had been the ‘orthodox’ essential training for those who want to become professional painters. I studied visual arts in the Normal College of Kaifeng in Henan Province for two years, and then in the Central Academy of Art and Design in Beijing from another four years in the early 1980s. There were two important goals to be achieved in our painting studios. First, the foundation of all our studies was to paint things ‘accurately’; which meant to represent on canvas the appearance of the objects in front of you faithfully and exactly. Second, ‘theory’ was added to the training along with ‘composition’. We learned how to identify the newest political policies and incorporate them into our subjects in our paintings. A good work should represent or match well with the party’s idea and express them with vivid and accurate subject matter. On top of that, an appropriate or popular taste would also be encouraged. In contrast, any work implying a ‘social truth’ or with any strong individual idea was never encouraged; in fact, these works were prohibited at many levels of examination. This method of art education was not only carried out by the schools I went to, but was, and is, the basic method of art education throughout all the institutes of the nation.

I have also studied in Australia. I completed my master’s degree in visual art at Edith Cowan University in 1998. Contrasting the Australian method with art education with that in China, I was excited that I was given full freedom to study and create art. It not only meant that I was made aware of the possibilities of numerous mediums and dazzled by new theories to learn, but more excitingly, I got away from the stultifying

Realism which was such a restrictive creative concept in China and was encouraged to find my own way and my own ideas to create my art. At that time, with a rebellious consciousness and celebrating my liberation, I chose to study abstract painting as a major in my studio units. I worked seriously on such work and enjoyed abstract painting, and agreed at that time with Clement Greenberg (1999) that abstract art was an ‘advanced’ art that built logically on past historical developments.

However, soon I found this liberation was limited. My study of abstract painting brought me through the Modern Western Art system, a system that institutionally encourages a quite specific and established visual language system. I realised that, in this system, my work was judged not by considering the truth to life, but by a series of theories linked to the contexts of signs in Western art. In this situation, the meaning of my painting is not to be read or found by linking with what I meant or what it represented from life, but was to be understood or identified by an established system of meaning, signs and conventions in a specific professional art circle. Indeed, it is not only difficult to understand the meaning of an abstract work in a culture other than Western, but also it is difficult for the work to be understood by people who are not experts in modern art in the Western culture. This is because, as N. R. Hanson considered, as abstract painting is:

deprived of the possibility of matching against some actual or imagined scene, we could expect that ‘established knowledge’ would be defined less by reference to natural science, or even to general or artistic convention of representation, and more by established paradigms of ‘abstract painting’ and by a set of appropriate linguistic descriptions. (Harrison, 1984)

Therefore Hanson concluded that abstract painting was “...more conceptually dependent upon language – and indeed upon a specific discourse about painting” (p. 70).

Indeed, not only abstract painting but the whole concept of Modern Art as a whole

faced a crisis outside the institutions that perpetuated it. In cultures other than the Western, it never worked. Noam Chomsky has stated that there were three main indications that give rise to a “crisis of modernism”. They are “a sharp decline in the general accessibility of the products of creative minds, a blurring of the distinction between art and puzzle, and a sharp increase in ‘professionalism’ in intellectual life” (Harrison, 1984, p. 263).

However, to produce non-comprehensible work or to narrow my audience to a specific one has never been my artistic goal. It is definitely not the right method to suit my idea that has been gradually emerging and is now clear to me as my experience of cultural life has changed. The idea is to make art with my independent voice in dialogue with both Chinese and the Western cultures. Whilst I do not pretend there is a direct match I have found intellectual and theoretical support in linking this idea with Homi Bhabha’s ideas about what he refers to as “the third space”, a notional space between cultures. He stated that:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of cultural as homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (1994, p. 37)

For the purpose of my aesthetic liberation, I needed to break out from the ‘unifying force’ of a two narrow aesthetic systems (the Chinese and the Australian), and as this process becomes reality a new guiding aesthetic and ideological principle is needed. Not as an absolute marker of but as an open and developing form of focus.

This chapter has two sections. In the first section, I will discuss why I will take Realism, a re-examined Realism, as my new principle to structure and work with on my art domain, as well as taking ‘the Third Space’ as a way of understanding my

personal aspirations. In the second section, I will examine the testing of this set of propositions by working it into my creative practice.

4-1. Realism as a personal ‘theory’

Why is Realism needed?

I have tried to establish a series of relevant observations that have been made me that make think that it is necessary for Realist Art to be continued practised today. For instance, if Realism is about exploring aspects of the truth, then we can see the project of humanity’s process of finding truth is not finished, and that the desire for truth is still there. However, our generation’s concerns about social, cultural, emotional, intellectual and material truths are different from people who lived in the 19th century in France, and different from those in the 20th century of China. My argument is, that because of the new situation presented to us, we need to watch and think about our new reality carefully, as Realist artists did in their time. By this I mean consciously adopting a particular creative attitude to life and art. This attitude, such as Courbet had, may bring the artist and his audience together to face the real questions in

contemporary life rather than transfiguring or fantasising about it just in the imagination.

In the 20th century, the development of Realism went along with weighty political pressure. It either was supplanted in the West, or distorted in socialist countries. The result was, as Finkelstein determined, that “the umbilical cord is broken which bound the art to some semblance of a real scene and human being” (1954, pp. 177-178). Crouch has also pointed out that one of the reasons that caused the “crisis in Modernism”; was because art had become interested in itself, “purely in terms of form and its problems”, and because it ignored a whole agenda of cultural discussion this created a situation where “its language was seen as sterile and inadequate to express issues and concerns that lay outside of the realm of art-making” (1999, p. 91).

In my opinion it is probably time to re-build the link between art, the everyday life and human life, and re-establish the links between form and cultural discussion. To do so, it is not only to retrieve the realist function of art, but it also satisfies a need in some people who are interested in understanding the truth of what surrounds them.

The exploration of truth, whether of nature or the human-self, could be seen as an unending process. Therefore, as a way to explore and a way to discuss, contemporary Realism should never have one foot in the past. Its subjects can be broad and can encompass any realms that human beings have an interest in. However, an important area that needs Realist artists to work on today is not far away, but is the very close issue of the natural and social environment. There are many glossed over problems that need to be discussed openly. Many powerful political or economic lies or myths need to be exposed, and, there are new beauties, new ideas and abundant personalities in life that also need to be observed. Finkelstein asserts that Realism “is the most bold and difficult task of art in our time”; and it requests the “artist be a person with mind, knowledge, courage, and depth of human sympathies” (1954, p. 181). The book *The Empire of Lies: the Truth About China in the Twenty-First Century*, written by Guy

Sorman and Asha Puri (2008), can be seen as a good example of raw material for today's Realist work. It pokes through the thin veil of the economic reformation in China, using abundant examples and incidents to reveal the lies of autocratic capitalist development to the world. A book might not change people's image of China. It might not strip away the fantasies and the lies from the truth in China, but it lets us hear an individual voice that is different from the mainstream of dominant public media inside and outside China. Crouch has observed, drawing from Derrida and Lyotard that if the individual is unable, as an individual, to change the structures of the society around him or herself, then the language of the dominant ideology at least can be disrupted and destabilised. This practice can lead to a fundamental questioning of the idea of a central or fixed point to culture and its ideology. (Crouch, 1999, p. 171)

Realism was “un sursaut du besoin de verite [a sudden start in the need for truth],” said Bornecque and Cogny (cited by Grant, 1981, p. 25). It “cleared the air of a thousand follies,” said Edmund Gosse (cited by Grant, 1981, p.25). It “revolutionized writing by liquidating the last assets of ‘romance’ in fiction and by purging it once and for all of the idealism of the ‘beautiful lie,’” said Philip Rahv (cited by Grant, 1981, p.25). And, Realism is needed for today, not only for Europe, and the Western nations, but for the globalised world.

The ‘Third Space’ hypothesis

Bhabha posits that there is a ‘third space’ between cultures. He says, “The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences...the incommensurable elements as the basis

of cultural identities” (1994, p. 218). Crouch considers that the contribution made by the idea of the ‘third space’ is that it enables the development of a debate between traditional and commodity culture possible, and it has the potential to lead to the construction of alternatives to the dominant cultural structure of consumption. “It supplements and attempts to change cultural value, and does not subscribe to the idea of the constantly deferred meaning” (Crouch, 1999, pp. 177-178)

In Australia, according to Fazal Rizvi, ‘third space’ is a phrase “widely used in cultural studies literature”. It commonly means ‘hybrid’ cultural conditions, which “simultaneously engage with both the local and the global” (2003, p.234-235). I take the idea of the ‘third space’, in my circumstances, to be a personal hypothesis. I have in a way found myself in a ‘third space’ between China and Australia, between the local and the global. I am able to look into and enter into dialogue with each culture equally and independently. I create art work by developing an understandable visual language and writing both English and Chinese texts. It is a difficult artistic process, in which the complexities and contradictions can be foreseen easily. The biggest problem I have is that I feel is that the ‘third space’ is an untended and little visited space filled with piles of cultural artefacts. I am confused by the mixed up cultural values in my mind. I see that I can not be like Courbet, who clearly stands for a radicalising French bourgeois culture. He painted for French bourgeois society and was not a Chinese painter living in Australia in the 21st century. I do not see myself belonging to any particular cultural group. I am working in between cultures but trying to find my audience on both sides. I have often felt that I have lost my judgement in making aesthetic values – it is as if my mind is sitting on a pulley, moving me through cultures which affect me with different cultural values.

Perhaps I have two choices for a method of practice. One of them is to identify the arguments between the different cultural values I encounter and digest then by deepening my understanding of cultural differences; this way I will synthesise my own understanding of issues and this will be presented in my work. Or, using another

method, I can represent the contradictions and confusion of the different cultural values I encounter, leaving the questions to my audience to answer. They are not the only methods I have of course and I am not limited to them and my intention is to leave enough space between theory and practice for any potential un-foreseeable inspirational impulses. Explaining in text the methods of a personal art practice is always a complicated topic. However, I believe that a creative method can only be started and fully understood by ‘doing’ it with a combination of considered knowledge and intuition and making and thinking which is what makes creativity never ending, and which makes a reflexive praxis a powerful way of thinking about creative working methods.

Practising art in the ‘third space’, Chinese-French artist Gao Xingjian (高行健) is a typical example of an artist working between Chinese and European cultures. Gao works as a painter, sculptor and writer. Born in China, he creates his art not only for a Chinese, but for an international audience. From the late 1980s, he has lived and worked in France where on the one hand he creates paintings and performances which are shown in Europe and on the other hand, he writes novels for Chinese readers. In 2000, Gao received the Nobel Prize in Literature, with the remark: “For an œuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama”(Nobelprize, 2000). The award of the Nobel Prize implies contradictory issues. Is it simply the recognition of high achievement for an individual artist? Or, is it that an independent thinker has been digested by an authoritative Western institution?

In October 2009, Gao presented a paper at the conference, *Living and Writing in Between Cultures: the Home at the Border* in Frankfurt. Speaking under the topic *The Writer’s Value is the Truth*, Gao said: “In front of politics and society, the artist is only a person, a fragile person ... but artists can do one thing; that if his heart is free then creation will start from his pen. This creation ignores any blocking and confining by social conditions”. Gao also says: “there is a value behind a free thought. For me, it

is a most widely valued one, the truth”(Miaozi, 2009, pp. 1-2; translated by the researcher).

4-2. Realism and a personal practice

The link between theory and practice is a difficult one. Trying to find a way to express how they link with each other is difficult. I believe that to try and describe a painting by text is impossible, were it possible there would be no need for the image. Indeed Elvis Costello has demonstrated this by observing that, “writing about music is like dancing about architecture” (sited by Tolonen, 2007, p. 145). Similarly, “image and text operate in separate realms” said Tolonen (2007, p. 145). Therefore, this section - the examining of my personal practice - is not trying to translate the paintings, but to review my praxis reflexively and examine the thoughts that ignited this creative practice; and examine how it worked to create this practice. I discuss this within three parts; they are subject, form, and taste.

The subject matter for my paintings

A central proposition for my practice is that a subject is always needed for a piece of

art. It is especially a key point for Realism. In this project, I have tried to find subjects that agree with the following considerations:

The subject matter of my art should be meaningful events, people, landscapes and objects used in common life - these all can be subjects for my art. By saying meaningful here, I mean a subject can be inspirational from an individual point of view, and then increase in value as it is looked at differently from both the perspective of a dominant elitism and popular kitsch fantasy. Therefore I choose subjects from my own life's surroundings, from what I can see or touch or feel. This is the process I have used to find my subjects, for the process for me is to develop an understanding of my life in amongst others' lives. Finally, the subjects I have chosen are usually events with an established vocabulary of related images and concepts and are distinguished from subjects based on happenstance or the artificialities of life. In this process, I am especially on guard for the provincial aestheticising of exoticism that happens everywhere. This is useful for the marketing of tours, but covers over the ordinariness of true life by overstating beautiful lies.

I am concerned with the significant changes in life, especially the changing of everyday life around us. I feel that it is a historical mission for the artist to depict and discuss these changes. For example, as I embarked on the tentative first stages of this investigation of realism I selected subjects from shopping malls for the series of paintings *Conveyor Belt* [plate 37], in which the images from shopping malls not only became the central theme for this created work, but also, it made a close link between the work and the audience. Similarly, the painting *Farming* [plate 38] is the result of collecting subjects from everyday life in the countryside of Western Australia. I feel that the familiar images and stories from life gave my work a documentary-like power, and I also feel that to represent the rapid changing of our life or life-style is a historical task.

I am not against representing significant political events; as long as it is an event that

influences our everyday life. For example I painted a social event concerning the Vietnam War in Perth. This is an important public ceremonial part of Anzac Day every year. I selected this event as a subject to paint because it strongly touched my feelings and was deeply meaningful to me. This is the day and the place, where the young and the old, the men and the women, the soldiers and the politicians come together with different mindsets but for the same reason. They are not simply recollecting an unforgettable tragedy only, but having to face today's wars. At this time, the Iraq war was going on; and the sad news of Australian soldiers dying still comes from time to time. I wonder if people throughout the world realise the heavy and deadly duty for some ordinary people who lived in a small remote city away from the centre of the world. I will continually call my audience to question war.

I am also interested in drawing out the truth from the lie. Exposing a lie can be a subject. For example I represented the world's largest hydropower project, the Three Gorges Dam, which was recently built on the Yangtze River in China. Up to 84.7 TWH power will be generated annually; but according to *The International Rivers* report, it

...sets records for the number of people displaced (more than 1.2 million), number of cities and towns flooded (13 cities, 140 towns, 1,350 villages), and length of reservoir (more than 600 kilometres). The project has been plagued by corruption, spiralling costs, technological problems, human rights violations and resettlement difficulties.(Rivers, 2009)

This is a man-made tragedy impelled by an economic ideology. However, except for the Group of International Rivers' single online voice, one hardly hears of any protests mounted to remind people of what the cost is to the local people and our natural environment. My painting, *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake*, brings up the subject and discusses it as a voice in art.

Creating form

Form is important in painting because it is the carrier of visual language. It is a condition that determines whether a piece of art is understandable or not. In my project I have taken form to include all the visible parts of the painting. It is about how to manage anything that makes the marks, and colours, and structures them to become a visually meaningful piece. In other words, I should treat those materials as characters or letters and structure them into a meaningful communicable form. It is the approach I am taking as a basis for my painting. However for 'third space' practice, there are cultural pitfalls that distort or kidnap the meanings of art and also need to hedge from them. Moreover, I like to borrow Crouch's sentiments as my goal for creating form. I wish to create a dialogue between the national and the global, develop the relationship between the abstract and the particular, and bring them together combine them with an ideological glue. I want my paintings to present a clear cultural commentary, using visual signs with multiple meanings, creating a cultural narrative laid over the form of Modernist visual language.(1999, p. 178). I am also aware of how form relates to the content of a work and how "the way something is said can change the content of information communicated" (p. 163). Although many forms for painting have been created during our history, no single one suits every case. Many forms were limited or blocked by cultures and times, and were polluted by dominating cultural systems in different degrees. Therefore, there is always a need to create new forms in art practice; and, there is no exact way to create them.

Creating a new form can be a complex intellectual action; most of the traditional neo-classical masters, (like Nicholas Poussin) seemed to take intellectual approaches. In contrast, some artists are more likely depend to on their intuition; an example would be Jackson Pollock's paintings illuminated by his study of Jungian theory and 'unconscious images' (Hughes, 1980, p. 313). Similar examples can be seen in

Traditional Chinese Scholars' painting. The very famous and very typical ones such as, Liang Kai (梁 楷), Chan Fa (常 法), Chen Chun (陈 淳), Xu Wei (徐 渭) and Zhu Da (朱 耷), were supported by the theory of Taoism, and they created their approach to paint with 'freehand brush' ("Xie yi,"). However, I decided my approach for this project was to research all the art forms I could find; and to feel, to read, to understand and analyse the structure of them, how they were constructed and how they communicate within their cultures. I have intended to build my own form for this project by learning and mixing the approaches from both contemporary and historical precedents. It is a complex creative process that includes continually judging, choosing, and negotiating between the visual languages from different cultures. Ideally, I would deal with all those not only by reasoned thinking but also by my personal intuition; but in practice I see that it was mostly controlled in a logical progression. As a result a form has emerged in my painting that on one hand can be seen as much closer to tradition than to Contemporary Western 'high art', but on the other hands it is closer to 'Modern' Chinese Art than traditional Chinese practices. It is the result of cultural negotiation. It is the result of how I see and how I have negotiated with those cultures. However, during and after this process, some points emerged that became more important than others and I discuss these as follows.

First, I do not think that the abstract is the opposite of the figurative in painting. Both of them are effective for carrying and passing information. They were developed from and performed by different cultures for different reasons and in different times; but to me they all became a part of an understandable tradition of Western visual language. A main reason that stopped me using abstraction as my main creative form was not because of its function as a generic visual language of expression but because of its function as an "art official". Once abstract art was institutionalised in the West it became "installed within the canon, the freest form of art now lacked freedom"(Saunders, 2000b, p. 275). Abstraction has become a powerful signifier of Western ideology. Just as Chinese official policy distorted Realism, Western institutional culture has polluted abstract art. If it is the case that all dominant systems

create their own languages it is also the case that all language systems are polluted by ideologies, therefore I can only use them by taking parts of them from their contexts in their system, and try to give them a new meaning in a new context. Abstract elements were carefully used in my practice. For example in *Farming* [Plate 38], I used the concept of 'flat'. However in using it, I changed the meaning from literal pictorial flatness, the picture plane surface of material that is the usual routine for an abstract painter to identify, to mean the flat land and sky which constituted the broader cultural information that I wanted to pass on. I used flatness literally and metaphorically combining also a flat picture plane with the traditional style of a realistic painting.

Second, figurative images are mainly used in my painting, and they are created by the traditional technique. I decided to do this for four purposes:

When thinking about the compatibility and understanding between image and viewer I came to the conclusion that painting figuratively does create a pictorial space that is more easily understood by a viewer. It followed that it easy for people to understand the meaning of painting if it uses the images that surround them in their life. Figurative painting is the central tradition in the West and has been practised in China for nearly a hundred years; it is now a language in both the West and in China; possibly in the world as well. It is a stable language that also appears to be stable to the viewing audience. I have already established that figurative painting is still a main official style in the nation of China and I intend to use the same style, which advocated by the elite, but I use it to subvert or rebuild Chinese Realism by showing the social truths both inside and outside of China.

I am not following the values made by and for Modern Art; therefore I do not enter myself into the Western institutional competition for the 'new'. I particularly do not need my work to alienate the mass of people; rather I wish to provide a peaceful visual environment and invite my audience into a discussion of the issues that are suggested by my paintings.

Mastering traditional technique is a highly complicated practice both physically and intellectually. While every detail of the painting is being made, they are all touching the artist physically and psychologically. Therefore this approach is not only enjoyable but more importantly it is an intellectual process that deepens and develops one's understanding, both on an intuitive and a rational. When I raise the issue of intuition here it is not to go into a psychological field of research, I use the word intuition to discuss a kind of knowledge or understanding that appears to come to me as if unconsciously. I talk about it because it significantly impacts on my creative practice; although, my explaining in a general (and Chinese) artistic sense might not answer the question satisfactorily for a psychologist or a philosopher. My intuition is an insufficiently understood power; it is a spirit, a helper and a troublemaker. It also is a contradiction for me to solve as well, for it is incomprehensible, ungovernable and therefore it is unreliable. Generally, I give a space and open my mind to it, engage with it reflexively, but sometimes I cannot let it bother me; in particular for example when I closely plan my painting's outcome or if I am in a very serious mood.

In my creative work during this period of study my intuition played an important role in the phase of collecting, judging and deciding subjects, but once I started to paint, it was rather inhibited by the serious planning. Being aware of this dialogue between a rational and an intuitive approach to my work meant that much thinking went on during the process of painting. I tried to determine the creation of how the forms should be marked on each canvas. The form of the painting, at a certain level, is an unfinished result caused by a continued contradiction between my intuition and my reason.

For example, for the creation of the series of painting, *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake* I was planning to build images in a 'cold' way, thereby suggesting an impersonal, objective reality. However whilst I was painting, my intuition demanded that an emotion should be involved. Therefore the contradiction between a cold plan and a strong emotion became a stop and start argument during the entire process of working.

It caused me to paint individual components of the series over and over. Even today when I look at the paintings I see intellectually and feel emotionally that the contradiction is still visible there.

As a good example I will take the painting that was a part of *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake* [Plate 35]. The plan was to paint a suffering man but without emotion, the portrait was to be of a particular type, a dispassionate metonym for all the migrant sufferers. I did not want it to be viewed as an individual's 'portrait' in the general way one might identify a specific likeness. I intended to show the individual as a generic River refugee. Therefore I decided to combine images from the photos I took of refugees, and paint them into one face and structure it into an image formed in between a figurative and abstracted likeness. It is not easy to achieve, but it is do-able. Practice is carried through not only in managing technique but also and more challengingly by managing intuition. An unregulated emotional impulse - sadness, anger - could sweep away all the technical planning that is being carefully laid down. However, on the day before this painting would be taken for exhibition, the voice of intuition eventually gained the upper hand (I still do not know why), and it dictated a final lashing of the image with a large brush. Its impact changed the plan of what this painting could be; but, when I looked at the painting, suddenly, I felt it was 'right'. It did not mean that it was better, more exactly: I think it was wrong, but I felt it was right.

This I think is the power of praxis, and I think this is what Barry Barnes means by saying that, "'validity' might depend upon an evaluation of the practice – the doing – of art rather than analysis of its results" (Harrison, 1984, p. 242). In aspiring to get as close to a global visual language as I am able, art processes which have different requirements from culture to culture, local to global, person to society all have been considered and negotiated intuitively and rationally, through theory and practice.

Aesthetic taste

Aesthetic taste is significantly important for me; it is a personal way of communication and enjoyment. However, the way to create taste is very different from the creating of other parts of painting, such as the subject and form. There is almost no way for an artist to create a new aesthetic taste for himself or herself. One can manage subject matter and what the kind of form one wants, but one cannot change one's own aesthetic taste easily. From the audience's point of view, taste can be felt and understood by a first glance, but to explain what it means will be much more difficult than to explain its form or subject.

Although a suitable aesthetic taste was part of my painting aspirations, I had planned nothing about it throughout this project. This is because of my knowledge based on long experience is that taste is 'ungovernable', and 'cannot be trained'. Therefore, it seemed pointless to put up a plan. However, a review of my position at the end of the three-year project opens up the possibility for a new personal understanding. In Chinese culture, people say, "to see a piece of art is just like meeting the artist". We also say, "The painting is the artist, the artist is the painting"(Zhou, 2008, p. 63). By saying this we believe that the taste that has been carried by the artist's work art is always a faithful representation of the artist's personality; it cannot be made up, neither can it be hidden. Taste in traditional Western culture is not of central concern but that does not mean that it has no value, or that it has not been discussed. Clement Greenberg raised discussions about aesthetic taste. He found that taste exists in the art world, but people either ignore it or do not 'trust' it, because it is "ungovernable". He observed that "last and worst, however, is that most art-lovers do not believe there actually is such a thing as ungovernable taste" (Harrison, 1984, p. 6). Here his understanding of taste is equivalent to that of the traditional Chinese scholars'; it is, in Greenberg's words, "ungovernable".

However in reviewing the paintings I created in this project – and they have been created not only by rational analysis, but also by emotional ‘feel’ - then it is clear that a kind of taste is presented within the painting. It is impossible to explain or understand this taste, this emotional sensibility, without looking at the painting for it is embodied in the work. If it exists in the painting then it has been created, and if it can be read then it can be interpreted rightly or wrongly. I wonder whether intuition *is* trainable, given that if it can be identified then perhaps it is possible for it to be and engaged with reflexively and then modified. This is outside the scope of this dissertation but it helps me prepared for my next creative project.

4-3. Who is my audience?

I am a cultural hybrid. I work across, over and between cultures. As an artist and as an academic, I have questioned who my audience might be. This has been a dilemma throughout my doctoral research, but it has, over time, become clearer to me. I have identified three audiences that are situated within distinct cultural ideologies. They are the people like me who exist within two or more cultures, those who only experience cultural life in Australia, and those who only experience life in China.

The audience as a cultural hybrid of Australian and Chinese cultures

The increase of cultural traffic between cultures over the world has meant that more and more people have come to live and work as I do. These include artists and theorists like Homi Bhabha, Gao Xingjian, and Ien Ang (Papastergiadis, 2003, pp. 30-41). This is the effect of changing economics, and the result of globalisation, which has directly impacted on the populations of cultural hybrids (Kraidy, 2005). It is through these changes that I have become aware of the ever-increasing number of cultural hybrids, like myself, who have come to 'live in translation'. Ang affirms this by stating:

What can be called 'living in translation' is a crucial characteristic of life today. Globally and locally, cultural traffic and encounters of people from different cultural backgrounds – as a result of travel, tourism and migration – have increased not only in frequency, but also in intensity and pervasiveness. (Papastergiadis, 2003, p. 30)

I am living in translation between Australia and China, and because of this, I believe that my art can form a powerful link between a broad range of people who have had similar cultural experiences to my own. These people may work between Australia and China for multinational companies or institutions; they are families, immigrants, and overseas students. Their relationships span the globe. They are cultural hybrids that live in translation between two cultures. They are not just my audience; they are the source and subject of my art practice. Through having shared similar life experiences, as cultural hybrids, I have been able to communicate with this audience through my art.

The purpose of my art is different from any of the dominant political and cultural ideologies in arts. I do not expect my audience to always agree with my opinion, or to

attract people to my work through the use of a popular style. My intention is to expose significant political, social and cultural issues, which have been neglected, and to encourage a broader, deeper understanding of their affects. An experience that provoked a deep discussion on a serious topic with another 'hybrid' during my exhibition can be seen as a good example of how to test my art works. This exhibition titled *Nothing But Reality: My life in Painting*, was hosted in August 2009, in Perth, Western Australia, and a visitor, a 'Chinese-Australian' senior engineer, who has worked in Western Australia for 20 years, discussed my painting *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake* with me. He seemed to fully understand what I wanted to say in this painting. It was clear that he had identified my attitude to the damming of the Yangtze River as being negative; this was the point that began our discussion, but he believed that I should not criticize the dam. He justified his position by explaining that the meaning of the dam's power capacity, which "averages an annual power generation of up to 84.7 TWH",¹ has to be understood with professional knowledge and considering economics. Based on statistical information, he explained the significance of the dam, not only for China, but for the global economy today and for the future. From an environmental stance, he challenged me by asking if I knew how much coal would have to be burned if the same quantity of power was to be produced in Australia. He made it known that he believed I should feel proud of China for having developed a project as expansive as the damming of the Yangtze River that is 'free of pollution' and is a 'cold power' alternative to the 'hot power' solution, like the burning of coal, as is typically used in Australia. His points really made me think, and in turn he agreed to consider my view on the displacement and safety of more than 1.2 million Chinese people, which has happened since the dam's early construction, along with the resulting migration of families. No matter who is right or who is wrong, the importance for me is to achieve free communication and greater understanding for both the artist and the audience, so that we can move deeper and closer to the truth, through an awareness and understanding of many and varied points of view that exist.

¹ This information was given in this exhibition, and it was taken from the China Three Gorges Project Corporation's website: http://www.ctgpc.com.cn/en/benefifs/benefifs_a_3.php

This has been demonstrated to me that as an artist my work can operate as a powerful tool to show that there are always different modes of seeing, understanding and believing.

The Australian audience

The modes of seeing and how my paintings are understood by the broad group who make up ‘everyday Australians’ are equally important to me. Having the chance to discuss Australian life with them and, as well, to introduce my knowledge of China to them has been an important aspect of my art practice and my doctoral research. With the title *Nothing But Reality: My life in Painting*, my exhibition not only announced my style of painting as Realist, but also my understanding of the truth to the Australian audience. It was my intention to guide the viewer to observe a broader sense of reality, not only in art, but also in cultural and political life all over the world. The exhibition was positively received, however more importantly for me, the audience had had a clear understanding of the political stance, and social issues, I have been addressing in my work. It was apparent that the forms and images within my paintings, linked with the cultural knowledge of the audience, had acted as a catalyst for the viewer to perhaps rethink aspects of how cultural and political views have influenced, even impacted on their lives.

In this exhibition, the painting *The Vietnam War Memorial in Perth* [Plate 42] drew great attention. Many people stopped in front of this painting and looked carefully, examining the details of the ‘diggers’. Some even recognised relatives or family friends. Several people returned to the gallery with their family members to show the relative they had recognised. The response to this painting shows the significance and

sense of patriotism Australian people feel for their soldiers and towards Australia's wars. There was a young man who discussed this painting with me. He studied the painting in great detail and was highly emotional about its message. He told me that his father had taken part in the Vietnam War, and he thought a Perth institution should buy this painting because of its significance to the people in Australia. I have heard similar suggestions to this more than once. Feedback like this indicated to me that my work has been understood and welcomed by the local people of Perth. It seems that these viewers' expectations of art have not been dominated by notions of 'high art', and they are much more open minded than the globalised institutions. I realized that they are a very close, friendly audience and enjoy communicating with art in an ordinary, figurative form. It confirmed my belief that as a Realist painter my work is able to communicate to the broader community, as it speaks to them on an open, honest level.

In the exhibition the painting *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake* has also been positively commented on by the local audience in Perth. They probably know the dam if at all, only from the media, and this painting introduces them to an important topic and shows them a personal view from an independent artist. It makes a personal impression on them that is different from the 'one to many' model of the mass media. I believe that no one can fully understand the situation of the migration caused by the Three Gorges Dam only by depending on an understanding of this event through the eyes of institutional media; there can be no full interpretation without a corresponding cultural life experience. What I felt was important was to tell the truth, to let the world know what has been happening. My hope is that when they are shown the Three Gorges Dam in the future on screen, a momentary doubt might sweep through their minds about power, money and crimes against ordinary people. They might also reflect about the real cost of the goods they purchase without thinking.

The audience in China

Having grown up in China, where many of my family and friends still live, my connection with China is still very strong. Throughout my practice, the communication that has continued to develop has proven to be a valuable source of dialogue. In China, my audience has extended beyond the everyday viewer, and includes intellectuals and other artists, thus enabling complex philosophical discussions surrounding the cultural and social issues I have addressed within my work.

During this process of doctoral research, the concept of reality, of social truth, has become a central issue in my art. A process to develop an understanding of truth could be undertaken in many fields as I have discussed earlier, but for my audience in China I see that the social truth is needed now more than ever. It is my ambition that my future action through art will find a way to create a space, and offer a chance for people to think, feel and to discuss the truth of everyday life.

I also equally see that to translate my experience of Australian cultural life to my Chinese audience is important. This translation helps to clear away many of the cultural mistakes, especially some of those made for a political purpose. More significantly for Chinese people as I see it, is to see and understand a different kind of life created by people with different thoughts about life. This will help open minds to further various ways of experiencing human life.

During this doctoral research, I showed my two large paintings in the exhibition *Between Cultures* held at Sun Yet-Sen University in GuangZhou China in 2007. In this exhibition, I focused on translating Australian culture to my Chinese audience, and the two paintings that were exhibited were *The Vietnam War Memorial in Perth*,

and *King's Park on Australia Day*. As well, I am currently planning an exhibition in Beijing China in 2010. I hope, through my work as a channel for visual dialogue, to create dialogue that challenges the common ideologies that have dictated what our life is and what our life should be. Therefore my work contains a message of challenge. I hope that it not only challenges the authority of ideology, but also challenges the popular, kitsch fantasy that is common in today's Chinese social life, in favour of open thinking, feeling and discussion based on multiple perspectives of life and politics. I intend to draw attention to, and discuss what I consider to be the real problems in the lives of Chinese people, and "to ballast its giddy imagination with the weight of truth" (Grant, 1981, p. 14).

The painting, *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake*, has not been shown in China yet. My expectation and hope when exhibiting this work in China is that the viewers will, at least, develop some awareness that responsibility should be taken by China for looking after the refugee-like migrants displaced by the dam, instead of remaining immersed in a dream of economic competition. It is my hope that my paintings, works like the *The High Dam Makes a Great Lake*, will in time be met with a response similar to that received when I exhibited *The Vietnam War Memorial* in Australia and create knowingness of the implications of the political, environmental, and social choices we make, as well as the effects of institutions through which we are influenced.

I also intend, through continually showing my art and publishing my thesis in China, to create debate with Chinese artists and intellectuals about what Realism is and what Realist art can do for today's China. While I might not be able to change the official policy of Realist art in China, I can show the Chinese art world that there is another kind of Realism that is different from the official ones. I wish to restate a point already made earlier in my dissertation:

If the individual is unable, as an individual, to change the structures of the society around him or herself, then the language

of the dominant ideology at least can be disrupted and destabilized ... It leads to a fundamental questioning of the idea of a central or fixed point to culture and its ideology. (Crouch, 1999, p. 171)

To understand the West is an attractive study in modern Chinese culture. It is not easy, especially with the fraudulent political and economic propaganda from the both the West and China, neither is it helped by the fantasy of 'new global Utopias' based on unregulated capitalism (Papastergiadis, 2003, p. 33). This situation makes my independent personal translation of my own experience of Australian cultural life to my Chinese audience become even more necessary.

Exhibiting a work like *The Vietnam War Memorial in Perth*, in which a new cultural experience of mine is communicated to an audience who shares a cultural background with me, is potentially an exacting experience. On the surface, the Vietnam War appears to have been forgotten in China. Most people in China do not know that the Vietnam War is an historical event that still impacts on people on the 'other side'. At memorial services like the ANZAC day ceremony depicted in my painting, people mourn the soldiers' lives and their deaths; the Australian appears to see war from a different point of view. In contrast, the Vietnam War in China is seemingly forgotten. It is a bitter dilemma for Chinese officials, because there are so many questions about it that remain unanswered. It is common knowledge in China that Chinese soldiers and the government were intrinsically involved in the Vietnam War, but the government today still keeps it a 'military secret' (Chanda, 1986; Jamiseson, 1995). The number of soldiers who died is still a 'national secret'. To mourn for the dead soldiers, even at a family level, must be a private and secret undertaking.

In most Chinese people's minds, the Vietnam War was the war that Chinese with Vietnamese people fought against Americans and Australians; just as in Western nations, people know that China sided with the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese revolutionary government; and the USA and Australia were aligned with the Military government in the south. However, during the war the American and Australian

soldiers were smeared by the Chinese Media. They were called the ‘devils’ (geizi), and were considered to be violent and arrogant. From *The Vietnam War Memorial in Perth*, the people in China are shown a very different perspective, a view of the Australian soldiers and their families, at home in Australia, dealing with the emotional impact and ongoing consequences of war. Although the Chinese and Australian people fought against each other during the Vietnam War, they are unified by the emotional impact that war has had on their lives, suggesting a new point of view from which to see the war and peoples. The Australian heroes share the same human qualities as Chinese soldiers and heroes. They have their families to care for, and they to have casualties from the war. It is my belief that the Australian and Chinese soldiers all share the qualities of spirit in this painting. There are the loved ones, the loyal and the brave, all highly valued in both societies. I expect my audience to be awakened, and hopefully challenged, by the different cultural attitudes in Australia and China toward wars like Vietnam.

As audiences change, along with cultural and social beliefs, the meaning of a painting can be lost or even misunderstood. At other times the meaning is extended beyond the original intention of the artist. Through realist paintings like *The High Dam makes a Great Lake* and *The Vietnam War Memorial in Perth* I have demonstrated the ability of Realism to create new meanings and understanding. For me this is an example of the

power of Realism in painting and the radical importance of the dialogue it can generate.

Conclusion

A ‘Conscious Realism’

I'd say more Realism, not more fantasy, sci-fi and all the rest is what is needed in the twenty-first.

.....John Fowles (1996, p. 20)

Simply, Realism in art is a way for seeking the truth. However the goal of exploring the truth in all fields is a never ending practice and the process of looking for truth through art will also be unending. Developing an understanding of truth is not uniform because we are exploring the truth in many different fields, with different knowledge systems, different purposes, with different histories in different cultures (Field, 2001). For example, how the truth was understood in the Soviet Union is definitely different from how it was understood in the United States of America during the time of the Cold War. Based on one's beliefs of what is true, one can create a personal truth in art, although it has every chance of being 'wrong' for everybody else. Through a historical process of exploring the world and developing an understanding of how individual ideas are formed institutionally and then reproduced and represented it is clear that a Realist approach to art making needs many varied faces. To understand these different faces is a very complex and contradictory experience as all that is revealed are the different directions, different ways, different understandings, and different achievements of artists as they struggle towards the same destination; a pictorial way of representing the world that can reveal the social truths we all share. There is nothing wrong with Realism in reproducing different solutions, that is a realistic expectation. Realist art is not stylistic, but an attitude to life. In other words, Realism is not hostile to discussion or argument about understanding differences in 'truth', but what it is hostile to, is the false in art and the lies in society. I think that today's concepts of Realism are strong enough to develop its central philosophical concept, a "simple exclusive idea", to be a "more complex inclusive one" (Grant, 1981, p. 75).

The intention of this thesis was not to demonstrate that Realism is the best idea for art, nor to suggest a particular form, but to re-examine and practice the central philosophy of Realism and provide an effective concept for today's art to engage with everyday life. As a result of undertaking Realist principles I have combined theoretical study with creative practice in order to enhance my evidence for its value

through my painting and make it explicit with the choice of subjects for my work. My cultural background is a hybrid one, and I see my role as continually undertaking Realism as a central art concept, using the “weight of truth” (Grant, 1981, p. 14) to fill out the depiction of the cultural ‘third space’.

Furthermore, by undertaking Realism as my central concept, I do not mean to follow a particular routine of Realist art making. My creative approach is a complex one, I have reflexively engaged with the institutional values that have formed my way of painting and of understanding the world and I have attempted to synthesize and negotiate between objective rational knowledge and subjective or intuitive knowledge of life; between the traditional figurative language and the abstract visual language; between the typical emblems of Western and Australian visual cultural and the Chinese ones. My goal is to achieve a subtler and more satisfactory synthesis between these equally valued materials. ‘Conscious Realism’ was a concept articulated by Damian Grant for the world of Literature. It is “the result of what might be seen as a new contract established between the writer and reality” (1981, p. 55). He explains, “Man embodies truth in art: which is therefore a kind of ‘knowing’, not an abstract or imitation, but in making, making new” (1981, p. 55). I see the approach that I am undertaking as a kind of ‘Conscious Realism’ that is practised in visual art.

Based on an insight that I have discovered by examining my practice (and discussed previously) I wish to go further in liberating and employing my intuition in my work. It is probably a key to opening new more intimate way of looking at the relationship of my art to life, and to perhaps create new forms and bring a new aesthetic taste to my art.

As a result of my recent studies and the discussion that has surrounded it I have been invited as an artist in residence at the Red Gallery in Beijing in 2010, and invited to work on an academic project on the subject of “Art exchange between China and the West” by The Department of Oriental Art at Nankai University in Tianjin in the same

year. I will take this opportunity to further experience the changing of Chinese culture and to translate what I understand of Australian culture for Chinese people in the form of articles, paintings and exhibitions.

My work in China will be a continual process in developing my understanding of the truth in life by focusing on ways in which art connects with contemporary life over there, and at the same time translating my Australian life for a new audience. It is my ambition to contribute to a new visual language that further prevents the cultural logjams made by an over emphasis on “groovy” media languages; therefore carrying a new path for a ‘third space’ in which person-to-person communication can be freely extended.

Bhabha’s ‘third space’ theory provided a theoretical and psychological support for my self-reflexive framing as a cultural hybrid. It helped liberate me from the dilemma of finding myself a stable cultural identity. I think it is strong enough to support a new platform in culture on which an independent personal identity could be founded, and forms the basis by which a new way and new attitude to see things can be started from. A significant point for me is that I can see and enter into a dialogue with different cultures neutrally, naturally and realistically. Personally, art communication and translation between cultures is just a beginning, but I think that it is important not just for me but also for the wider society. In my future I see a Realist cultural dialogue as important for cultural translation between cultures.

Plates



PLATE 01

Gustave Courbet.

A Burial at Ornans, 1849-50.

Oil on canvas, 315 x 668 cm.

Musee d'Orsay, Paris.



PLATE 02

Édouard Manet.

Olympia, d. 1863.

Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

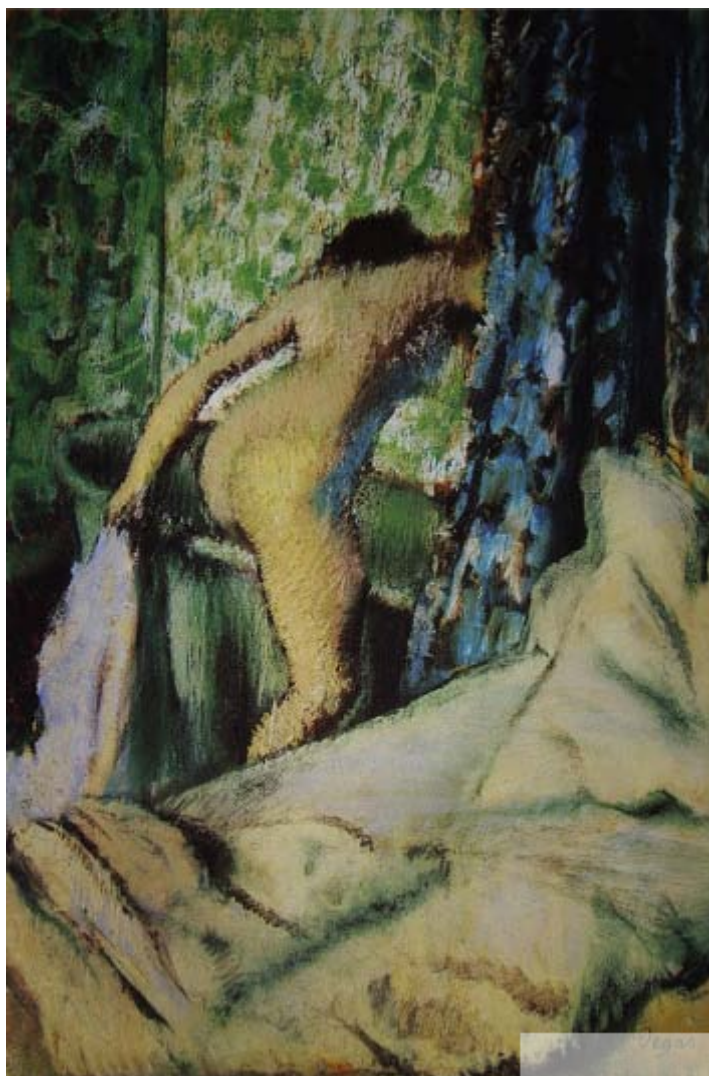


PLATE 03

Edgar Degas.

The Morning Bath, c. 1883.

Pastel on paper, 40.39 x 67.31 cm.

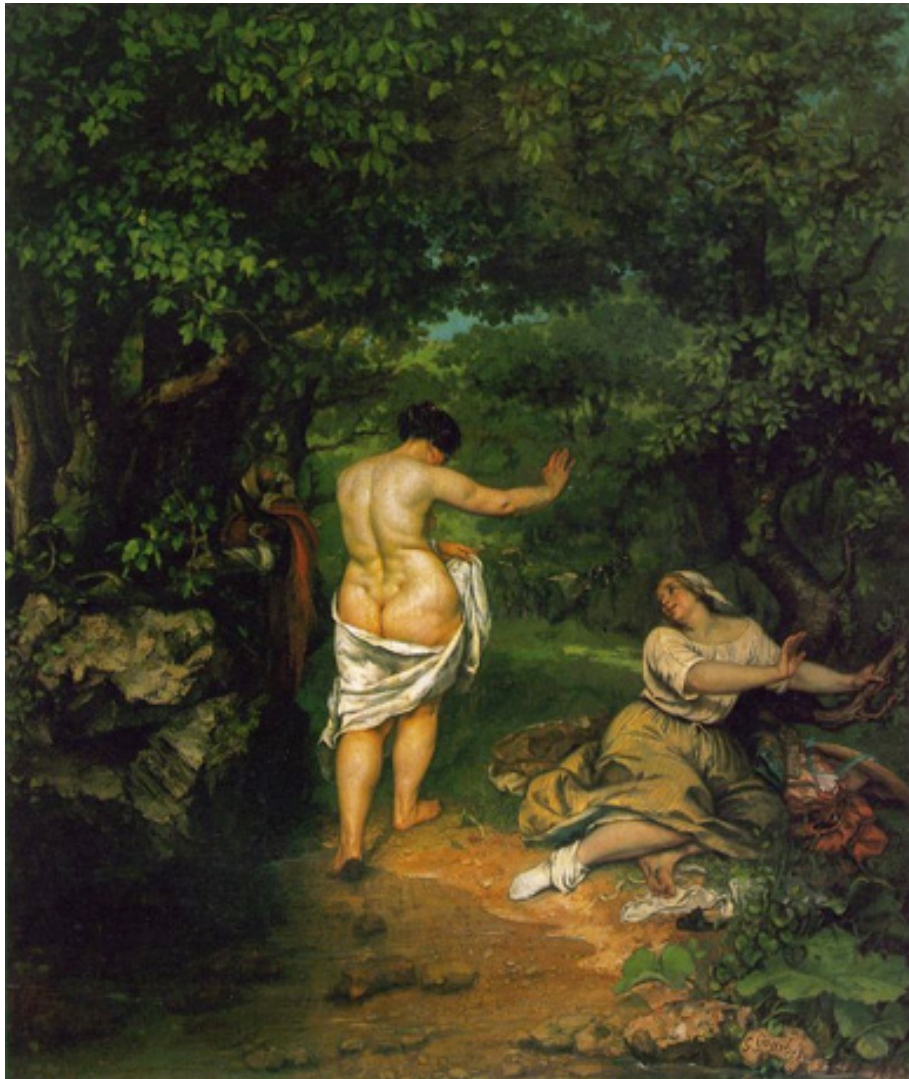


PLATE 04

Gustave Courbet.

The Bathers, 1853.

Oil on canvas, 227 x 193 cm.



PLATE 05

Gustave Courbet.

Sleep, 1866.

Oil on canvas, 135 x 200 cm.



PLATE 06

Gustave Courbet.

The Origin of the World, 1866.

Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm.



PLATE 07

Gustave Courbet.

The Stonebreakers, 1849-50.

Oil on canvas, 190 x 300 cm.



PLATE 08

Gustave Courbet.

The Grain Sifters, 1854.

Oil on canvas, 131 x 167



PLATE 09

Gustave Courbet.

Charity of a Beggar in Ornans, 1867-68.

Oil on canvas, 210 x 175.3 cm.

City Art Gallery, Glasgow



PLATE 10

Jean-Francois Millet.

The Sower, 1850.

Oil on canvas, 102 x 82 cm.



PLATE 11

Jean-Francois Millet.

The Gleaners, 1857.

Oil on canvas, 83.5 x 111 cm.



PLATE 12

Jean-Francois Millet.

The Man with the Hoe, 1859-62.

Oil on canvas, 80 x 99 cm.



PLATE 13

Jules Breton.

The Return of the Gleaners, 1859.

Oil on canvas, 90 x 179 cm.



PLATE 14

William Bell Scott.

Industry on the Tyne: Iron and Coal, 1855-60.

Oil on canvas.



PLATE 15

Hubert Von Herkomer.

On Strike, 1891.

Oil on canvas. 228 x 126.4 cm



PLATE 16

Ford Maxdox Brown.

Work, 1852-65

Oil on canvas, 138.6 x 196 cm



PLATE 17

Honoré Daumier.

The Third-Class Carriage, ca. 1862-64

Oil on canvas. 65 x 90 cm



PLATE 18

Édouard Manet.

Concert in Tuileries, 1862.

Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 118.1 cm.

National Gallery, London.



PLATE 19

Édouard Manet.

La Chanteuse des rues (The Street Singer), 1862.

Oil on canvas, 174 x 118 cm



PLATE 20

Edgar Degas.

The Ballet Scene from Robert le Diable, 1876.



PLATE 21

Édouard Manet.

On the Beach, Trouville, 1870.

Oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm



PLATE 22

Édouard Manet.

Swallows, 1873.

Oil on canvas,



PLATE 23

Édouard Manet.

The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian, 1868-69.

Oil on canvas, 252 x 305 cm



PLATE 24

Francisco de Goya.

The Third of May 1808, 1814.

Oil on canvas,



PLATE 25

Xu Beihong.

The Five Hundred Retainers of Tian Heng, 1930.

Oil on canvas, 197 x 348 cm.



PLATE 26

Xu Beihong.

Yu Gong Removes the Mountain, 1940.

Ink and colour on paper, 144 x 421 cm.



PLATE 27

Jiang Zhaohe.

Poor Woman with Children 1937.

ink and slight colour on paper. 110 x 65 cm



PLATE 28

Jiang Zhaohe.

The Old Man Selling Snacks. 1936.

Ink and slight colour on paper. 74 x 65 cm.



PLATE 29

Jiang Zhaohe.

Refugees (part). 1943.

Ink and slight colour on paper. 200 x 2600 cm.



PLATE 30

Jiang Zhaohe.

A Flute Blowing and Thousand Doors Singing. 1962.

Ink and slight colour on paper. 141 x 67 cm



PLATE 31

Dong Xiwen.

The Ceremony Declaring the People's China (original version).1953.

Oil on canvas, 230 x 405 cm

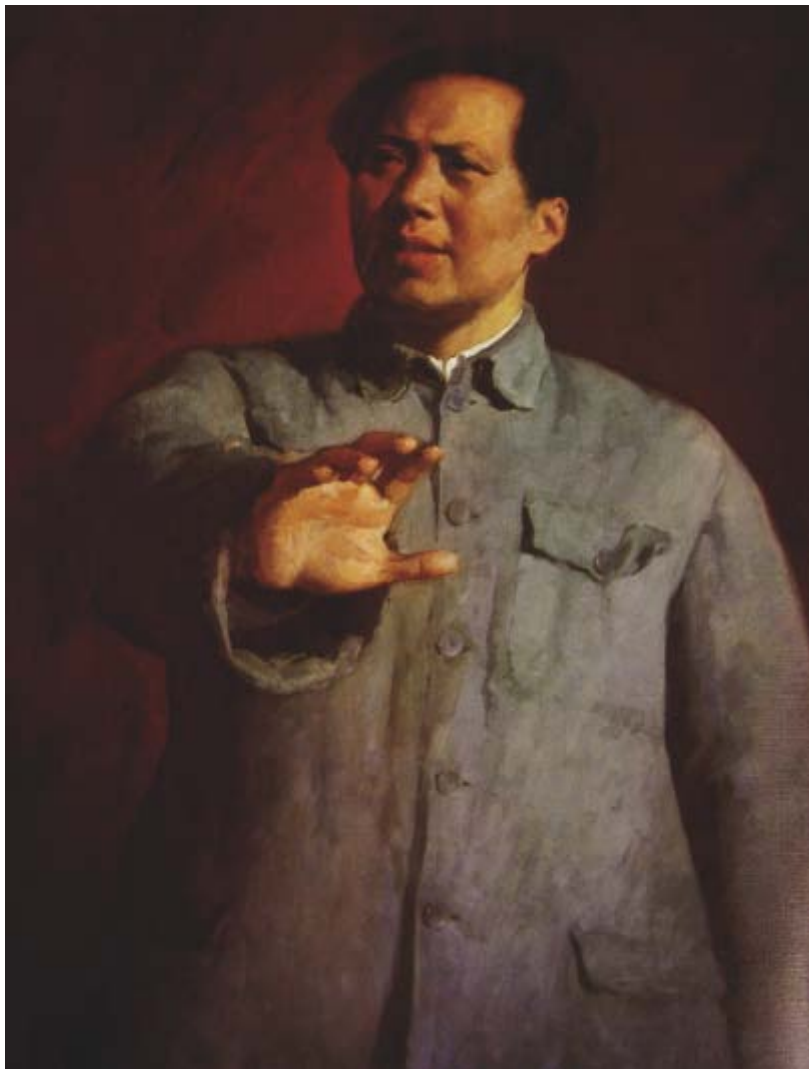


PLATE 32

Jin Shangyi.

Chairman Mao at the December Conference. 1961.

Oil on canvas, 155 x 140 cm

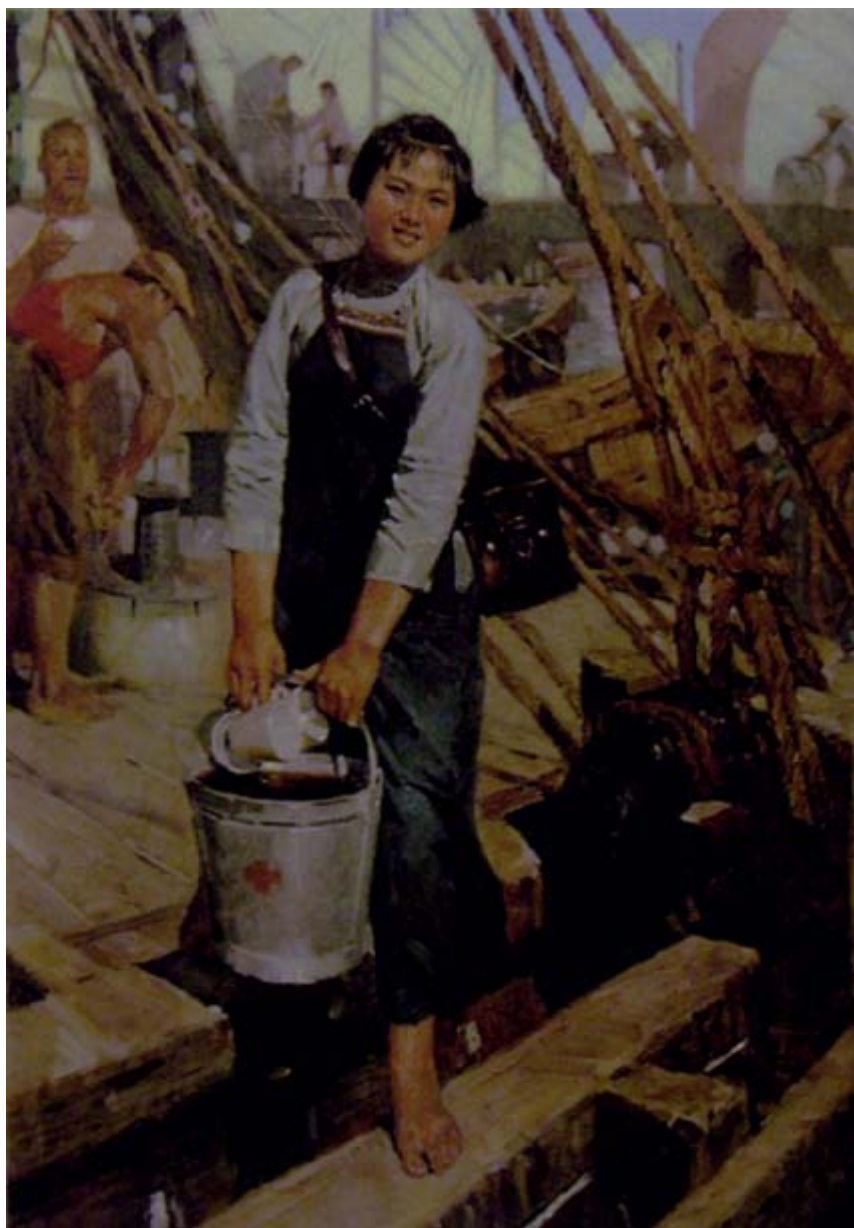


PLATE 33

Chen Yanning.

The New Doctor at Harbour. 1973.

Oil on canvas, 110 x 138 cm



PLATE 34

Xiao Feng & Song Ren.

Doctor Norman Bethune, 1974.

Oil on canvas, 170 x 200 cm

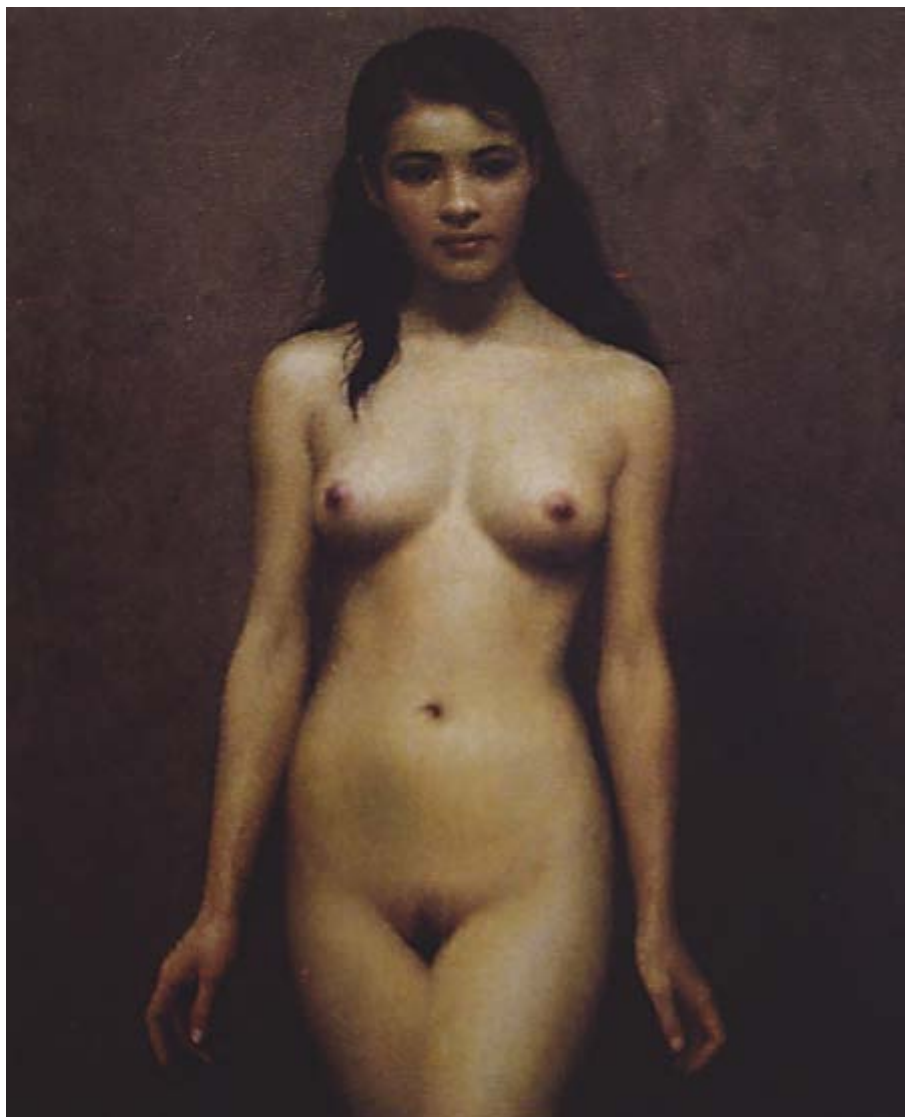


PLATE 35

Jin Shangyi.

Nude .1989.

Oil on canvas 53 x 65.3cm

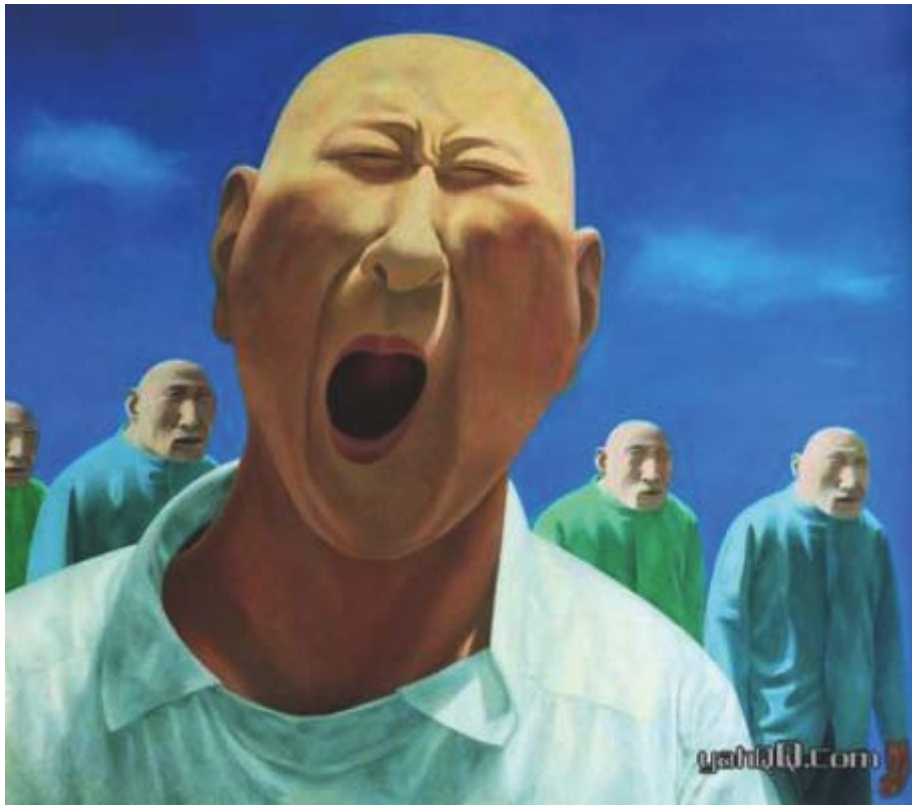


PLATE 36

Fang Lijun.

Series 2. No.2 .1992

Oil on canvas, 200 x 230 cm.

Öl auf Leinwand Museum Ludwig, Sammlung Ludwig, Köln



PLATE 37

Xuning Wang.

Series Conveyor Belt 002. 2006.

Acrylic on canvas, 152 x 114 cm.



PLATE 38

Xuning Wang.

Farming. 2009

Acrylic on canvas. 103 x 103 cm.



PLATE 39

Xuning Wang.

The High Dam Makes a Great Lake (Series part 1). 2009.

Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 130 cm.

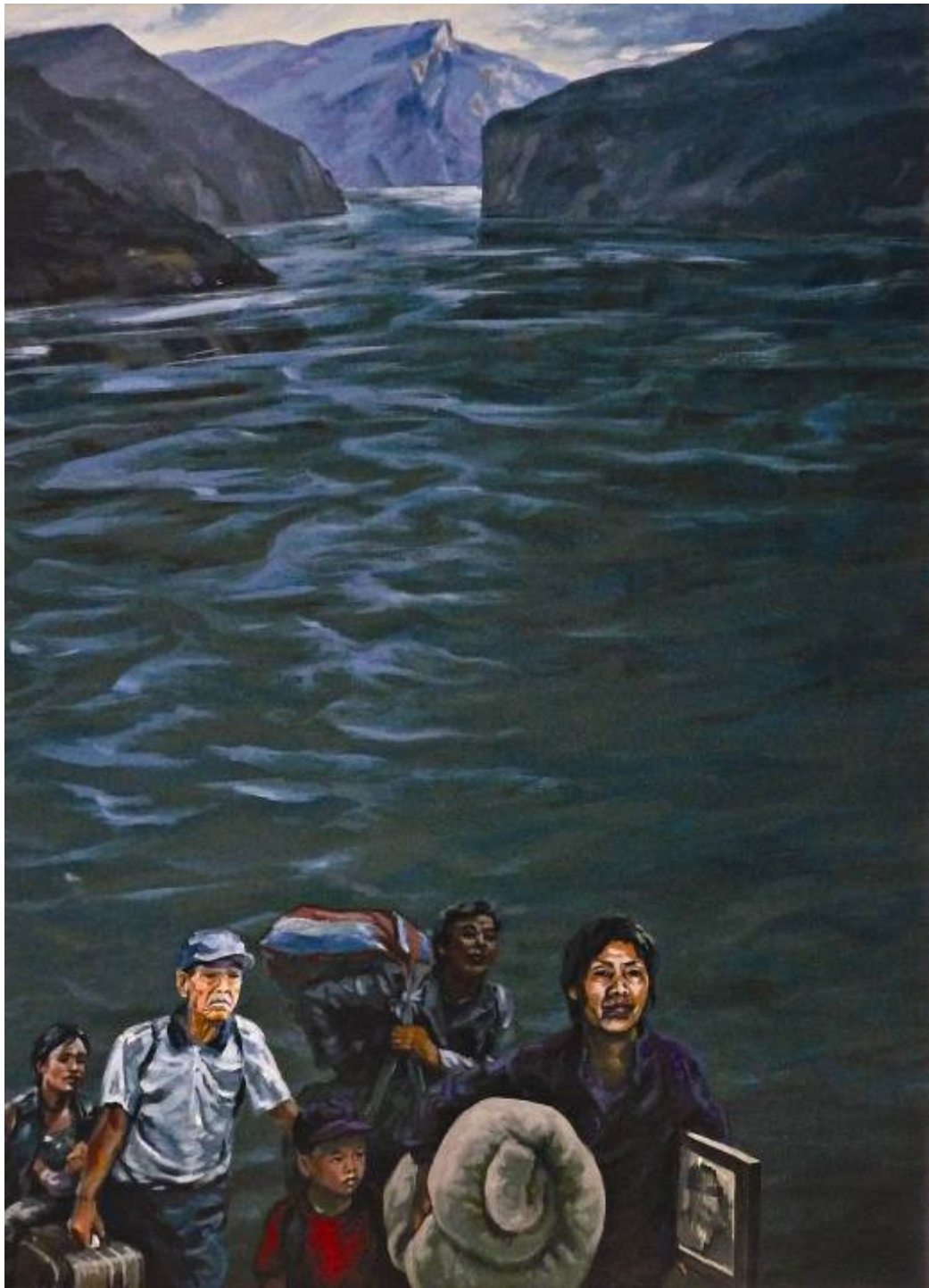


PLATE 40

Xuning Wang.

The High Dam Makes a Great Lake (Series part 6). 2009.

Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 130 cm.



PLATE 41

Xuning Wang.

The High Dam Makes a Great Lake (Series part 3). 2009.

Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 130 cm.



PLATE 42

Xuning Wang.

Vietnam War Memorial in Perth. 2007.

Acrylic on canvas. 333.5 x 136.6 cm.

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