



香港市政局主辦

Presented by the Urban Council, Hong Kong

香港藝術館籌劃

Organized by the Hong Kong Museum of Art

A Gift of Heritage

Selection from the Xubaizhai Collection of
Chinese Painting and Calligraphy



古 萃 今 承

虛白齋藏中國書畫選

一九九二年九月廿七日開始展出

From 27.9.92

A Gift of Heritage

Selection from the Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy

Christina Chu

In 1989, Mr. Low Chuck Tiew donated a collection of Chinese painting and calligraphy to the Hong Kong Museum of Art of the Urban Council. Known as the Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, it is an extraordinary assemblage of masterpieces collected by Mr. Low Chuck Tiew over a 50-year period. A special exhibition gallery "The Xubaizhai Gallery of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy" has been inaugurated for display of this valuable collection of masterpieces on a rotating basis.

In celebration of the inauguration of the Gallery, an exhibition "A Gift of Heritage: Selection from the Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy" is presented by the Urban Council. This exhibition features 60 paintings and 20 works of calligraphy to highlight the accomplishment of Ming and Qing masters.

The Wu School

In the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the style of the Southern Song Imperial Academy in Hangzhou was revived in the early Ming court and was distinguished by academy artists like Dai Jin (1388-1462) in landscape painting, Bian Wenjin (act. early 15th century) and Lin Liang (ca. 1416-ca. 1480) in flower-and-bird painting. In reinvigorating the conservative Academy style, Dai Jin was credited for the founding the Zhe School of Painting after his native province, Zhejiang.

As imperial patronage declined after the the Xuande period (1426-1436), the front stage of Ming painting was taken up by scholar-amateur painters from Suzhou. Suzhou, one of the richest areas of China, was a centre for literati painting towards the end of the Yuan dynasty. The Yuan style was passed on to the Ming by intermediaries such as Wang Fu (1362-1416), Du Qiong (1397-1474), Liu Jue (1410-1472) and Xie Jin (late 14th-early 15th century).

The preservation of the Yuan painting style by these men of letters bridged the political transition from the Yuan to the Ming and served as linkages between the Yuan masters and their Ming inheritors. Shen Zhou (1427-1509), a student of Du Qiong and Liu Jue, together with Shen's student Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), fostered a collective identity for early Ming literati painting under the designation of the Wu School style.

Both Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming came from prominent landowning gentry families in Suzhou. They attracted a large group of learned men who assembled in elegant gatherings to exchange views and produced poetry,



沈周 (1427-1509)

歲暮送別圖

Shen Zhou (1427-1509)

Farewell by a stream at the
end of the year

painting and calligraphy for mutual appreciation. They came to dictate taste and fashion in local society. The social ambience and the life-style of learned society gentlemen were most conducive to the consolidation and propagation of ideas and social conventions. It was under those circumstances indeed the whole of Jiangnan in the fifteenth century.

Coexisting with the Wu School style in Suzhou were other professional painters such as Zhou Chen (ca. 1450-ca. 1535) and his students Tang Yin (1470-1523) and Qiu Ying (ca. 1494-ca. 1552). Both Tang Yin and Qiu Ying were friends of Wen Zhengming and moved within the same scholarly circles of Suzhou. Through their acquaintance with the literati painters, their paintings underwent changes which bridged the gap between literati and professional painting. Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming together with Tang Yin and Qiu Ying are esteemed as the "Four Ming Masters".

Shen Zhou's followers and Wen Zhengming's many family members and students propagated the Suzhou style all the way to the Qing dynasty. Shen Zhou's students include Hou Maogong (late 16th-early 17th century), Zhang Hong (1577-ca. 1652), Shen Hao (1586-after 1661), Mi Wanzhong (act. 1595-1628). Succeeding generations of Wu School artists within the Wen family represented in this exhibition include his sons Wen Peng (1498-1573) and Wen Jia (1501-1583), his nephew Wen Boren (1502-1575) as well as their children and grandchildren Ju Jie (act. 1530-1585), Wen Congjian (1574-1648) and Wen Dian (1633-1704).

Lu Zhi (1496-1576) and Chen Chun (1483-1544) were Wen Zhengming's most outstanding students. Both were competent painters of landscape and flower paintings; Lu excelled in landscape painting of an elegant manner, Chen is

best known for his exposition of the "mogu" or "boneless" manner of flower painting without the form-defining outlines. As a result of their collective effort, the influence of the Wu School style of painting spanned generations after Shen and Wen.

Dong Qichang and the Songjiang School

The idea of the scholar's painting or the literati painting was further explored by Dong Qichang (1555-1636) in Songjiang. The artistic theory and practice of Dong were consolidated and propagated in elitist circles and under the same circumstances and in the same way the Wu School masters disseminated their influence. Together with Mo Shilong (1537-1587) and Chen Jiru (1558-1639), Dong advocated the Northern and Southern Schools of Painting, a division which corresponds to the Northern and Southern Schools in Chan Buddhism in China.

In distinguishing the Northern and Southern Schools, Dong Qichang equated the distinction between the professional and amateur painters. In his exaltation of past masters, he considered painters of the Southern School exemplary models for emulation.

Dong's dominance eventually eclipsed the Wu School and became the driving force in steering the development of the main trend of painting in the Qing period.

Dong Qichang inherited a rich repertoire of past forms and styles from which he selected to expound what he considered viable artistic styles. Zhao Zuo (ca. 1570-after 1633) and Shen Shichong (act. ca. 1607-1640) are Dong Qichang's contemporaries profoundly influenced by Dong. They were able to do paintings so closely to that of Dong that they occasionally acted as Dong's "daibi" (ghost painter).

Other artists influenced by Dong include Wang Shimin (1592-1680) and Wang Jian (1598-1677), Li Liufang (1575-1629), Cheng Jiasui (1565-1644), Yang Wencong (1596-1646), Zhang Xuezheng (act. ca. 1630-1650), Bian Wenyu (act. 1620-1670) and Shao Mi (act. ca. 1620-1660). Together with Dong they were referred to as the "Nine Friends in Painting" after an undated poem entitled "Huazhong juyou ge" ("Ballad of the Nine Friends in Painting") by the late Ming and early Qing poet Wu Weiye (1609-1671).

All the Nine Friends were poets, painters and scholars. With Dong Qichang as the titular head, they investigated a similar set of artistic problems.

The Four Monks and The Huangshan School

Similarly influenced by Dong Qichang, a group of monk-painters emerged with distinctive artistic profiles. They were Hongren (1610-1664), Kuncan (1612-1673), Zhu Da (1626-1705) and Shitao (1642-1707). They are referred to as the "Four Monks".



黎簡 (1747-1799)

山水圖

Li Jian (1747-1799)

Landscape

In many ways, the "Four Monks" are also closely related to the Xin'an School of painters through personal acquaintance and mutual artistic influence. Hongren who was from Shexian, was credited as the founder of the Xin'an School. Together with Wang Zhirui (died ca. 1657-1659), Sun Yi (died ca. 1658) and Zha Shibiao (1615-1698), they are referred to as the "Four Masters of Xin'an". The Xin'an masters of the late Ming and early Qing period were a group of outstanding painters from the Anhui province particularly around the Huizhou, Xuancheng and Wuhu prefectures. They shared a common preference for depicting the sceneries of Huangshan or Mount Huang. Many of them paid tribute to Ni Zan in their pictorial depictions. These artists are also referred to as the Huangshan School.

Many of these artists who did not acknowledge the Manchu rule lived as recluses and were referred to as "yimin" ("left-over people"). Many critics attribute the individuality and often eccentricities in their personality and their art as a consequence of their tragic experience caused by the turmoil during the change of dynasties.

The individualist painter Gong Xian (1619-1689), who was so deeply disturbed by the fall of the Ming dynasty, he joined the other "yimin" painters in Nanjing and devoted himself to painting. He was acclaimed as the foremost member of the "Eight Masters of Nanjing". In his constructive mode of building forms Gong Xian makes ingenious adaptation from Dong Qichang, and then enriched his forms by heavy illusionistic shading.

The mystique of Dong Qichang's art is intriguing in that he captivated the individualist painters as well as the conservative painters. While the individualists are able to transform Dong Qichang's imprints in most imperceptible



鄭燮 (1693-1765)
墨竹圖
Zheng Xie (1693-1765)
Ink bamboo



朱耷 (1626-1705)
五松圖
Zhu Da (1626-1705)
Five pines

manners, it is in the hands of the orthodox masters that Dong Qichang's orthodoxy was pushed to unprecedented heights.

The Orthodox School

Dong Qichang's invocation of orthodoxy and his exaltation of antiquity gave ascendancy to the Orthodox School championed by the "Four Wangs" namely: Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, Wang Yuanqi and Wang Hui. Together with Wu Li (1632-1718) and Yun Shouping (1633-1690), they are collectively known as the "Six Masters of Early Qing". The Six Masters continued the tradition of literati amateurism as advocated by Dong Qichang. They assumed a position of supremacy in early Qing as a result of imperial favour bestowed upon them by the emperors Kangxi (1654-1722), Yongzheng (1678-1753) and Qianlong (1711-1799).

The influence of their art spreads far and wide. Imitation occurred on a large scale. The repercussion of the immense popularity of the orthodox style was that creativity was stifled and soon this kind of orthodoxy was to lead to resistance from artists with independent minds.

The Individualist Painters and the Eccentrics of Yangzhou

The independent minds amidst waves and current of mainstream styles in the Ming and Qing can be observed in a number of painters. Xu Wei (1521-1593) plotted along his own path and asserted a strong personal style with his spontaneous use of brush and ink. Chen Hongshou (1598-1652) brought a new mannered outlook to figure painting by reworking earlier styles while Gao Qipei (1660-1734) displays a marked originality and virtuosity in his finger

paintings.

The experimentation of individual artists inspired other innovative spirits. In the commercial and artistic centre of Yangzhou, the style of the so-called the "Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou" made a lasting impact on the history of Chinese painting. Eccentric painters from Yangzhou featured in this exhibition include Hua Yan (1682-1762), Gao Fenghan (1683-ca.1749), Li Shan (1686-ca. 1760), Jin Nong (1687-1764), Huang Shen (1687-1772), Zheng Xie (1693-1765), Li Fangying (1695-1754), and Luo Pin (1733-1799). The Yangzhou eccentrics are masters of flower-and-bird painting as well as landscape and figure. The boldness of their compositions, the often mannered and exaggerated depiction of their subjects sow seeds of transformation in later Chinese painting.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy in the early Ming was distinguished by the works of the Songjiang calligraphers Song Ke (1327-1387) and Shen Du (1357-1434). Shen Du's neat and pleasing standard script was so well-favoured by the Yongle Emperor (1360-1424) that it became a sample style known as "taige ti" or "examination hall" style.

However, aesthetic attention shifted from Songjiang to Suzhou with the emergence of Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, Wu Kuan (1435-1504) and Zhu Yunming (1461-1527). While Shen and Wu revived Song models like Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) and Su Shi (1036-1101), Wen and Zhu were especially dedicated to the revival of Jin and Tang models. In combining his mastery in all the ancient styles including Zhong You (151-230), Wang Xizhi (303-379), Huaisu (737-after 799), etc., Zhu distinguished himself with a highly

personal style of "wild" cursive script which shows his personal innovation and artistry at his best.

Zhu Yunming and his younger contemporary Wang Chong (1494-1533) who was influenced by Zhu, sought to incorporate a kind of simplicity and "primitivism" in the carved copies of "fatei" ("copybook") of Wei and Jin masters and rubbing from some of these samples. Wang Chong achieved great fame in calligraphy and commanded as much respect as Zhu Yunming and Wen Zhengming.

During the middle Ming, the dominance of Suzhou calligraphers was overtaken by Dong Qichang who restored the glory of Songjiang calligraphers. Dong pursued a conscientious and broad study of ancient sources in calligraphy, as in his painting, in order to establish his orthodoxy on a firm basis. His calligraphy reveals his complex absorption of ancient sources, combining the mildness and ease of the tradition of the Two Wangs with the firmer brush articulation of the Tang masters, Yan Zhenqing (709-785) and Liu Gongquan (778-865).

Dong Qichang's authority was respected in the Jiangnan area and the imperial precincts. The Kangxi Emperor personally endorsed Dong's calligraphy and instituted it as a model for examination candidates. The style retained favour in court circles during the Qianlong era, and continued to be practised by individuals outside the court throughout the remainder of the Qing period.

Dong Qichang, together with Zhang Ruitu (1570-1644), Xing Tong (1551-1612) and Mi Wanzhong (act. 1595-1628) were considered the four greatest calligraphers of his time.

During the late Ming, Wang Duo (1592-1652) and his younger contemporary Fu Shan (1605-1684) were particularly known for his running and cursive scripts. Not content merely to study former traditions, they created their own bold and somewhat eccentric style of writing. The cursive writing of Wang Duo and Fu Shan have been characterized as a form of "lianmian cao" ("continuous, unbroken cursive"). Their stylish writing is emblem of the late Ming early Qing calligraphers' unique contribution to the development of the cursive script.

As Wang Duo and Fu Shan brought the abstract expressionism of calligraphic scripts to new heights, there were signs of attempts to steer away from the trend of extreme freedom of the late Ming early Qing cursive writers.

Staying aloof from the creative experimentation of contemporary cursive writers, the Nanjing painter Zheng Fu (1622-1693), a seal carver and calligrapher specialising in clerical script, searched for inspiration beyond the Tang in his study of the rubbing of Han stelae. He trekked back to early models to rediscover the aesthetic possibilities of early scripts. Zheng Fu's major followers include Gao Fenghan (1683-ca. 1749) and Zheng Xie (1693-1765). Zheng Xie's calligraphy incorporated characteristics of the four major



石濤 (1642-1707)
長干風塔圖
Shitao (1642-1707)
The pagoda of
Changgan Monastery

types of calligraphic scripts: the archaic clerical, standard, running, and cursive scripts. Some people called his style "licao" ("the cursive style of the clerical script"). Zheng himself named it as "liufenben shu", meaning "sixty-five per cent standard script".

Zheng Fu's work, together with some of his contemporaries' and their many followers', formed a first stage in the transition from the *tiexue* (Copybook School) of early Qing to the *jinsbixue* (Metal and Bronze School) or *beixue* (Stele School) that matured in the middle Qing in the person of calligraphers such as Yi Bingshou (1754-1815).

The archaistic revival brought about by the the Stele School exerted profound influence. The inquisition into the aesthetic possibilities of the stele style was carried over into painting as well by artists like Jin Nong of the eighteenth century and continued in the nineteenth and twentieth century in the art of Zhao Zhiqian (1829-1884) and Wu Changshuo (1844-1927). However, development in the twentieth century goes beyond the scope of this exhibition.

Conclusion

In the course of about six hundred years of development of painting and calligraphy since the beginning of the Ming dynasty covered by pieces from this exhibition, the main portion of the history of Chinese painting is preoccupied with recounting the process of evolution through the ebb and flow of major schools and styles. However, it is the undercurrent of these dominant trends that makes up the true face of history. In the selection of exhibits for this exhibition, it is hoped that an overview of the development in these centuries will be conveyed.