

# Global histories

a student  
journal

**The Construction of Chinese Art History as a Modern Discipline in the Early Twentieth Century**  
Author: Jialu Wang

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2019.294>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May 2019), pp. 64-77  
ISSN: 2366-780X

Copyright © 2019 Jialu Wang



License URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

---

Publisher information:

'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin  
Global Histories: A Student Journal  
Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut  
Koserstraße 20  
14195 Berlin

Contact information:

For more information, please consult our website [www.globalhistories.com](http://www.globalhistories.com) or contact the editor at: [admin@globalhistories.com](mailto:admin@globalhistories.com).

**The Construction of  
Chinese Art History as a  
Modern Discipline in the  
Early Twentieth Century**

*by:*

**WANG JIALU**

## ABSTRACT

This paper challenges the dichotomies of modernity and tradition, West and East, global and local, by shedding light on the construction of Chinese art history as a modern discipline in the twentieth century. Through uncovering the conditions and power structures that made such construction possible, I argue that the “transfer” from a Western and Japanese art history template to Chinese art historical writing is not a unidirectional process. Rather, it must be embedded in broader cultural and political contexts which shaped the values and discourses of said period. The paper intends to use a transcultural approach to art histories, by considering the entanglements and transfers between cultures.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jialu Wang is currently pursuing a Master’s degree in Transcultural Studies at the University of Heidelberg. Her areas of study are Visual, Media and Material Cultures, with a particular focus on China and its relationship with Europe. Her interests include contemporary media and cultural studies, global art history, and curating practices. She also holds an MA degree in Identity, Culture and Power from University College London and a BA degree in International Communications Studies from University of Nottingham Ningbo China.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the concept of “modernity” emerged in Europe, the Western world has made use of it to establish a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and to interpret history as a developmental process, as the lineal transit from one to another. In this narrative, the West achieved “modernity” before other regions. Following Western imperialist expansion, the idea of pursuing modernization was widespread among non-Western countries, which caused a variety of processes—unique to each region—that dealt with this conceptual novelty. Although contemporary to the West, the non-Western civilizations are often regarded as “antique”, or “primitive” by art historians and collectors in the context of Modernism. In the delineation of a “developmental history of art”, the evolutionary classification schemes are used to characterize the cultures of the world from the “savage” to the “civilized”.<sup>1</sup> The concept of “primitive” was coined in the context of Modernism to manifest the advantage of modernity. The works of Modernist artists and writers are inspired by the ever-changing present, the modern world. They deliberately reject the past traditions and views of art. This break with the past means that modern artists and art writers need to invent signs, media, compositions, and forms that are adequate to express the fast pace of the modern world.<sup>2</sup> Curator Marco Scotini uses trains as a metaphor for the development of cultures: While the train of Western civilization is keeping up its high speed, the trains of other civilizations are running in their own speed, too. When they come across each other, from the view of the Western train, seemingly other trains are moving backwards, whilst this is only because they are heading to different directions.<sup>3</sup> Western modernism is described by John Clark as a closed system, which is unable to accommodate other modernist discourses beyond the West.<sup>4</sup> Taking the historical writing as a case, the spread of modernist historiography to Asia, Africa, and Latin America is usually seen as the effect of a cultural import forced by the colonial powers.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I will shed light on the construction of Chinese art history as a modern discipline in the early twentieth century. Through uncovering what the conditions and power structures are that made the construction possible, I will argue that the “transfer” from a Western and Japanese art history template to a Chinese art historical writing is not a one-way shifting process. Rather, it must be embedded in broader cultural and political

---

1 Monica Juneja, “Alternative, Peripheral or Cosmopolitan? Modernism as a Global Process”, in *Global Art History - Transkulturelle Verortungen von Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft*, ed. Julia Allerstorfer and Monika Leisch-Kiesl (Bielefeld, 2017), 79-107.

2 Anne D’Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King, 2012), 142-43.

3 Marco Scotini’s exhibition, “Too Early, Too Late: Middle East and Modernity,” accessed 31 July 2018, <https://www.naba.it/en/too-early-too-late-middle-east-and-modernity-0>

4 Partha Mitter, “Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531-48, doi:10.1080/00043079.2008.10786408.

5 Sebastian Conrad, “‘Nothing is the Way It Should Be’: Global Transformations of the Time Regime in the Nineteenth Century,” *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no.3 (November 2017): 1–28.

contexts.

### 1.1 METHODOLOGY

“Problematization” will be employed in this essay as a methodological tool. It is one of the most important methodological contributions of Michel Foucault<sup>6</sup>. Instead of viewing history of morality as a linear development, which assumes that words keep their meanings and ideas retain their logic in a single direction, Foucault suggests a genealogical method that does not seek one answer to an issue, but examines how certain knowledge is “questioned, analyzed, classified and regulated” at “specific times and under specific circumstances”.<sup>7</sup> It captures “how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) become a problem” and how they are shaped as something for thought.<sup>8</sup>

Art history is a discipline that came into being under certain historical and political settings, respectively and differently in the West and East. How did the field come into being? Why has it been developing following a Western structure even though Chinese art has its own history dated back to thousands of years ago? Is the process more of a cultural transfer, or there are competitions and struggles within the formulation of the discipline? Does it function as an apparatus of national building under specific conditions? In order to answer these questions, it is unhelpful to see the development of the discipline as a “natural” process. Rather, it “becomes”, and “emerges”, as an object for thought in practice. Studying it as a problem makes it possible to consider the power relations involved through examining how values are “thought” in certain ways.

## THE EMERGENCE OF ART HISTORY AS A MODERN DISCIPLINE IN MODERN CHINA

### 2.1 ART HISTORY: MODERNISM AND THE SHAPE OF TIME

“How did a field like the history of art come into being?” Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville pose the question in their book *Writing Art History*.<sup>9</sup>

---

6 Robert Castel, “‘Problematization’ as a Mode of Reading History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Jan Goldstein (Blackwell Publishers, 1994): 237-252.

7 Roger Deacon, “Theory as practice: Foucault’s Concept of Problematization,” *Telos* 2000, no.118 (Winter 2000): 127-142.

8 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 139-164.

9 Margaret Iversen and Stephen W. Melville, *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010)

Nowadays, if one looks at the art history curriculum in institutions such as universities, the answer would seem quite obvious: there is art, it is widely spread, and art history is the study of art with attention to its social and historical specificity (thus it is classified based on period and geographical location). However, if we look at the curriculum more closely, the shape of it becomes blurry. Some of the primary terms seem to have a rather loose relation with the presumed scheme. “Baroque”, for example, seems to have named a chunk of time. Nevertheless, as argued by Iversen and Melville, that is all it does. Although the term was intended to function as a style name to some extent, the relationship between a style and a historical period is still obscure. Moving forward from the Baroque, it is suggested by Iversen and Melville that matters are becoming only more and more obscure as the shape of art history tends to bend towards particular names such as “Realism” or “Impressionism”, many of which were coined in relation to “Modernism”.

Within terms such as “Baroque”, “Realism”, “Impressionism”, and “Modernism”, further difficulties can be seen: the medieval object makers studied by art history neither saw themselves as artists, nor described the objects they made as art; and students of Asian art constantly find that the objects and practices they study are falsified by the categories of the distinctively Western art-historical thought.<sup>10</sup> Discussions of such issues rapidly become muddy: many historians of Asian art do exactly the same kind of interpretive work as their Western colleagues do, whereas they feel that some articulations fundamentally different from that used by historians of Western art are in need. Seemingly this is an argument about the term “art”, while on another level, as Iversen and Melville argue, this is also an argument about “history” as a Western way of give meaning. The systematic study of artistic objects is no more than five hundred years old, beginning with the description of art works of Italian Renaissance.<sup>11</sup> In art history, modernism is usually considered to begin in France in the 1850s, when artists such as Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) and Édouard Manet (1832-1883) gained popularity.<sup>12</sup> Along with modernism, the idea of avant-garde came into play, creating and seeking the new, attacking the old and established institutions of culture and art. Meanwhile, modernism became a particular way of narrating the history of art. For a long time, the geography of modernism in the mainstream writing of art history has been following a Paris-Berlin-Vienna axis, and was subsequently extended to New York following the migration of artists, scholars, critics, gallery owners and art lovers caused by WWII. When outposts such as Seoul, Shanghai, São Paulo, or Mexico City appear in the list of art historical writings, they are likely to be read as diffusion from the Western centers to

---

<sup>10</sup> Iversen and Melville, *Writing*, 1-14.

<sup>11</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> D’Alleva, *Methods*, 142-50.

remote peripheries.<sup>13</sup> Global art history has been preoccupied with a Eurocentric stance towards modernism and often overlooked modernist phenomena in other places. While one may find oneself applying a certain view of the practice of art history, such view offers no particular reason why it is the best in terms of shaping the discipline. From a transcultural perspective, one could argue that modernist movements unfolded very differently in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America than in Europe or the United States. They did not just happen in Europe, nor did they happen there first and then travel to other parts of the world. It is insufficient to assume that the non-Western nation-states and civilizations simply submitted to a Western modernity or regard their formulations of national identity and particularity merely as reactions to the Western modernity.<sup>14</sup> There were modernist practices, which are both distinct from as well as in dialogue with the Western modernism. It is unhelpful to see the process of globalization and localization as framed in terms of dichotomies; rather, they are inextricably bounded together.

## **2.2 WESTERN AND JAPANESE INFLUENCE ON CHINESE MODERN ART AND ART EDUCATION IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western art had little influence on Chinese painting. The Chinese tradition, as represented by, for example, the late-nineteenth-century masters Wu Ch'ang-shih (吴昌硕) and Jen Po-nien (任伯年), seemed to have been continuing the calm, slow progress throughout the time and never been affected by outside factors.<sup>15</sup> Even today there are artists whose art is still totally unaffected by the Western style. Traditional Chinese painting is a self-satisfying mode of expression which cannot be significantly enriched through infusing Western techniques.<sup>16</sup> In the nineteenth century, as China suffered from humiliations from the European powers (e.g. the first and second Opium War, the first Sino-Japanese War, Siege of the International Legations, etc.), it was forced to adopt more elements from the West. The imbalanced power structure urged changes. Nevertheless, the leaders of China since the twentieth century insisted that science and technology from the West should only be the “shell”, while Mencius and Confucius should remain the “core” of Chinese culture. Westernization in China was a slow process, and until 1911, with the establishment of the Republic, art was scarcely influenced at all. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Western-style art was largely confined to the Treaty

---

<sup>13</sup> Juneja, “Alternative,” 79-107.

<sup>14</sup> Mike Featherstone, “Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity,” in *Global. Local. Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson (Duke University Press, 1996), 46-77. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822381990-003>

<sup>15</sup> Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art; from Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (New York: Graphic Society, 1973), 165-171.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of*, 165-171.

Ports. Unlike its Meiji counterparts, China tended to be anti-Western in terms of cultural matters. Western technologies such as machine-guns and railways were one thing, paintings were quite another. In several epochs, China has strictly delineated its own terms.<sup>17</sup> Buddhism and Buddhist art, for example, were slowly digested and made as part of its own art culture in its own majestic way.<sup>18</sup> Mao Tse-tung's (泽东) words, "Make foreign things serve China", as still frequently quoted in China today, sums up her way of dealing with foreign cultures. At the turn of the twentieth Century, reform was in the air. In China's pursuit of modernization, Japan played an important role from the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> After the Sino-Japanese War (1895), Chinese scholars and students flocked to Japan to learn Western paintings. It is estimated that over three hundred Chinese artists went to Japan in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Japan's success in modernization encouraged the Chinese intellectuals to learn from them in treating visual art as a crucial part of modern knowledge. Numerous Japanese art publications were translated into Chinese language. From 1920s to 1930s, over half of the publications of translated literature on art history in China are from Japanese works. Nevertheless, little of the content concerned Japanese art. Every one of the books either introduced histories of Western art, or discussed Western art theories. At that time, Japan and Japanese art were not the ultimate goal of Chinese scholars. Rather, for them Japan was more similar to a bridge that linked China with the West.<sup>21</sup>

Changes can also be seen on the institutional level. During the twentieth century, art courses and art history studies based on Japanese experience began to occupy the educational curricula in China. Following the establishment of a modern education system since 1902, there was an urgent need for curricula and textbooks. The early Western art accepted by China was determined only by functional needs. Namely, the drafting requirements of architecture, engineering, and empirical science. The government-operated school of Western learning, the Tongwenguan (同文馆) in Shanghai, which began in the mid-1860s, published the translated "how to" books on Western painting as early as the 1870s.<sup>22</sup> Ink painter Pan Tianshou (潘天寿 1886-1971) viewed art education from a different perspective<sup>23</sup>. In 1936, he published a paper on the development of Western art in China, where he acknowledged that the young people of China had a desire

---

17 Sullivan, 165-171.

18 Sullivan, 165-171.

19 Guo Hui, "Writing Chinese Art History in Early Twentieth-Century China" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2010)

20 Liu Xiaolu. *Shijie meishu zhong de Zhongguo yu Riben meishu* [Chinese and Japanese Art in World Art] **世界美术中的中国与日本美术** (Nanning: Guangxi meishu chubanshe, 2001), 246.

21 Guo, "Writing," 15-28.

22 Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi, "The Japanese Impact on the Republican Art World: The Construction of Chinese Art History as a Modern Field," *Twentieth-Century China* 32, no. 1 (2006): 4-35. doi:10.1179/tcc.2006.32.1.4.

23 Pan Tianshou, "Yuwai huihua liuru zhongtu kao lue [Brief investigation into foreign paintings in China] **域外绘画流入中土考略**," in *Zhongguo huihua shi* [A history of Chinese painting] **中国绘画史** (Shanghai: Daxue congshu, 1936; Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chuban she, 1983), 295



to seek and learn Western art, a desire that was more essential to art itself, than merely responding to functional requirements. In the same paper, Pan also acknowledged the accomplishments of Western art education in modern school systems, as well as in the Japanese models. However, he realized that there was no record of accomplishment in his own field, namely, Chinese ink painting. The earliest institution for studying Western art in China was the Nanjing Liangjiang Superior Normal Academy (南京两江优级师范学堂), which was established in 1902. According to Pan, its curriculum was very much similar to that at Tokyo Higher Normal School (东京高等师范学校). Despite the destruction of some well-equipped school facilities in the 1911 revolution, around fifty to sixty graduates developed art teaching career all over China. Western-style painting imported from Japan was promoted by these teachers throughout this new art education system. A functional view of Western-style art was widely spread as part of China's modern curriculum. Nevertheless, by the last years of Qing Dynasty, the Western art practice was only viewed as an ahistorical skill. There was little need in understanding its history.<sup>24</sup>

According to Andrews and Shen, Chinese painting during this period fell into a limbo state. It was officially ignored because in this modern educational system, which came from Japan and essentially the West, it did not have a category. Probably more strongly than other “pre-modern” cultures, China had a long history of art criticism which distinguished high and low culture. Ink painting and calligraphy were seen as the highest form of visual art during the pre-modern period. Literati painting (文人画) was positioned at the pinnacle. Sculpture and architecture, which were valued in the West, were never considered as artistic genius in China and occupied little space in early Chinese art historical writings. Therefore, the ignorance of Chinese painting in modern education system was a denial of the most fundamental part its artistic tradition. It was not until 1911, when Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培) came back from his studies of philosophy in Leipzig University that a higher purpose for art was identified in “modern” Chinese society. In 1912, he gave a speech about what he called “aesthetic education” (美育), in which he separated art from utilitarianism and provided a philosophical bases for art training. To quote Mayching Kao: “Cai’s conception [was] that art and its appreciation would contribute to the formation of a new perception of reality – a perception that he considered key to the transformation of Chinese society... In Cai’s thinking, love of beauty could help to eliminate greed and prejudice, the obstacles to harmony in the material world...art should ultimately replace religion as the spiritual cultivation of the individual and the unifying principle of society.”<sup>25</sup> Soon after, museums and exhibitions were established, and art curriculum were introduced to higher learning institutions. Art was then regarded no longer as only

---

24 Andrews and Shen, “The Japanese Impact,” 4-35.

25 Mayching Kao, “Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-Style Painting Movement in China,” in *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth Century China*, ed. Julia F. Andrews and Shen Kuiyi (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 146-161.

a tool, but a crucial humanistic activity, which should have a history and needed a canon.<sup>26</sup> Through these intellectual operations results of the interactions with the West, a Chinese notion of “Chinese art” emerged, and what followed was its consolidation in the early twentieth century.

### **2.3 CANONIZATION IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINESE ART HISTORY**

Faced with instable political, economic and social conditions during the early twentieth century, Chinese scholars of art attempted to find new canons to affirm their cultural authority. The hierarchy of categories in Chinese art is one issue to be thought about. Before the twentieth century, there was no single word in classical Chinese conforming to the Western concept of fine arts. Although certain amount of theoretical and biographical writings about calligraphy and ink painting survived from the fourth to the nineteenth century, few historical monographs say much about other forms of artistic production. In pre-modern China, architecture, sculpture, bronze, and decorative arts were regarded differently from painting and calligraphy.<sup>27</sup> Painting and calligraphy were seen as proof of a scholar’s personal cultivation and high social status. On the contrary, other forms of art, such as bronze and ceramics, were out of their concern. From the late nineteenth century, Chinese art started to embrace a new notion and different categories of art in tune with the Western concept. For example, Jiang Danshu (姜丹书), Teng Gu (滕固), and Li Puyuan (李朴园) first followed the Western analysis by making architecture as the supreme topic of discussion, demoting painting as the second, and omitting any mention of calligraphy. It was explained by Jiang that architecture led the development of art, while sculpture and painting were subordinate to it. Zhu Jieqin (朱杰勤) was less radical and included calligraphy in his art historical writings, putting calligraphy between painting and sculpture. Whereas Zheng Wuchang (郑午昌) used a new order: sculpture, architecture, painting, calligraphy, and ceramics. These scholar’s choices reveal their efforts in showing the significance of Chinese art in accordance with Western artistic values. Chinese art was positioned in parallel with Western art, which was an attempt to demonstrate the comparability of Chinese art to Western art. Nevertheless, there were also compromises. For example, as Western studies devoted most attention to bronze, lacquer, ceramics, and decorative arts since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese scholars also dedicated to these art forms as a consequence.<sup>28</sup>

The temporal structure given to Chinese art history also has played a crucial role in the canonization of the discipline. A temporal structure, or shape

---

26 Andrews and Shen, “The Japanese Impact,” 4-35.

27 Guo Hui, “Canonization in early twentieth century Chinese Art History,” *Journal of Art historiography*, no.10 (June 2014), 1-16.

28 Guo, “Canonization”, 1-16.

of time, defines what is the canon of a discipline in a certain period of history and marks its differences to another period. Writing art history in China during the early twentieth century was closely in relation to a new consciousness of time, which also influenced the process of defining a new canon of national culture. The temporal frameworks emerged in this period offered a new logic and structure for the canons of Chinese art.<sup>29</sup> While some authors still employed the imperial reigns dating system, the Western calendar was also increasingly used. Painter Fu Baoshi (傅抱石, 1904-1965), for example, used both Chinese and Western calendar in the table of content to indicate the date of era in his *Chronological Table of Chinese Art* (《中国美术年报》)<sup>30</sup>. Such temporal arrangement inscribed the modern system of time onto the traditional one. It indicates a new linear perception of time, which was also a founding construction of Chinese modernity.<sup>31</sup> Prior to this, the writing of history was periodized only according to imperial regimes. Other art history authors, such as Li Puyuan (李朴园), provided only the Western dates. He adopted a unified calendrical dating system tracing art history, establishing its beginning and its end. This suggested a new coherence in Chinese art history, where the relations between different dates are presented without the cultural impact that dynastic nomenclature inevitably has.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike dynastic history, art history challenges the power of chronological time based on political regimes.<sup>33</sup> In this new temporal disposition, art objects had their own sequence of time in relation to each other, which was different from the dynastic time. In Pan Tianshou's (潘天寿) book in 1926, however, he pointed out that it was difficult to find the material needed for a sequential and comprehensive history. Then he listed three sources: *Peiwenzhai shuhuapu* (Peiwenzhai Calligraphy and Painting Book, 佩文斋书画谱), Nakamura Fusetsu (中村不折 1868-1943) and Oga Seiun's (小鹿青雲) *Shina kaigashi* (History of Chinese Painting, 支那绘画史), and *Meishu congshu* Book of Art, 美术丛书.<sup>34</sup> Pan Tianshou not only consulted the Japanese sources, but his work was also a direct translation of Nakamura Fusetsu and Oga Seiun's book in 1913 (See Figure 1). There were discussions about the reason why Pan Tianshou used this book's system of periodization to develop his work on Chinese painting history. Its prestige, convenience, and coherence were surely important, but the most essential reason was that this historical framework served Pan Tianshou's generation's reformist purpose during the Republican period of China. The history of painting was divided into the ancient period (上世史) from pre-Han to

---

29 Guo, "Canonization", 1-16.

30 Guo, 1-16.

31 Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945," in *The American Historical Review* 105, no.4 (October 2000): 1274-1275.

32 Guo, "Canonization", 1-16.

33 Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 143-145.

34 Pan, *中国绘画史* (A history of Chinese Painting) (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1926), preface, 2-3.

the Sui dynasty, the medieval period (中世史) from Tang to Yuan, and the Early Modern Period (近世史) from Ming to Qing. Pan Tianshou completely followed this system of periodization from Nakamura-Oga's book, using their terms to label the historical periods. This book offered the Chinese a solution to the problem of how to value China's art in the past, while still condemn the late Qing decline.<sup>35</sup> For Nakamura, the art of Song and Ming was highly praised, while the orthodoxy of literati paintings after Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636) were condemned. He claimed that the civil service examination system caused a reduction of creativity, as scholars all sought to develop their work into a conventionalized *baguwen* (八股文) format. Therefore, he regarded the late Ming and Qing dynasties as a decline. The viewpoint of a Qing decline fit well the ideological stance of most artistic scholars in the world during that period, while the highlight of the Japanese authors and the Chinese translators were quite different.<sup>36</sup>

Among Japanese thinkers, the theory of China's decline was widespread. However, for Chinese writers, the same words could imply different meanings. On the one hand, the recognition of China's great past made possible the sense of a cultural pride, which was a powerful claim against the humiliations that China underwent during the previous decades. The decline itself, on the other hand, was for Chinese readers a call to arms, rather than submission. As Andrews and Shen argue, this call was a crucial part of the culturally nationalist project of creating an art history that could express the greatness of Chinese people both as individuals and a collectivity. With an aim of overthrowing the legacy of Qing dynasty during the Republican China, Chinese art history ended it with a confidence in the future of Chinese art.<sup>37</sup> If Japan borrowed, and then absorbed, Western art's historical formulation, then China borrowed the Japanese version of the occidental structures and absorbed it. Chinese art history as a modern discipline thus came into being in no more than a decade during the 1920s on the basis of Japanese organizational frameworks. Nevertheless, after the Japanese occupation to Manchuria in 1931, it became unfashionable to mention the Japanese contributions to Chinese art history.<sup>38</sup> They have been thus largely forgotten. The Chinese did not wish to encourage a harmonious cultural exchange between China and Japan during the early Republican era, since this could be considered as ideological weapons which justify the Japanese aggression.

---

35 Andrews and Shen, "The Japanese Impact," 4-35.

36 Andrews and Shen, "The Japanese Impact," 4-35.

37 Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "The Traditionalist Response to Modernity: The Chinese Painting Society of Shanghai," in *Visual Culture in Shanghai, 1850s-1930s*, ed. Jason C. Kuo, (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2007).

38 Andrews and Shen, "The Japanese Impact," 4-35.

**Pan Tianshou (潘天壽)**  
**Zhongguo huihuashi (中國繪畫史 1926)**

**Part I: Early History (上古史)**

- Ch. 1 Ancient Painting
- Ch. 2 Han Painting
- Ch. 3 Painting of the Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties Periods
  1. General Introduction to Wei-Jin and Six Dynasties Culture
  2. Painting of Wei and Jin
  3. The Northern and Southern Dynasties
- Ch. 4 Sui Dynasty Painting

**Part II: Painting of the Medieval Period (中世史)**

- Ch. 1 Tang Painting
  1. General Introduction to Tang Culture
  2. Early Tang Painting
  3. Late Tang Painting
  4. Tang Dynasty Painting Theory
- Ch. 2 Five Dynasties Painting
  1. Painting of Southern Tang
  2. Painting of Early and late Shu
  3. Landscape and Miscellaneous Painting of the Five Dynasties period
  2. Painting of Early and late Shu
  3. Landscape and Miscellaneous Painting of the Five Dynasties period
- Ch. 3 Song Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Song Culture
  2. Song Painting Academy
  3. Song Painting
    - a. Landscape Painting
    - b. Buddhist and Daoist Figure Painting
    - c. Bird and Flower Painting
    - d. Ink Plum Blossom and Bamboo and Miscellaneous Painting
  4. Song Painting Theory

- Ch. 4 Yuan Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Yuan Culture
  2. Yuan Painting

**Part III: Early Modern Painting (近世史)**

- Ch. 1 Ming Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Ming Culture
  2. Ming Painting Academy
  3. The Evolution of Ming landscape
    - a. Zhe School
    - b. Court Painting
    - c. Wu School Painting
  4. Ming Dynasty Buddhist and Daoist and Genre Painting
  5. Ming Bird-and-Flower Painting and Miscellaneous Painting
- Ch. 2 Qing Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Qing Culture
  2. The Evolution of Landscape Painting
  3. The Evolution of Figure Painting
  4. Bird-and-Flower and Miscellaneous Painting

**Nakamura Fusetsu (中村不折) and Oga Seiu (小鹿青雲)**  
**Shina kaigashi (支那繪畫史 1913)**

**Part I: Early History (上古史)**

- Ch. 1 Pre-Han Painting
- Ch. 2 Han Painting
- Ch. 3 Six Dynasties Painting
  1. General Introduction to Six Dynasties Culture
  2. The Wei-Jin Period
  3. The Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties
  4. The Sui Dynasty

**Part II: Painting of the Medieval Period (中世史)**

- Ch. 1 Tang Painting
  1. General Introduction to Tang Culture
  2. Early Tang Painting
  3. Later Tang Painting
  4. Tang Dynasty Painting Criticism
- Ch. 2 Five Dynasties Painting
- Ch. 3 Song Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Song Culture
  2. Song Painting Academy
  3. The Development of Painting Style in the Song Period
    - a. Development of Landscape Painting
    - b. Evolution of Buddhist and Daoist Figure Painting
    - c. Development of Bird and Flower and Miscellaneous Painting
    - d. Painting Criticism of the Song Period

- Ch. 4 Yuan Painting
  1. General Introduction to Yuan Culture
  2. The Evolution of Yuan Painting

**Part III: Early Modern Painting (近世史)**

- Ch. 1 Ming Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Ming Culture
  2. Ming Painting Academy
  3. Landscape Painting
    - a. Zhe School
    - b. Court Painting
    - c. Wu School Painting
  4. The Evolution of Buddhist, Daoist, and Genre Painting
  5. Bird-and-Flower Painting and Miscellaneous Painting
- Ch. 2 Qing Dynasty Painting
  1. General Introduction to Qing Culture
  2. Landscape Painting
  3. Figure Painting
  4. Bird-and-Flower and Monochrome Ink Painting

**Figure 1:** Pan Tianshou's 1926 *Zhongguo Huihuashi* & Nakamura Fusetsu and Oga Seiu's 1913 *Shina kaigashi*. A side-by-side comparison.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Andrews and Shen, "The Japanese Impact," 20.

Joachim Kurtz called the wave of historical interest during the 1920s China the “twin obsessions with antiquity and modernity”.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, archaeological findings encouraged the nation to rely on its prosperous past. On the other hand, Republican China’s failure stimulated painful doubts on its ability to adapt to the modern age.<sup>41</sup> In the early twentieth century, China needed a rapid modernization. Nevertheless, it is arbitrary to argue that the transformation towards a modern era was a one-way cultural transfer. Within the transformation, there are adaptations, selections, compromises, negotiations, assimilations, and conversations. The “truths” in the art history discipline in China are not to be taken for granted, but rather we should consider that they were shaped after what was valued at the time, pursuing certain purposes during a specific time. It is the ethical and political structures that allow and constitute them to be thought about in particular ways. Ultimately, the Chinese found their need to develop their own, and sometimes nationalistic, discourse. This transcultural interchange was an essential part of the emergence and construction of the discipline of Chinese art history.

### CONCLUSION: IS ART HISTORY GLOBAL?

About Chinese painting, James Elkins has observed: “It seems to me that no matter how seriously you take Chinese painting, no matter how long a time you spend studying it, if you are within art history, as it is generally construed you can never take Chinese painting as seriously as you take Western art.” Further on he added: “In order to see [Chinese art] as central...you have to give up large parts of the discipline of art history.”<sup>42</sup> This indicates that the usual plots of the “history of art” do not adequately accommodate non-Western cultures and traditions. As Monica Juneja suggests, it is an urgent task to examine the genealogy of narrating worldliness in art history, as it directs our attention to the epistemic foundations, which continue to shape our current scholarly practice.<sup>43</sup> It is thus necessary to rethink these epistemic moorings as well as the values they transport.

In conclusion, this essay has employed the method of “problematization”, which examines how certain knowledge is regulated under specific circumstances, to study the construction of Chinese art history as a modern discipline in the early twentieth century. China did borrow a Western art history

---

40 Joachim Kurtz, “Chinese Dreams of Middle Ages,” in *The Medieval History Journal* 21, no.1 (2018): 13, Sage Publications, Doi: 10.1177/0971945817753874

41 Joachim Kurtz, “Chinese Dreams, 1-24.

42 James Elkins, in Interview with Tamara Bissell, *Umění* 46 (1998), 151.

43 Juneja, “Alternative,” 79-107.

formulation from Japan for her own art historical writings. This global reach, however, was not the effect of a cultural transfer alone. Rather, it must be understood as historical actors responding to a series of discursive changes. If we talk about a global art history in its singular form, as modernism tends to do, it signals towards an inclusive feature and inevitably overlooks certain cultures when they do not fit the logic of an overall structure. It is thus necessary to find a way to underline the relationships between cultures that encompass both disparities and contradictions, and negotiate among multiple subjectivities of actors involved.<sup>44</sup> Rather than understanding Chinese art history as an addition to an existed canon of Western art history, a transcultural understanding of globality, which takes into account the entanglement between cultures and defines cultures within the context of nation-building, is suggested in this paper. In comparison with one global art history, art histories in their plural forms could be defined upon the relationships where they are implicated. This would further mean to approach time and space not as linear and homogenous, but through the logic of contingent historical practices.

---

44 Juneja, "Alternative," 79-107.