Reworking the Classics: Revitalization of Guohua, Traditional Chinese Painting, in Search of Contemporaneity

An exegesis submitted for

the degree of Doctor of Fine Art (DFA) – Professional Doctorate

Koon Wai Bong

School of Art, College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University, Melbourne
August, 2011
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Koon Wai Bong

August 1, 2011
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to...

Associate Professor Kevin White,

Associate Professor Terry Batt,

Dr. Ma Kwai Shun,

Dr. Ho Siu Kee,

Ms. Sunny Wang,

Ms. Eileen Hauling Lam,

Dr. Pedith Chan, and

My Heavenly Father.
Abstract

Since the early twentieth century a quest has been eagerly anticipated for Chinese painters to revive and rejuvenate the concept guohua, which literally means national painting. In Hong Kong which serves as a convergence of Chinese and Western cultural narratives, "hybridity" comes to be a primary concern for local artists to take into consideration in their art creation. As a Chinese painter I consider my artworks to related to the guohua concept, however I also aim to shape my art to reveal the identity of Hong Kong culture through hybridity, and to revive guohua through sustaining the great tradition of bimo (literally meaning the brush and ink), in Chinese painting, as well as appropriating Western modes of expression. Based on the concept of "reworking the classics", I decipher the codes embedded in traditional landscape painting and attempt to infuse my paintings with a new and contemporary look. With regard to spatial definition, I reinterpret the concept of the void and the solid and employ a multi-panelled setting for my works in order to further develop the "reworking" concept. Recently, I have been actively exploring other media, such as sound in order to create a contrast between ancient Chinese cultural heritage and contemporary city-life.
Table of Contents

Declaration i
Acknowledgements ii
Abstract iii
Table of Contents iv
List of Figures vi

Introduction 1

Chapter 1
1.1 Hong Kong New Ink Painting and its Counterpart 5
1.2 Contemporary Ink Art 14

Chapter 2
2.1 Positioning My Painting as Guohua 25
2.2 The Metaphysics Embedded in Brush and Ink 26
2.3 The Reconciliation of Man and Nature 29
2.4 The Daoist Concept of "You" 33

Chapter 3
3.1 Brush and Ink as a Vehicle for Self-expression 39
3.2 The Codification of Brush and Ink 45
3.3 Reworking the Classics 51
3.4 The Void and the Solid 67

Chapter 4
4.1 The Multi-panelled Setting 71
4.2 Polyptych with Continuing Scenery 80
4.3 Other Media 83

Conclusion 86

Bibliographies 90

Appendix 1: Appropriate Durable Record 106
Appendix 2: Curriculum Vitae 122
Appendix 3: Art Review Record 133
Appendix 4: CD 133
List of Figures

Fig. 1. Lü Shoukun, Zhuangzi, 1974, ink on paper, vertical scroll, 139 x 70 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 2. Liu Guosong, Moon Walk, 1969, ink and acrylic with collage on paper, 69 x 85 cm.

Fig. 3. Wucius Wong, Reclusion, 1978, ink and colour on paper, 40 x 185 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 4. Gu Wenda, Tranquillity Comes from Meditation: Overlapping Characters, 1984, ink on paper, vertical scroll, 276 x 175 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 5. Wilson Sheih, The Duo Clubs, 2002, ink and colour on golden cardboard, octaptych, each 50.7 x 48 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 6. Leung Ka-yin, Joey, Messy Flower, 2006, ink on paper, tetraptych, each 98 x 38 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 7. Wong Hau-kwei, Fate, 1998, ink and colour on paper, 157 x 96.5 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 8. Choi Hoi-ying, Moon Over the Flowing Stream, 2001, ink installation, 250 x 500 x 150 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 9. Kwok Ying, Mattress, 2001, ink on Chinese hanging scroll, 195.5 x 78.4 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 10. Wong Chung-yu, Spiritual Water II, 2009, digital media, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 11. Leung Kui-ting, Internet, 2009, mixed media, 205 x 230 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 12. Ng Kwun-lun, Tony, Lab Study Series, 2009, mixed media, 160 x 150 x 30 cm.

Fig. 13. Wong Sau-ching, Numbers, 2002, Ink and colour on paper, 200 x 400 cm.
Fig. 14. Kum Chi-keung, Desmond, *View • Inside Out*, 2009, mixed media, 25 x 20 x 20 cm.

Fig. 15. Cai Guoqiang, *Drawing for Fetus Movement II: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 9*, 1992, Gunpowder on paper, 56 x 76 cm, private collection.

Fig. 16. Fay Ming, *Floating Reeds*, 2006, mixed media, installation work, 300 x 1800 cm, collection of Shenzhen Fine Art Institute Collection & Artist Collection.

Fig. 17. Man Fung-yi, *Not This, Not That, Not Here, Not There*, 2008, ink installation, 200 x 300 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 18. Koon Wai-bong, *Pine*, 2009, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 243.8 x 121.9 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 19. Koon Wai-bong, *Edges*, 2006, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, 34.6 x 36.7 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 20. Koon Wai-bong, *Laterality*, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on woodblocks, diptych, each 178 x 60.5 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 21. Koon Wai-bong, *Connection*, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on stretchers, diptych, each 69 x 96 cm, private collection.

Fig. 22. Zhao Mengfu, *Twin Pines, Level Distance*, 1300, ink on paper, handscroll, 26.9 x 107.4 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 23. Zhao Mengfu, *Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees*, ink on paper, handscroll, 27.5 x 62.8 cm, collection of Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig. 24. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*, 1072, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 158.3 x 108.1 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 25. Li Tang, *Wind in the Pines Amid Ten Thousand Valleys*, 1124, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 188.7 x 139.8 cm, collection of National
Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 26. Mi Fu, *Poem Written in a Boat on the Wu River*, 1100, ink on paper, handscroll, 31.3 x 559.8 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 27. The early Tang tracing copy, Wang, Xizhi, *Three Passages of Calligraphy*: Pingan, Heru and Fengju, ink on paper, handscroll, 24.7 x 46.8 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 28. Koon Wai-bong, *CUHK*, 2003, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, each 136 x 33 cm, private collection.

Fig. 29. Koon Wai-bong, *Laterality*, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on woodblocks, diptych, each 178 x 60.5 cm, artist's collection.

Fig. 30. Gong Xian, *Landscapes and Trees*, 1679, ink on paper, album with twelve set of paintings and calligraphic works, 15.9 x 19.2 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 31. Zhang Daqian, *Splashed-colour Landscape*, 1965, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 60.3 x 95.9 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 32. See Fig. 25.

Fig. 33. Dong Qichang, *In the Shade of Summer Trees*, 1635, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 321.9 x 102.3 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 34. See Fig. 33.

Fig. 35. Mi Youren, *Spectacular Sights of the Xiao and Xiang Regions*, 1135, ink on paper, handscroll, 19.7 x 258.7 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig. 36. See Fig. 33.

Fig. 37. Huang Gongwang, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 1350, ink on paper, handscroll, 33 x 636.9 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.
Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 38. See Fig. 33.

Fig. 39. Attributed to Dong Yuan, *Wintry Trees by a Lake*, undated, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 181.5 x 116.5 cm, collection of The Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures.

Fig. 40. *Mustard Seed Garden Manual*, 1782, edition of the Qing Dynasty, woodblock printed book, seventy nine pages, 29.8 x 17.3 x 0.5 cm, collection of Brooklyn Museum.

Fig. 41. Koon Wai-bong, *Reworking the Classics*, 2008, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 42. The first left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 43. Wang Meng, *Retreat in the Qing Bian Mountain*, 1366, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 140.6 x 42.2 cm, collection of Shanghai Museum.

Fig. 44. Zhang Daqian, *Landscape in the Style of Wang Meng*, 1946, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 145 x 56 cm, private collection.

Fig. 45. The second left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 46. Attributed to Juran, *Layered Peaks and Dense Forests*, undated, ink on silk, hanging scroll, 144.1 x 55.4 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 47. Wu Zhen, *The Idle Fisherman*, undated, ink on paper, handscroll, 24.7 x 42.3 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 48. The third left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 49. Guo Xi, *Old Trees, Level Distance*, undated, ink and colour on silk, handscroll, 34.9 x 104.8 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 50. Attributed to Li Cheng, *Reading Tablet Inscription Among Jagged Rocks*, undated, ink on silk, hanging scroll, 194.9 x 26.3 cm, collection
of Osaka Municipal Museum of Art.

Fig. 51. The fourth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 52. Ni Zan, Rongxi Studio, 1372, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 74.7 x 35.5 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 53. Shitao, Returning Home, 1695, ink and colour on paper, one leaf of album of twelve paintings, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 54. The fifth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 55. Fan Kuan, Travellers Amid Streams and Mountains, undated, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 56. Shitao, Returning Home, 1695, ink and colour on paper, album of twelve paintings, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 57. The sixth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 58. See Fig. 35.

Fig. 59. Wu Hufan, Dwelling by the Willows, 1935, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll 86.7 x 39.5 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 60. The seventh left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 61. Zhao Danian, Lake Retreat Among Willow Trees, ink and colour on silk, round fan, mounted as album leaf, 22.2 x 24.6 cm, collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Fig. 62. See Fig. 59.

Fig. 63. The eighth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 64. Zhao Mengfu, Autumn Colours on the Que and Hua Mountains, 1296, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, 28.4 x 93.2 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 65. Tang Yin, Drunken Fisherman among Reeds, undated, ink on paper,
Fig. 66. Koon Wai-bong, *Mountains and Streams*, 2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, pentaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 67. The first left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 68. See Fig. 44.

Fig. 69. Wang Meng, *The Simple Retreat*, 1370, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 136 x 45 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 70. The second left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 71. Zhang Daqian, *Peach Blossom Spring*, ink and colour on paper, framed and mounted, 211 x 93 cm, private collection.

Fig. 72. Attributed to Li Cheng, *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks*, 1965, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 111.7 x 55.9 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 73. The third left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 74. Zhang Daqian, *Mountains in Blue and Green*, 1965, ink and colour on gold-dusted silk, framed and mounted, 173 x 93.5 cm, private collection.

Fig. 75. Zhang Daqian, *Lotus*, 1967, ink and colour on paper, 94 x 43 cm, private collection.

Fig. 76. The fourth left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 77. Zhang Daqian, *Mount Yulei at Daojiang*, 1961, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 192.4 x 102 cm, private collection.

Fig. 78. Ma Yuan, *Water Study*, undated, ink and colour on silk, handscroll with twelve paintings, each 26.8 x 41.6 cm, collection of Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig. 79. The fifth left panel, Fig. 55.
Fig. 80. Zhang Daqian, *Landscape in the Style of Juran*, 1944, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 166 x 84 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 81. Dong Yuan, *The Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, undated, handscroll, ink and colour on silk, 50 x 141.4 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

Fig. 82. See Fig. 55.

Fig. 83. Bada Shanren (Zhu, Da), *Fish and Rocks*, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 134.6 x 60.6 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 84. Koon Wai-bong, *Dichotomy*, 2005, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, each 136 x 45 cm, private collection.

Fig. 85. Koon Wai-bong, *CUHK*, 2003, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, each 136 x 33 cm, private collection.

Fig. 86. Claude Monet, *Stack of Wheat*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 65.6 x 92 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 87. Claude Monet, *Stack of Wheat (Thaw, Sunset)*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 64.9 x 92.3 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 88. Claude Monet, *Haystacks: Snow Effect*, 1891, oil on canvas, 65.0 x 92.0 cm, collection of National Galleries of Scotland.

Fig. 89. Claude Monet, *Stacks of Wheat (Sunset, Snow Effect)*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 65.3 x 100.4 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 90. Claude Monet, *Stacks of Wheat (End of Day, Autumn)*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 65.8 x 101 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 91. Claude Monet, *Stacks of Wheat (End of Summer)*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 60 x 101 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 92. Xie Zhiliu, *Sunny Spring and Rainy Summer*, 1974, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, each 22.4 x 51.8 cm, private collection.

Fig. 93. Xie Zhiliu, *Frosty Autumn and Snowy Winter*, 1974, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, each 25.2 x 50.4 cm, private collection.
Fig. 94. Xie Zhiliu, *Birds and Flowers of Four Seasons*, 1949, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, each 75 x 21.2 cm, private collection.

Fig. 95. Feng Kanghou, *A Set of Twenty Scrolls of Calligraphy After Ancient Scripts*, 1977-1979, ink on paper, hanging scroll, a set of twenty calligraphic works, each 136 x 36.5 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Fig. 96. David Hockney, *Woldgate Woods, March 30-April 21 2006*, 2006, oil on canvas, hexaptych, each 91.5 x 122 cm.

Fig. 97. Zheng Xie, *Ink Bamboo*, 1761, ink on paper, tetraptych, each 222.5 x 63 cm, collection of Hubei Provincial Museum.

Fig. 98. Koon Wai-bong, *Left and Right*, 2006, ink on paper, mounted and framed, diptych, each 68.7 x 35.6 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 99. Koon, Wai-bong, *Up and Down*, 2008, ink on paper, hanging scroll, diptych, each 136.5 x 34 cm, private collection.

Fig. 100. Koon Wai-bong, *Three*, 2005, ink on paper, mounted and framed, triptych, each 136 x 33 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 101. Koon Wai-bong, *Four*, 2005, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, each 34.6 x 36.7 cm, private collection.

Fig. 102. Koon Wai-bong, *Tree Methods*, 2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, polyptych in fourteen pieces, each 96 x 68 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 103. Koon Wai-bong, *Corners 2008*, 2008, ink and colour on paper, mounted and framed, octaptych, each 30.3 x 30.3 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 104. The photo of *Connection 2009* (2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, each 68 x 96 cm, artist’s collection). It was shot at an oblique angle at the exhibition entitled *Koon Wai Bong: Reworking the Classics* (Blue Lotus Gallery, Hong Kong, China, October 4 to November 29, 2009).
Fig. 105. The close-up photo of Connection 2009. (Information of the artwork, see Fig. 104.)

Fig. 106. Mounting formats of hanging scroll. (Source from Wong Yaoting, Looking at Chinese Painting (Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Co. Ltd., 1995), 98-99.)

Fig. 107. Koon Wai-bong, Bamboo, 2010, ink and colour on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 25 x 25 cm, private collection.

Fig. 108. Attributed to Guan Daosheng, Bamboo Groves in Mist and Rain, 1308, ink on paper, handscroll, 23.1 x 113.7 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.

Fig. 109. Koon Wai-bong, Motifs and Ideas, 2009, mixed media, 205 x 400 cm, artist’s collection.
Introduction

Since the early twentieth century, the genre of guohua has been regarded as an art form in need of revitalization and rejuvenation. Confronted by the arrival of Western painting, the dominance of guohua which had been entrenched in China for thousands of years has been soundly challenged. Some critics claimed that "Chinese painting has come to a dead end" and further still, "the brush and ink (the core aesthetic category of the concept of guohua) is equal to zero". But for those who have used ink and paper or silk as a medium of expression, it is still their obligation to explore the position and definition of Chinese painting in an international context. Not only do ambitious artists resolutely embrace the cultural narrative of Chinese painting when contending with their counterparts engaging in a variety of art forms in order to assert their position to affirm their own claim to cultural identity, but they also adhere themselves to the internationalized

1. Throughout this exegesis, the terminologies of "guohua"; "Chinese painting"; "ink painting"; "new ink painting" and "modern Chinese painting" have been used extensively. The differences between "guohua" and "Chinese painting", will be discussed in sub-chapter 2.1 of this exegesis. On principle, the term "Chinese painting" is employed in this exegesis for general use. However, the use of the term "guohua" refers to Chinese painting that has a particular mission of inheriting the tradition of Chinese painting. The use of the terms "ink painting" or "modern painting" will be used to indicate a form of Chinese painting that seeks to revive or rejuvenate the conventional mode of Chinese painting in pursuit of a sense of modernity or contemporaneity. The term "New ink painting", is used exclusively to refer to paintings by artists active in the Hong Kong New Ink Painting Movement that was prevalent in Hong Kong in the 1960s to the early 1980s. For more information, please see sub-chapter 1.1 of this exegesis.

2. The original Chinese text of this quote reads "中國畫已到了窮途末路的時候". See Li Xiaoshan, 李小山, "My Opinions on Contemporary Chinese Painting," 當代中國畫之我見, in Select Essays on Chinese Arts in the Twentieth Century, 二十世紀中國美術文選, (Volume Two) ed. by Lang Shaojun, 郎紹君, and Shui Tianzhong, 水天中 (Shanghai: Duo Yun Xuan, 1999), 418.

3. The original Chinese text of this quote reads "筆墨等於零". See Wu Guanzhong, 吳冠中, The Brush and Ink is Equal to Naught, 筆墨等於零 (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Monthly, 1992). Heated debates emerged in the wake of the publication.
art world wherein Western definitions of modernity or contemporaneity are hegemonic. In the face of a sense of incompatibility between the "modern" and the "Chinese", Chinese artists have incorporated two different cultural narratives to create art with a notion of "hybridity", despite many who find this approach to be implausible.

_Guohua_ is essentially a painting genre that emerged from the Confucian society while the Western definition of modernism stands at the core of the spirit of "capitalism". In China, "amateurism" was one of the primary aesthetic categories of literati painting, which had been the mainstream of _guohua_ since the Song and Yuan dynasties. Nevertheless, such an ideal seems to be irrelevant in a modern age, during which time novelty and professionalism have advanced. Some scholars are of the opinion that modernization is unlikely to occur in China due to the incompatibility of the diverse social structures between the East and the West. This kind of notion, however, has been criticized recently because of its "Eurocentrism", in which the West is defined as the core while China and other oriental countries are considered to be peripheral. Once this presumption is wiped

4. It is known that Chinese society was developed from Confucianism which was a complex system of moral, social, political, philosophical and religious thought that has had tremendous influence on Chinese art and culture, including _guohua_. On the other hand, modernity always refers to the social relations associated with the rise of capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state. Western modern art was based on such ideology to develop and evolve. Therefore, _guohua_ and Western modern art fell into two distinct artistic systems and developments.

5. The mainstream of _guohua_ was "literati painting" which was developed by a large group of the intellectual elite. They were all amateur artists cum literati and reinforced spontaneity and playfulness in art creation. That is why _guohua_ was regarded as an art form which is in opposition to the professional art and painters.
out, the teleological and universalist conception of the modern world system based upon the Euro-American experience will lose much of its credibility. In fact, many self-orientalizing terms such as "Confucian capitalism", "East Asian modernity", and "Asian values" suggest that traditional Chinese culture is no longer an impediment to historical progress, but rather an Asian mode of the "Protestant ethic" and a driving force of modernization in Asian societies. The revisionist narratives of global and local capitalism provide alternative models of historical interpretation. Such an alternative to the notion of modernity can be considered to be a response of non-Western countries to the challenge of the post-Enlightenment paradigm of the modernity of the West. The project of modernity, therefore, should not follow a supposedly "correct" path for a faithful duplication. In other words, Western modernity cannot be simply transferred to Chinese soil. The realistic approach to Chinese painting in Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻)’s style was doomed to failure because Xu considered the modernization of Chinese painting as a unilinear, evolutionary sequence of development in compliance with the Western pattern. In striking contrast, modern Chinese painting should be ripe with potential alternatives to the post-Enlightenment European paradigm.

With the introduction of an agent derived from the external narrative,

hybridity becomes one of the solutions that could efficiently and effectively reconcile "Chineseness" and "modernism". Hybridity may involve a wide spectrum of processes and attitudes ranging from acceptance, adaptation, appropriation, and application, to revision, resistance, and rejection to the Western model. Hybrid art is meant to take elements from both cultural narratives without being overwhelmed by any one of them. Owing to its past as a British colony and its long history of being an international trading centre, Hong Kong has served as an eclectic cultural hub with extensive influences from Guangzhou, mainland China, the Western world, Japan, and Southeast Asia. As such local residents are able to inherit Chinese traditions and receive a wide variety of cultural elements at the same time. Against such a historical and cultural background, a movement of new ink painting with an aim to create a modern yet recognizably Chinese art has taken place in Hong Kong since the 1960s.
Chapter 1

1.1 Hong Kong New Ink Painting and its Counterpart

Since Hong Kong's population grew more as a result of immigration rather than by natural means following the Second World War and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, many post-war artists in Hong Kong had stronger cultural links to mainland China than to their adopted home. In keeping with the artistic experiments that took place in mainland China, especially in Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s, the artists who were active in the Hong Kong New Ink Painting movement had a mission to integrate Western stylistic influences into a consciously national art. In the 1960s and 1970s, a group of artists availed themselves of their background when faced with the reformation of Chinese painting that called for establishing their own cultural identity. Among those was Lü Shoukun (Lui Shoukun), 呂壽琨 (1919-1975)\(^8\) who was widely regarded as the leader of the first generation of artists to start the "New Ink Painting" movement.

Born and trained in Guangzhou and having taught art in Hong Kong at the School of Continuing Studies (now School of Continuing and Professional Studies) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Lü developed a concern for the modernization of Chinese painting. His pedagogic viewpoint

---

8. Most Hong Kong people, some Taiwanese, and a few mainland Chinese use more than one system of Romantization to produce their names like what Lü Shoukun did. In order to introduce an element of standardization and to make it easier for those who are interested in working out the Chinese characters, the name put into brackets after the first-mentioned name is *pinyin*, the standard Romanization of Chinese pronunciation. The name without brackets as in the cases of mainland Chinese and pre-modern artists is understood to be *pinyin*. 
demonstrated the artist's attempt to create art that displayed both a modernist and Chinese context. In fact, Lü gained a solid foundation of *guohua* training since his father, Lü Canming (Lui Canming), (1892-1963), was an artist and art dealer in Guangzhou. Through his family business, Lü had access to many ancient paintings and made copies of them in his early years. After he immigrated to Hong Kong in 1948, Lü started publishing art criticism and art theory about rethinking and reforming Chinese painting in local newspapers and he conducted experiments with ink painting in the pursuit of innovation and the modernization of Chinese painting. He founded the In Tao Art Association, 元道畫會, with his follower Irene Chou (Zhou Luyun), 周綠雲 (b. 1924), in 1968, and the One Art Group, 一畫會, with another follower Chui Tze Hung (Xu Zixiong), 徐子雄 (b. 1936), in 1970. Due to the liberal impetus in Western modernist art and the breakdown of communication with mainland China during the Cultural Revolution, the concept of a locally-orientated development in Chinese art became increasingly significant to Lü. In his eyes, "ink painting" was not a counterpart of "Western painting", but a subcategory of "painting" in which it is in parallel with other media such as "oil painting", "watercolour", and "print-making". In order to contend with competitors working in these mediums, Lü employed the visual language rooted in the practice of Western modernist or post-modernist art, rather than in the Chinese brushwork traditions, as sufficient primary sources

---

for exploration of his ink painting. In his work Zhuangzi (Fig. 1), the strident abstract brushwork employed on the surface of the rice paper is considered an allusion to American Abstract Expressionism and its European counterpart. To Lü, Western art was the symbolic system of modernity and cultural advancement, and Abstract Expressionism was considered to be one of the most up-to-date signifiers in Western modernism at that time. In Lü’s work, Abstract Expressionism was not employed because he was acquainted with the concepts and theories beyond those Western abstract paintings, but because the gestural nature of the painting had superficial similarities with the free-styled brushwork of Chinese painting. (In fact, many Abstract Expressionist artists were often interested in East Asian brushwork and many had appropriated aspect of it.) In addition, Lü’s later works always evoke a kind of "Zen" flavour due to the terse quality of the visual elements. Lü was never an adherent of Zen Buddhism and Daoism, but the lotus-, flame-, or butterfly-like images and the abstract quality of brushstrokes
with the assistance of the inscription of "Zhuangzi zizai", literally Zhuangzi’s liberty, offer a strong sense of self-transcendence and Zen meditation in the painting. Even though the assimilation of Western aesthetics and Chinese philosophies was devoid of a profound understanding, Lü admittedly gave his Chinese painting the claim of contemporaneity. Merging Chinese and Western narratives, Lü’s Zen paintings prove that hybridity is capable of carving out a niche for the emergence of a style of New Ink Painting, and for the revelation of a unique sense of Hong Kong identity.

Liu Guosong, 劉國松 (b. 1932), younger than Lü by 13 years, also showed an attempt to create "Modern Chinese Painting" by applying the Western practice of experimental techniques to the materials of ink painting. Liu, born in Anhui, graduated from the art department of the National Taiwan Normal University in 1956, and taught New Ink Painting in the Department of Fine Arts at The Chinese University of Hong Kong during 1971-1992. Like his contemporaries, Liu was fascinated with Western modern and post-modern art. In the early 1960s he began New Ink Painting with collage and other painting techniques such as rubbings, printing, or dabbing ink onto specially-ordered paper which comprised of coarse surface fibres. Advocating "thorough Westernization" of guohua and "revolting zhongfeng" (zhongfeng, literally meaning the centre brush, refers to the traditional technique to keep the brush tip concealed within the central part of the line), Liu found his own way to create brushwork without using a single brush. He did this by removing some of the thick filaments
over a coarse paper in order to let the intriguing and irregular "gaps" create unexpected textural "strokes" with an organic structure. In fact, the "stroke" is remarkably similar to the conventional calligraphic brushstrokes created by the Chinese brush. Liu also pushed back the boundaries of Chinese materials and techniques, experimenting with the technique of collage for new possibilities for Chinese painting. He sometimes employed reproduction images from magazines or newspapers to create a direct relationship with contemporary life. His work Moon Walk, 月球漫步 (Fig. 2), is a good example of this technique. Even though Lui's most recent paintings exhibit an attempt to return to a more traditional path, his total contribution to contemporary culture in Hong Kong is significant and cannot be doubted.

Both Lü and Liu had a large number of followers who directly learned and indirectly drew reference from what their teachers had attained. Among those is Wucius Wong (Wang Wuye), 王無邪 (birth name is Wong Chung-ki (Wang Songji), 王松基 (b. 1936)) who was able to take advantage of both Western modernism and Chinese tradition. While

Fig. 2. Liu Guisong, Moon Walk, 1969, ink and acrylic with collage on paper, 69 x 85 cm. (source from Painting by Liu Kuo-sung (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 1992), 88.)
adopting ink as his medium for the misty-mountain motif, Wong laid claim to contemporaneity by introducing a grid-like structure to his work. Wong worked as a lecturer at Swire School of Design of Hong Kong Polytechnic (now Hong Kong Polytechnic University) at one time, and authored several widely disseminated manuals on two- and three-dimensional designs that present a Bauhaus educational model. With such a substantial design background, Wong was well acquainted with design and design concepts. In his work Reclusion, 清幽 (Fig. 3), the geometric framework of a partitioned structure strikes a contrast with the organic form of the landscape motif presented. The grid structure is in many ways reminiscent of the visual vocabularies derived from hard-edged painting. In addition, Wong also employed Western materials such as acrylic paint and other mediums and painting agents to his work in the pursuit of succinct watermarks and minute details. Compared with his predecessors, Wong had no intention to blur the distinctions between the East and the West and to integrate them into one. He allowed the complementary parts to co-exist with a large degree of autonomy. That is why he always claimed that his painting belonged to the East as well as the West, 亦東亦西, but at the same time.

Fig. 3. Wong Wucius, Reclusion, 1978, ink and colour on paper, 40 x 185 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/ce/Museum/Arts/english/collections/collections04.html)
belonged neither to the East nor the West, 非東非西. Indeed, Wong’s mode of painting, as David Clarke says, "has something of a double-voiced quality, acknowledging difference but ending up reducing both Chinese and Western cultures to (diametrically opposed) essences." 10

The New Ink Painting movement (led by Lü and Wong) and its counterpart (led by Liu) came to their prime during the 1960s and 1970s. By the late 1980s, apart from the three previously mentioned artists, many outstanding ink artists began to show prominence. Among these artists were Irene Chou, Leung Kui-ting (Liang Juting), 梁巨廷 (b. 1945), Lee Chun-yi (Li Junyi), 李君毅 (b. 1965), Ma Kwai-shun (Ma Guishun), 馬桂順 (b. 1952), Fung Wing-kee, Raymond (Feng Yongji), 馮永基 (b. 1952), Ng Kwun-lun, Tony (Wu Guanlin), 吳觀麟 (b. 1964). Some of these artists were not involved neither in the New Ink Painting movement nor in its counterparts, yet their work can also be regarded as a reflection of the concept of New Ink Painting. However, the modernization of Chinese painting with Chinese media is not something that accrues by default. As global citizens, Hong Kong artists began to rethink the necessity to employ traditional Chinese brushwork as a useful resource, or not to get involved with the medium of ink. There was a decline in ink painting during the 1980s and 1990s after a number of young artists had returned from overseas where they had gained their technical grounding. Due to their educational background, they were

10. See David Clarke, *Hong Kong Art: Culture and Decolonization* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001), 18.
inevitably unfamiliar with Chinese painting and ink media, and made use of a Western artistic language as a useful resource in order to appeal to the local audience at that time. Another consideration was that Hong Kong was at a critical turning point, as the one hundred and fifty years of British colonial rule was coming to an end and sovereignty was to be returned to mainland China on July 1, 1997. Fearful of China's brutal crackdown of the Tiananmen Square student democratic movement in 1989 (also known as the Tiananmen Square massacre in which the Chinese government used force to clamp down on the demonstrations and protests organized by students and intellectuals), Hong Kong residents tended to distance themselves from mainland China in the face of the handover, and hence, their pursuit of a cultural identity. Around the time of the 1997 handover, there was a considerable amount of visual, televisual, filmic, and artistic representations of Hong Kong's past and present. Since then, political demands for democracy have raised the concern for cultural identity in art. Regarding ink painting, the reconciliation of the two cultural narratives in the ink medium for the purpose of the modernization of Chinese art seemed to be less relevant to the social context which was in desperate need to mark out a defined distance from the larger cultural context. On the contrary, installation art and mixed media artworks became very popular, particularly among younger artists during this time. This was principally due to the fact that this form of art provides a greater degree of flexibility for artists to

11. Ibid, 71.
express their personal views and experiences. As such it is easier to establish
a local language and a cultural identity in art.
1.2 Contemporary Ink Art

While Hong Kong ink artists were keen to diversify Chinese painting in order to accommodate a new political and cultural idnvironment at the turn of the twenty-first century, a large number of mainland artists jumped the gun in developing ink art in experimental and non-traditional ways. After the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, China had initiated a series of economic and institutional reforms. Even though political reforms were minimal and China stubbornly remained a socialist country, the Chinese economy moved decidedly and irreversibly in the direction of a "socialist market economy" with the backing of the former leader Deng Xiaoping, 鄧小平 (1904-1997). In late 1999, China's admission into the World Trade Organization (WTO) signaled the total integration of the Chinese economy into the capitalist world system. Along with the structural transformation into a more competitive and efficient economy, China opened its market to foreign countries and at the same time pushed forward in the development of contemporary Chinese art.

In the 1980s, few artists explored radical extensions of traditional techniques on a massive scale. Among them, Gu Wenda, 谷文達 (b. 1955), was one of the most renowned. Gu began the first of a series of projects fabricating meaningless, false Chinese ideograms which attempted to reveal the cultural confusion and contradiction of the Chinese great tradition and modernized city life. Gu's work, as demonstrated in the
work entitled *Tranquility Comes from Meditation: Overlapping Characters* (Fig. 4), successfully hybridized a Western mode of expression with the tradition of ink and brush painting and gained considerable attention from international markets and curators outside of China. In the 1990s, there were many ink artists engaged in projects that experimented with ink painting. Artists such as Zhang Yu, 張羽 (b. 1959), Zhang Jin, 張進 (b. 1958), Yang Zhilin, 楊志麟 (b. 1956), Shi Guo, 石果 (b. 1953), Liu Zijian, 劉子建 (b. 1956), Chao Hai, 晁海 (b. 1955), Hu Youben, 胡又笨 (b. 1961), Li Zhihong, 李志宏 (b. 1969) and Linang Jianping, 梁建平 (b. 1962) succinctly fit into this category. While Gu had a self-awareness of the cultural situation in which a cynical voice was always given over to criticism and the dilemma between the great tradition and modern city life, many of these ink artists reinforced the ambiguous concepts relating to "contemporaneity", "experimentalism", and "anti-traditionalism". Abstract Expressionism is the common art form adopted by their works. In fact, their works were primarily informed by Chinese and Abstract Expressionist influences, but they mainly "Sinicized" the reference to Abstract Expressionist influences by rendering it in Chinese ink. Such
an idiosyncratic mode of expression could be considered a continuation of what Lü and his followers did from the 1960s to the 1980s, though there was not a shred of evidence that an intention of conducting a dialogue with Hong Kong ink artists had been undertaken.12

After the silence of the 1980s and the 1990s, the development of Hong Kong ink painting regained its energy at the fin de siècle. While the Hong Kong Museum of Art organized an ink art exhibition entitled New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond held in the Hong Kong Museum of Art from August 22 to October 26, 2008 (curated by the Guest Curator, Alice King, 金董建平), the Hong Kong · Water · Ink · Colour: Exhibition of Chinese Paintings 2009 (curated by Chai Bu-kuk (Cai Bugu), 羅布谷 and Ma Kwai-shun) was held at the Hong Kong Central Library from January 22 to February 3, 2009. As well as these exhibitions, the Artist Commune had been organizing the "Contemporary Ink Art Series" biennially in the form of a series of art exhibitions since 2002. The Ink Contemporary: ReXPERIMENT (curated by Eric Leung (Liang Zhaoji), 梁兆基) held in the Artist Commune from October 3 to 6, 2009 was the last exhibition held during that year. These events featuring Chinese painting showcased a wide variety of works ranging from traditional guohua; New Ink Painting or modern Chinese painting; ink installation; ink media art; to those which

---

"seemingly have nothing to do with the ink brush tradition"\textsuperscript{13}. Such a phenomenon comes down to the fact that ink painting is still flourishing to this day. Some artists have joined the local art scene since then. Among those are Choi Hoi-ying (Cai Haiying), 蔡海鷹 (b. 1945), Wong Hau-kwei (Huang Xiaokui), 黃孝逵 (b. 1946), Wilson Shieh (Shi Jiahao), 石家豪 (b. 1970), Kwok Ying (Gu Ying), 郭瑛 (b. 1977), Wong Chung-yu (Huang Congyu), 黃琮瑜 (b. 1977), Leung Ka-yin, Joey (Liang Jiaxian), 梁嘉賢 (b. 1981) and so on. All of them were active in the local ink art scene in the 1990s. The exploration and experiments undertaken by their predecessors with the ink medium with primary references to Abstract Expressionism and Hard Edged Painting have made the definition of “Chinese painting” in the twenty-first century more ambiguous. Although some of the artists mentioned above are still clinging to traditional ink media, the meaning of “Chinese painting” has become increasingly unclear. Wilson Shieh and Joey Leung, for instance, have demonstrated the exquisite quality of fine lines reminiscent of the Chinese painting technique of gongbi, 工筆 (literally meaning fine brush style). Their works, however, are not derived from traditional Chinese painting in terms of content and presentation. Shieh models his cartoon-like, unisex figures with just a hint of cynical expression to mock the ambiguity between the two genders and the post-colonial cultural identity (Fig. 5), whereas Joey Leung weaves a girly, childish tapestry with her poetic and fairytale-like imaginary images and illogical

\footnotesize{13. See New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art), p. 17.}

17
free associations without using a Chinese brush. But rather, she creates lines primarily with Western drawing pens or pencils. (Fig. 6) In search of modernity, Wong Hau-kwei primarily makes use of the wooden stretcher of Western painting instead of the conventional mounting process with silk borders and scroll rollers. With the dramatic visual impact of the black-and-white spatial arrangement and the painstaking pointillist painting skills, Wong's paintings demonstrate how best to marry the landscape motif.

Fig. 5. Wilson Sheih, The Duo Clubs, 2002, ink and colour on golden cardboard, four paintings out of octaptych, each 50.7 x 48 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from Ink Art Vs Ink Art (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2010), 84-85.)

Fig. 6. Leung Ka-yin, Joey, Messy Flower, 2006, ink on paper, tetraptych, each 98 x 38 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from Ink Art Vs Ink Art (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2010), 83.)
within the context of a contemporary presentation. (Fig. 7) Choi Hai-ying transforms two-dimensional ink painting into three-dimensional installation work. Chinese narrative speaks through the abstraction of forceful brushstrokes while its Western counterpart leads him to create work on a much-enlarged scale (Fig. 8). Kwok Ying’s work often has a close relationship with the surface textures of many trifling objects such as tiles, bricks, and textiles. One of her paintings entitled Mattress, 裡地 (Fig. 9), demonstrates her talent in transforming the texture from a Chinese hanging scroll to a tactile bamboo mat, which was a must-have for Hong Kong families of the last generation. Wong Chung-yu violates the conventional rules of traditional brush and ink by introducing digital media as a component in Chinese painting. (Fig. 10) The random variability of computing technology and the computer-generated virtual images of the effect of
ink wash provides the viewer with a new visual experience that cannot be seen in the physical world.

At this time, the ink paintings created by these artists became increasingly diverse in content as much as in presentation. In contrast to their predecessors who primarily utilized Chinese ink painting techniques, the younger generation of artists chose to employ a variety of stylistic languages and techniques more related to those of Western art. Under the influence of their contemporaries working within a Western art context, many of these artists produced work with strong visual elements similar to those of Western "post-
modernists" and with new media assisted by high technology. In addition, some artists of the last generation shifted their position from producing ink painting to working with mixed media, and some who had been working in a predominantly Western mode changed to work with an ink medium. Leung Kui-ting, for instance, juxtaposes the old and the new through the installation of neon lights against the ink-painting surface on which the images of Tai Lake Rock and graphically dotted lines are drawn. (Fig. 11) Ng Kwun-lun, Tony, uses found objects and photographic images in relation to the ideal scene of the traditional Chinese landscape painting, or shanshui. (Fig. 12) Wong Sau-ching (Wang Shouqing), 王守清 (b. 1954) makes use of Chinese brush and ink instead of the Western bristle brush and oils, or acrylics, to depict different
numbers in various sizes and tones to illustrate the digitalized modern life. (Fig. 13) Apart from those who work or have been working with an ink medium, there are a few artists who have never taken up the Chinese brush for their artworks. Kum Chi-kueng, Desmond (甘志強, b. 1965), for instance, frequently employs birdcages as a major element in his work since keeping birds was popular in the past history of the territory. (Fig. 14) Birdcages are commonly taken as an explicitly local reference, though they are analogous objects in other Chinese communities.

At present, local ink art is being developed in a complex modern habitat. Many “ink” artists have begun to jettison the Chinese brush and rice paper or even Chinese ink in their works. Installation art, digital images, and mixed media have become more and more popular.
among these artists for the purpose of adhering to fashion and striving for a strong modern or contemporary position. Some artists and intellectuals, such as Prof. Harold Mok believe that the local ink art scene has become somewhat "chaotic" due to its "embracing conceptualism or bordering on graffiti at the expense of virtuosity and in turn the beauty of the brush and ink." In fact, some exhibitions such as *New Ink Art* and *Hong Kong · Water · Ink · Colour* have been criticized because of their failure to define the boundaries of Chinese painting. Some works with no "ink" medium or even "Chinese" cultural characters still retain "ink art" or "Chinese painting" by way of definition. Some of the more controversial cases include the gunpowder work of Cai Guoqiang, 蔡國強 (b. 1958) (Fig. 15), the work of glass and mixed media artist Fay Ming (Fei Mingjie), 費明傑 (b. 1943) (Fig. 16), and the work known as "the burning treatment" by Man Fung-yi (Wen Fengyi), 文鳳儀 (b. 1968) (Fig. 17) (all shown in *New Ink Art* exhibition, and the work of Man was also shown in *Hong Kong · Water · Ink · Colour*).

---

Water · Ink · Colour exhibition). There will undoubtedly be endless debate about the possible way for artists to further develop this traditional Chinese genre. The principle of guarding the values of the Chinese painting tradition includes the concept of "thinking outside the box of Chinese painting tradition." One could say that the future of Chinese painting currently hangs in the balance.

Fig. 16. Fay Ming, Floating Reeds. 2006, mixed media, installation work, 300 x 1800 cm, collection of Shenzhen Fine Art Institute Collection & Artist Collection. (source from New Ink Art: Innovation and Beyond (Hong Kong: HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education, 2008), 225.)

Fig. 17. Man Fung-yi, Not This, Not That, Not Here, Not There, 2008, ink installation, 200 x 300 cm, artist's collection. (source from Ink Art Vs Ink Art (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2010), 87.)
Chapter 2

2.1 Positioning My Painting as Guohua

Chinese painting, with such historical and cultural complexity, for me, is both a challenge as well as an opportunity to extend and expand my personal artistic development. Compared with other art forms that stress innovation and plurality, I believe that Chinese painting is able to evolve rapidly and inevitably into installation and multi-media arts and will become more diverse than ever, even though some of the artworks are not formally supposed to truly represent "Chinese painting" or "ink art". It proves that Chinese painting is well served by a profound tradition and is still charged with power and energy to keep up with the times. On the other hand, I regret that some of the values of Chinese painting have been severely compromised due to the exploration and the appropriation of other media and art forms. In many ways I consider my role within a contemporary context to give due reference to the great tradition and consequently regard my works as "guohua", or national paintings, rather than "Chinese painting". It is because "guohua" simulates to preserve national heritage whereas "Chinese painting" does not necessarily follow that principle. Notwithstanding the opinion of some intellectuals and artists who believe that "Chinese painting has come to a dead end" and that "the brush and ink is equal to naught"\(^{15}\) at the turn of the twentieth century. It is beyond doubt that Chinese painting has transplanted different cultures

\(^{15}\) See note 1.
and arts to its own tradition along the course of its development. According to history, the Tang Dynasty, for instance, was considered to be the golden age of Chinese art which was made possible by trade and subsequent cultural stimulation from other countries such as India and the Middle East. Contemporary artists are expected to create works that are relevant to the here and now. Yet, marrying the traditional with the modern, in my opinion, does not necessarily sacrifice the national heritage and the value of ink and brush. That is why I am determined to continue to learn and practice the mastery of the skills of brush and ink as required by guohua. Apart from the acquisition of techniques, the ideas and concepts embedded in "brush and ink" are also of the essence in my artworks.

2.2 The Metaphysics Embedded in Brush and Ink

Bimo, or brush and ink, which has been reinforced by Chinese painters again and again throughout history, is one of the core values in my artwork. Bimo, however, is not merely a technical term that refers to particular painting skills involved in traditional Chinese brush painting, involving rice paper or silk, and ink medium. On the contrary, it embeds numerous concepts and theories that enable it to reach the top aesthetic level in ancient Chinese painting.16 The Southern Dynasties intellectual Xie He, 謝赫 (active 500-535) put "the bone methods and the use of brush" (gufa

yongbi), 骨法用筆, in his Six Canons, 六法, the prominent aesthetic principles in Chinese painting. It was placed next to the uppermost "spiritual resonance and life's motion" (qiyun shengdong), 氣韻生動. Even though "brush" here literally refers to serving the "bone structure" of an image or modeling a form, brushwork made in a free and easygoing manner is undoubtedly capable of evoking the "spirit" of the subject matter. Before Xie, there were many theories about the evocation of "spirit". Among them are "the theory of shape and spirit" (xing seng lun), 形神論, by Gu Kaizhi, 顧愷之 (345-407) and "the theory of smoothing mind" (chang seng lun), 暢神論, by Zong Bing, 宗炳 (375-442) and Wang Wei, 王微 (415-453). The "use of brush", 用筆, in the eyes of these theorists, is more than a means to model a three-dimensional form on a two-dimensional paper surface. Also, it serves as a vehicle in the pursuit of the "spirit", i.e. the inner being, of the subject matter. Even though the execution of the brush at that time lacked a sense of variety, the concept of the "brush" had become one of the crucial concepts among Chinese theorists and painters at the very beginning of the history of Chinese painting.

17. The Six Canons of painting laid down by Xie He are one of the most important writings in Chinese art history. They state six desirable attributes of the artwork and/or its maker, and have been quoted and reinterpreted through the ages. They are: 1. Spiritual resonance and life's motion; 2. Bone methods and the use of brush; 3. Correspondence to the object and depiction of forms; 4. Suitability to type and the laying of colours; 5. Planning and compositional arrangement; and 6. Transmission and copying of models. For more information, see Craig Clunas, Art in China (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46.
19. Ibid, 4-5.
To my understanding, *bimo* was highly regarded because it is concerned with significant metaphysical concepts such as the "reconciliation of man and nature" (*tian ren heyi*), 天人合一, and the Daoist idea of "you", 遊.\(^{20}\)

As for the "reconciliation of man and nature", Chinese intellectuals had always tried to avoid defining it literally in the past as they believed that such a concept is indescribable and difficult to be verbalized if the reader has not reached the same "spiritual realm" as the speaker. As in the case of a physical sensation, it is very difficult to express the concept of an acute pain in the stomach to those who have never had such an experience. Frankly speaking, a stomachache pain is quite a different pain to that caused by bruising, wounding, or grazing, and not similar to a toothache, headache, angina pain or a sore throat. It would be too abstract to describe it as "a severe fluctuating pain caused by the stomach" or any other analogies. Only those who have had such an experience are able to appreciate the exact meaning of the physical sensation. In the same way, through the eyes of most Chinese intellectuals, it is almost impossible to convey the spiritual sensation embedded in such a metaphysical concept to those who have not reached the same spiritual realm.\(^ {21}\) Therefore, Chinese theorists generally wrote about it sparingly or used very abstract wording to describe

\(^{20}\) The concept of "you" in Daoism is so complicated and metaphysical that is difficult to translate in English. "You" could refer to "enjoyment in untroubled ease" which reflects a "manner" or a "state of mind" which may be considered to be like playing a game or travelling through life in accordance with the concept of Zhuangzi, one of the founders of Daoism. (In Chinese, "you" could literally refer to "playing" or "traveling".) I will carry out my understanding on this concept in sub-capter 2.2 of this exegesis.

\(^{21}\) As for the notion of understanding in accordance with the life quality of inner being, see Mou Zongsan, 牟宗三, *The Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy*, 中國哲學的特質 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 上海古籍出版社, 1997), 4-7.
the spiritual meaning of the metaphysical concepts of the past. In order to present such concepts in my own work, I inevitably need to explain their meanings. To avoid using too complex or abstract language, I am not going to explain them directly, but I will attempt to explain them with the assistance of the concept of "I". 22

2.3 The Reconciliation of Man and Nature

The word "I" is a pronoun that "refers" to the participants in a discourse, but cannot function to "describe" anything. The meaning or the content of "I" could be changed in accordance with the subject changed in the discourse. For example, "I" is able to refer to Peter or Mary depending on the discursive context, yet deficient in describing any trait or feature of the subject. It is unlike, for example, the noun "man" or "woman" which generally describes a human with body and soul, a head, two hands, and two legs, yet without a tail, distinguished from any other kind of animal. Thus, it is said that "I" is non-descriptive and its meaning is quite flexible. In some sense, "I" could refer to all the parts of a human physical body. But it is sometimes not at all because when a man, for example, loses one of his arms, the meaning of the concept of "I" will not become deficient at once. According to this logic, the provision of "I" remains unchanged

22. Such analysis of the "reconciliation of man and nature" through the concept of "I" refers to Li Tianming, 李天命, From Viewpoints of Life to the Philosophy for Reacting the World, 從人生觀到應世哲學 (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Publications Limited, 1999) (an audio live-recording of a lecture conducted at Hong Kong Baptist University in November, 1991).
even though the man may lose another arm, legs, eyes, ears, internal organs, skeleton, or even his consciousness and soul. The concept could be extended in accordance with the spiritual status of the man. If the man, for example, loves his wife, sons, daughters, and other family members such that he would give up his life for them, the "I" here extends its meaning to cover those he loves and cares about. The affections and caring of noble people could relate to more than those with whom they have an intimate relationship, but for a society, a country, a nation, or even all human beings and every living creature, the meaning of "I" could be extended to cover the whole universe. It is analogical to the concept of "love" in Christianity and that of "mercy" in Buddhism. That is why Jesus Christ sacrificed himself to be crucified on the cross for people's sins, and the founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni also sacrificed himself for justice. It is because they considered the world as a part of their "I", and they sacrificed the small "I" (the physical body of themselves) with the purpose of the completion of the large "I" (their nations and the world). In my understanding, at the very moment when the physical body and the spiritual mind of "I" is as one with the whole universe, he will attain the spiritual status or achieve self-cultivation in the "reconciliation of human and nature". In contrast with the concept of Western intellectuals who imply that nature is a confronting and opposing counterpart to man, the Chinese stress the relationship between the unity of man and nature and considered man and nature as one and the same.

With such values and significance embedded in brush and ink, the
The development of Chinese painting has always involved a comprehension of nature and has never embraced the concept of abstraction as has been the case with Western painting. In order to evoke a spiritual status, the technique of xieyi, the presentation of the idea of the object, or free style, that relies on unrestricted brushwork and terse details in the quest to capture the “idea” of the subject matter, is the primary goal of Chinese painters. Through free expression with the Chinese brush and ink on absorbent rice papers, the “idea” or the intrinsic quality of nature will emerge naturally without any artificial additives or embellishments.

In the Song Dynasty, Su Shi, 蘇軾 (1073-1101), stated, "The principle embedded in both poem and painting is the work of nature with pureness and freshness."23 It reveals the aesthetic judgment in Chinese painting of the importance of the “work of nature” and the depreciation of the “work of man”. Indeed, these principles are regularly reinforced in my art creation. The painting entitled Pine (fig. 18), for example, where the automatic

---

technique to splash, smear, and dribble the ink freely on the surface of the rice paper at a height of about two and a half metres was employed. The abstract darkness of the ink wash representing rocks or dark mist occupies nearly seventy-five percent of the painting surface thus providing me with time and space to build up a connection between the painting and nature. Taking more than a month to complete the ink wash whose total area is larger than my physical body, the painting and nature seem to have "devoured" me. According to the concept of "I" mentioned before, "I" during the process of "devouring" was gradually extended to spilling and splashing the ink to create a sense of the spirit of nature. In addition, I capitalized on the potential of the random effects of the highly absorbent rice paper that largely undermines the "work of man". Due to the almost unpredictable and uncontrollable technique of wash, the basic forms of the painting are totally organic and accidental, and the random approach provides a clear metaphor with nature.

Apart from the ink splashing technique, the delicate work entitled Edges (Fig. 19) also retains similar qualities. In this work,
I rely on the rapid-fire, calligraphic brushwork to depict the rocks and mountains. Viewed up close, each sketchy stroke can be seen to be raw and straightforward such that the viewer could almost trace the movements of my hand. Due to the free-hand movements, viewers are able to clearly see that I have executed the brush spontaneously and created the images without the slightest hesitation. In some respects, such a process is not necessarily about the technical proficiency of the artist (though a certain level of technical skill is a prerequisite). If the obstacle between nature and "I" is removed, or if nature and "I" come to be as one, the hand of the artist is capable of creating images of nature that are natural and unaffected. As for the painting, it will conjure up, as Su Shi said, a sense of the pureness and freshness of nature. These principles are the primary goals that I set for myself when I attempt to create my paintings.

2.4 The Daoist Concept of "You"

In Daoism “you” refers to a state of “enjoyment in untroubled ease” which reflects a “manner” or a “state of mind” which may be considered to be like playing a game or travelling through life in accordance with the concept of Zhuangzi, one of the founders of Daoism. The book Zhuangzi, 莊子, reveals the idea "enjoyment in untroubled ease" (xiaoyao you). In the chapter of "Nourishing the Lord of Life" (Yang Sheng Zhu), 養生主, there is a story:

*His cook (named Ding, 丁) was cutting up an ox for the ruler Wen*
Hui (文惠君). Whenever he applied his hand, leaned forward with his shoulder, planted his foot, and employed the pressure of his knee, in the audible ripping off of the skin, and slicing operation of the knife, the sounds were all in regular cadence. Movements and sounds proceeded as in the dance of the Mulberry Forest (Sang Lin, 桑林) and the blended notes of the King Shou (Li Shou, 豹首). The ruler said, 'Ah! Admirable! That your art should have become so perfect!' (Having finished his operation), the cook laid down his knife, and replied to the remark, 'What your servant loves is the method of the Dao, something in advance of any art. When I first began to cut up an ox, I saw nothing but the (entire) carcass. After three years I ceased to see it as a whole. Now I deal with it in a spirit-like manner, and do not look at it with my eyes. The use of my senses is discarded, and my spirit acts as it wills… Nevertheless, whenever I come to a complicated joint, and see that there will be some difficulty, I proceed anxiously and with caution, not allowing my eyes to wander from the place, and moving my hand slowly. Then by a very slight movement of the knife, the part is quickly separated, and drops like (a clod of) earth to the ground. Then standing up with the knife in my hand, I look all round, and in a leisurely manner, with an air of satisfaction, wipe it clean, and put it in its sheath.²⁴

---

²⁴. The English text is quoted from the Chinese Text Project found at the following address: http://chinese.dsturgeon.net. The original Chinese reads "庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然嚮；奏刀，騞然莫不中音：合於《桑
The "leisurely manner", in which the cook Ding separated the ox as in the dance of the Mulberry Forest and the blended notes of the King Shou, revealed the Daoist idea of "you". Similar to the cutting up of an ox, Chinese painters hold a Chinese brush in their hand and allow their eyes to wander the rice paper in order to look for an untroubled ease and spirit-like manner. In some sense, such "enjoyment in untrouble ease" cannot be obtained when a person pursues something without a sense of leisure or mulls over gain and loss. The spiritual realm of "you" in Daoism, as Xu Fuguan, 徐復觀 said, is "useless", because the core value of the "untroubled ease" is never meant to be restricted by any utilitarian purpose or condition concerning gain and loss. When playing a game, the players' "you" is exclusively focused on the pleasantness and satisfaction of playing the game. Such "you" will definitely disappear and the game will lose its intrinsic meaning if there are too many considerations taken into account. In
pursuit of such "you", xieyi becomes a crucial mode of expression among Chinese painting. Xieyi here does not refer to any particular style, but is regarded as a manner in which artists can express their idea without going against nature.\(^\text{27}\) It emphasizes the "playfulness" in the process of art creation, rather than to focus on the end product of the images created within the painting.

Through such playfulness, the artist is able to transcend many of the restraints of the rules, skills, and techniques of painting, and reach the level of "art", or "Dao", the absolute principle underlying the universe.

In my work entitled Laterality (fig. 20), for example, I have employed assertive and robust brushwork to represent the vegetation and the rocks as well as the subdued and unilluminated ink-washes to denote the

---

\(^\text{27}\) In the tradition of literati painting, monochrome painting is the best way to reveal the idea of xieyi because the artists believe that colour is to distract the viewers from looking at the inner part of the painting as delineated in the Daoist idea that "Colour's five hues from the eyes their sight will take", 五色令人目盲 (for more information, see Laozi, 老子, Daode Jing, 道德經). In other words, painting exclusively with ink comes to be more pure in the eyes of ancient literati painters.
mountains and cliffs, and to give claim to xieyi expression and to further reflect my untrammelled manner towards painting. Through the process of the repetitive application of the ink and brushstrokes on the paper, I, as in the case of the cook Ding, experience the spiritual sense of "you". In this instance, the focus of my painting was exclusively about playing with the brush and ink, rather than observing the rules of painting or solving technical problems. However, such a spiritual manner does not imply that there was no rule in my mind, or that I was competent to solve all of the technical problems. Indeed, rules are there, and so are the problems; otherwise the work would result in a total mess. Nevertheless, the rules and the problems had not turned into any kind of restriction.

It is analogous to the cook Ding who cut up the ox at its joints where there were gaps, the easy parts among all the "difficulties". Even though I might not have the exact same movements of the cook who was in the dance of the Mulberry Forest and the blended notes of the King Shou, my painting exhibits an easy-going manner in which I

Fig. 21. Detail, Koon Wai-bong, Connection, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on stretchers, diptych, each 69 x 96 cm, private collection.
was set free from tension and anxiety arising from the rules and technical problems. I am not going to say I have achieved the "Dao" as did the cook, but I believe that I am on the path leading toward it.

In contrast to the xieyi style, the painting entitled Connection (fig. 21) is a work in a comparatively delicate style that also reveals the idea of "you". In this painting, the dense forest is formed by millions of tiny, dainty dots which collectively achieve a sense of delicacy. However, viewed from up close, each brushstroke has an organic shape, indicating that I did it in an unstrained manner and as such preserving some of the inherent xieyi quality. In fact, xieyi does not refer to the quality of brushwork that is bold and expressive, or fine and delicate, but to a status where the hand is able to accomplish what the mind wishes.
Chapter 3

3.1 Brush and Ink as a Vehicle for Self-expression

In the pursuit of stronger expression through brushwork, I employ the idea of Zhao Mengfu, 趙孟頫 (1254-1322), one of the greatest Yuan literati artists who imparted the "brush" concept from the calligraphic brushstroke to painting. It is known as "painting and calligraphy being of the same origin", 書畫同源. Literally, "the same origin" basically means that the arts of calligraphy and painting have a common source. However, it essentially refers to the techniques of calligraphy transplanted into Chinese painting. In other words, the brushstrokes on the painting surface for modelling forms or portraying images are the same as those for calligraphic works. By executing the brush in an unrestricted manner and creating calligraphic strokes in a "writing" manner, painters are able to display the spirit of the subject matter and/or their own inner being. Take Zhao's painting entitled Twin Pines, Level Distance, 雙松平遠圖 (Fig. 22) as an example. The landscape is defined as a harmonious orchestra of different calligraphic strokes worked out by various brush methods. The
stack of rocks, mountains, and the bark of the pine trees, for example, are created by flying white (fei bai), 飛白, a particular type of cursive script or textural brushwork with gossamer lines, while every pine needle and branch are rendered as a 3-dimensional form as the seal script. Zhao by no means presents nature based purely on objective observations, but every single calligraphic line in his painting is taken as a vehicle for the intrinsic needs of the painting itself and the subjective necessities of the artist’s mind. In fact, a poem written by Zhao for Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees, 秀石疏林圖 (Fig. 23), tells of the close relationship between painting and calligraphy:

Rocks are like flying white, trees like seal script.

To "write" bamboo go back to the pa fa, (八法, the clerical script) method.

Only when a person is capable of understanding this

Will he know that painting and calligraphy are basically the same.28

Compared with the motifs and idioms of the Song paintings such as *Early Spring*, 早春圖, by Guo Xi, 郭熙 (ca. 1000-ca. 1090) (Fig. 24), and *Wind in the Pines Amid Ten Thousand Valleys*, 萬壑松風圖, by Li Tang, 李唐 (ca 1070s-ca. 1150s) (Fig. 25), Zhao's painting appears to have a stronger graphic quality which reveals the artist's deviation from a more realistic approach. When compared with a calligraphic work entitled *Poem Written in a Boat on the Wu River*, 吳江舟中詩卷 (Fig. 26) by Mi Fu, 米芾 (1051-1107), it can be said that the brushwork of the flying white in Zhao's work clearly shows his intention to appropriate the techniques of calligraphy for the purpose of painting.

With such forceful and dramatic brushwork, the painting distinctly comes to be a vehicle in search of self-expression by the artist. In the art of calligraphy, self-expression through

abstract brushwork was developed much earlier than in the case of Chinese painting. In the copies of the *Three Passages of Calligraphy*: Pingan, Heru and Fengju, 平安何如奉橘三帖 (Fig. 27), traced by an unknown early Tang calligrapher, we are able to see how the Calligraphic Sage Wang Xizhi, 王羲之 (303-361) demonstrated his ability how to give expression through the flexible movements of the brush tip. Indeed, the slating and undulating brushstrokes of various thicknesses in a dynamic equilibrium reveal much of the inner self of the artist. With such an aesthetic backup from calligraphic works, painters transformed the pictorial images into various calligraphic brushstrokes, treating each line and dot as a vehicle for inner-self expression. Henceforth, the function of Chinese painting was renewed and extended.

In my painting, brush and ink is crucial
to the heritage of traditional Chinese painting and culture. Compared with other art forms such as traditional Western painting, the use of the brush and ink in a traditional way is one-of-a-kind that enables me to elicit the sense of "Chineseness". To construct an intimate relationship with the great tradition of Chinese painting, I abide by Zhao Mengfu's tradition and calligraphic principles, and regard my paintings as calligraphic works. In my tetraptych entitled "CUHK" (Fig. 28), each brushstroke is conceived within the landscape composition calligraphically. The pine foliage, trunks, and branches are executed with the centre of the brush, 中鋒, the brush tip is concealed within the centre of each stroke as in seal script, while the rocks and the mountains are rendered with a striking attack with a slanted brush, 側鋒, as in the flying white manner and cursive script. Besides, the use of subtle ink-tone and pale drawing to render the atmospheric sense of aerial perspective of the dim light in the distance is reminiscent of the scholar-amateur style. Such a noticeable consciousness of a reconciliation with calligraphic qualities within the surface of my painting acts as a distinct vehicle for self-
expression. In the hope of accentuating emotional expression, I wash a great deal of compositional space into total darkness. Take the painting entitled *Laterality* (Fig. 29) as an example. In spite of refining the traditional motifs, a large dark tonal patch was created through the accumulation of multiple layers of brushstrokes and ink wash. The quality of brush and ink not only serves the representational purpose for portraying the sections of the mountains in shadow, but also shifts the focus of the work to the up and down movements of my hand, through which my innermost feelings and emotions are radically released.

Fig. 29. Koon Wai-bong, *Laterality*, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on woodblocks, diptych, each 178 x 60.5 cm, artist's collection.
Technically speaking, the expressive nature of brush and ink tends to embed the traditional methods of "accumulating ink" and "splashing ink". The accumulating ink method refers to the deep ink that is created by accumulating multiple layers of pale ink on the surface of the painting. The artist Gong Xian, 龔賢 (1619-1689), excelled in this technique (Fig. 30). The splashing ink method is a painting technique through which the depiction of images relies on splashing the ink onto the work and then a process of refinement with fine details. Zhang Daqian, 張大千 (1899-1983), was a fine exponent of the technique (Fig. 31). However, the compositional arrangement and the density of the brush and ink also tends to add a touch of modernity to my work since the use of interweaving brushwork and dense ink-wash is uncommon in traditional Chinese painting. It is my attempt to infuse a contemporary feel to the Chinese painting tradition.

3.2 The Codification of the Brush and Ink

Apart from my approach to the transformation of technique-oriented representation, I reinterpret the classic works of past masters and translate
their established work with brush and ink into a new kind of expression. Conscious emulation of the styles of past masters has always been regarded as an effective and efficient way to train artists in the past. Many ancient artists even regarded emulation as a process of art creation, through which the artistic explorations of an artist is enhanced. Zhao Mengfu espoused the idea of "antiquity", 古意, and once said "The value of a painting rests on its antiquity. Even though done with exquisiteness, a painting without antiquity ends up being naught." The evocation of "antiquity" in no doubt relies on the imitation of the old masterpieces. Zhao's work entitled Twin Pines, Level Distance (Fig. 22), for instance, shows that Zhao imitated the motifs of trees and rocks from the Song Dynasty paintings. The method of modelling the twin pine trees, especially the structure of the pine needles, is reminiscent of those of Guo Xi (Fig. 23); while the texture of the strokes representing the

rocks resembles Li Tang’s particular texture stroke known as the "small axe-cut stroke", 小斧劈皴 (Fig. 32). Zhao’s landscape, though an emulation, is definitely not allegiant to the original works but merely taken as a point of reference. Emerging with the expression of the calligraphic strokes, Zhao’s painting aims to emulate the "idea" of its sources, allowing a high degree of flexibility for the artist to reinterpret the elements from the original source and to create new works.

In the late Ming Dynasty, the emulation of brush and ink was further developed through the concept forwarded by Dong Qichang, 董其昌 (1555-1636). Dong regarded the emulation and reinterpretation of brush and ink from the old masterpieces as a process through which to gather a "Great Synthesis", 集大成. Like Zhao Mengfu, Dong tended to emulate the "idea" of the source rather than the appearance because emulation of the appearance means nothing while the "idea" enables the painter to extract the spirit, the inner being, of nature. At the same time, it opens up a way for artists to get into the "spiritual mind" of past masters. Dong said:

*I paint level-distance views after Zhao Danian,* 赵大年 (Zhao
Lingrang, 趙令穰, active ca. 1080-ca. 1100) and stacks of mountains after Jiang Shen, 江參 (ca. 1090-1138). In texture strokes, I use Dong Yuan, 董源 (ca. 934-ca. 962)'s hemp skin and dots of his Xiao and Xiang Rivers (瀟湘圖卷). For trees, I follow the methods of Dong Yuan and Zhao Mengfu. For Rock, I borrow... those in the snow scenes of Guo Zhongshu, 郭忠恕 (Guo Xi).... Having gathered [these styles] into a Great Synthesis, I make my own innovations. In four or five year’s Shen [Zhou], 沈周 and Wen [Zhengming], 文徵明 may not walk alone in our Wu country. 31

This clearly shows how Dong integrates various technical skills or modes of expression from a wide range of past masters in search of a "Great Synthesis". Some intellectuals in the early twentieth century viewed the emulation of ancient models as no more than imitation, which led to the decline of Chinese painting. To Dong, however, emulation was not merely a process of imitation, but also a transformation of the old models in pursuit of a new significance and greater artistic achievements. Through different configurations of emulation, an artist is able to reveal his understanding of the history of art. Take Dong’s painting entitled In the Shade of Summer Trees, 夏木垂陰圖, as an example (Fig. 33) in which a stylistic synthesis of the works of the artists Mi Youren, 米友仁 (1074-1153), Dong Yuan, and

Huang Gongwang, 黃公望 (1269-1354)’s motifs are displayed. The stylistic synthesis could be analysed as follow:
1. The far remote mountains of Dong’s painting are reminiscent of the landscape painting entitled *Spectacular Sights of the Xiao and Xiang Regions*, 瀟湘奇觀圖, by Mi Fu (Fig. 34 and 35);

Fig. 34. Detail, Fig. 33.  
Fig. 35. Detail, Mi Youren, *Spectacular Sights of the Xiao and Xiang Regions*, 1135, ink on paper, handscroll, 19.7 x 258.7 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Beijing. (source from http://www.npm.gov.tw/zh-tw/collection/selections_02.htm?docno=77&catno=15&pageno=4)

2. The textural brushstrokes of the distant mountains and the forms of the remote trees of Dong’s painting are reminiscent of the landscape painting entitled *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 富春山居圖, by Huang Gongwang (Fig. 36 and 37);

Fig. 36. Detail, Fig. 33.  
Fig. 37. Detail, Huang Gongwang, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 1350, ink on paper, handscroll, 33 x 636.9 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://www.npm.gov.tw/zh-tw/collection/selections_02.htm?docno=77&catno=15&pageno=4)
3. The semicircular rocks in the foreground of Dong's painting are reminiscent of the landscape painting entitled *The Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, 瀟湘圖, by Dong Yuan (Fig. 38 and 39).

Fig. 38. Detail, Fig. 33.

Fig. 39. Detail, Dong Yuan, *Wintry Trees by a Lake*, undated, ink and colour on silk, hanging scroll, 181.5 x 116.5 cm, collection of The Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures. (source from http://tech2.npm.gov.tw/sung/flash/index.asp)

In the eyes of Dong Qichang, these three artists together formed the orthodoxy of the Southern School, 南宗, of which literati painting is representative. Through his re-configuration of the masters, Dong revealed his aesthetic judgement about Chinese painting and his understanding of art history.

3.3 Reworking the Classics

Chinese painters gradually developed a "system" to learn and understand brush and ink painting, in which a wide range of styles, idioms, motifs, visual languages, and forms of expression in accordance with particular masters were codified. The grasp of this codification in some sense becomes a cultural capital among the literati painters. Thus, apart from concepts
and technical training, acquaintance with art history and aesthetics for de-

codification was a prerequisite for artistic creation. For the purpose of art

Fig. 40. *Mustard Seed Garden Manual*, 1782, edition of the Qing Dynasty, woodblock printed book, six pages (in inconsecutive order) out of seventy nine pages, 29.8 x 17.3 x 0.5 cm, collection of Brooklyn Museum. (source from http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/17617/Mustard_Seed_Garden_a_Chinese_Painters_Manual/image)
education, the Mustard Seed Garden Manual, 芥子園畫譜, a widely used technical bible for newcomers to Chinese painting, was published in 1679. It systematically introduces the brush and ink techniques and styles of the great masters. (Fig. 40) With the assistance of this manual, artists could easily find their way to access the codification system of the ancient models.

Thanks to my substantial training in emulating the ancient styles, I make use of the codification of brush and ink painting to summon ancient masters to my work in pursuit of a new interpretation. In the painting entitled Reworking the Classics (Fig. 41), which won the Hong Kong Contemporary Biennial Award in 2009, each of the eight panels corresponds to a classical landscape motif or idiom in accordance with a particular past master ranging from the Five Dynasties to Republican China. The relationship between the panels and the masters are shown as follow:

Fig. 41. Koon Wai-bong, Reworking the Classics, 2008, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.
1. 蒙 (1308/1298-1385), of the Yuan Dynasty and Zhang Daqian of Republican China; (Fig. 42, 43, and 44)

Fig. 42. Detail, the first left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 43. Detail, Wang Meng, *Retreat in the Qing Bian Mountain*, 1366, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 140.6 x 42.2 cm, collection of Shanghai Museum. (source from http://www.shanghaimuseum.net:82/gate/big5/www.shanghaimuseum.net/cn/dcjs/hh_1.jsp?id=170)

Fig. 44. Detail, Zhang Daqian, *Landscape in the Style of Wang Meng*, 1946, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 145 x 56 cm, private collection. (source from *Special Study on Zhang Daqian's Landscape Paintings in the Early Stage*, 張大千前期山水畫特集 (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1993), E19.)
2. The "jie"-shaped foliage, 介字點, by Dong Yuan and Juran, 巨然 (active ca. 976-93), of the Five Dynasties and Wu Zhen, 吳鎮 (1280 – 1345), of the Yuan Dynasty; (Fig. 45, 46, and 47)

Fig. 45. Detail, the second left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 46. Detail, attributed to Juran, Layered Peaks and Dense Forests, undated, ink on silk, hanging scroll, 144.1 x 55.4 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://www.npm.gov.tw/zh-tw/collection/selections_02.htm?docno=93&catno=15&pageno=1)

Fig. 47. Detail, Wu Zhen, The Idle Fisherman, undated, ink on paper, handscroll, 24.7 x 42.3 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1989.363.33)
3. The woods depicted in winter by Li Cheng, 李成 (ca. 919-ca. 967) and Guo Xi of the Northern Song Dynasty; (Fig. 48, 49, and 50)

Fig. 48. Detail, the third left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 49. Detail, Guo Xi, Old Trees, Level Distance, undated, ink and colour on silk, handscroll, 34.9 x 104.8 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1981.276)

Fig. 50. Detail, attributed to Li Cheng, Reading Tablet Inscription Among Jagged Rocks, undated, ink and silk on silk, hanging scroll, 194.9 x 26.3 cm, collection of Osaka Municipal Art Museum. (source from http://tech2.npm.gov.tw/sung/flash/index.asp)
4. The "broken belt" textural brushstroke, 折帶皴, by Ni Zan, 倪瓚 (1301-1374), of the Yuan Dynasty and Shitao, 石濤 (990-1020), of the early Qing Dynasty; (Fig. 51, 52, and 53)

Fig. 51. Detail, the fourth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 52. Detail, Ni Zan, Rongxi Studio, 1372, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 74.7 x 35.5 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://www.npm.gov.tw/zh-tw/collection/selections_01.htm?pageno=3&catno=15)

Fig. 53. Shitao, Returning Home, 1695, ink and colour on paper, one leaf of album of twelve paintings, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1976.280)
The "rain-drop" textural brushstroke, 雨點皴, of Fan Kuan, 范寬 (d. after 1023), of the Northern Song Dynasty or the moss dots, 苔點, by Shitao, 石濤 (990-1020) of the early Qing Dynasty; (Fig. 54, 55, and 56)

Fig. 54. Detail, the fifth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 55. Detail, Fan Kuan, Travellers Amid Streams and Mountains, undated, ink and colour, hanging scroll, 206.3 x 103.3 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://tech2.npm.gov.tw/sung/flash/index.asp)

Fig. 56. Detail, Shitao, Returning Home, 1695, ink and colour on paper, one leaf of album of twelve paintings, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1976.280)
6. 米点, or the mountains shrouded by clouds by Mi Youren of the Southern Song Dynasty and Wu Hufan, 吳湖帆 (1894-1968) of Republican China; (Fig. 57, 58, and 59)

Fig. 57. Detail, Fig. 35.

Fig. 58. Detail, the sixth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 59. Detail, Wu Hufan. Dwelling by the Willows, 1935, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll 86.7 x 39.5 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from Tradition and Innovation: Twentieth Century Chinese Painting (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1996), 148.)

32. "Dot" here doesn't literally refer to small marks, but the ink-wash method for depicting mountains or clouds after the style of Mi Fu and Mi Youren.
7. 趙大年 (Zhao Danian, 令穰 (late eleventh to early twelfth centuries)) in the Southern Song Dynasty and Wu Hufan of Republican China; (Fig. 60, 61, and 62)

Fig. 60. Detail, the seventh left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 61. Detail, Zhao Danian, Lake Retreat Among Willow Trees, ink and colour on silk, round fan, mounted as album leaf, 22.2 x 24.6 cm, collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. (source from http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=29019&coll_keywords=Lake+Retreat+Among+Willow+Trees&coll_accession=&coll_artist=&coll_place=&coll_medium=&coll_culture=&coll_classification=&coll_credit=&coll_provenance=&coll_location=&coll_has_images=&coll_on_view=&coll_sort=0&coll_sort_order=0&coll_view=0&coll_package=0&coll_start=1)

Fig. 62. Detail, Fig. 59.
8. The weeds by Zhao Mengfu of the Yuan Dynasty and Tang Yin, 唐寅 (1470-1524) of the Ming Dynasty. (Fig. 63, 64, and 65)

Fig. 63. Detail, the eighth left panel, Fig. 41.

Fig. 64. Detail, Zhao Mengfu, Autumn Colours on the Que and Hua Mountains, 1296, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, 28.4 x 93.2 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://www.npm.gov.tw/en/collection/selections_02.htm?docno=62&catno=15&pageno=2)

Fig. 65. Detail, Tang Yin, Drunken Fisherman among Reeds, painting's information unknown, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from Wong Yaoting, Looking at Chinese Painting (Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Co. Ltd., 1995), 120.)
In addition, the painting entitled *Mountains and Streams* (Fig. 66) also integrated the concept of idea emulation. Each of the five panels includes a number of typical elements from masterpieces as follows:

![Mountains and Streams](image)

*Fig. 66. Koon Wai-bong, *Mountains and Streams*, 2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, pentaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, artist’s collection.*
1. Landscape after the Style of Wang Meng, 仿王蒙林泉雅集圖, by Zhang Daqian and Retreat in the Qingbian Mountain, 青卞隱居圖 by Wang Meng; (fig. 67, 68, and 69)

Fig. 67. Detail, the first left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 68. Detail, Fig. 44.

Fig. 69. Detail, Wang Meng, The Simple Retreat, 1370, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 136 x 45 cm, collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (source from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/L.1997.24.8)
2. *Peach Blossom Spring*, 桃花源, by Zhang Daqian and *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks*, 晴巒蕭寺圖 attributed to Li Cheng, 李成 (ca. 919-967); (fig. 70, 71, and 72)

Fig. 70. Detail, the second left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 71. Detail, Zhang Daqian, *Peach Blossom Spring*, ink and colour on paper, framed and mounted, 211 x 93 cm, private collection (source from *Special Study on Zhang Daqian’s Landscape Paintings*, 張大千山水畫特集 (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1993), E19.)

Fig. 72. Detail, attributed to Li Cheng, *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks*, 1965, ink and colour on silk, 111.7 x 55.9 cm, collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei. (source from http://tech2.npm.gov.tw/sung/flash/index_en.asp)
3. **Mountains in Blue and Green**, 青绿山水, and **Lotus with Splashing Ink Technique**, 潑墨荷花, by Zhang Daqian; (fig. 73, 74, and 75)

---

**Fig. 73.** Detail, the third left panel, Fig. 55.

**Fig. 74.** Detail, Zhang Daqian, Mountains in Blue and Green, 1965, ink and colour on gold-dusted silk, framed and mounted, 173 x 93.5 cm, private collection. (source from *Special Study on Zhang Daqian’s Landscape Paintings*, 張大千山水畫特集 (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1993), 42.)

**Fig. 75.** Detail, Zhang Daqian, Lotus, 1967, ink and colour on paper, 94 x 43 cm, private collection. (source from *Han Mo Series A3: Zhang Daqian – Lotus Paintings*, 張大千/荷花 (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1994), 46.)

---
4. **Mount Yulei at Daojiang**, 導江玉壘圖, by Zhang Daqian and **Water Study**, 水圖卷, by Ma Yuan, 馬遠 (active late twelfth-thirteenth century); (fig. 76, 77, and 78)

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 76.** Detail, the fourth left panel, Fig. 55.

**Fig. 77.** Detail, Zhang Daqian, **Mount Yulei at Daojiang**, 1961, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 192.4 x 102 cm, private collection. (source from *Special Study on Zhang Daqian’s Landscape Paintings*, 張大千山水畫特集 (Hong Kong: Han Mo Xuan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1993), 25.)

**Fig. 78.** Ma Yuan, **Water Study**, undated, ink and colour on silk, one section out of the handscroll of twelve paintings, each 26.8 x 41.6 cm, collection of Palace Museum, Beijing. (source from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ma_Yuan_-_Water_Album_-_The_Yellow_River_Breaches_Its_Course.jpg)
5. Landscape in the Style of Juran, 仿巨然山水寺圖 by Zhang Daqian

and The Xiao and Xiang Rivers by Dong Yuan. (fig. 79, 80, and 81)

Fig. 79. Detail, the fifth left panel, Fig. 55.

Fig. 80. Detail, Zhang Daqian, Landscape in the Style of Juran, 1944, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, 166 x 84 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/ce/Museum/Arts/english/collections/collections02.html)

Fig. 81. Detail, Dong Yuan, The Xiao and Xiang Rivers, undated, handscroll, ink and colour on silk, 50 x 141.4 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing. (source from http://big5.dpm.org.cn:82/gate/big5/www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/117/@/5578.html?query=%E7%8C%97%E6%B8%AB%E5%8F%B2%E5%9B%9B%E8%B0%B7%20%E7%8C%97%E6%B8%AB%E5%8F%B2%20%E5%8F%B2)
By juxtaposing the masters’ idioms with my work, the intention of the "idea" emulation is coherently revealed due to the non-correspondence of outward appearance. In fact, I do not consider the emulation of the physical likeness in my paintings because it is much less innovative and of no help to me as a vehicle to express my idea. On the contrary, the emulation of the "idea" holds a higher degree of flexibility for me to establish my own idiomatic language on one hand, and to provide a means by which I can attempt to reach the "spiritual realm", 意境, of the corresponding artist through the very process of imitation on the other. In my eyes, the emulation of the "idea" of the ancient models is a way of reworking the classical visual and the idiomatic language. Through reworking and reinterpreting old elements as well as integrating and consolidating contemporary ones, new renditions of the tradition provide me with a greater understanding and appreciation of both past and present.

3.4 The Void and The Solid

Apart from reworking the idioms and motifs within my painting, I also focus on the spatial arrangements of the ancient models. In Chinese painting, as Michael Sullivan remarks, space "is simply – space, the matrix out of which forms emerge, the medium in which they are related, like the water in a goldfish bowl in which the fishes swim about."\(^{33}\) That is why a space could be occupied by a rock or a pine tree, or a poem. The writing,

---

indeed, is as much a part of the painting as any object given by the artist. Furthermore, the "void", 虚, to some extent, doesn't mean "nothing". It refers to "something" when the artist weighs it against the "solid". For example, the waterfall in the painting entitled Travellers Amid Streams and Mountains by Fan Kuan (Fig. 82), is not rendered by applying lines or ink-washes on the silk, but by the gap between the ink-wash of the mountain cliffs. The "void" gap vis-à-vis the "solid" serves as a substantial element responsible for representing the waterfall. In addition, Chinese landscape artists commonly leave a great deal of empty space in the upper part of the painting. (Fig. 83) Apart from representing the sky, the void space allows the viewer to fall deeply into meditation and it helps to create a poetic ambience in the painting. Dong Qichang said of the relationship between the void and the solid, "Only when a painter subtly weighs void against solid, and presents both elements with feeling, will his painting appear naturally energized."34 For me, a reversal

---

of the crucial concepts of yin and yang, 隱陽, in line with the void and the solid, 虛實, could make a provision for the revival of Chinese painting. In the painting entitled *Dichotomy* (Fig. 84), the flat, plain ink-wash covering a large surface area of each painting serves as the "void" space, comparable to the empty space of traditional painting. As such this reversal of an accepted position is a key concept in my notion of reworking the classics. In addition to attacking the paper surface with extreme dark tone and leaving the space as a complete void is also a means for me to revive the concepts of yin and yang, which can be seen in the painting entitled *CUHK*. (Fig. 85) In my rendition, this tetraptych becomes extremely minimal due to
the profoundly large sense of emptiness left in each painting. Treating the scenes as formalistic, non-representational elements, I juxtapose four of them up and down in order to create a rhythm across the painting surfaces.
Chapter 4

4.1 The Multi-panelled Setting

The idea of gathering the idioms from the eight masters is derived from Dong Qichang's concept of the Great Synthesis. Dong synthesized the "greatness" of various old masters in a single work aiming to form his art-historical viewpoint and aesthetics. For me, I prefer separating the elements that represent "greatnesses" by displaying them as a series, which is, as Harold Mok said, "quite common in Western art." In fact, imparting ideas of Western modern art to Chinese painting is one of my artistic aspirations to search for a new outlook. Displaying a work as a series had become something of a tradition in Western modern art during the late nineteenth century. The Impressionist Claude Monet (1840-1926) had worked on "series" paintings, in which a subject was depicted in varying light and weather conditions since the 1880s. The series of paintings entitled Haystacks, for example, were painted from the same

Fig. 86. Claude Monet, Stack of Wheat, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 65.6 x 92 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago. (source from http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/111318)

Fig. 87. Claude Monet, Stack of Wheat (Thaw, Sunset), 1890/91, oil on canvas, 64.9 x 92.3 cm, collection of The Art Institute of Chicago. (source from http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/100191)

35. See Koon Wai-bong, ed., Corners: Experimental Guohua by Koon Wai Bong (Hong Kong: Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2009), 9.
point of view but at different times of the day, or in different seasons of the year. (Fig. 86, 87, 88, 89, 90 and 91) It could be construed that a single painting could not adequately define Monet's concept of light and shade in order to reveal a "comprehensive" understanding of the haystacks. In China, painting and calligraphy, presented as a set, was very popular historically. For example, a landscape in four seasons or different species of vegetation, animals, or poems written in different scripts, were regularly divided in multi-scrolls to form either a diptych, tetraptych, octaptych, or polyptych. (Fig. 92, 93, 94 and 95) A series of individual paintings was sometimes meant to juxtapose with each other to build up one large
Fig. 92. Xie Zhiliu, Sunny Spring and Rainy Summer, 1974, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, each 22.4 x 51.8 cm, private collection. (source from *The Art of Xie Zhiliu and Chen Peiqiu* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Arts, 1998), 166-169.)

Fig. 93. Xie Zhiliu, Frosty Autumn and Snowy Winter, 1974, ink and colour on paper, handscroll, each 25.2 x 50.4 cm, private collection. (source from *The Art of Xie Zhiliu and Chen Peiqiu* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Arts, 1998), 170-173.)

Fig. 94. Xie Zhiliu, Birds and Flowers of Four Seasons, 1949, ink and colour on paper, hanging scroll, each 75 x 21.2 cm, private collection. (source from *The Art of Xie Zhiliu and Chen Peiqiu* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Arts, 1998), 84-85.)
painting, and was sometimes used to complement one another according to the season and the weather conditions of the year. In the paintings entitled *Reworking the Classics*, or *CUHK* (Fig. 85 and 41 respectively), the eight or four independent panels tend to be displayed in such a juxtaposition as to show the variations of the idioms of the ancient models, however the panels can sometimes be reduced in number in accordance with the limitation of the physical space of the exhibition venue. Such an in-series format with a certain number of paintings inevitably evokes a feeling of "repetitiveness" that can in turn reinforce a sense of "comprehensiveness". As the paintings entitled *Reworking the Classics* and *CUHK* are aimed at reworking the representative idioms of the ancient masters such as the tree

---

Fig. 95. Detail, Feng Kanghou, *A Set of Twenty Scrolls of Calligraphy After Ancient Scripts*, 1977-1979, ink on paper, hanging scroll, a set of twenty calligraphic works, each 136 x 36.5 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. (source from *Ink Art Vs Ink Art* (Shanghai: Shanghai Art Museum, 2010), 100-101.)
and rock methods, 
"comprehensiveness" comes to be a crucial element to convey this idea. After sourcing my references from the traditions of the East and the West, I make use of the horizontal extension of the scenery vis-à-vis the vertical panels to intensify the characteristics of the void and the solid, or *yin* and *yang*, which incorporates the crucial aesthetic theory in traditional Chinese painting. According to the composition of large format painting, the parts of the "solid" vis-à-vis the eight "void" panels are meant to delineate a sinuate line in an up-and-down rhythm. Although some painters have depicted a scene, or a grove of bamboo, across a number of scrolls or paintings such as the artwork entitled *Woldgate Woods, March 30-April 21 2006* by David Hockney (b. 1937) and the artwork entitled *Ink Bamboo* by Zheng Xie, 鄭燮 (1693-1765) (Fig. 96 and 97), they fail to
strike a balance between the "wholeness" of the painting and the "independence" of each part of the work.\textsuperscript{36}

Apart from the horizontal extension of the scenery as defined in the vertical panels, different spatial arrangements are explored to diversify the compositional effects among my works. For instance, the diptyches entitled \textit{Left and Right} (Fig. 98) and \textit{Up and Down} (Fig. 99) demonstrate how the calculated spatial arrangement in each work interplays with each other to form a whole. The motifs representing mountains, rocks, and trees occupy the upper or lower part, or a corner of the corresponding painting, to conjure up a sense of frisson or compositional tension. The landscape paintings entitled \textit{Three} (Fig. 100), \textit{Four} (Fig. 101) and \textit{Tree Methods} (Fig. 102) further develop the spatial arrangement in a polyptych format. Such stylistic innovation

\textsuperscript{36} In case of Chinese painting, it is primarily due to the size of the paper or silk, or the inconvenience caused to install the scrolls on wall.
Fig. 100. Koon Wai-bong, *Three*, 2005, ink on paper, mounted and framed, triptych, each 136 x 33 cm, artist’s collection.

Fig. 101. Koon Wai-bong, *Four*, 2005, ink on paper, mounted and framed, tetraptych, each 34.6 x 36.7 cm, private collection.
is an inferent theme in the set of delicately constructed insect paintings entitled *Corners 2008*. (Fig. 103) With the tiny creatures occupying corners of the corresponding painting, the whole set is arranged with a composition of dispersion, *kai*, 開, and gathering, *he*, 合, for which the principal requirement is to create visual momentum. Such a reciprocal composition makes sense of the in-series setting because the visual dynamics only occur when four or eight of the individual paintings are juxtaposed with each together. The compositional arrangement, at the same time, suggests that the formal pictoral structure is the most significant element in the painting.
to be followed by context and content. Indeed, the arrangement is primarily concerned with aesthetic balance and has little to do with either context or content of the work. Therefore, I choose to discard the traditional mounting for some of my works. In fact, the minimal structure of stretcher-support without a silk border or roller (Fig. 104, 105 and 106) has become distinctively coherent in the art "form" itself, regardless of the fact that the mounting as commonly seen in Western art may be associated with modernity.

As for composition, Xie He had reflected upon the significance of the "management of composition", jǐng yìng wèi zhì, 經營位置, in his Six Canons, revealing its importance in the aesthetics of Chinese painting. In landscape painting, composition often refers to the arrangement of the landscape motifs within a work such as the separation of foreground, middle ground, and background.
In addition, Guo Xi’s theory of the "three distances", 三遠, has governed Chinese painting for thousands of years. The notion of "distances" stands for three perspectives, The "elevated distance", gao yuan, 高遠, the "level distance", ping yuan, 平遠, and the "deep distance", shen yuan, 深遠, which allow the viewer to look at a scene from a lower level, at the same level of a mountain top, and with a bird’s-eye view respectively. It is very analogous to the case of Western landscape painting, though Western artists rarely term their works as specifically as the Chinese did. For me, the notion of "distances" is a basic rule to deploy the landscape motifs within a work, but it has nothing to do with paintings constructed as a set. Due to the fact that the paintings such as Reworking the Classics are not supposed to be displayed separately, the visual horizontal linkage throughout the eight individual works is, for me, a way to revive guohua in terms of composition.

4.2 Polyptych with continuing scenery

I endeavour to rework or reinterpret the format of the presentation besides considering the idioms of the ancient models. The handscroll is a unique format in Chinese painting while the hanging scroll and the album leaves
correspond to Western painting and the print album respectively. The emergence of the handscroll was well in advance of the invention of silk and paper when writing was inscribed on the surface of bamboo or wood strips. The strips were rolled from left to right for the sake of storage and the reading practice of the Chinese from right to left. Such a rolled form came to be the prototype of today's handscroll while paper and silk with a unique mounting format were developed later on. The handscroll is distinguished for its unique format of a horizontal extension from others like the hanging scroll that is meant to be hung on the wall and viewed upright. Instead, the handscroll is supposed to be laid flat on a plane, such as a table top. When a handscroll is unrolled from right to left with the left hand, the right hand correspondingly rolls it up from the right at the same time. A long handscroll is never unfolded in its entirety, but should show only in part between the viewer's hands to about an arm's length. In the process of viewing, the handscroll is being rolled and unrolled simultaneously and the scenes appear and disappear one after the other. Thus, the elements of time and space and multi-point perspectives are inherent in the visual narratives of the scroll. However interesting such a format may be, as Wan Qingli says, "it does not fit the way of presentation today."\(^{37}\) It is because art exhibition evolved from exposition is an important means by which art works engage public attention and artists advance their careers.\(^{38}\) Nevertheless, the

---

handscroll and album paintings are supposed to be seen in a private space by a few selected people and at close proximity as is defined by being held in the hands of the viewer. The polyptych in panel format is employed in my paintings to contain scenery that is separated into several parts. The painting entitled Bamboo (Fig. 107), for example, follows the style of the landscape painting entitled Bamboo Grove in Mist and Rain, 烟雨叢竹圖卷, attributed to Guan Daosheng, 管道昇 (1262-1319) (Fig. 108). To accommodate the contemporary exhibition environment in which the hanging format has its advantage, the bamboo groves are broken up into eight sections that are mounted in a hanging stretcher format typical of Western painting. Instead of changing the viewpoint of the viewer during the rolling and unrolling of the handscroll process, each hanging painting is adjusted slightly upwards or downwards according to the pictorial requirements of the images, which in a way contradicts the presentation.
format and philosophy of the handscroll. For me, it is a way to rethink, rework, and reinterpret the mounting format of Chinese painting.

4.3 Other Media

In search of contemporaneity, I recently sought to extend the boundaries of the presentation of guohua to create artworks relevant to the gallery setting in the twentieth-first century. The artworks entitled Motifs and Ideas (Fig. 109) comprises four versions which designate trees, rocks, waves, and clouds. Each version consists of three parts: a panel printed with a motif method from the Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden, a silk-mounted painting rendered with a particular landscape motif in accordance with the same manual, and a headphone which introduces two different kinds of sound to represent nature and contemporary city life respectively. It is designated to show my perception of modern city dwellers who, unlike their

Fig. 109. Koon Wai-bong, Motifs and Ideas, 2009, mixed media, 205 x 400 cm, artist’s collection.
precedents, have lost the ability to read the motifs. In the past, a viewer was able to decipher the motifs due to the mode of education and art training they received, and the indecipherable elements such as concepts and meanings beyond the motifs, or even the sound, could be read at first sight. On the contrary, city dwellers saturated with information from a variety of media such as print, television, radio, and the Internet are seemingly incapable of understanding the motifs that their precedents took their time to learn and study. In my opinion, people looking at the tree motif, for example, may associate it with those rendered by past masters, or with the sound created by foliage in nature, but they might also confuse it with modern elements. Therefore, while the headset introduce the natural sound of trees on one hand, it is also playing noises of the city from a street corner on the other. The integrated sounds from both nature and the city, to me, is symbolic of the mindset of city dwellers.

The inclusion of sound components is an important element in the new exploration of my ink paintings. In Hong Kong, as I have said before, many of my contemporary artists are working with a range of possibilities for ink painting by combining or substituting it with other media. Wong Chung-yu, for example, works with "digital" ink art without physically getting involved in the media. His work entitled Spiritual Water II is a good example. (Fig. 10) He says, "Works with a total absence of ink and paper and made by fully virtualized ink effect with digital media will be an art form covered by the
term of 'Contemporary Ink Art' in future.\textsuperscript{39} His belief that new media will play a pivotal role in the development of new ink art during the twenty-first century is clearly evident and shared by other contemporary young artists such as Tong Wing-sze (Tang Yongshi), 唐詠詩 and Mak Shing-fung (Mai Chengfeng), 麥盛豐. Regarding the further development of the ink art, I am all in favour of a wider diversity of different artworks. In some sense, I appreciate the conventional painter who persistently stick to the traditional tools and materials to create artwork. At the same time, my support also goes to those who replace the brush and ink with new media or digital technology without a second thought. However, to embody the core values of guohua, such as the concepts and the metaphysical characteristics of brush and ink in my works is still central to my artistic aims. Even though the sound component of Motifs and Ideas is appropriated with a contemporary Western mode of expression, the quintessential qualities of brush and ink are retained in the work in my quest for an inherent sense of my cultural Chinese heritage. Such a national trait is not connected with the superficial medium, but is derived from the skills and philosophy of traditional Chinese painting, literati painting in particular, for which other contemporary ink artists are not concerned.

\textsuperscript{39} The text is quoted from the artist statement of Wong Chung-yu. See Eric Leung, ed., \textit{Ink Contemporary: ReXPERIMENT} (Hong Kong: Artist Commune, 2009), 20.
Conclusion

Hong Kong, a meeting place of Chinese and Western cultural narratives, saw flourish of interest in Chinese painting over years since the 1960s. In the wake of the revitalization of guohua in mainland China at the turn of the twentieth century, Hong Kong artists further developed Chinese painting to reveal their own cultural identity. Local ink painters have freely employed modernist Western elements from foreign traditions in art for Chinese ink and paper, in order to claim a contemporary position in the history of Chinese art over the last few decades. At the turn of the twenty-first century, ink painting had reached a point where the concept of "Chinese painting" had become ambiguous and controversial. Many so-called "Chinese paintings" that had appropriated various concepts and modes of expression from Western art were criticized for their faint connection with Chinese cultural narratives. Up until now, an equation to hybridize Chinese painting with the profundities of Western cultivation and Chinese traditions can still be said to hang in the balance.

Positioned as guohua rather than as Chinese painting, my painting emphasizes the core values of traditional painting, especially those of literati painting. Compared with Hong Kong new ink paintings, my works are deeply embedded in the tradition of brush and ink and the metaphysical ideas beyond them. This illustrates a strong point of difference between my guohua paintings and the ink painting of many of my contemporaries. Based on the concept of "reworking the classics", I emulate the ancient classical
models in landscape painting for the purpose of revising, reinterpreting, renewing, and reviving the principles of *guohua*. Such an emulation is no longer merely regarded as a means of art learning or a way to "communicate" with past masters, but is a revelation of my understanding of the ancient idioms through the decoding of individual landscape motifs. For example, at this point, my paintings differ from those of the Four Wangs of the early Qing Dynasty who were keen to create a form of landscape painting in a number of individual paintings. It could be construed that a single painting could not adequately define Monet's concept of light and shade in order to reveal a "comprehensive" understanding of the haystacks of past masters. In addition, I have reconsidered many of the meanings of the modes of expression in Chinese painting such as spatial composition, the relation between the void and the solid, and the setting of multi-panelled format, and have employed other media in search of contemporaneity. Stylistically, I have exaggerated the void space in composition as in *CUHK*, to give the painting a new look. As well I have refused to follow the golden rule of the void and the solid by treating the "void" as the "solid", and vice versa, as in the painting entitled *Laterality*. In *Reworking the Classics*, I demonstrate how to display paintings in multi-panels in which the over-all rhythm does not undermine the completeness of individual painting. Moreover, the multi-panelled painting such as *Bamboo*, displays my rethinking of the format of the handscroll format in my attempt to accommodate my work to a modern gallery environment. I have also introduced the use of audio elements to push the boundaries of Chinese painting. In my opinion, the
principle of guohua should not be restricted by the media used. In Motifs and Ideas, I employ different sounds and noises from nature and the city in order to re-examine the conflicts between man and nature, coding and decoding, and in doing so reveal the ancient mode of art education and the modern mindset of city dwellers.

Building on the solid foundation of traditional art theories and concepts, I aim to continue to explore the concept of "reworking the classics". In keeping with the black or the white series, the arrangement of multi-panelled painting remains a direction for further development. Technically speaking, the greater the number of panels integrated within a set of works, the more compositional possibilities there are to play with. In fact, the arrangement of the work entitled Tree Methods, for example, has already suggested this potential. In the future, the application of the format of the insect paintings entitled Corners to landscape painting and the extension of the arrangement of Bamboo in terms of scale will become crucial resources for my projects. With regard to other media, an exploration of other relevant alternative options does not only amount to opening up more possibilities for the development of Chinese painting, but is also in keeping pace with prevailing global artistic trends in the twenty-first century. From the experience of creating the mixed-media work Motifs and Ideas, I will continue to work on other media such as video or the Internet by using images, sounds, or videos from YouTube, for example, or other popular Internet platforms.
As a contemporary artist, I am inevitably concerned in extending my art practice to parallel and challenge the tendencies of the international art world. Even though the spatial composition, presentation, and the other media explored in my recent works has come close to the modes of expression in Western art, I have never pursued contemporaneity at the cost of "Chineseness". In *Motifs and Ideas*, which goes well beyond the tradition of Chinese painting, the core values of the brush and ink and the concept of "reworking the classics" are still regarded as a prerequisite for artistic creation.
Bibliographies

Books


35. Hong Kong Arts Centre Thirtieth Anniversary Award - Exhibition of Winning and Shortlisted Entries. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre,


41. *Ink in the City*. Hong Kong: Artist Commune, 2006.


52. Kuo, Jason C., *Heirs to a Great Tradition: Modern Chinese Paintings from the Tsien-Hsiang-Chai Collection*. College Park: Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland, 1993.


54. Lang, Shaojun and Shui Tianzhong, eds., *Select Essays on Chinese Arts in the Twentieth Century, 二十世紀中國美術文選 (Volume Two)*. Shanghai: Duo Yun Xuan, 1999.


63. Liao, Guiying, Study on New Development of Hong Kong New Ink Painting in the 80’s, 八十年代以來香港水墨畫新發展探討 (M.F.A. thesis). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1996.


118. Wong, Aida Yuen, Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China. Honolulu: University of


Articles


149. Fu, Li-tsu Flora, "Reframing Landscapes: Koon Wai Bong's "Past Becomes Present," in Past Becomes Present: Works by Koon Wai Bong ed. by Koon Wai-bong (Hong Kong: Center for the Arts, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, 2009), 4-8.


153. "'Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards’ Encouraging Pluralistic Development of Local Art Creation, 「香港當代藝術雙年獎」鼓勵本地創作多元發展, Hong Kong Economic Times (June 9,


2009), 7-12.


166. Youli, 尤力, "'Award' Goes on a Continuous Journey for the Purpose of 'Exhibition'," *a.m.post*, volume 78/June (2010): 54-57.

**Websites**

167. The Art Institute of Chicago, http://www.artic.edu


Appendix 1: Appropriate Durable Record

Plate 1. Koon Wai-bong, *Laterality*, 2008, ink on paper, mounted on woodblocks, diptych, each 178 x 60.5 cm, artist’s collection.
Plate 2. Koon Wai-bong, *Reworking the Classics*, 2008, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art.
Plate 3. Koon Wai-bong, *Up and Down*, ink on paper, hanging scroll, diptych, each 136.5 x 34 cm, private collection.
Plate 5. Koon Wai-bong, Corners 2008, 2008, ink and colour on paper, mounted and framed, octaptych, each 30.3 x 30.3 cm, artist's collection.
Plate 6.
Koon Wai-bong. Ecclesiastes, 2008, ink and colour on paper, mounted and framed, triptych, each 64.2 x 31 cm, artist's collection.
Plate 7. Koon Wai-bong, *Mountains and Streams*, 2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, pentaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, artist's collection.
Plate 9. Koon Wai-bong, *Reworking the Classics 2009*, 2009, ink on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 213 x 45.8 cm, private collection
Plate 12. Koon Wai-bong, *Deep Valley*, 2009, ink and colour on silk, mounted on stretchers, 213 x 45.8 cm, private collection.
Plate 15. Koon Wai-bong. *Bamboo*, 2010, ink and colour on silk, mounted on stretchers, octaptych, each 25 x 25 cm, private collection.
Plate 16. Koon Wai-bong, Motifs and Ideas, 2009, mixed media, 205 x 400 cm, artist’s collection.
Appendix 2:

Curriculum Vitae

A) Solo Exhibition Record

1. *Sauntering around…: Chinese Paintings by Koon Wai Bong, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China, September 22 to 30, 2011. (D.F.A graduation exhibition)*

2. *Koon Wai Bong — Picturing Mountains and Streams, Grotto Fine Art, Hong Kong, China, September 7 to 30, 2011. (Invited)*

3. *Guohua: A Contemporary Interpretation, Blue Lotus Gallery, Hong Kong, China, November 7 to December 18, 2010. (Invited)*

4. *Past Becomes Present: A Solo Exhibition of Chinese Painting by Koon Wai Bong, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong, China, October 27 to November 8, 2009. (Invited)*

5. *Koon Wai Bong: Reworking the Classics, Blue Lotus Gallery, Hong Kong, China, October 4 to November 29, 2009. (Invited)*

6. *Lift up My Eyes to the Mountain: Koon Wai-bong’s Chinese Landscape Painting, Hui gallery, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, May 3 to 9, 2002. (M.F.A. graduation exhibition)*

B) Group Exhibition Record

1. *Legacy and Creations – "Ink Art vs Ink Art", Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, China, May 27 to August 28, 2011. (Invited)*

2. *Hong Kong International Art Fair 2011 (presented by Grotto Fine Art), Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, May 25 to 29, 2011. (Invited)*

3. *Outshining Exhibition 2011, Jockey Club Ti-I College, Hong Kong, China, January 9 to March 5, 2011. (Invited)*

4. *Être dans les Choux (for the 10 Years of Fotanian: Open Studios 2011), Blue Lotus Gallery, Hong Kong, China, January 8 to February 27, 2011. (Invited)*
5. *Ink Art in the New Century*, Hong Kong Central Library, Hong Kong, China, January 4 to 9, 2011. (Invited)


8. *Fine Art Asia 2010* (presented by Grotto Fine Art), Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, October 3 to 6, 2010. (Invited)


10. *In Contact with China: Hong Kong · Water · Ink · Colour*, Beijing World Art Museum, The China Millennium Monument, Beijing, China, June 28 to July 4, 2010. (Invited)

11. *In Prelude: Opening Exhibition @ Koo Ming Kown Exhibition Gallery*, Communication and Visual Arts Building, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China, June 18 to July 2, 2010.

12. *Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards 2009*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, China, May 21 to August 1, 2010. (Art competition)


14. *Hong Kong International Art Fair 2010* (presented by Grotto Fine Art), Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, May 27 to 30, 2010. (Invited)

16. *Blessed are the Peace-makers*, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, March 2 to 21, 2010.


18. 2009 Min, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau Invitational Exhibition of Chinese Painting, Shishi Museum, Fujian, China, October 29 to November 3, 2009, and Xiamen Museum, Xiamen, China, November 13 to 15, 2009. (Invited)

19. *Water & Ink Interpretations: Taipei Invitation Exhibition of Hong Kong Modern Ink Painting*, National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei, Taiwan, October 20 to November 2, 2009. (Invited)

20. *Ink Contemporary: ReXPERIMENT*, Artist Commune, Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, China, October 3 to 28, 2009. (Invited)

21. *Hong Kong International Art and Antiques Fair 2009* (presented by Artist Commune), Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, October 3 to 6, 2009.

22. *Hong Kong International Art and Antiques Fair 2009* (presented by Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong), Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, October 3 to 6, 2009.


24. *Shanghai Art Fair* (presented by MOYT Fine Art International), ShanghaiMART, Shanghai, China, September 8 to 13, 2009. (Invited)

25. *Exhibition of the Works of Hong Kong Calligraphers’ Association*, Exhibition Hall, City Hall, Hong Kong, China, June 5 to 7, 2009.

26. *2008/09 Visual Arts Thematic Exhibition: Hong Kong · Water · Ink ·
Colour: Exhibition of Chinese Paintings 2009, Exhibition Gallery, Hong Kong Central Library, Hong Kong, China, June 28 to July 20, 2009. (Invited)

27. Dao Revealed through Brush & Ink: Chinese Paintings and Works of Calligraphy & Seal Engraving by Wan Qingli, Daniel Lau Chak Kwong and Koon Wai Bong, Gallery of Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China, January 17 to 29, 2009, and Lam Woo International Conference Centre, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, China, February 2 to 9, 2009.

28. "Hong Kong Arts Centre Thirtieth Anniversary Award" Exhibition of Winning and Shortlisted Entries, Hong Kong International Art and Antiques Fair 2008, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China, October 4 to 7, 2008. (Art competition)

29. "Hong Kong Arts Centre Thirtieth Anniversary Award" Competition Entries Exhibition, Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong, China, August 7 to 21, 2008. (Art competition)

30. Configurational Force: Chinese Calligraphy, Chinese Painting and Glass by Daniel Lau, Koon Wai Bong and Sunny Wang, Blue Lotus Gallery, Hong Kong, China, June 28 to July 20, 2008. (Invited)


34. Recent Works by Part-time Teachers of Department of Fine Arts, Hui gallery, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, April 27 to May 13, 2006. (Invited)
35. *Hong Kong Art Biennial 2005*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, China, December 16, 2005 to March 5, 2006. (Art competition)


37. *Art Exhibition in Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the School of Continuing Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong, China, April 8 to 10, 2005. (Invited)


39. *In Touch with Visual Arts: Exhibitions and Education Programme*, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong, China, August 11 to 21, 2004. (Invited)

40. *Cheng Ming in All Directions: Fortieth Years of Art at The Chinese University of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong, China, December 12 to 30, 2003. (Invited)

41. *Artworks by Hong Kong Teachers 2003*, Hong Kong Cultural Centre, Hong Kong, China, October 18 to 28, 2003. (Invited)

42. *Impression of Beijing: Pau Mo-ching and Koon Wai-bong’s Chinese Painting*, Hui gallery, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, April 26 to May 1, 2002.

43. *Dialogue: Koon Wai-bong and Chan Pui’s Chinese Painting*, Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong, China, December 22 to 27, 1999.

44. *Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial 1998*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, China, September 15 to October 11, 1998. (Art competition)

45. *Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial 1996*, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong, China, September 17 to November 3, 1996. (Art competition)
C) Book Publication Record

1. Koon, Wai-bong, *Reworking the Classics*. Hong Kong: Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2011. ISBN 978-988-19665-1-3 (This refereed publication has been assessed by international academics.)


D) Exhibition Catalogue List


F) Artwork Publication Record


14. Koon, Wai-bong, "Lyrics", calligraphic work; and "Couplet," calligraphic
work. In *Exhibition of the Works of Hong Kong Calligraphers’ Association* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Calligraphers’ Association, 2009), 167-8.


Appendix 3:

Art Review Record


9. Chan, Pedith. "Picturing Contemporaneity: Reading Koon Wai-bong’s Landscape Painting in the Hong Kong Context," in Reworking the Classics,
by Koon Wai-bong, 229-250. Hong Kong: Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, 2011.


Appendix 3:

CD