

Introduction

This article will focus on the art of several modern Chinese painters within the context of the collection of their paintings in Europe. As a curator of the Collection of Chinese Art in the National Gallery in Prague, I have been researching the origins of the outstanding collection of 20th century Chinese ink painting housed in this institution. I have become interested in the way the works of modern Chinese painters were added to European collections and the circumstances and general climate which made the formation of these collections possible. This research involves the study of several European collections of modern Chinese painting, namely those housed in France, Great Britain and the Czech Republic, to cite just some of the most important ones. When we look at these collections side by side, it is striking that although they differ significantly from each other, they also possess common features which help us better understand the situation surrounding the international acknowledgement of the work of some modern Chinese painters.

In this aspect, the paper presents one of the first attempts to study the European collections of modern Chinese painting side by side as well as to track their significant differences and the distinctive features which distinguish them in contrast – or better as a supplement – to the collections housed in Asia. To my knowledge, this is a task that has not been undertaken so far, even though partial information related to individual European collections and the activities of different European collectors were presented recently in conferences on collecting Chinese art in Europe such as in Paris in 2009¹ or most recently in London in 2012.² Having thus laid the foundation for future research, it is time that we start regarding the European collections of Chinese painting as a meaningful whole and inquire into the possibilities of a more complex picture of the collecting activities in Europe in the first half of the 20th century. These efforts may provide us with a new and intriguing frame of reference for learning more about the lives, activities and concerns of the Chinese painters involved in the process of modernizing their discipline in China in general and the development of their individual painting styles in particular.

It is widely known that the discipline of Chinese painting underwent tremendous changes during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to foreign influences.³ A large number of Chinese students received artistic training in Japan and Europe. At the same time, Western teachers helped to establish programs that incorporated the use of Western media and techniques into the curricula of

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1 Peinture chinoise: la restauration et la recherche en Europe et en Chine. Paris, Institut national du patrimoine, 19–20 March 2009.

2 Study day: Chinese paintings and Europe. London, SOAS, 25 June 2012.

3 For details of this development, see essays in the following publications: Andrews and Shen 1998; Andrews *et al.* 2000; Hearn and Smith 2001; Birnie Danzker *et al.* 2004.

Chinese universities. Consequently, a number of Chinese painters emerged who were able to use both traditional Chinese ink painting and Western painting techniques to create their works of art. Moreover, although other painters painted exclusively in traditional Chinese media, their work received important impetus and support from foreign collectors and non-Chinese art enthusiasts. This paper will therefore more specifically concentrate on the work of several modern Chinese painters who stand in the centre of the whole process of encounters and acquaintances between the Chinese and the Western art worlds in the inter-war period.

Including artists from both ends of the traditional–modern spectrum of 20th century Chinese painting, the paper will discuss the work of painters like Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864–1957), Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895–1953), Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900–1991) and Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896–1994). It will treat their involvement with foreign artistic currents, collecting practices and exhibition interests as a kind of case study to demonstrate some of the forces which were at work in the Sino-Western artistic encounters throughout the former part of the last century. The paper will mainly use the material available in European collections of Chinese painting and look for potential clues that the concentration of certain kind of works in these collections may provide for a better understanding of the creative output of each of the painters. The aim, on the one hand, will be to provide a more detailed description of the nature of the European collections themselves, while, on the other hand, contributing to our understanding of the intricate nature of the oeuvre of the painters under discussion.

1 Qi Baishi and his popularity with foreign collectors

It might seem strange to start with Qi Baishi, who is usually regarded as a paragon of conservative values. He is known as a representative of the very traditional approach to ink painting and its potential as an artistic response to the turbulent era of Chinese modernization. It is true that Qi Baishi used exclusively Chinese painting media and techniques and that he personally never travelled abroad to get acquainted with other approaches and concepts. His oeuvre is thus customarily described as a model example of traditional Chinese painting modernized by way of its inherent qualities and intrinsic capacity. If we take a closer look at details of his biography, however, and relate it to the development of his painting style, interesting observations can be made regarding his relationship with foreign clientele, which are also in fact illustrative of the foreign presence and indirect influences upon the field of Chinese painting in the first half of the 20th century. Therefore, I will first discuss Qi Baishi's work and try to show how his involvement with foreigners and the reception of his work abroad influenced his painting activities.

It is well known that after Qi settled in Beijing in 1919, he led a meagre existence until his potential was discovered by Chen Hengke 陳衡恪 (1876–1923). Chen encouraged him to change his style for the more exuberant and dynamic expression found, for instance, in the works of Wu Changshi 吳昌碩 (1844–1927).⁴

⁴ See e.g. Lang Shaojun 1997, 123. For more on Qi Baishi's relationship with Chen Shizeng and Chen's encouragement of Qi's new painting style, see Zhu Wanzhang 2012. Cf. fig. 1.

painters, while others – mainly Qi’s early figural compositions and portraits – were close to the creations of local folk artists (cf. fig. 2), who had been commissioned to execute these subjects for centuries.



Fig. 3. Qi Baishi (1864–1957).
Refusal (No. 2), undated, early 1930s.
Ink and colours on paper, 33 x 27 cm.
Coll. of the National Gallery in Prague,
Vm 3057

After the change in 1919,⁷ Qi’s representative works by contrast featured daring landscape compositions and bright colors used for the depiction of subjects in the flowers and birds genre. They were often created using the “boneless” technique (*mogu* 没骨) or presented witty figural scenes that sometimes featured the artist himself as a kind of playful self-portrait (cf. fig. 3). We know that Qi Baishi never studied foreign painting techniques and never travelled abroad. These changes, therefore, must have stemmed from his own creative elaborations upon traditional practices and techniques. It is, however, worth considering that very shortly after this “change of style” occurred in his painting, his

7 Besides being a significant date in Qi Baishi’s biography, 1919 is also a significant year in the whole of modern Chinese history. It is the year when the “May Fourth Movement” was launched, which was closely linked to the post-WWI political development and brought about tremendous changes in the way China was modernized in many aspects of people’s lives as well as society as a whole. The outbreak of the movement, however, does not have a direct relation to Qi Baishi’s career and the change of his painting style, at least as far as the sources for his personal biography indicate. It was probably only a coincidence that he settled in Beijing exactly in this year, whereas his personal artistic development afterwards only indirectly reflected some of the many processes that were in evidence on the larger Chinese art scene.

art quite unexpectedly turned into something like a sensation among foreign patrons and art lovers, both Japanese and European.

The rise of Qi Baishi's popularity after his paintings were exhibited at the Second joint exhibition of Chinese and Japanese painting in Tokyo (*Di er ci Zhong Ri lianhe huihua zhanlanhui* 第二次中日聯合繪畫展覽會) in 1922 has been noted by scholars⁸ and also recently described in greater detail.⁹ It is therefore an acknowledged fact that the recognition of Qi's novel painting style first occurred on Japanese soil in an era when conservative Beijing art circles still remained more or less undisturbed by the changes in the field of painting.¹⁰ In the 1920s, the modernizing currents were indeed just starting to be introduced in Northern China, and the success of Qi Baishi's innovative paintings clearly coincides with these tendencies.¹¹

In her study of the Sino Japanese influences in art, Aida Yuen Wong states that the "material evidence of Qi's Japanese patronage is scarce" given Qi's persistence in maintaining the image of a "village bumpkin" (*xiang balao* 鄉巴佬). His reputation as a leisurely artist who was not concerned with the material aspects of his creative output was also in line with the age-old concept of the literati's detachment from monetary issues. Nevertheless, a few facts concerning Qi Baishi's involvement with foreign clients can be obtained from the archival materials relating to the Chinese sojourns of Vojtěch Chytil (1896–1936), a Czech artist and collector, who resided in Beijing in the 1920s and 1930s and was one of the important buyers of Qi's paintings. In a letter written to a friend from China on 8 February 1931, Chytil boasts:

Although back to Beijing only for a week, I have done a great deal of work already. ... I have acquired several original Tibetan paintings and two bronze sculptures. Qi Baishi's mistress sold me an album of 12 paintings, which he had once painted for her as a token of love. Old Qi allowed me to take away his *Fisherman* (which he hadn't been willing to sell to anybody before), and further, I have acquired one of his best paintings, namely the *Lake in Wind*, from a private owner. Now, he is painting entirely for me; when he saw me back, he embraced me and called me a brother of his! His success has been spread in the whole of Chinese and Japanese press. The Japanese imperial court sent people to buy his paintings for 2000 dollars. The Japanese have been buying just anything from his hand. They even organized an exhibition of his shadow painters in Dairen [i.e. the city of Dalian] and sold works in the amount of 9000 Yen, even though all of them were mere copies by Qi's pupils and followers. Another two Japanese bought copies of his paintings at Liulichang, and when they finally saw the master himself, they told him they had been planning to exhibit his paintings in Paris. And when he found out that out of the 40 paintings they showed him only 2 were really his own, Qi Baishi declined to sell or paint anything for them ...¹²

8 Wong 2006, 108–109.

9 Lu Weirong 2010.

10 These took place much earlier in Southern and South Eastern China, particularly in the cities of Guangzhou (Canton) and Shanghai, where many progressive painters had been concentrated since the late 19th century.

11 For the primacy of Shanghai as the centre of modernist tendencies, see e.g. Kuo 2007. For a detailed survey of the development on the Beijing art scene, see Shao Dazhen and Li Song 2012. For a general description of Beijing as the stronghold of traditional values, see e.g. Strand 1989, 1–19.

12 It is of particular interest that the collection of the Japanese diplomat Suma Yakichirō 須磨弥吉郎 (1892–1970), who was stationed in Beijing, Guangdong, Shanghai and Nanjing between 1927–1937 (i.e. exactly coinciding with Chytil's period of stay in China), was published most recently by the National Museum in Kyoto. Suma also belonged to Qi Baishi's personal acquaintances among foreign collectors of his painting, but

Today, no genuine painting of his can be found on the art market at any price. And I feel very fortunate to have acquired the best collection of his works, which comprises more than 60 large originals and about 100 smaller ones (flowers and insects, crayfish, frogs and fish). This collection will no doubt play an important role in the world forum, as Old Qi is indisputably the best painter since the high times of Chinese painting a thousand years ago.

While this was written in February, Chytil continues with the enumeration of his activities and achievements on 13 March:

A long-standing contact with the artists active here allows for a friendship and intimacy, which are the source of many new findings and experiences that normally cannot be achieved by a foreigner. We hold frequent dinners (just yesterday we had one) with Qi Baishi, Chen Banding and Xiao Qianzhong, where one talks a lot about art and where 'West meets East' in general.

Attached herewith are a few photos of the originals I have acquired lately. I possess about 80 paintings by Qi Baishi now, and many of them are exquisite. I am sure they will cause a great stir in the West, as before I haven't shown even a half of these treasures in Berlin or Vienna. I have finished a short draft of my preface for the catalogue, which I will send you next time.

In a Czech private collection, a photograph is indeed preserved which was taken during one of the parties Chytil and his wife threw together with the three famous painters (cf. fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Party, 1931. Photograph, private coll. Top row, left to right: Sun Kewu, Vojtěch Chytil, Xiao Qianzhong. Bottom row, left to right: Chen Banding's wife, Nina Chytilová, Qi Baishi, Chen Banding

he is probably not one of "the Japanese" Chytil refers to in his letters. For more on the Suma collection and Mr. Suma's relationship with Qi Baishi, see Nishigami Minoru 2003–2004. For the reproductions of Qi Baishi's paintings from the Suma collection, see Nishigami and Kure 2012.

It documents the cheerful and carefree atmosphere which must have permeated these ‘dinners’, where there was a lot of drinking and talk about art. The last of the three letters in this sequence, which are related to the preparations of Chytil’s third Prague exhibition of modern Chinese painting, is dated 12 April 1931. It records the following:

This week, the shipping of the paintings I have acquired will begin; I suppose you will be taken by surprise. I have bought the whole of Qi Baishi’s oeuvre; at the moment, I have got 112 of his [large] paintings ...¹³

From these letters, it is obvious that Chytil was determined to acquire Qi Baishi’s work in a systematic and comprehensive way and strove to build an internationally unique collection. Throughout Chytil’s texts on the nature and significance of modern Chinese painting, which can mainly be found in the catalogues of his European exhibitions, he praises the style of Qi Baishi’s paintings as being truly innovative and revolutionary in the history of Chinese painting. He often calls him the first and foremost master since the high period of Chinese painting under the Tang and Song dynasties.¹⁴

Chytil, for instance, writes in the catalogues of the 1930 Vienna exhibition, the 1931 Prague exhibition and the 1933 London exhibition, respectively:

[I]n the sphere of the contemporary art [in China], we can find two apostles at the moment, Wu Changshi and Qi Baishi, who grew and matured almost simultaneously. The latter is a pillar of the art of contemporary China and exercises a decisive influence upon the whole young generation of artists.¹⁵

The present exhibition is a manifestation of the art of the three greatest artists of contemporary China. Besides Qi Baishi, it’s the landscape painter Xiao Qianzhong [i. e. Xiao Sun] ... The third is Chen Banding [i. e. Chen Nian], who paints flowers and landscapes.¹⁶

Qi Baishi, now 74 years old, is the co-creator of a new school and is the apostle of the whole artistic movement. He marks the end of the stagnation period, and is the pioneer and propagator of the further progress in Chinese art ... The genius of Qi Baishi seems to me to have attained the perfection of the famous artists of the Tang and Sung Dynasties.¹⁷

Chytil’s descriptions here attest, on the one hand, to the fact Qi’s novel style had already been established and its specific qualities had attracted intense attention during the period that Chytil was his client and friend, which started sometime around 1927 and ended with Chytil’s premature death in 1936. On the other hand, Chytil’s indiscriminate praise indicates that his own choices were guided by the general trends of the time, which in Qi Baishi’s case were determined by the popularity of his works with Japanese clientele. Qi Baishi’s reputation as an artist thus seems to have spread gradually. First, he was discovered by Japanese art lovers upon his introduction to the Japanese public by Chen Hengke. This, in turn, gave a new impetus for his own innovative creations that afterwards attracted even more admirers from among the collectors of modern Chinese painting, such as Vojtěch Chytil.

13 Archive of the National Technical Museum, Praha, Section 109 – Feuerstein, box 1 – I a – II b, 1. The transcript of the three letters in Czech is published in Čapková 2010. In the present article, the passages from the letters, originally published in Czech, are quoted in my translation.

14 For more on Chytil’s collecting activities in China and his European exhibitions, see Pejšochová 2012.

15 Exhibition catalogue Vienna 1930, 5–6. Translation from German by myself. Cf. fig. 5.

16 Exhibition catalogue Prague 1931a, 13. Translation from Czech by myself.

17 Exhibition catalogue London 1933, 4.

The latter, finally, solidified his image throughout his European exhibitions as the most progressive artist of the so-called Beijing school of painting. In this way, Qi Baishi, an exemplary 20th-century traditional Chinese painter, became famous in Japan in the 1920s, in Europe in the 1930s and, more or less as a consequence, in China itself from this period onwards.

As the National Gallery in Prague inherited a part of the former collection of Vojtěch Chytil, which comprised dozens of Qi Baishi's paintings datable to the 1920s and the 1930s, its holdings can now be regarded as a kind of testimony to the development of Qi Baishi's personal style in this period. Paintings housed in the Prague collection document the stylistic features of his works from this period, which comprise, among other things, some of the witty figural compositions (cf. fig. 3.) or landscapes using bold areas of colour or daring and unrestrained brushwork (cf. fig. 5.). These works were much praised by the Japanese and European collectors in the 1920s and 1930s, which led to their acquisition for the collection of Suma Yakichirō or Vojtěch Chytil. In contrast, other European collections hold paintings by Qi Baishi that are mostly datable to later periods of the artist's activity, when he often depicted shrimps, crabs and other animal and plants topics usually associated with his work and sought after by the collectors from the 1940's onwards. As a result, the unique character of the Prague collection is undoubtedly attributable to the fact that it is the special beneficiary of a part of Chytil's former holdings.



Fig. 5. Qi Baishi (1864–1957). Return from the pasture among mountains and pine trees, 1931. Ink and colours on paper, 74 x 43 cm. Coll. of the National Gallery in Prague, Vm 1448

2 Chinese painters involved in the introduction of Western painting techniques

There were other Chinese painters, however, who strove to revive, or even reform, the whole discipline of Chinese painting by means of introducing Western painting techniques. In the following, I will therefore look at a few of the most significant of these painters, whose achievements both in China and Europe are documented by their activities on European soil and their works currently preserved in European collections.

Xu Beihong

Xu Beihong was one of the three most important artists-teachers who tried to modernize Chinese painting through the incorporation of Western painting techniques into the curricula of Chinese art-training institutions and individual painting practice. The other two were Lin Fengmian and Liu Haisu. Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian obtained their education in Europe and Liu Haisu, too, admired and studied European art available in China and Japan. Moreover, all three of these painters worked hard to introduce portions of what they had learned abroad into the system of art education after returning to China. Xu Beihong studied in France and Germany from 1919 through 1927 and he developed an interest in European realism, which he studied in the classical art works of 19th century realism and from his more or less conservative European teachers. In Xu's opinion, the methods of rationally guided, technically precise depiction were exactly what was missing in traditional Chinese painting, a shortcoming that he and likeminded reformers felt had brought about the fatal decline of Chinese painting.¹⁸ In this respect, he differed significantly from the other two great innovative teachers, Lin Fengmian and Liu Haisu, who explored new ways of incorporating modernist and avant-garde elements into Chinese painting.¹⁹

Xu Beihong started his sojourn in France as a poor student, much like thousands of others who had travelled to the West to gain education and experience.²⁰ He led a meagre existence and tried to

18 The traditional practice of painters that was based on copying works of old masters and perpetuating the brushwork and compositional solutions of a few canonized artists of the past came to be regarded as repetitive, backward and lacking in innovation and originality by some of the reform-minded intellectuals of the late Imperial era and ensuing Republican period. It was therefore considered essential to get rid of the restrictions imposed on the artist's creativity by the old methods of study and work and to find new ways of expression. Some of the reformers even saw traditional painting, which relied mainly on the brushwork and ink-wash techniques when modelling compositional elements of a picture, as being incapable of a faithful description of reality that could be achieved with the use of Western techniques of *chiaroscuro* and linear perspective. Many painters active in the first decades of the 20th century therefore turned to the modernized Japanese and traditional European painting for clues to remedy this situation and rejuvenate Chinese painting with new approaches and methods. For source texts by Chinese artists and intellectuals where such a need is expressed, see e.g. Janicot 2007; Lang Shaojun and Shui Tianzhong 1999. For secondary studies on this development, see mainly the works quoted in note 3. On the many changes taking place in the first decades of the 20th century, see also Guo 2010.

19 This controversy was also reflected theoretically in a famous series of letters exchanged between Xu Beihong and the modernist poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897–1931) on the subject of the desirable orientation modernized Chinese art should take. For details of this dispute, see Ge Ba 2010 in Chinese and Chou 2011 in French.

20 For a general survey of the history of Chinese students who have gone abroad, see Shu Xincheng 2011. For the specific conditions of study in France, see Zhou Yongzhen 2008. For a short survey in a Western language, see Peng 2011. To offer a general impression of the Chinese presence in Western institutions of higher education in the inter-war period, it can be noted that according to the above quoted sources several thousand Chinese students were sent to the

win recognition as a painter in an era when Chinese contemporary art was all but acknowledged as a fully-fledged current of modern art.²¹ Xu Beihong experienced a marked rise of interest in his works only towards the end of his sojourn in Europe, when, for instance, nine of his works were accepted for exhibition at the Salon des Artistes Français in 1927 and reportedly received a very favourable reaction.

Later in 1927, Xu returned to China and started his teaching career. He came back to Europe only in 1933–1934 as a commissioner of several exhibitions of contemporary art, which were organized by the Chinese government and mounted in different major cultural centres.²² Among these venues, the one with probably the greatest impact on the European reception of modern Chinese painting was the Paris show that was held from May to June 1933 at the Musée des écoles étrangères et contemporaines, also called the Musée du Jeu de Paume.²³ Xu Beihong exhibited 15 of his paintings here and another approximately 50 Chinese painters supplied close to 200 paintings.²⁴ Twelve of the artworks shown in 1933 in Paris were selected by the current director of the Musée du Jeu de Paume, André Dezarrois, to be purchased by the French government and kept in the collection of his institution to “form a base of a Chinese section, equivalent to the Japanese one”.²⁵ These were later transferred into the holdings of the Musée Guimet.

As Éric Lefebvre notes in his study, it is significant that the choices of the French curator in this case closely followed Xu Beihong’s selection of authors and subjects for exhibition in France. These were mainly intended to show the best of Chinese contemporary painting, which in Xu’s opinion – as we know from his stance expressed during the classical/modern debate – encompassed works that were executed in the traditional vein and unspoiled by modern artistic currents. As a result, pictures by Qi Baishi, Wang Zhen 王震 (1867–1938), Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), Chen Banding 陳半丁 (1876–1970) and others were selected to be purchased for the French collection that were painted in ink in the form of Chinese scrolls. Xu did not select any oil paintings or significantly Westernized works for the 1933 exhibition, and consequently neither did Mr. Dezarrois for the acquisition, although some of the works had entered French public collections individually on other occasions. As for Xu Beihong, his large painting entitled *A Figure under the Trees* dated 1932 was also purchased, which is a typical example of Xu’s melange of Chinese ink painting with elements of Western techniques.²⁶ A painting of a strikingly

West in the first decades of the 20th century. Only a handful of them, however, studied art in Europe. Sun Chunmei 孫淳美, for instance, has so far traced around 50 names of Chinese students who were attending the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris in the late 1910s through 1930s. I am indebted to Sun Chunmei for sharing with me her unpublished research findings on the activities of Chinese students of art in France. For a vivid description of the existential difficulties the Chinese students of art experienced in Europe, see Sullivan 1996, 38–41.

- 21 According to Craig Clunas (1989), this was clearly manifest in the dismissive reception the first European exhibitions of contemporary Chinese paintings received in Strasbourg in 1924 and in Paris in 1925.
- 22 For details pertaining to the complexities of the organization of the exhibitions touring Europe under the commission of the Chinese government in the mid-1930s, see Pejčochová 2013.
- 23 Exhibition catalogue Paris 1933.
- 24 Exhibition catalogue Paris 1933. For an interesting reflection upon the perplexities surrounding this exhibition, see Xu Beihong 1933.
- 25 Lefebvre 2011, for the quotation see p. 51. The author also notes that already two years earlier, André Dezarrois decided to purchase an oil painting by Liu Haisu entitled *The Luxembourg Gardens in Snow*, which thus became the first Chinese contemporary painting to enter the French public collections. Further, in 1934, two oil paintings by Chang Shuhong 常書鴻 (1904–1994) were acquired for the Musée de Beaux-Arts de Lyon.
- 26 For a detailed description and a reproduction, see Lefebvre 2011a, 80–81. I am also indebted to Éric Lefebvre

similar subject, dimensions and technical execution, and interestingly also dated 1932, can be found in the Prague collection under the title *Village Ferry* (cf. fig. 6).²⁷ In this case, however, it is not a remnant of the 1935 exhibition organized by the Chinese government, which was organized by Xu's opponent Liu Haisu and did not contain even a single painting by Xu Beihong.²⁸

Besides these works, most of the European collections of Xu Beihong's paintings – whether in France, the Czech Republic or Germany – consist of his vintage style ink paintings of horses, other animals, occasional ink depictions of figures and the like. To my knowledge, not a single oil painting by Xu whatsoever can be found in any European collection. This is quite surprising given Xu's extended European stays, during which he trained with masters of the classical realist style in Berlin and Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. This irony can probably be explained by the fact that few of the works from the inter-war period collections have survived to this day.²⁹ The greater part of the paintings by Xu Beihong in Prague and Paris were acquired only after the Second World War, both directly from China and from Chinese collectors in Europe.

By way of comparison, a rare example of an oil portrait by Xu Beihong collected outside of China can be found in the collection of the Kyoto National Museum. It depicts a sitting figure of Xu's first wife Jiang Biwei 蔣碧微 (1899–1978) and, according to the diary of the work's original owner, Suma Yakichirō, it was painted in Paris in 1933.³⁰ Having seen this painting in Kyoto, I find it surprising that no similar works survived in any of the European collections, even though Xu must have painted a number of them during his European stays in the inter-war period. Some indeed are recorded as having been shown in the official Salon exhibitions. In contrast, most of Xu's extant oil paintings are now housed in the collections in China and date from the period after Xu Beihong's return in 1927. As it turned out, these were not among the post-war acquisitions that had been arranged by European museums. As Michael Sullivan puts it, this was likely due to the fact that “the European public ... was not ready for Chinese oil painting. What they wanted and expected was Chinese ink painting.”³¹ I would accordingly suggest that researchers should make this premise a subject of even closer examination and uncover the specific conditions and motivations surrounding the early acquisitions by public institutions in individual countries.

for sharing with me portions of his research and for a fruitful ongoing collaboration.

27 For a description and reproduction, see Pejčochová, 2008, 380–381.

28 Exhibition catalogue Prague 1931b.

29 The above-mentioned collection of the Czech artist Vojtěch Chytil amassed in China in the 1920s and through mid-1930s is a significant exception. To my knowledge, however, it did not contain any paintings by Xu Beihong.

30 Nishigami and Kure 2012, 301. For the reproduction of this painting, see *ibid.*, 202. The precise circumstances surrounding the acquisition of this painting by Mr. Suma, however, still await deeper examination. Moreover, other oil paintings or paintings executed in a distinctly Western manner by Xu Beihong cannot even be found in the Kyoto collection.

31 Sullivan 1996, 74. For more details on the situation surrounding the early acquisitions by French public museums in the 1930s, see Lefebvre 2011, 51, where e.g. another oil painting by Chang Shuhong purchased by the Musée du Jeu de Paume in 1935 is mentioned as an exception.



Fig. 7. Xu Beihong (1895–1953).
Village ferry, 1932.
Ink and colours on paper,
111 x 118 cm.
Coll. of the National Gallery
in Prague, Vm 4320

Lin Fengmian

As mentioned above, dozens of other painters came to Europe to study European painting techniques in order to find new ways of expression and rejuvenate the discipline of Chinese painting. One of the painters who had the strongest impact upon the later development of modern painting in China and was also a key figure represented in the collections of Chinese painting in Europe was Xu's counterpart in the classical/modern debate, Lin Fengmian.

Lin was born precisely at the turn of the century in Guangdong Province in southern China. At the age of 19, he left for France, where he landed in early 1920. Settling first in Dijon, he started to learn Western painting techniques, which he continued to employ after moving to Paris in 1921. His sources of inspiration were drawn from modern European painting, most notably works by painters like Henri Matisse and other fauvist and cubist artists. Unlike Xu Beihong, his paintings were recognized quite early by the French public, with his works being accepted by the Salon d'Automne as early as 1922 and 1924. He was also one of the leading lights of the 1924 Strasbourg exhibition, where 42 of his paintings were shown, the single largest group by an individual painter.³² In the Chinese section of the 1925 Paris exhibition of modern decorative and industrial arts, he was the only painter represented as part of the display of Chinese decorative and applied art objects.³³ Conversely, in the

32 Exhibition catalogue Strasbourg 1924.

33 Exhibition catalogue Paris 1925. See also Lefebvre 2010.

1933 Paris exhibition at the Musée du Jeu de Paume only one painting by Lin was shown due to the above-mentioned antagonism between Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, the curator of the Paris show.

None of the exhibitions organized by Vojtěch Chytil in Vienna (1930), Berlin (1930), Budapest (1930), Prague (1931) and London (1933 and 1934) contained any paintings by Lin Fengmian, although Chytil demonstrably knew Lin and met him in Beijing in 1926, i.e. shortly after Lin's return to China and just before Chytil's departure for Europe.³⁴ It is probably due to the extreme shortness of the time they were able to spend together in Beijing that Chytil did not reflect upon Lin Fengmian's work or his importance for the development of modern Chinese painting in the way he did for other artists in his texts and catalogue prefaces. It is a historical coincidence that these two personages significantly missed each other, their paths never crossing for more than several months at most in Beijing in 1926.

Even more interestingly, Lin Fengmian's paintings also were not shown in either of the exhibitions organized by Liu Haisu in Berlin and Prague.³⁵ On the other hand, they contained a great number of Liu Haisu's own works. As for Lin Fengmian, however, it seems that his presence in the European shows was limited to those where he was personally engaged in the organisation process and did not exceed the period of his stay in Europe. He returned to China in January 1926, where he became the rector of the National Fine Arts College in Beijing and later moved to Hangzhou.³⁶

Lin's works painted in this period and included in the European shows in the 1920s were basically executed in two distinct styles. One style can be characterized as "reminiscent of the Lingnan School"³⁷, which already at this early stage of the artist's development represented a unique modification of the traditional ink painting genre that is imbued with both a strong expressive power and a deep melancholy. The unconventional "compressed" inscriptions in Chinese characters are another remarkable feature of these works. Lin's other unique painting style that he utilized throughout his French period is his oil painting on subjects related to human existential issues such as cold, hunger and suffering. These works are imbued with an atmosphere of even greater despair, yet are close in their expressive capacities to Lin's ink paintings of the time. It seems that Lin Fengmian, probably under the influence of his personal circumstances, was therefore able to achieve a strikingly unified mode of expression in both his ink paintings and oil paintings throughout his European period.

Nevertheless, none of Lin's early works survive in European collections, as his paintings in Prague, Paris and Oxford were all acquired only much later and reflect mostly the post-war development of his painting style. Even among these works, however, marked differences can be found, which is especially apparent when comparing his paintings in Czech and French collections. Whereas all of the Prague works exemplify Lin's distinctive variations on the traditional ink painting techniques dealing with subjects of beautiful ladies (cf. fig. 8) and depictions of Chinese countryside, the French collections encompass a much wider array of his oeuvre.

34 A photograph even exists where Chytil is shown together with Lin Fengmian and André Claudot (克羅多在 Chinese, 1892–1982) at a gathering with students in Beijing, supposedly in 1926. See Ruan Rongchun and Hu Guanghua 2009. For the reproduction of the photograph, see p. 83.

35 For the catalogue of the Prague exhibition, see note 28. For Liu Haisu's exhibitions in Frankfurt and Berlin, see Exhibition catalogue Frankfurt 1931 and Exhibition catalogue Berlin 1934.

36 Lang Shaojun 2002, 232–233.

37 Lefebvre 2010.



Fig. 8. Lin Fengmian (1900–1991).
Lady with a lotus,
undated, early 1950s.
Ink and colours on paper, 33 x 32 cm.
Coll. of the National Gallery
in Prague, Vm 2631

Besides including more traditional depictions similar to the Prague paintings, these images range from the famous *Pieta* dating from the mid-1940s, which is still very close in its expression to the above-mentioned lost paintings from the inter-war period, through the opera scenes of the early 1950s and all the way to the unconventional renderings of Chinese landscapes from the 1970s. In these latter works, Lin obviously drew upon his acquaintance with Western techniques and modes of expression and essentially combined the capacities of cubism and abstract impressionism with the possibilities of Chinese ink and colour painting on paper.

Conclusion

As elucidated in the preceding discussion, we can see that specific qualities of individual European collections of modern Chinese painting are mainly dependent on the inter-war development and the nature of the art-related contacts in this period. While the Prague collection benefited greatly from the activities of Vojtěch Chytil and his acquaintance with Beijing-based painters active in the 1920s and 1930s, the Paris collections with their significant holdings of paintings by the Western-trained artists preserve many links and contacts to the pre-war development on the French art scene. As for the works of Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian and other Western-trained painters, the Prague collection by contrast only drew upon the post-war relationships, when it, however, lacked the possibilities that were still open in Paris due to the maintenance of pre-war contacts. Even though these Chinese artists left almost nothing behind in France as students, when some of them returned to Europe in the post-war period as professors, curators or simply masters they managed to contribute significantly to the enrichment of the public collections.³⁸

38 For a detailed formulation of this argument, see Lefebvre 2010 and Lefebvre 2011b.

The collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, for its part, can be regarded as a special case. Here, the circumstances of its own collecting activities throughout the latter part of the 20th century much resemble those of the Prague collection. Its holdings comprise a single painting by Lin Fengmian, executed in his more traditional style on a conventional Chinese topic, and a single painting by Xu Beihong, dated 1941 and again in a very traditional style and technique. Recently, however, a new stage was begun with the museum's close relationship to Michael Sullivan, one of the most distinguished foreign collectors of modern Chinese painting. Portions of his collection have been exhibited at the museum and some objects acquired for its collections. In the context of the recent development of collecting Chinese painting, this situation is indeed unique in the whole of Europe and allows the Oxford collection to be expanded in an unparalleled way.

While the present paper aimed to explore the specific nature of Sino-Western encounters and the contacts closely linked to the activities of masters important for the development of Chinese painting throughout the major part of the 20th century, it would be interesting to add to this picture individual case studies of other artists active both in China and Europe. It will remain a task for future research to enrich the rough outlines of the pattern presented above with more details and fresh particulars, mainly concerning the lesser-known Chinese painters active in Europe in the first three decades of the last century.

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