

Modern Chinese Painting & Europe

New Perceptions, Artists Encounters,
and the Formation of Collections

Michaela Pejčochová and Clarissa von Spee (eds.)

Reimer

Preface

Europe, its history and economic power is an intriguing topic in current political debates. The publication, *Modern Chinese Painting & Europe. New Perceptions, Artists Encounters and the Formation of Collections*, is indeed a timely product. The book directs our attention beyond Europe to Asia. It offers insight into fruitful and friendly inter-national cultural collaboration despite war and revolutions that shook whole nations and the world in the twentieth century.

According to the wishes of the late Magdalene Clara Hammonds (with the initials M.C.H.), the MCH Foundation was established in 1995. The Foundation is led by the belief that culture and art can make a difference in human relations and can serve a positive and diplomatic role in world affairs. Diplomatic activities of her former husband had brought Magdalene Boltze (later called Hammonds) to China and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s where she began to collect art. In Japan, Magdalene met the American geologist George Scott Hammonds whom she subsequently married in Yokohama. After Scott Hammonds death, Magdalene moved to Baden-Baden in Germany in the 1990s. This was the time when the idea of establishing a foundation developed, entrusting its realization and management to board members she had appointed herself.

The MCH Foundation endeavours to support research projects and publications related to Magdalene Hammond's interest in the arts and culture of Asia. The Foundation's art collection has been expanded in recent decades with twentieth century Chinese paintings. These included most notably the acquisition of modern Chinese paintings of the late Victoria Contag von Winterfeldt (1906–1973) whose collecting and scholarly activities form a chapter in this book. While the Foundation's origins were inspired in Asia in the 1930s and 1940s, it is naturally a keen interest of this institution to foster research and publication in this field.

The Foundation congratulates the editors, Michaela Pejčochová and Clarissa von Spee, as well as all authors of this volume to their valuable contributions. We would also like to convey our good wishes and heartfelt gratitude to all those who were involved in the book's production. Beate Behrens, Ben Bauer, Anna Felmy and Nicola Willam have overseen the publication of this book with great professionalism and care. We are grateful for our long-standing partnership with Reimer Book Publishers in Berlin

who have successfully published a series of monographs on Asia, supported and issued by the MCH Foundation. We hope that this volume will make a fascinating read and expand our knowledge of cultural relationships between twentieth century Asia and the European world.

Dr. Hermann Siegfried Graf zu Münster, Chairman of the MCH Foundation



Qi Baishi, *Squirrels*, before 1946, hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper, 134 x 33.4 cm, Former collection of Victoria Contag, © The MCH Foundation



Michael Sullivan with a painting by Pang Xunqin, the scroll *Tiger Hill, Suzhou* (1979, ink and water-colour on paper, 67.4 x 67.3 cm, EA2015.257) was given to Michael by the artist in Beijing in 1979, exact date and location of the photography unknown, possibly early or mid-1980s, © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Introduction

China produced one of the world's greatest civilizations. When the country's imperial system collapsed after thousands of years in 1911, China's cultural heritage and its relevance to solve modern problems became the subject of heated debate. Views differed on how China's cultural and artistic legacy could be used to support the establishment of a modern nation state worthy of world respect.¹

Painting and calligraphy, traditionally regarded as the high arts of China, played a crucial role in this debate. While the Chinese art education system during the Republican period (1912–1949) included and propagated European styles and materials, traditional ink painting, “lacking realism”, was officially criticized as an impediment to China's modernization. However, China's move towards modernism, in a Western sense, came to a temporary halt with Japan's invasion of the Mainland in the 1930s and later with the Communist takeover in 1949. Modernization through exchange with international art movements was not resumed until after the Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping's 鄧小平 (1904–1997) reform policy in the late 1970s.

The focus of this book is on Europe's integral role in the advocacy of *guohua* 國畫 as “national-style painting”.² *Guohua*, referring to brush painting in ink in traditional formats, is often misconstrued as a left-over art form from the dynastic age that restrained itself with classical traditions. This book places ink painting at the forefront of cultural exchange with Europe. Notable proponents of *guohua*, Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864–1957) and Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), are discussed in the context of Europe where they represented this art form against the backdrop of encroaching westernization in their home country. While the role of ink painting was questioned in mainland China, exhibitions and the formation of collections in Europe of this indigenous art form helped to raise China's profile and reputation abroad.

China's development and progress in the nineteenth and twentieth century are often measured in terms of its degree of westernization. The essays of this book depart from this approach and balance their focus back and forth between China and Europe. Aiming to convey an even, yet differentiated view, the authors address issues of cultural exchange and interaction in recognition of each perspective. In addition, the book presents a wealth of previously unpublished historic photographs and paintings, providing new study material and information. Since Russian and East European collections, such as those in the State Hermitage Museum, the National Gallery in Prague and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin, have been less familiar to scholars active in Western Europe and the United States, it was a deliberate choice of

the editors to highlight each with a chapter in this book. Moreover, while the scholarly contributions and collecting activities of individuals, such as Michael Sullivan (1916–2013), have been widely published in the English-speaking world, this book dedicates separate chapters to less known but equally pioneering figures in the field, such as Vojtěch Chytil (1896–1936), Victoria Contag (1906–1973), and Guo Youshou 郭有守 (1901–1977).

Essays

The editors are well aware that the choice of essays can give neither a coherent, nor a comprehensive picture of all aspects of twentieth century Chinese painting in Europe. The variety of contributions reveals the complexity and diversity of interaction and exchange between China and Europe at the time. The essays are divided in three groups.

New Perceptions, the heading for the first group of essays, emerge on both sides of the continent with the introduction of unfamiliar visual material resulting from Sino-European encounters. Yin Hwang's essay, "The Art of Describing the New: Chinese Visuality and Europe in the Early Modern Period," discusses Chinese paintings entering European collections through trade connections in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries; and Western imagery being introduced to China in the late nineteenth century. The introduction of new visual imagery and changing perceptions in the early twentieth century are discussed in Michaela Pejčochová's essay, "The Meeting of Two Worlds: Vojtěch Chytil as Collector of Chinese Ink Painting." Vojtěch Chytil not only taught Western oil painting to Chinese students, he also started to collect modern Chinese paintings and later exhibited them in Europe. Chytil organized some of the earliest exhibitions of modern Chinese ink painting in Europe, and furthermore introduced Qi Baishi as one of the best represented Chinese living artists in a European collection. Given Qi Baishi's importance in the history of modern Chinese painting today, this is a remarkable achievement. The following essay "Victoria Contag: Pioneer, Collector and Scholar of Chinese Paintings," by Clarissa von Spee introduces Victoria Contag who arrived in China in 1934 to study Chinese painting. As a foreigner, her serious engagement with artists and the traditional arts of China had an encouraging effect on Chinese ink painters, enforcing the idea of establishing ink painting as national-style painting, *guohua*. Like Chytil, Contag maintained close friendships with Chinese artists and connoisseurs. These relationships enabled her to transmit and convey in her writings the Chinese perception and understanding of art to a European public. Since most scholars at the time judged Chinese art according to Western standards or through the Japanese perception of Chinese art, Contag's writings were exceptional.

The second section of the book, *Chinese Artists and Europe*, explores the various agendas and legacies of Chinese artists visiting Europe. The authors address their interactions with Europeans whom they met either in their home country or while Chinese artists were abroad. Éric Lefebvre's essay, "Collecting as an Ambassade:

Guo Youshou and the Introduction of Modern Chinese Painting to Post-War France,” moves the book’s discussion chronologically forward into the mid twentieth century. Lefebvre illuminates Guo Youshou not only as a man of the May Fourth generation who came to Europe for study, but as a key political and cultural player of his time. Guo established friendship with Chinese artists who resided in Paris and in China. He later embarked on a diplomatic career and donated part of his Chinese art collection to the Musée Cernuschi with the intent to establish international relations and promote Chinese culture in France. Today, Guo Youshou’s donations form a significant part of the painting collection in the Musée Cernuschi. In addition, the essay reveals Guo Youshou’s “mysterious” entanglement in the political affairs of his country. Rui Jiang-Blumenhagen’s essay, “Zhang Daqian Meets Pablo Picasso: New Insight into the Circumstances of a Legendary Meeting,” focuses on Zhang Daqian’s visit with Picasso (1881–1973) in Cannes in 1956. She explores Zhang Daqian’s agenda in setting up and documenting the meeting with the intention to establish himself as Picasso’s “Eastern” counterpart. While the visit has been subject of earlier studies, Jiang-Blumenhagen’s discussion of Picasso’s statements on Chinese art and his ink sketches adds a new dimension to the record of this event and documents Picasso’s keen interest in Chinese aesthetics.³ The last essay in the group, “Chinese – European Encounters: Modern Ink Paintings at the British Museum,” by Clarissa von Spee focuses on a selection of works from the British Museum to illustrate the development and diversity of ink painting by artists active in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Europe. Each painting has a specific provenance that documents an encounter connecting China with Europe and *vice versa*. The essay expands the discussion geographically and in time beyond mainland China and the twentieth century. Since the author refers to works in the British Museum collection, the essay anticipates the theme of the third section in this book: *The Formation of Museum Collections in Europe*.

The Formation of Museum Collections in Europe presents essays by curators introducing historical aspects that conditioned the formation of four of the major museum collections of modern Chinese painting in Europe. “Chinese Paintings in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford,” by Shelagh Vainker sets the museum’s collection into the context of the institution’s history and the development of the field of Asian art in England. At his death in 2013, the Oxford based Michael Sullivan bequeathed his Chinese paintings, one of the world’s greatest private collections of modern and contemporary Chinese art, to the Ashmolean Museum.⁴ It comprises more than four-hundred works of art assembled by Professor Sullivan since the 1940s, and represents works by the principal artists of late-twentieth century and contemporary China. Amongst the most important pieces in the collection are works by Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian, and Fu Baoshi 傅抱石 (1904–1965). Key to Michael Sullivan’s understanding of the subject, and to the collection of Chinese art which he built with his wife Khoan, were the friendships he made with artists both in China and abroad. Works from the collection have been displayed over the years at the Ashmolean in the Khoan and Michael Sullivan Gallery which opened in 2000. The bequest marks a milestone in

the museum's collecting history and is discussed by the author alongside other important museum acquisitions. "Collecting Modern Chinese Paintings at the Hermitage, St Petersburg," by Kira Samosyuk introduces a group of paintings that stayed in the museum collection after the closure of Xu Beihong's 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953) landmark travelling exhibition. This show of modern Chinese paintings toured around Europe, and was exhibited in Leningrad (St Petersburg) in 1934. The striking painting of a lion by Xu Beihong from this group was chosen to feature on the book's cover. Filling the whole space of the composition, the beast's muscular body seems to express the moment of focus and tension before it leaps forward to attack its prey. Painted presumably specially for the touring exhibition in the 1930s, the motif may well express the artist's concern for the fate of his country in the years during which Japan had begun to attack and invade China. "The Formation of the Modern Chinese Painting Collection at the National Gallery in Prague" by Michaela Pejšochová describes the development of this large collection in two stages. The first part was assembled by Vojtěch Chytil during his sojourns in China in the 1920s and 1930s. The second stage began after the Second World War when Czechoslovakia and China had both committed themselves to socialism and declared friendship in political, economic and cultural spheres. These unique circumstances resulted in a collection that today ranges among the most outstanding outside China and Taiwan. "Collecting, Exhibiting, Interpreting: Modern Chinese Painting in Berlin" by Uta Rahman-Steinert presents an equally fascinating account of the formation of two modern Chinese painting collections: one in East and one in West Berlin and their amalgamation in 1991 after Germany's reunification. The last two essays discuss how the collections in Prague and in East Berlin could substantially grow within the Eastern Block during the time of the Cold War (1947–1991), while contacts and exchanges with mainland Chinese artists in non-socialist European countries ceased and came to a standstill. Institutions in the Western Block, such as the Ashmolean Museum and the museum in West Berlin, directed their attention in the 1960s and 1970s towards acquiring works by artists from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Earlier Studies

Exhibitions inspire and often anticipate future academic research. This is true with regard to the field of modern Chinese painting that includes the media of oil and ink. The first scholarly study in a Western language on the arts of the twentieth century in China was written in 1959, three decades after the first exhibitions had been staged and collections had begun to be formed. The following survey attempts to outline the mainstream of earlier studies in the field and identify some future research areas that relate to the subject of this book.

Michael Sullivan's pioneering study, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (1959), was the first book to address the subject, followed by a later revised and more com-

prehensive edition, *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (1996).⁵ These books have remained standard reference works to the present day. *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting* (1988), edited by Mayching Kao, complemented Sullivan's study and offered a collection of in-depth studies on ink painting by various experts in the field.⁶ Published in the same year, *The Winking Owl. Art in the People's Republic of China* (1988) by Ellen Johnston Laing, greatly enhanced our understanding of the arts of the postwar period in mainland China.⁷ A more comprehensive approach that included developments of modern painting from both the Republican period, the Mao era, and throughout into the 1990s, was presented in the exhibition catalogue *A Century in Crisis. Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (1998) by Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen.⁸ While the American scholars Laing, Andrews and Shen focused on mainland China in general, three later exhibitions curated in Europe illuminate the history and engagement of specific twentieth century cities with China. The Munich exhibition catalogue, *Shanghai Modern 1919–1945* (2004) vividly illustrates and documents Shanghai as a centre of exchange with Europe and the world through fashion, commerce, and the arts.⁹ *Masters of 20th-Century Chinese Ink Painting from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague* (2008) by Michaela Pejčochová presents for the first time a complete overview and insight into the history of the collection and its represented artists.¹⁰ *Artistes chinois à Paris* (2011) edited by Éric Lefebvre illustrates the fruitful years of exchange and the creativity of Chinese artists in France, whose works are to a large part collected in the Musée Cernuschi.¹¹ The exhibitions in Munich, Prague and Paris are in line with the approach of this book in that they illuminate early interaction and contact of Chinese artists with Europe and *vice versa*. However, major areas of research remain to be explored.

It is a striking phenomenon that the early exhibitions of modern Chinese painting in Europe organized in the 1930s by Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994), Xu Beihong and Vojtěch Chytil did not include oil paintings. The crucial question arises to what extend this was the personal decision of the organizers, and which other factors may have influenced their concepts.¹² Parallel developments in Japan may be taken into consideration to analyse the circumstances of the time. The criticism of traditional painting as an impediment to China's modernization and the need for the introduction of Western "realism" in the arts is expressed in 1918 in an article by Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (*New Youth* magazine). A decade later, in 1929, the Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), expresses his regrets in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue of the First National Exhibition of Art (*Diyici quanguo meishu zhanlanhui* 第一次全國美術展覽會) in Shanghai, that oil paintings still represent a minority of the works on display.¹³ Both statements contradict the fact that, with the consent of the government, only ink paintings were sent abroad in the 1930s exhibitions. In addition, it is important to note that the majority of artists in fact continued to practise in the paper and ink medium and believed in innovation within tradition rather than adopting concepts of Western art.

Another aspect that deserves further study and re-evaluation, is the importance of artists from Beijing who are often characterized as "conservative" and less innovative

in comparison with artists of the so-called Shanghai or Lingnan 嶺南 Schools. Artists from Beijing did not only organize international exhibitions in the 1920s together with their Japanese colleagues, but made it also a goal to transmit and teach the concept of national-style painting to foreigners, such as Katy Talati (Da Shunming 達舜明, 1922–2015), or Fritz van Briesen. Artists like Pu Quan 溥佺 (1913–1991) even produced painting manuals with the specific intention to instruct foreign students, one of which is collected in the British Museum. Two leaves of this manual are reproduced in the essay on modern Chinese ink painting in the British Museum by Clarissa von Spee (see Figs. 1 and 2).¹⁴

Acknowledgments

This book is the outcome of the Study Day *Modern Chinese Painting & Europe*, organized in conjunction with the exhibition *Modern Chinese Ink Painting. A Century of New Directions*, at the British Museum on 25 June, 2012. The research papers presented on this occasion constitute the core of this book. Participants of the Study Day were Hildegard Rui Jiang-Blumenhagen, the late Michael Sullivan, Nick Pearce, Nixi Cura, Uta Rahman-Steinert, Shane McCausland, Shelagh Vainker, Yin Hwang and the editors of this book. The Study Day was hosted at the School for Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London University, made possible through the kind mediation of Shane McCausland and Tianshuang Liang. We are equally indebted to Christie's Education, in particular to Elizabeth Hammer, for having supported the idea for a Study Day from the beginning and making its realization possible. The keynote speaker of the Day was none other than the honourable and much admired Michael Sullivan who sadly passed away before the publication of this book could be completed. In fond memory of his invaluable contributions to the field of modern Chinese art, this volume is dedicated to him.

The publication of this book would not have been possible without the generous support of the MCH Foundation and the foundation's board members, chairman Dr. Hermann Graf zu Münster, Gary Hoskins and Klaus Wagner. The book itself has been steered through design and production by the talented team of the Reimer Verlag in Berlin, led by Beate Behrens, Ben Bauer, Anna Felmy and Nicola Willam. *Modern Chinese Painting & Europe. New Perceptions, Artists Encounters, and the Formation of Collections*, is part of a series of monographs and catalogues on Asian Art published by Reimer Book Publishers with the support of the MCH Foundation. We also express our heartfelt gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments and valuable advice. In addition, we acknowledge the support offered by Yuen-Kit Szeto and James Godfrey.

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China – Europe and Visual Cultures: A Historic Outline

As early as the 15th century, Portuguese ships landed in Southern China bringing foreign merchants and missionaries on shore. Missionaries introduced the first European images of Christian icons to China alongside other novelties. The sublime execution and vivid verisimilitude of European prints, drawings and oil paintings caused a sensation among the Chinese. The Chinese elite, in particular, was used to look at landscape paintings in ink on paper or silk as the supreme expression of the genius of a painter.¹⁵ Similarly, Europeans were fascinated by the arrival of Chinese porcelain in Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands from the 14th century onwards.¹⁶ Europeans developed a taste for Chinese painting much later, most notably from the second half of the 19th century. The existence of four rare Chinese paintings is however already documented in an Austrian collection for the late 16th century.¹⁷

From the late 19th century, in particular after the end of the Opium Wars in 1860, the presence of Europeans who settled in the official trading port cities increased. The port of Guangzhou (Canton) in southern China was open to foreigners even earlier, in 1685, during the reign of the Kangxi emperor. It was thus here where the milieu for the first Sino-Western encounters and exchanges developed to a considerable degree. From the late 17th century, Chinese workshops in the seaports (*yanghang* 洋行) began to make mass-produced pictures. The audience for these so-called trade paintings were in particular foreigners. Foreign artists, like the well known George Chinnery (1774–1852), are recorded to have worked in Canton as well. Their works became models for some Chinese artists who produced for the European market.¹⁸

A systematic introduction of Western painting to China, however, began after the fall of the Qing empire in 1911. As part of the many reforms introduced by the new government, artists were sent abroad to study European-style painting. Upon their return, they established art academies inspired by Western models in major Chinese cities, disseminating new knowledge across the country. Partly initiated by Liu Haisu, the first institution of this kind was a private art school in Shanghai, today called the Shanghai College of Fine Arts. Academies in Beijing, Hangzhou, Nanjing and other artistic centres followed. Chinese students could now study Western drawing techniques, colour theories, three-dimensional modelling and the use of perspective. They were also for the first time allowed to attend mixed-gender classes, had classes *en-plein-air*, and painted from nude models, a practice that caused much indignation among their conservative compatriots.¹⁹

The art academies, including the Shanghai College of Fine Arts, the Beijing Fine Arts College, and National Academy of Art in Hangzhou, among others, invited foreign painters who helped to spread Western art education in China. The most famous of these is probably André Claudot (1892–1982), a close collaborator of Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900–1991). Claudot taught first at the Beijing Fine Arts College in the late 1920s. He then followed Lin to Hangzhou where the latter served as the National Art Academy's first principal from 1928. Other less renowned European painters who taught in China in the first decades of the twentieth century included the Flemish artist

Alfonz Kets (dates unknown) and the Czech painter Vojtěch Chytil. Some of these foreign artists played an instrumental role in introducing Western painting to China, and, conversely, Chinese painting to Europe.

The earliest encounter of the European public with modern Chinese painting occurred in the Palais du Rhin in Strasbourg from 21 May to the end of July 1924. The show, *Exposition chinoise d'art ancien et moderne*, was organized jointly by the Association of Chinese Artists in France and the Chinese Society of Decorative Arts in Paris.²⁰ It was a grandiose show with around 500 artworks on display. Significantly, a large number of oil paintings and other artworks in Western techniques was exhibited, including fourteen oil paintings by Lin Fengmian, fifteen by Liu Jipiao 劉既漂 (1900–1992), four by Xu Beihong, two by Wei Chaofeng 魏朝風 (1899–1964?) and twenty by Fang Junbi 方君璧 (1898–1986). In addition, the sculptor Li Jinfa 李金髮 (1899–1976) exhibited ten works of European subject matter, such as the sculptures *Schopenhauer* and *Nietzsche*. Such a strong presence of Chinese works in European techniques and styles was never repeated again in later shows of Chinese painting in Europe. A year later, in 1925, China participated in the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry that took place in Paris in the Grand Palais. This time, Chinese objects of decorative arts and paintings displayed here were all executed in traditional materials and techniques. Except for the overall design of the Chinese exhibition area designed by the young avant-garde artist Liu Jipiao, there were no objects inspired by Western art included in this show.

The two shows in 1924 and 1925, however, were put together more or less *ad hoc* by Chinese artists who at the time resided in Europe. These were followed by two larger touring exhibitions in 1931 and 1934–1935. Officially endorsed by the Chinese government, it was mainly Liu Haisu, initially together with Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889–1933), who masterminded these shows. The 1931 exhibition was shown in Frankfurt, while those of 1934–1935 toured through major European cities, such as Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, the Hague, Bern, Geneva, London, and Prague.²¹ Liu Haisu accompanied the paintings to some of the venues and lectured extensively at the respective places. Talks in Berlin at the Prussian Academy of Arts on the history and development of Chinese painting and at the University on the Six Principles of Chinese painting are said to have been well attended. In London, he gave two talks and published two articles on the recent development of modern Chinese painting.²²

An enterprise comparable with the one Liu Haisu had arranged, Xu Beihong's modern Chinese painting exhibition in 1933–1934 travelled from Paris to Milan, Leningrad and Moscow. In addition, a series of travelling exhibitions of modern Chinese paintings was organized by Vojtěch Chytil. Like Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, Chytil was an art educator and artist himself. As a foreign teacher of European-style painting at the Beijing Fine Arts College, Chytil befriended the painters Qi Baishi, Chen Banding 陳半丁 (1876–1970) and Xiao Sun 蕭遜 (1883–1944). He took an active part in the activities of the art scene in Beijing and brought several hundred modern Chinese paintings to Europe, alongside other objects. According to his own

records, he had initially negotiated with the Chinese government to organize a large comprehensive exhibition of Chinese art of all periods in Europe, which in the end did not materialize due to turbulences in Chinese politics and the relocation of the government to Nanjing in 1927. From 1928, Chytil mounted more than 20 shows around Europe, most notably in the cities of Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Budapest, Vienna, and Berlin. Two of them took place in the Whitechapel Gallery in London.²³ Like the shows in 1931 and 1934–1935 arranged by Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, part of the artworks were for sale. The profit served in all three cases to help cover the costs of the exhibitions. Within a decade, Chytil made one or more trips from China to Europe per year, an enormous effort at the time. In his shows Chytil introduced occasionally artists who were not part of the Chinese canon. His choice differed from that of his Chinese colleagues in that he presented mostly artists from Beijing and northern China.

In light of these modern Chinese painting exhibitions and in addition to the international exhibitions of Chinese art in Amsterdam 1924, in Berlin 1929, and in London 1935–1936, the European public in these years experienced a compelling encounter with Chinese culture. As a result, public interest in China rose together with a gradual awareness of China being an ancient civilization. According to the writer and book illustrator Chiang Yee 蔣彝 (1903–1977), who lived in London from 1933 to 1946, the London touring exhibition *Modern Chinese Painting* (21 February – 23 March, 1935) and the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (28 November, 1935 – 7 March, 1936) changed the public perception. He recalls that London newspapers were full of articles discussing Chinese art. In addition, strangers stopped him on the street to compliment him on the rich cultural history of his country. This was a remarkable change in a city like London.²⁴

A core part of the European collections of modern Chinese painting, both private and public, derives from these early modern painting exhibitions. Their legacy is key and helped to transform our perception and understanding of modern Chinese painting in Europe.

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