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THE LANDSCAPE PAINTING OF LI KERAN AND ITS SPECIAL QUALITIES

3 VOLUMES, VOL. 1

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THE LNADSCAPE PAINTING OF LI KERAN AND ITS SPECIAL QUALITIES

Abstract

Li Keran (1907-1989) is one of the most important artists in the history of twentieth century Chinese art. He experienced all the major events of political chaos, national wars and ideological revolution in China this century. Involved in the mainstream art of the May Fourth tradition, he achieved the transformation of traditional landscape painting into a modern style, and became the representative of the new orthodox art.

This thesis aims to understand Li Keran's unique way of solving the problems with which modern Chinese artists have been faced involving the confrontation between art and politics, the Chinese and Western approach, and tradition and reality. Li's landscape painting shows special qualities demonstrating both the development of traditional art itself and the dream of its reform by artists of several generations in this century.

The thesis is divided into an introduction and six chapters. Chapter 1 describes Li Keran's early artistic career. Chapter 2 investigates the process of his reform of Chinese painting and his establishment as a master in New China. Chapter 3 makes a survey of the formative process of Li's landscape style. Chapter 4 discusses five special subjects raised by his case. Chapter 5 reveals how his art exists in the context of traditional art. Chapter 6 reviews the relationship between Li's art and that of different schools and masters in Chinese painting reform movements in this century. The conclusion included in Chapter 6 provides a summation of the author's view on Li Keran's artistic path.

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324. Li Keran, *Mountains and Rivers*, 1988, hanging scroll, ink and colour, 83.7 x 50.9cm, ibid., pl.144

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382. (Qing Dynasty) Deng Shiru, *Wuyan Lian*, grass script, ink on paper. *A Collection of Illustrative Plates of Chinese Calligraphy History*, ed. by Yin Sun, vol.II, Shanghai:

Shanghai Publishing House of Calligraphy and Painting, 1989, pl.892

383. Kang Youwei, *Wuyan Lian*, grass script, ink on paper, ibid., pl.931

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389. ibid.

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403. Huang Binhong's brushwork and signatures at the age of fifty-nine, 1922, ibid.

404. Huang Binhong's brushwork and signatures at the age of ninety-two, 1955, ibid.

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413. Lin Fengmian, *The Lake*, 1950s, ink and colour on paper, ibid., pl.123

414. Lin Fengmian, *Village Cottages*, 1950s, ink and colour on paper, ibid., pl.137

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417. Huang Binhong, *Coloured Landscape*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 68 x 41cm. *A Collection of Huang Binhong's Painting*, compiled by Zhejiang Museum, Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Calligraphy and Painting, 1993, pl.73

418. Huang Binhong, *Pale Brown Landscape*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 96.3 x 44.4cm, ibid., pl.29

419. Huang Binhong, *Coloured Landscape*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 84 x 42cm, ibid., pl.118

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428. (Qing Dynasty) Shi Tao, *Landscape*, ink and colour on paper, 24 x 28cm. Private collection, ibid., p.203

429. (Yuan Dynasty) Zhao Mengfu, *Autumn Colours on Que and Hua* Mountains, (detail), ink and colour on paper, 28.4 x 93.2cm. Collection of Taibei Palace Museum. Jiang Xun, *The History of Chinese Arts*, Beijing, Sanlian Book Store, 1993, p.170

430. (Yuan Dynasty) Wang Meng, *Retreat in Qingbian Mountain*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 140.6 x 42.2cm. Collection of Shanghai Art Museum, ibid., p.188

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433. Rembrandt van Rijn, The Raising of the Cross, 1633, oil on canvas, 96.2 x 72.2cm, Pinakothek at Munich

434. Rembrandt van Rijn, The Descent from the Cross, 1633, oil on wood, Pinakothek at Munich

435. Rembrandt van Rijn, The Raising of Lazarus, 1630, oil on panel, 96.2 x 81.5cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

NOTE

All Chinese names and terms are romanised according to pinyin orthography.

All Chinese articles and books are referred to in the main text and footnotes by English translations of their titles. The full Chinese original and the English version is given in the Bibliography. All paintings are referred to by an English translation of their Chinese title.

DECLARATION

I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University.

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INTRODUCTION

Contact between oriental and occidental civilizations began very early, and was getting closer by the nineteenth century. Chinese art, which had been seen as representative of Chinese culture, was taken seriously by western scholars. Not only did research in English in this field appear from the beginning of this century, but also, by the 1960s, diverse schools in the study of Chinese art had begun to appear in the United States. But modern Chinese art of the twentieth century had been regarded in western cultural circles as lacking in academic value, and therefore could not constitute a specific academic field. Michael Sullivan was a pioneer in developing this field. *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* [1] which he published in 1959, was one of the earliest works on modern Chinese art written in English. In 1979, Li Zhujin published his *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting*. [2] In 1980, Arnold Chang published his *Painting in the People's Republic of China: the Politics of Style*, [3] which reflected the viewpoint of a majority of the scholars of the time who insisted that contemporary Chinese art was merely a propaganda instrument of politics and should not be regarded as an art. But the Symposium on Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting, organized by Andamans East International Ltd. in Hong Kong in 1984 clearly demonstrated that the situation had greatly changed. Modern Chinese art is beginning to attract many well-known international historians and scholars. People expected its complexity and diversity to be penetratingly understood in an all-round way. *The Winking Owl: Art in the People's Republic of China* [4] by Ellen Johnston Laing, published in 1988, covered contemporary art materials up to the end of the 1970s.

The modern study of ancient Chinese art began to take shape in mainland China this

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[1] Michael, Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, Berkeley, 1959

[2] Li Chu-tsing (Li Zhuji), *Trends In Modern Chinese Painting*, Artibus Asiae Publishers, Ascona, Switzerland, 1979

[3] Arnold Chang, *Painting in the People's Republic of China: The Politics of Style*, Boulder, Colorado, 1980

[4] Ellen Johnston Laing, *'The Winking Owl - Art in the People's Republic of China*, University of California Press, Ltd., London, 1988

century, and much has been published on the subject. But the study of twentieth century Chinese art only took shape in the 1980s, far behind developments in the West. This was due to the interference of politics after 1949. The paintings, theories and materials of many painters and painting schools became politically sensitive and could not be made public and discussed freely. It was only by the end of the 1970s that the New Tide Art began the assault, bursting into the forbidden area. In 1986, *Modern Chinese Painting History, 1919-1985* (5) by Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan made its debut in the mainland. This work consisted of a review and critique of modern Chinese painting history by passionate young artists. Hereafter, many works on or by individual artists or painting schools, including those which were well-known as well as those which had been neglected or slighted were published one after the other, and a series of art exhibitions was held. The enthusiasm displayed by cultural circles on the mainland for the study of modern art since the beginning of the 1990s has overtaken their concern for classical art. The subjects and issues of modern art history have already become a focus for study, art exhibitions and publications in mainland China.

Li Keran (1907-1989) was an important figure in the history of Chinese art in the twentieth century. In the 1930s, he had been much prized by Lin Fengmian; and in the 1940s, while he was in Chongqing, he had won some fame for himself, and had been recommended by Xu Beihong and Lao She. Later, he was highly praised by Qi Baishi as an able successor to Wu Changshuo. In the 1950s, he endeavoured to reform Chinese painting and had the ardent support of Huang Yongyu, Wang Zhaowen and Zhang Ding, though he was criticized by others as "anti-traditional". By the early 1980s, Li's social status as a master painter had been firmly established in Chinese art circles. Art journals both in Hong Kong and Taiwan devoted considerable space to him. (6) His position as an explorer and

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[5] Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Modern Chinese Painting, 1919 - 1985*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1986

[6] Sun Meilan, 'Li Keran and His Landscape Art', Hong Kong: *The Artist*, No.13, 1980; Wu Guanzhong, 'The Style of Li Keran's Paintings',Hong Kong: *The Artist*, No.34, 1983; Zheng Ming, 'Talk of the Art of Li Keran - a Modern Renovator of Landscape Painting',Taibei: *Xiongshi Art*, No. 9 and No. 10, 1984; 'Special Issue on Li Keran', Taibei: *The Artist*, 1984

pioneer of modern landscape painting had been fully confirmed by art circles in mainland China. (7) Meanwhile, Li had been criticized as a "conservationist" by the New Tide artists. In 1989, Li Keran died. After his death, from 1990 to 1993, research and study connected with him reached a peak in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland.

In the three years, several comprehensive editions of Li's painting were published in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland. His treatise on art was published in the form of an anthology by the Beijing People's Fine Arts Press. Grand scale exhibitions of his work were held for the first time in Beijing (1992), and then in Taibei (1993) and Nanjing (1993). As to the study of Li Keran, it began with memorial articles by his friends and students, which provided voluminous historical material for reference. Later, several editions of Li's biography were published.(8) At this time, articles and essays treating diverse aspects of Li's artistic achievements mostly appeared as prefaces in the various editions of Li Keran's collected paintings. The monograph *A Study of Li Keran* by Sun Meilan, published in 1991, reflected the result of many years' study of Li Keran's art on the mainland. That same year, the successful PhD dissertation by Wan Qingli, a former student of Li Keran, at the University of Kansas, U.S.A. was entitled 'Li Keran and Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting'. Starting in 1990, the Hong Kong monthly *Brush and Ink*, faunded in 1990, published four special issues about Li Keran.(9) The studies covered a wide range of problems including authentication and the art market.

On 15th December 1994, when the author was visiting Li Keran's widow Zou Peizhu, the Li Keran Art Foundation, which had been in existence for two years, gained approval from the government. At present, the Foundation is devoting its efforts to building a Li Keran Memorial Hall in Beijing. The Foundation is planning to promote the study of Li

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[7] Zhang Ding, 'Li Keran – The Renovator of Landscape Painting', *People's Pictorial*, Beijing: The Foreign language Press, No. 10, 1979; Wan Qingli, 'The Founder of the Li School - Li Keran', *Appreciation of Famous Works*, Taiyuan: Shanxi People's Press, No. 2, 1984; Lang Shaojun, 'On the Landscape Painting of Li Keran', *Literature and Art Studies*, Beijing: The Literature and Art Press, 1986/3

[8] Li Song, *The Life of Li Keran*, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Fine Arts Press, 1992; Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991; Wan Qingli, 'Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26

[9] Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No. 4, 25, 26, 43

Keran's art, the Li School's landscape painting and modern traditional Chinese painting.

The characteristics of the study of Li Keran from 1990-1993 were: all who devoted themselves to this project included his former students or his followers. They had all had direct contact with Li either for a long or short duration, and had, to a greater or lesser extent, first-hand information of the artist. Their studies reflect their painstaking accumulation of materials over many years, together with their critical manner in the manipulation of the traditional maxim "know the man before criticizing his painting" and in grasping styles from the angle of creating and appreciating works. No doubt, the results of their studies represent the highest level of research work on artistic history in the mainland during recent years. When the author first entered into this sphere of study, the master painter had already died. The superior quality of the work by the aforementioned researchers seemed to constitute an insurmountable rampart for latecomers. However, there remain many attractive areas for future scholars to explore from diverse angles. As for the author, the following would prove to be the most interesting.

First of all, Chinese art today differs so much from that of a century ago. A perfunctory glance may not espy any inter-relationship between them. To the younger generation, Chinese traditional art may appear more remote than Western art. If this is the case, what has really occurred in art over the period of a hundred years? Has the concept of value in traditional art any influence today? What are the expectations and desires of traditional artists that they want to be gratified in art? The personal history of Li Keran is truly a rare case for the inspection of the transition in traditional art within the space of a hundred years. The reasons are: he lived for eighty-two years in this century, and experienced all its important events. It was he who successfully brought traditional landscape painting into the new society. Many historic problems were manifested in concrete form in his case, for example, the problem of the continuation and mutation of tradition; the problem of the conflict between Chinese and Western cultures; the problem of the relationship between art and social reality, etc. In his individual case, one might see the successful experience of an artist under particular conditions, as well as an episode in the evolution of art history and tradition.

Secondly, under the influence and inspiration of the viewpoint of E. H. Gombrich "great Art always changes under the influence of its own autonomous problems", [10] the author seriously studied the formative process of Li's artistic style, and was surprised to discover that the style and mode of his new modern landscape painting could be traced back to his immediate teachers and the painters with whom he was associated. In other words, his creativity directly rested upon and was enlightened by his predecessors' efforts in solving the problems of art. It was precisely through this kind of succession and development that he was able to keep the most concrete and the closest contact with tradition. In many respects, the case of Li Keran was a proof of Gombrich's theory. However, the author also discovered that the violent changes that have taken place in twentieth-century Chinese society did really give an enormous impetus to art. The case of Li Keran, meanwhile, illuminated the kind of attitude that a successful artist adopted in a society where political demands took precedence over the practice of art.

Thirdly, the structure of the thesis adopted by the author does not proceed from the usual analysis of the background of the times in order to give prominence to individual peculiarities, but from an investigation of the relationship between the individual and the environment to manifest the conditions under which the artist formed his style and thought (Chapters 1 and 2). After making an analysis of the formative process of the artist's style and his outstanding achievements (Chapters 3 and 4), the thesis returns the individual to the background of tradition and his times, and by making comparisons, evaluates the historical significance in those achievements (Chapters 5 and 6).

Fourthly, this thesis, the fruit of studying the case of Li Keran in recent years, investigates and clarifies contradictions existing in the previously used historical materials (for example, the family members of Li Keran; the time when Li Keran began to draw buffaloes, see Chapter 1). More investigations are made into the background of the art circles from the 1950s to 1960s, a topic which had been neglected in earlier studies (for example, the analysis of the periods in the reform movements of Chinese painting after

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[10] Karl Popper, 'Gombrich on Situational Logic and Periods and Fashion Art', in *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed. by P. A. Schilpp, Open Court, 1974, p.1178

1949, see Chapter 2). The summary of the characteristics of Li Keran's art at various stages, especially that of his mature period, is based upon concrete analysis of his voluminous works, which have also been neglected by researchers hitherto. From this, the author raises for the first time the problem of stylizing modes and schematizing a personal artistic language in the case of Li Keran, and provides a description of his mature modes and his artistic language (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.3). This thesis compares the different attitudes taken by Li Keran and other artists of the time in the dilemma of reconciling revolutionary politics with artistic practice (see Chapter 4.1). As regards the problem of blending the Chinese and the Western in Li's art, a concrete analysis of which was lacking in previous studies, the author would venture to put forward the view that Li merged the arts of the Chinese and of the West within the macro-frame of traditional art, and she discusses this viewpoint from the angle of brushwork, modes, forms, attitude to nature and artistic concepts (see Chapter 4). Similarly, regarding the question of the origin of Li's new style, which was in need of concrete demonstration by research, the author also puts forward her own viewpoint and argument (see Chapter 5). Finally, this thesis discusses the formation of the reform movements in Chinese painting of this century. Further, it proves that Li's style benefited from the influences of diverse contemporary schools, and to a great extent satisfied the general demands of the time (see Chapter 6).

The phenomenon of Li Keran involves aspects of many of the problems encountered in twentieth-century Chinese art, such as, should an artist pursue art as a superior handicraft or as a profound intrinsic philosophy; does the value of art rest in perfecting traditional rules or in freely displaying one's personality; is it significant that Chinese traditional painting turns towards a realist style; is it significant that traditional landscape painting inclines towards popularization? Together with the gains and losses of the new orthodoxy compared with traditional art; the position of moderate art in the future; and the future prospects of traditional art, all of these issues remain for further study and consideration.

CHAPTER 1: LI KERAN'S EARLY ARTISTIC CAREER

This chapter attempts to describe the early artistic life of Li Keran, to search and to reveal again the cultural and artistic environment in which he passed his early years, together with those events and persons that affected him in his growth as an artist. In investigating the personal experience of Li Keran, the background of the modern art movement in the first half of this century is unfolded as well. The study of the present author was based to the utmost upon the original materials of recollections or writings provided by Li Keran himself or by his contemporaries, and she has made investigations and argued her views when contradictions occurred among the various editions of the biographical content about Li Keran.

1.1 THE EARLY XUZHOU YEARS (1907--23)

Li Keran, originally named Li Yongshun [1], was born on 16th March, 1907 (*dingwei*, the 13th day of the 2nd moon of the lunar calendar) in Xuzhou municipality of Jiangsu Province. His father Li Huichun (?-1935) fled to Xuzhou from a famine-stricken rural area when young. He earned his livelihood by fishing in the Sui River on the southern outskirts of Xuzhou. Later on he was apprenticed as a cook, and having completed his apprenticeship, set up a stall selling steamed stuffed buns and working in an eating house. By living frugally, he managed to save a little money. Together with his brother, he built a few thatched cottages at the 'Guangda Lane' (*Guangda Xiang*) in the neighbourhood of Xuzhou's north city gate. (Li Keran was born in one of these cottages, which was repaired

[1]. According to the "Biography of Li Keran" by Wan Qingli, Li Keran's original name was Li Sanqi; in one of his early works, *Tea-Serving Picture* (1939), one can still find a square seal engraved with the words 'San Qi's painting seal'. Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.98 and p.100. According to the author's record of her visits to Li Keran's widow Zou Peizhu and Li Keran's 4th sister, Professor Li Wan, the family had no knowledge of Li Keran ever having such a name. It was their belief that the authenticity of *Tea-Serving Picture* and the seal awaited verification.

by order of the Xuzhou Municipal authorities in 1985 and named as the old home of Li Keran where a part of the famous painter's works were displayed.) It was then that Li Huichun got married and the two brothers managed to run a small eating place. Li Keran's mother was the daughter of a vegetable pedlar in Xuzhou also surnamed Li. She did not know her own birthday and did not even have a name. According to the practice at that time, she was known as Mrs. Li Li after marriage. She was industrious, hardworking and open-minded and lived in good health until she was over 80. The couple lived a discreet and frugal life, having been quite successful in the management of their small restaurant. The family's financial situation gradually improved and by the time Li Keran was born, they were quite comfortably off. Li Keran was the third child of the family.(2)

During his childhood, Li Keran's deepest impression of his mother was her two hands. In order that her children could have clothes to wear, she spent all her time sewing, mending, washing and dyeing and as a result of her hands being immersed all the year round in dye liquor which she herself prepared from walnut leaves, they became rough and dark brown in colour. Li Keran's memory of his father was that the old man was very fond of relating historical stories. Stories like "bury pens to form a tomb", and "Xizhi raising geese", often made him wonder how his father could have remembered so many historical tales besides being able to speak so well, not only vividly but also changing his styles of speech frequently. Sometimes he started from the middle of a story and though telling the

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[2]. According to a record of the author who paid a visit to Mrs. Li Keran, nee Ms. Zhou Peizhu, Li Keran's brothers and sisters, including himself, totalled eight in number. Keran was the third child among the brothers and sisters. His eldest brother, Li Yongping (1902-86), had a few years schooling in an old- style private school in his childhood. He soon left school and helped the family in household management, spending his whole life in Xuzhou. Keran's elder sister (her birth and death dates unknown) helped her mother to look after her younger brothers and sisters and did some household work. She was married into a family called Feng. One of her sons is now a director of an institute of chemical industry in Nanjing. Keran's second younger sister (birth and death dates unknown) was married into a family called Zheng. She has a son called Zheng Yuhe (born in 1934), who was known for his coloured clay sculpture. He was a member of the Chinese Artists Association, and now lives in Beijing and holds a post in the Chinese Historical Museum. Keran's third younger sister (birth and death dates unknown) was one of a part of twins, but the other one died early. Keran's younger brother Li Kepeng (birth and death dates unknown) became a painter under the influence of Keran. He died before China's War of Resistance against Japan. Keran's fourth younger sister Li Wan (1920-) followed Keran during the War of Resistance and left for Chongqing in Sichuan. She graduated from the National Art School at Chongqing and was a good friend and schoolmate of Keran's second wife Zhou Peizhu. She later became a member of the Nanjing Painting Institute in Jiangsu Province and professor of the Nanjing Art Teachers College. The "Biography of Li Keran" by Wan Qingli records that Li Keran had a brother and two sisters (Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No. 26, p.98), which is not correct.

same story, he was able to generate a feeling of something fresh which his audience never got tired of hearing. When speaking of paintings and art later on, Li Keran often interspersed his speech with stories, which showed the influence of his father.

Free of the bondage of the feudal ethical code, Li Keran in his childhood was able to develop himself freely and unrestrainedly into an admirer and student of art. The place he enjoyed most and was most reluctant to leave was a sandy beach formed by the old course of the Yellow River outside the southern outskirts of Xuzhou City. As days passed by, the beach had gradually become a popular country fair and a place of recreation. There were some who set up a stall with goods spread out on the ground for sale, some performed acrobatics and magic, some told versified stories sung to the accompaniment of a small drum and other instruments and some sang local operas. When he was only six or seven years old, he already knew how to use bits of broken bowls to sketch operatic figures, which often attracted a crowd of spectators offering praise.

Li Keran entered an old-style private school in 1914 when he was seven. In an account in his own words, he said: "There was no good teacher in the village, I learned nothing in two years, only in the central room could I write and draw at will."[3] The tutor of the private school who was partial to him often hid himself behind Li, quietly watching him drawing and writing at random without making any attempt to interrupt him. Certain little boys of the same school had given Keran two lithographic books of model paintings of unknown origin which he was so fond of that he wouldn't let go of them. He began to draw and looked at the book and after looking at it began to draw again, holding it in his bosom and even taking it to bed with him. In his reminiscences in later years, he remembered that he once saw a scroll of a landscape painting hung in the middle of the wall of the main room in the house of the man who owned the private school. Before he was able to get near and have a good look at the painting, all of a sudden he felt that the air changed, he was enveloped in mist, a cloud of mist was rising all around, and it appeared as if he was enveloped in a thick black-coloured mysterious atmosphere, seemingly having flown to the

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[3]. Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, P.3, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991

summit of a high mountain. He felt thunderstruck, deeply sensing the subtlety of Chinese landscape painting.(4) Later on when he had more contact with art, he got to know that that particular scroll was the work of Li Lan (dates of birth and death unknown), the celebrated Xuzhou painter who died before Li Keran at school-age. Li Lan used thick, dark ink in his painting which won him the name of "Li Lan ink Block". In his later years, Li Keran used to recall the deep impression of that painting imprinted on his memory. He quoted this impression into China's painting history, having felt that its style was rather close to but more attractive than that of Lan Tianshu (1585-?). Wittily he said later, "I am fond of using black in my painting, I am afraid it was the impression of that occasion when I saw Li Lan's painting that rooted it in my mind."(5)

Li Keran's interest in calligraphy was also acute. In the beginning, he practised writing characters after a calligraphy model. At about nine years of age, he chanced to see at the private school two big characters *Chang Huai* written by local calligrapher Miao Juwu (dates of birth and death unknown), expert in copying the lovely style of the regular script of Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322). These stimulated him so much that when he reached home, he used a big brush which he made himself to write the two words. His father was very proud of what his son had done, consequently posting the paper which carried the two words on the wall of the restaurant. It drew local scholars to inscribe poems on it, and Miao Juwu himself also wrote a colophon on the paper. After that, at every spring festival many of his neighbours and fellow villagers would engage him to write Spring antithetical couplets for them.

New schools were set up in Xuzhou in 1917. Li Keran was ten years of age at that time, and he changed over to a new primary school run by the government. This was called Xiu Yi primary school. The painting teacher Wang Qinfang noticed that Li Keran was intelligent, fond of learning and quite different from other children, he therefore chose a new name, 'Keran', for the child, indicating that "the boy is worth teaching". From then

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[4]. ibid., P.8

[5]. ibid., P.9

on, he used the name of Keran throughout his life.

Li Keran was crazy about traditional opera. He was especially fond of the *huqin*, a two-stringed bowed instrument used specially in opera. As a child, he used to spend whole days wandering about in streets and lanes and once had followed a blind *huqin* master roaming about the town. Li Keran was deeply touched by the blind man's long-drawn-out desolate melody. On the ensuing days, he persisted in following the blind *huqin* master roaming about the streets till midnight, feeling satisfied only after having listened to every one of the blind man's melodies. When he was eleven, he implored his father to buy a second-hand *huqin* from a vendor's stand for him and began to practise by himself. Playing *huqin* became his hobby for the rest of his life. In his later years, he said that his primary wish in his youth was to become a *huqin* player. But because he did not have a solid mastery of the basic skills to understand and remember the music score, his self-study process was disrupted and ended in his failure to become a stringed instrumentalist, and he felt quite miserable about it.(6) Later on, 17-year-old Li Keran entered the College of Fine Arts in Shanghai. Through the introduction of a fellow villager, he paid a formal visit to Sun Zuochen, reputed to be a great master of the *huqin*. After listening to Keran's *huqin* playing, the master said Keran's fingering was quite good. Keran listened to the old man's talk about his past, how he practised his fingering skill in the snowy weather out of doors when he was young. Keran was deeply touched by the story which he remembered all his life. When he was 22 and a student at the Art College in Hangzhou, he used to practise the *huqin* near the West Lake early in the morning and late into the evening. The sound of his *huqin* often attracted a crowd of sightseers in the park who would gather around and listen to his melody. Both of Li Keran's love affairs which resulted in marriage were linked with his love of Beijing Opera and *huqin*. His first and second wives were both sparetime Beijing Opera players and singers.

In 1920 when Li Keran was 13, he had by chance gained an opportunity to formally become a pupil of a local master of landscape painting, Mr. Qian Shizhi (1880-1922). (7) It

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[6]. *Li Keran On Art*, P.27, Beijing:The People Fine Arts Press, Beijing, 1990

[7]. Qian Shizhi (1880-1922) took the brush-name Songling, he copied the style of Wang Shigu (1632-1717)

was during the summer holidays of that year. Keran and his playmates had wandered to a garden plot at the corner of Xuzhou's southeastern city wall whereon were scattered rows of garden-style buildings. A kiosk known as *kuaizai ting* was situated in the middle of the place which had become a rendezvous among local literati. At play one day, Li Keran accidentally found a hall in a house among a row of buildings at the foot of the city wall, where several people were watching at close quarters a certain gentleman standing before a desk painting a picture. Keran was at once attracted by the scene, for that was the first time he, at the age of 13, saw a painter working on a painting. He therefore slipped down from the slope of the wall, and perching himself on the outside of the window, watched intensely. He just could not tear himself away even though all his playmates had gone away. On the second and third days, he lay outside the window and peeped in as usual, which ultimately attracted the notice of the people inside, who called him to go into the hall, also permitting him to come every day to watch the master doing his painting. This painting master was Qian Shizhi, a local painter whose name was unknown beyond his native village and a member of the local *Ji* (gether) *Yi* (wisdom) painting and calligraphy society, chiefly known for his landscape painting. Keran came every day to watch him paint and made notes as he watched. When he returned home, he copied the whole painting and by the time the copies formed a volume, he took it to Qian for advice. Various noted painters were moved by Keran's talents in the discerning power of his eye, his power of memorization and tracing by hand. They therefore urged Keran to formally become the pupil of Qian who gladly acceded to his request. In accordance with the prevailing custom, Keran's father prepared a few dishes in his little restaurant to honour the event, after which Mr. Qian spent about a week painting a scroll of about 4 *chi* (1 and 1/3 of a metre) long after the model of the four Wangs'[8], and gave it as a gift to Keran. Mr. Qian also wrote many lines as a postscript to the painting with a poem attached at the end, the last four sentences reading:

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whereas in calligraphy, he copied the style of Liu Shi'an and of the Han and Wei dynasties. In poetry,he followed Tao Yuanming. His works included *Collections of Poetries, Calligraphies and Paintings in Huai-wei Cottage*. Mr. Qian Shizhi's photo was seen hung in the hall of Li Keran's former dwelling.

[8]. Wang Shimin (1592-1680); Wang Jian (1598-1677); Wang Shigu (1632-1717); Wang Yuanqi (1643-1715)

"Fond of writing and drawing when a child, rare in sensitivity and dexterity, your son is like a roc that thrusts into the firmament, while I, like a flounder, recede in flight." This original work by Qian Shizhi was kept for many years in Keran's home but was ultimately lost in the war chaos.

According to Li Keran's own account, Mr. Qian learned painting from Wang Shigu (1632-1717), one of the four Wangs. As Wang Shigu's range of knowledge was wide, his painting was easily understood. Li learned the landscape painting of Wang Shigu under the guidance of Mr.Qian, whose teaching method was to draw some models himself and ask Keran to copy them. This period lasted about two years until Mr. Qian passed away. It marked the beginning of Li Keran's formal contact with Chinese painting.(9)

When Li Keran was fifteen (1922) there lived in Xuzhou City a rich and influential family surnamed Zhang. Zhang Xun, a bureaucrat who launched a movement to restore the monarchy in 1917, in order to celebrate his mother's birthday, had engaged several very well-known Beijing Opera actors and actresses from Shanghai and Beijing to put on joint performances in Xuzhou, the scale and lineup of which were rare in the history of China's Beijing Opera. The actors present included celebrities like Yang Xiaolou (1878-1938), Yu Shuyan (1890-1943), Cheng Yanqiu (1904-58), Xun Huisheng (1900-63), Wang Youchen (1885-1943), Wang Changlin (1856-1931), Qian Jinfu (1862-1937), etc. By sheer luck, Keran was able to get an invitation card from a venerable elder who had got one because he had sent a birthday banner to the Zhang family. The elder was unable to go himself, so he asked Keran to attend the grand occasion. In his later years, Keran called this opportunity "the chance of a lifetime," considering himself most fortunate in having been able to attend a major joint performance by Beijing Opera celebrities gathering together in a hall and to be able to appreciate the high level of China's traditional operas. In his later years, he still remembered Bai Dengyun who beat a drum during the performance of the Beijing Opera (whose job corresponded to the conductor of a Western orchestra). He also remembered the *huqin* player Hu Tiefen. He said that Hu's movements in playing the *huqin* appeared never

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[9]. Li Keran, 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.13

to change, but that the timbre was ever-changing. "He had captivated my soul,"[10] Keran said. After that he realized the hows and whys sought after by Chinese art, which was to seek for something natural and changeable in simplicity and unadorned condition. He said many times later,

> "When I was more than 10 years old, I heard Cheng Yanqiu singing "*Yu Tang Chun*". Ancient people talked about "the music lingering in the air non-stop for three days after the performance", whereas to me, it lingered for more than half a year. When I think of it now, I am still deeply impressed by his singing."[11]

In his old age, Keran said,

> "It was solely through opera that I was ushered into the world of art. Opera is something that displays life, but at the same time it is not life. Its realm is different from life, one is able to see the distinction between an objective world and art". [12]

Li Keran was born in a poor family of illiterate parents, with no tradition of scholarly learning. However, in his initial contacts with folk arts, operas and books and paintings, he had become aware of the most touching charm from the realms of Chinese traditional art. With the gift of sensitivity, he felt that the purpose of art was to manifest life, but at the same time, it is not life; the realm of art is expression, its appeal is able 'to captivate one's soul.' Among the four forms of art, lute-playing, chess, calligraphy, and painting, reputed to be the means for the cultivation of the moral character and the nourishment of the inborn nature of the literati and scholar-officials, Keran had, with the exception of chess, exhibited unusual talent in the other three in his early youth. Though the ways of the above-mentioned arts were different, to him, the theories related to them could be merged and understood, and the highest realm was entirely the same. Thereafter, he held in awe and veneration the highest realm of Chinese traditional art. His heart yearned for it and his whole life was devoted to the search for the comprehension of the true meaning of art.

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[10]. See Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, P.10, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991

[11]. ibid., P.94

[12]. Li Keran, 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.16

1.2 ART STUDENT AT THE SHANGHAI ART SCHOOL AND LATER (1923-29)

Li Keran graduated from Xiuyi primary school in 1923 when he was sixteen. He left Xuzhou for the first time to go to Shanghai and was enrolled in the Shanghai Art School [13] for further studies. He chose primary teacher-training as an elective course. The level of a primary teacher-training course corresponded to that of an elementary middle school. It was set up for training primary school art teachers, and the length of the course was two years. The main curriculum included painting and handwork.[14]

Other subjects at the school included Chinese painting, Western painting, technological design, sculpture and high-level teacher-training. The teachers of Chinese painting included Pan Tianshou (1897-1971); Zhu Wenyun (1894-1938) and the teacher of Western painting was Ni Yide (1901-70). Li Keran's two years at the school happened to be the first two years when Pan Tianshou taught Chinese painting and the history of Chinese painting there. But as Pan Tianshou was then in an important period of stylistic development, it seemed that he did not exert much influence over Li Keran.[15] In his later

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[13]. Shanghai Art School was one of the earliest private art schools set up in contemporary China. Liu Haisu was the principal of the school for a long time. The school was first set up in November, 1912 by Wu Shiguang, Zhang Yuguang and Liu Haisu, etc. under the name of the Shanghai Art Institute and was changed to Shanghai Painting Art Institute in 1915. In 1916, it was renamed Shanghai Painting Art School. In 1917, it organized a School Board of Directors, inviting Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao, Wang Zhen, Shen Enfu, Huang Yanpei, etc. to be members of the Board. In 1920, the school again changed its name to Shanghai Art School and again in 1921 to Shanghai Art Specialty School. The school introduced the educational ways of the West in teaching Western art, using models for sketching practice, organizing students to go travelling, making sketches from nature, and advocating the diversification of art styles. In his thoughts on running the school, Liu Haisu was under the influence of Cai Yuanpei's viewpoints on new aesthetic education including his "freedom of thoughts and all-embracing" stand. In calligraphy and many art standpoints, he came under the influence of Kang Youwei. In a poetic postscript on painting, Kang Youwei had eulogized Raphael's (1483-1520) painting and placed great hope on the Art School set up by Liu Haisu: "Today we should draw the essence of Europe in the depiction of form for the defects of our Chinese art. In setting up the Art School, Liu Haisu has combined Chinese with the West. Evidently is it here that one day there will emerge a talent who will combine Chinese with the West to form a new style?" (Liu Haisu, *Talks on Art at Qi and Lu*, Jinan: Shandong Art Press, Jinan, 1985, p. 87)

[14]. Li Keran, 'Recalling' Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.13

[15]. In the "Biography of Li Keran", Wan Qingli said that during Li Keran's schooling period in Shanghai Art School, Li had learned through Pan Tianshou and Zhu Wenyun, then teachers of the School, that "Wu Changshuo had developed the painting of the *jin shi* school initiated by Zhao Zhiqian to another height." (Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.102)

years, Li Keran said:

> "When I came to Shanghai at the age of 16, I had come into contact with many works by Wu Changshuo and was very fond of them."(16)

But he never mentioned anything about his impression of Pan Tianshou when he was in the Shanghai Art School between sixteen and eighteen years of age. During his graduation examination, Li Keran painted a Wang Shigu-style fine-brushwork landscape which astonished his schoolmates. Liu Haisu, the Principal, wrote a colophon for it which ranked topmost in the graduation creations.

As to the rudimentary knowledge of Western painting which Li Keran learned at the Shanghai Art School, it consisted chiefly of some of watercolour. He had not gone through any strict sketching training, neither had he come into contact with oil painting.(17) The teacher of Western painting in the school at that time was Ni Yide, who was a graduate of the school in 1922 and remained as a teacher after graduation. He used to publish his views concerning basic teaching methods and theory in the school publication, *Art*. In 1927 when he had already had five years of teaching experience, he published *An Outline of Watercolour Painting*. It was quite possible that Li Keran's initial watercolour sketches from nature bore the influence of Ni Yide.

Deeply influenced by the viewpoint of Cai Yuanpei's (1868-1940)(18) new aesthetic

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[16].*Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.191

[17]. The "Outline of Art Education" of the West Lake National Art Academy (The National Art School of Hangzhou) (1928-1937) with Lin Fengmian as its principal, had pointed out: "sketching-training is the foundation of plastic arts, the mistake of our art schools in the past has been the neglect of the importance of sketching. It has been the practice of the school to teach the beginners watercolour or oil painting after giving them some superficial fundamental knowledge in pencil drawing." (Zheng Chao, ed., *Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts Press, 1988, p.11). Li Keran later on recollected his condition in 1929 when he sat for an examination for enrolment in the West Lake National Art Academy. He said, "to be frank, at that time I was only able to do some watercolours, I was no good in Chinese painting and had never yet touched oil painting." (Li Keran, 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.13). As to sketching, Li Keran's drawing was the poorest in the class in the first few months. This shows that during Li Keran's schooling period in Shanghai Art School, the lessons he had were mostly those of watercolour drawings. He had never touched oil painting and had not learned very much about sketching.

[18].Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), China's leading educationist, a native of Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. In 1917, he was appointed as the principal of Beijing University. He advocated "freedom in systematic learning", recommended the "all-embracing" of new and old thoughts, spread the idea of "using aesthetic education to replace religion."After the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, he was forced to resign his post. In 1927, he was appointed Head of the Guomindang Government University Office, and afterwards changed to become the Principal of the Central Research Institute. After the September 18th Incident, he advocated resistance to Japan and together with Song Qingling, Lu Xun, etc., organized an Alliance for Safeguarding China's Human Rights. He died of illness in Hongkong during the War of Resistance against Japan.

education and the "freedom of thoughts, all-embracing" stand (*sixiang ziyou, jian rong bing bao*), the Principal of Shanghai Art School, Liu Haisu, let go his hold, allowing his students to freely choose different styles and schools. In teaching, there was no strict system, neither was there any teaching procedure that ran through the whole. Li Keran was dissatisfied in his two years study in the Shanghai Art School. Later on he said "I did not learn anything when studying in Shanghai".(19)

According to Wan Qingli's record of Li Keran's recollections on his lifetime, there was an event during Li Keran's student days that deserves our attention. In 1924, in response to the invitation of Principal Liu Haisu, Kang Youwei (1858-1927)(20) gave three addresses in the Shanghai Art School, which had a deep influence on Li Keran. According to Li Keran's recollection, Kang Youwei's principal viewpoint consisted of the following -- Until the Song Dynasty, Chinese painting had all along been at the summit of world art. But since the Yuan Dynasty, as a result of the rise of literati painting, Chinese painting had been on the wane. He attacked the "four Wangs" in particular, remarking that it was the orthodox painting school that became the stumbling block of Chinese painting. He advocated "Return to the ancients for rejuvenation", and the restoration of the Song academic painting style. He further encouraged realistic views and the study of Renaissance painting in order to achieve "the merging of Chinese and Western painting." He also encouraged the students to study tablet inscriptions of the Six Dynasties, especially those of the Northern Wei, so as to create a "strong and vigorous" style.(21)

After the 1940s, Li Keran became immersed in the tradition of Chinese painting.

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[19]. Zheng Chao, ed., *Art Cradle*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts Press, 1988, p.82

[20]. Kang Youwei (1858-1927), leader of China's modern Reform Movement group. He was a native of Nanhai, Guangdong Province. In 1898, he was summoned to an audience with Emperor Guangxu, which led to the "Hundred Days Reform Movement". After the coup d'etat in 1898, he went into exile in Europe. Later on, he organized the constitutional monarchists in opposition to democratic revolution. After the 1911 Revolution, he published talks against republicanism and for the preservation of the quintessence of Chinese culture. Because of his petition to the Northern Government to fix Confucianism as National Religion, he was ridiculed and severely criticised by people like Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and Lu Xun, the promoters of the New Cultural Movement. But Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, the two most important figures in the history of modern artistic education, were Kang's pupils and still looked upon Kang Youwei as their teacher.

[21] Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.104

His lifelong devotion to the reform of traditional landscape painting was inseparable from his entrance to the Shanghai Art School in his youth and his contact with people like Kang Youwei.

Li Keran graduated from the Shanghai Art School when he was eighteen (1925) and came back to Xuzhou. He accepted an appointment as an art teacher in the primary school affiliated to the 7th Teacher's School of Xuzhou City until the winter of 1928. At the same time, he held a post as a teacher of charcoal painting in a private art school in Xuzhou City. The job was a voluntary one with no salary but a travel allowance of 3 yuan each month. During summer vacation periods, he often held get-togethers with his former schoolmates of Shanghai Art School to practise Chinese painting. He also used to frequent the area around Xuzhou's Yunlong Hills to draw from nature, taking peanuts as rations, going out early in the morning and returning late in the evening. Li Keran at the same time consistently practised his *huqin*.

1.3 GRADUATE STUDENT OF ART IN THE NATIONAL ART ACADEMY AT WEST LAKE IN HANGZHOU (1929--32)

The Graduate Research Section of the National Art Academy at West Lake in Hangzhou was to enroll eight postgraduate students of oil painting in 1929, one year after the academy was founded. Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), President of the Academy, engaged French painter Andre Claudot (1892-1982)[22] as the supervisor. At the invitation of Lin Fengmian, President of the School National Beijing Specialist of Fine Arts from the begining of 1926 to the autumn of 1927, Claudot came to Beijing[23] in September 1926 to

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[22] Andre Claudot had in his early years been much influenced by the impressionist, the post-impressionist and the painting style of Henri Matisse. His structure of natural forms were found to be succinct and brief, and his style strong and powerful. In 1926, he held a personal exhibition of rather big scale in Paris and after a great success in it came to China in September of the same year. The portraits made by him when he was in Beijing between the years of 1927-28 and in Hangzhou in 1929 had shown a style of slight deformity, high condensation and between post-impressionism and expressionism. He was a painter who had in his whole life resisted post-impressionism. (See Wan Qingli, Qi Dawei, 'French Painter Andre Claudot and his travels in China', Taibei: *Xiongshi Art*, No.242, 1991/4, pp.181-190)

[23] In 1928, the Nanjing Nationalist Government changed the name of Beijing to Beiping. On 1st October,

be in charge of the Department of the Western Painting. Again at the invitation of Lin, he came down south to Hangzhou to take up his new job.(24)

Li Keran, 22 years of age that year,decided to enter himself for the entrance examination for postgraduates, with the consent of his mother, who gave him her total savings of 20 yuan as the expenses for his trip. Li arrived in Hangzhou in June the same year.

The National Art Academy (NAA) was founded with the approval of Cai Yuanpei, who was then Head of the Government University Office, the supreme administrative organ in charge of academic education. On his recommendation, Lin Fengmian, a returned student from France (1919-1925), was appointed headmaster of the National Beijing Art School. In 1927, Lin left for Shanghai and was nominated by Cai as Director of the Arts and Education Committee by Cai in his Office. In March 1928, with support from Cai, Lin set up the National Academy of Art beside the West Lake in Hangzhou and acted as President and professor. Its two Departments of Western Painting and Chinese Painting were integrated into one a year later, in 1929.

Li Keran met Zhang Tiao (1900-1934), a candidate for the examination from Shandong Province, the day he set his foot in Hangzhou. They immediately became acquainted after having exchanged a few words. They settled down in a cheap house (later they called it "dangerous building") rented for one yuan a month in Shanfu An (Benevolence Temple) near the Tomb of Yue Fei. Li Keran only had an educational background equal to junior high school when he graduated from the Shanghai Art School. He trailed seven years behind a postgraduate and had never learned oil painting. Zhang Tiao had studied oil painting in an art school in Jinan before he came to Hangzhou. So he volunteered to teach Li how to paint oil. They went to buy the paraphernalia needed and went to paint landscapes at the West Lake. After a short period of time, they went to take the exam. They were required to draw a life-size nude in oil which Li had never tried before. Nevertheless, by

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1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, it was changed back again to Beijing.

[24] See Wan Qingli and David Clarke, 'French Painter Andre Claudot and His Travels in China', Taibei: *Xiongshi Arts*, No.242, 1991/4, pp.184-186

making use of his good basis on drawing opera characters in his early youth, he painted a nude, a first in his life. He was not sure of the result. When the list of students to be admitted was published, his name was on it instead of Zhang Tiao. Zhang Tiao asked to see Mr. Lin Fengmian and stated sincerely his aspirations. Mr Lin was moved by his words and made an exception to admit him. As Li later recalled,

> "Mr Lin thought I was unusual and my painting was out of the ordinary because I painted oil in a Chinese way" [25].

Li was very fortunate. At the crucial stage of his study in the youth, he met Lin, who advocated blending of the Chinese and Western paintings and emphasized artistic individuality. During his three years in the Academy, he came under the influence of Lin Fengmian and the painting style of the Academy.

> "I received no knowledge from my family in my childhood, and learned little when I was in Shanghai. It was in Hangzhou that I really learned something," later said Li [26].

He called his stay in Hangzhou "a crucial stage that helps me decide my lifetime career" [27].

The artistic atmosphere and thinking in the National Art Academy affected Li Keran in the following three respects:

[1] The teaching of Western painting.

[2] The teaching of Traditional Chinese Painting

[3] The professors' New Arts Movement and the activities of student organizations

[1] THE TEACHING OF WESTERN PAINTING:

The academy attached great importance to the training in basic skills, which focused on sketching or charcoal painting. It stated in its *Syllabus of Art Education* that

> "sketching constitutes the essence of the formative arts. Art schools have in the past ignored the importance of sketches and gave beginners only superficial knowledge of pencil drawing before teaching them water colour or oil" [28].

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[25] Li Keran 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.13,

[26] Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.82

[27] Li Keran, 'A Brief Account in His Own Words', from Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.259

[28] refer to Zheng Chao etc. 'Chronicle of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.11

The painting style of the Academy at the time belonged to post-impressionism. The Academy adopted a flexible system in the teaching of sketching that focused on summary and expression, and training of modelling ability. The students called it the "School of Hangzhou" or "School of Lin".

> "This kind of sketching system put emphasis on the modelling of the overall outline of the objects instead of slight changes in their contours. In dealing with lighting effects, it paid heed only to the part exposed to the light and the part in the dark, and purposely abandoned the large patches of grey between them. Striving to be objective and realistic, the works, though roughly sketched, presented vivid images of individuality in distinct black and white." (29)

For example, Fang Ganmin (1906-84), an early professor at the NAA, once studied under a French historical painter belonging to the French Academic School. Fang was proficient at realistic painting but he never mentioned his mentor. Instead he introduced more works of Cezanne (1939-1906) and Matisse (1869-1954) to his students. He believed that

> "Modern paintings are simple and distorted and seem like poorly and hastily painted pieces, but they actually show a good foundation of the painters who created the modern paintings and the strict attitudes towards sketching of them. These painters observe things from new angles so that they paint in different ways."(30)

Fang laid stress on training in observational methods and said that in observing an object, one should look at it as a whole, then compare and associate its different segments with each other, and analyze each individual part from different angles, thus getting a thorough comprehension of it before starting modelling; For example, one should dismember a plaster statue into several parts and try to summarize it three-dimensionally. (31)

Wu Dayu (1903-1988), another professor returned from France, held that painters must first of all grasp the entirety instead of being entangled in details, that is, in the training of basic skills they must pay heed to the entirety of the composition, as well as

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[29] See Cai Ruohong, 'Lin Fengmian in My Memory', Zheng Chao and Jin Shangyi, ed., *On Lin Fengmian*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1990, p.17

[30] Min Xiwen, 'In Memory of My Teacher Fang Ganmin', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.64

[31] See Zhu Ying 'Unforgettable years', *The Cradle of Art*, p.97, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Press, 1988

expression. He insisted that works must reflect the vitality of the objects.(32)

When the school began in September, Andre Claudot was the sketching instructor of the postgraduate class. According to one student's recollection, the 1.7-metre tall Claudot had a blonde moustache and wore a brown bold-stripe corduroy suit. He was sincere, amiable and straightforward but rather stern with the students. Well grounded in sketching, he was also very knowledgeable about plaster statues. Students were required to use pantographs to sketch outlines, and he applied precise lines to polish their pictures.(33)

Li Keran recalled about the course,

> "I lagged far behind other Specialist School graduates in sketching. When the weekly appraisal came, I always felt embarrassed to show my work which looked like a mass of cotton. I always put the reverse side out and turned it over when Claudot approached."(34)

Li felt so ashamed and wrote the word *"wang"*, a homonym for another *"wang"*, "desperate" (*"yi fu wang ming qian fu nan dang"*), on his easel. He determined to work desperately hard and catch up with the others.

> "I got up every morning before daybreak and practised sketching under the kerosene lamp," (35)

His hard work paid off in six months. At the end of the term, he got the top grades in the academy. And the word *"wang"*, meaning desperate, became known as his one-word motto.

According to Li himself, the works of Gauguin (1848-1903) had exercised a profound influence on him regarding colour (36). He said he was prone to use colours like khaki, Indian red, purple, lotus green and black in Claudot's oil painting class, and he had a special liking for black.

> "One day in the class, Mr Claudot approached me, looked at my painting and then me, touched my forehead and asked, 'Have you got a

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[32] See Cao Zengming, 'My Teacher Wu Duyu', *The Cradle of Art*, p.52; *Chinese Encyclopedia, Fine Arts Volume*, II, p. 868, China Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1991.

[33] See Qiu Xi, 'Notes on Foreign Professors in the Mother School', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.69

[34] see Hua Xia, 'Recollections of Li Keran in his life in the Art School', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.81

[35] ibid.

[36] ibid., p.82

> fever?' 'No,' I said. 'Then why don't you know what exact colour to use?' He then told me unhappily that it was not sensible to use black. A few days later, Mr. Claudot greeted me warmly when he saw me, and invited me to go over to his house some day. 'It was wrong for me to criticize you that day for using black,' said Claudot. 'You are a Chinese, and black is your fundamental colour. You may use it again'."[37]

Claudot's tolerance towards Li's use of colour also reflected the Academy's principle of emphasizing artistic expression and blending Chinese and Western art. The thick tones Li applied in his oils when he was in the Academy became more developed in his later publicity posters in the Anti-Japanese War. It constituted one of the unique features in his later landscape paintings.

French pictorials and magazines were then available at the library of the Academy. Students had access to works of masters in different periods, from Italian Renaissance to the classical period, from impressionism to Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin of post-impressionism; Matisse and Derain of Fauvism; Picasso of cubism and the expressionist painters in Germany. They held heated discussions on these works which were then totally alien to ordinary people. Professors at the Academy also displayed their reproductions painted from French originals, such as Cezanne's *Mount Sainte-Victoire* (1890-1900) and *Woman in Red Trousers* copied by Fang Ganmin.

Li Keran later recalled,

> "Only then did we have access to works of famous painters from different European countries including Italy, France, Holland and Germany. I like Botticelli from the Renaissance period best because the lines in his works are quite similar to those in Chinese paintings. As for French paintings, I like the characters of the labourers in Millet's paintings. His work *A Man Leaning on A Hoe* is a touching piece; I also have a liking for Daumier and Gauguin. The colour Gauguin employed in his paintings is my favourite. Other painters like Rembrandt and Kathe Kollwitz also affected me greatly. During that period, I often stayed in the library for a whole day, bringing only a pie with me for lunch. The library is closed at noon. But the librarian was very good to me. He locked me inside. In this way, I read more books and pictorials than any other students."[38]

One paragraph in his letter to Mr. Wang Zhanfei in 1980 stated the influence he received in Hangzhou.

> "You said Zhang Tiao and I were greatly affected by Gauguin. Yes, it's true, especially in colours. But the painting style at the NAA was basically post-impressionist, which had aroused discussion among us. The

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[37] ibid.

[38] ibid.

> light and colour tone of impressionism are valuable, but they are not profound in reflecting the new society. And we thought that works of Michelangelo from the Renaissance period, and those of Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli were serious and expressive; the works of Botticelli show the application of pure colour, clear-cut lines and are close to Chinese works. Moreover, Millet's works reflect the lives of farmers in a simple and honest style. Daumier's are sarcastic about the dark side of society and Rembrandt's are expressive and unrestrained in strokes"[39].

From this statement, one can clearly see that Li held two basic attitudes when he first came into contact with Western art. First, he was attracted by the traditions from the Renaissance to post-impressionism. He was not involved with any particular style but tried to find their common features - their highly artistic expressive power - instead of differences between the various schools. Second, he broke through the individual system of each school and took as nourishment and reference in his own creation all that was useful. This indicates that deep in his heart, he looked at Western traditions from a Chinese artistic angle. Though he was a postgraduate student of oil painting, he worked hard on sketching as well as oils during that period.

Appreciating Li's artistic talent, Lin Fengmian had planned to keep him on as an assistant lecturer when he finished his studies and send him to France one or two teaching years later [40]. But after Cai Yuanpei left his post in education, the NAA was renamed the National Hangzhou Specialist Art School in October 1930. The length of schooling was reduced from five to three years and the Graduate Section removed [41]. Andrew Claudot left the School for France at the end of the same year [42]. Under Lin's arrangement, Li Keran worked as an assistant in the studio so that he could continue to paint at the School and make a living. In this way, he managed to finish the second year of his studies[43]

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[39] For Li Keran's letter to Wang Zhanfei, 8th April, 1980, see Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.267

[40] See Hua Xia, 'Recollections of Li Keran in his life in the Art School', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.83

[41] See Zheng Chao etc., 'Chronicle of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.10 and p.11

[42] See Wan Qingli and David Clarke, 'French Painter Andre Claudot and His Travel in China', Taibei: *Xiongshi Arts*, No.242, 1991/4, p.187

[43] See Hua Xia, 'Recollections of Li Keran on his life in the Art School', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.83

[2] THE TEACHING OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE PAINTING

The Academy adhered to the principle of academic freedom, and adopted an all-embracing stand blending Chinese and Western arts in running the school while introducing in an all-round way the teaching methods, teaching processes and library materials from French fine arts schools. Lin Fengmian combined the two departments of Western painting and traditional Chinese painting into one, and at the same time invited Pan Tianshou, who dissented from Lin's views and the combining of the two departments[44], to teach traditional Chinese painting[45]. Lin Fengmian explained:

> "Many people then thought that traditional Chinese painting and Western painting differed greatly and were completely unrelated. Professors and students in the two different departments could not understand and looked down upon each other. If we were going to blaze a new trail in revitalizing traditional Chinese painting in order to adapt it to social consciousness, students studying it should not neglect the contributions made by Western painting. Meanwhile those learning Western painting should not ignore the achievements of more than a thousand years of traditional Chinese painting if we were to get rid of the stereotyped mode of Western painting and develop it as a new art that represented national spirit."[46]

However, due to the attacks on traditional Chinese paintings since Kang Youwei, and in particular during the May Fourth Movement, young students held the prejudice that traditional Chinese paintings were out of date and unscientific, and thus shifted their attention to Western paintings. Wu Guanzhong (1919-), who was admitted into the Academy in 1936, recalled,

> "The specialized courses of the whole morning are on Western painting

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[44] In 1939, separating the Chinese and the western into two Departments again in National Art Academy was put forward by several professors with Pan at their head. On the relationship between the Chinese and the western, Lin Fengmian laid special stress on absorption and harmonization of the two; while Pan Tianshou believed that the eastern and the western belonged to two systems; like two mountains, they on one hand should learn from each other, while on the other, should increase the distance between them.

[45] Towards the end of 1927, Lin Fengmian sent a message to Shanghai inviting Pan Tianshou to go to Hangzhou to make preparations for the setting up of a state-run art academy and to assume the post of Head Professor of Chinese painting. Pan Tianshou left Shanghai for Hangzhou in the beginning of Spring 1928, settling down in Hangzhou for the next years and never leaving the Academy again. See Pan Gongkai, *Critical Biography of Pan Tianshou*, p.21, The Commercial Press, Hongkong, 1986. With regard to the relationship between Chinese and Western art, Pan and Lin disagreed with each other, see Zheng Chao and Jin Shangyi,ed., *Comments on Lin Fengmian*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Art Press, 1990, pp.112-114

[46] Zheng Chao etc., 'Chronicle of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.12

everyday. There are only two afternoons per week for traditional Chinese painting courses. Despite Mr. Pan's artistic talent and excellent character, students took fewer of his classes because they thought Western painting was more important. Mr. Pan talked more about the artistic features of masters of traditional Chinese paintings, especially Shi Tao and Ba Da, and put stress on composition, tone and the concept of a painting in his teaching, which were exactly what modern Western painters have been pursuing and exploring. However the students then were far from being able to study thoroughly." (47).

Mr Pan had called those students who dropped out after the attendance register had been checked "roll call students" and others "ink-rubbing students" because they stayed and slowly ground the ink till the teacher finished his review or instruction, and then joined a group for discussion before they started their own works (48)

Li Keran had recalled in his later years (1982),

"Due to the corrupt imperial court of the Qing Dynasty, wars among the warlords, and invasions by imperialist nations, many people turned to Western painting in order to find a way out, and a tendency towards total Westernization appeared. I am someone who has gone through it. I started to learn traditional Chinese painting in my teens and had once looked down upon it when I was studying Western painting for two years in my 20s, but I realized later that it was wrong for me to think so."(49)

Li admitted that he also became affected by the tendency to look down upon traditional Chinese paintings during the two years in Hangzhou. Nevertheless he read a lot of books on the history of Chinese fine arts and wrote a chronology and put it up on the wall of his lodgings. He learned by heart the name of every famous historical painter from various dynasties. (50)

[3] THE PROFESSORS' NEW ARTS MOVEMENT AND THE ACTIVITIES OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Many young professors at NAA were students who had returned from France. Lin Fengmian, the president, Lin Wenzheng (1903-90), the dean and professor of history of Western arts, Wu Dayu, the principal professor of Western arts, and Liu Jipiao (dates of

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[47] Wu Guanzhong, 'Out of an ivory tower', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Art Academy Press, 1988, p.170

[48] See Hong Yiran, 'Random Recollections on Luo-Yuan's art learning', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Art Academy Press, 1988, p.93

[49] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.92

[50] Hua Xia, 'Recollections of Li Keran on his life in the Art School', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.83

birth and death unknown), the principal professor of design had organized an Overseas Arts Society to respond to Cai Yuanpei's call for aesthetic education against religion while they were in France. After they came back, they set up a nationwide arts society composed mainly of the staff of NAA to promote "creations for new arts in a new era". They came under the influence of Impressionism and other modern schools in respect of artistic thought and style, and meanwhile, they brushed their opinions on important social events. Some of the works produced in this period were *Exploration* (1923, in Berlin), *Humanity* (1927), *Agony* (1929), and *Distress* (1934) by Lin Fengmian; *A Fallen Tripod*, by Wu Dayu; *Martyrdom of Qiu Jin in Shao Xing*, and *Sun Zhongshan* by Cai Weilian, *Premier's Guidance* by Fang Ganmin [51]. The left-wing Professor Andre Claudot, after repeated visits to alleys and lanes, based a number of his works in China on the lives of the poor such as *Beggars* (1928) and *Blind Persons* (1928).[52]

When studying, Li Keran showed no sign of sticking to the "arts for life's sake" principle. Landscapes and nudes formed the subject of his practice drawings. Having Lin Fengmian and Claudot as his tutors, he learnt from them the basic skills of modelling and the approach to expression in art. He then showed a deeper interest in pursuing the possibilities of art itself, but did not seem to care much about social reality.

Student societies of the NAA organized a series of activities. Some were held by the school. Some societies were initiated by the students themselves. There were altogether scores of such public societies around 1929 [53]. With different world outlooks and artistic standards, some advocated "arts for art's sake" while many others believed in "arts for Life's sake". Among these societies was Yiba Yishe (The Eighteen Art Society), the earliest and the best known progressive organization which lasted the longest among the groups of the same kind.

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[51] Refer to Zheng Chao etc., 'Chronicle of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.12

[52] Taibei: *Xiongshi Arts*, No.242, 1991/4, p.188

[53] Wang Zhanfei, 'Friendship by the side of West Lake', collected in Sun Meilan's *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.273

Xihu Yiba Art Society was founded on January, 22, 1929. Chen Zhoukun, the organizer, put up a notice together with others and a few days later, eighteen members were enrolled by signature. The Society was thus named because it was established in the 18th year of the Republic of China with eighteen members, at the West Lake. The Society received assistance from the School with President Lin, foreign Professor Andre Claudot and other professors as its advisors. In March 1930, The League of Left-wing Writers (LLW) headed by Lu Xun (1881-1936) was founded in Shanghai. Under its influence and the introduction of Puro's works, as well as through the efforts of Zhang Tiao[54], the Chinese Communist Party Member in the School, the members of the Society started a heated dispute on whether to take working-class people as a main subject in artistic work or to remain closed to their lives, views which were raised by LLW. The discussion ended in conflict. On 21st May, 1930, some of the students, headed by Chen Zhoukun, changed the name of the Society from "Xihu Yiba Art Society" to "Yiba Art Society" and took in more members, including Hu Yichuan, Ji Chundan (later called Li Yang), Wang Zhanfei, Wang Zhaomin, Shen Fuwen, Lu Hongji and so on. After 1930, Yiba Art Society put itself under the leadership of LLW. Other students still held on to the original name "Xihu Yiba Art Society". Influenced by Zhang Tiao, Li Keran joined the reorganized Yiba Art Society.

Zhang Tiao often organized discussions among the students to help them read progressive books. He aroused the government's suspicion and was put into prison in the spring of 1930. Two months later he was bailed out by Lin Fengmin. However, he was then

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[54] Zhang Tiao (1900-1934) was born in a poor family of scholars in Wei County, Shandong Province. Before he came to Hangzhou, he had studied oil painting in an art school in Jinan. Later on, because of his participation in the anti-imperialist, patriotic movement, he was expelled from school. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1926. He came to Hangzhou in the Spring of 1929 and after examination was admitted to the National Art Academy. Together with Li Keran, he was admitted to the Graduate Section. In the spring of 1930 Zhang was arrested and put into the Hangzhou Army Jail. Through the efforts of President Lin Fengmian, he was released on bail but expelled by the Academy. Subsequently he went to Shanghai to shoulder the responsibility of leadership of the Mutual Relief Society of the Communist Party in Fa Nan district and of the League of Left-wing Artists. He had once been appointed the Party Secretary of the LLW. In 1932, he was sent by the Party to the northeast Soviet area of Jiangxi and to shoulder the reponsibility for the leadership of literature and art there. Subsequently, he was appointed as Education Minister of the Soviet Government in Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangxi. In 1934, he was framed and killed by a "Central special commissioner" who followed Wang Ming's political line. (See Wang Zhanfei's 'The First Communist Member of the Mother School, Zhang Tiao'; Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, pp.71-72

expelled from the school. Soon after, six other members of Yiba Art Society were expelled too [55]. After Zhang Tiao was taken prisoner Li Keran came over to see him, bringing him some clothes and other necessities. Later, when Zhang Tiao came out of jail and was going to leave Hangzhou, Li Keran paid him another visit at a friend's house.

Forced to leave the school, the members of Yiba Art Society managed to meet in Shanghai, and later got in touch with Lu Xun. Following to his advice, they began to work on woodcuts, which, though they cost less, embodied fine artistic values[56]. In his speech on painting made at Shanghai Zhonghua Art College in February 1930[57], Lu Xun introduced the functions of woodcuts to the audience and proposed this art form. A member of Yiba Art Society, Lu Hongji listened to Lu Xun's speech, and the society received assistance from Lu Xun. He recommended two of his published books, *Selected Works of Modern Woodcuts* (1929) and *Pictures of Shi Mintu* (1930) to its members for reference. Encouraged by Lu Xun, some of them began to show an interest in woodcuts.[58]

Yiba Art Society put on its second painting exhibition in Shanghai from 11th to 13th June, 1931. The show included more than 180 works, with an average of two to three from each member, among them traditional Chinese paintings, oil paintings, woodcuts, sculptures

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[55] Besides Zhang Tiao, the six members of Yiba Yishe expelled in 1930 were Yu Hai, Chen Zhuokun, Chen Yaotang, Gu Honggan, Luo Yankan, Huang Ying. (See Chen Guang and Lu Hongji 'The Whole Story of *Yiba* Art Society', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunan and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1981, p.4) Wan Qingli wrongly recorded that the six fellow students "included Li Keran's good friend Wang Zhaomin (born in 1908)" ('Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.108). Wang Zhaomin's status as a student was cancelled in 1932 because of his participation in the third painting exhibition of Yiba Yishe in Shanghai in a period between Spring and Summer 1932, and the Five-man Exhibition held in the School in Hangzhou. In September, 1932, with the consent of Lin Fengmian, a certificate showing courses attended was issued to Wang Zhaomin who was soon transferred to the Western Painting Department of the Art College of Beiping University. (See Wang Zhaomin, 'Myself and *Yiba Yishe*', and Wang Zhanfei, 'Notes on *Yiba* Art Society', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1981, p.45, p.34, p.37

[56] Chen Yuan, 'The Relationship Between Lu Xun and *Yiba Yishe*', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1981, p.29

[57] Lu Xun had, on Sunday 21st February, 1930, delivered a speech at the Zhonghua Art College in Dou-Le-An Road (now Duo Lun Road) on a topic called 'Miscellaneous Talks on Painting', in which he talked about the artistic and social function of the woodcut and advocated it for the first time. In 1976, Liu Ruli wrote 'Record of Lu Xun's Talks at Zhonghua Art College' and 'Supplementary notes', published for the first time in full, Beijing: *Art*, 1979/4

[58] Chen Yuan, 'The Relationship Between Lu Xun and *Yiba Yishe*', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1981, p.30

and designs. Hu Yichuan and Wang Zhanfei's woodcuts made their first appearance at the show. Lu Xun asked Uchiyama Kanzo (1885-1959) [59] to rent the second floor of the Japanese Daily Press as the site for the exhibition and offered to write a commentary introduction for the show [60]. During the exhibition, he came and saw it for himself. He appreciated the woodcuts *Famine Victims* and *Prisoner* by Hu Yishan and *The Five Dead* by Wang Zhanfei, and also commented favorably on some oil works such as *Portrait of An Old Man* by Xu Shiyong, *Sweat and Toil* by Chen Yuan, *Crying* and *Night* by Wang Zhaomin[61]. The Shanghai *Literature and Arts Press* carried the news of the show, the catalogue and Lu Xun's brief introduction and two commentaries. Li Keran submitted three paintings to the show[62]. According to a comment by Yu Hai,

> "The use of full and rich brushwork revealed his depressed state of mind" [63].

However, in Li's works one could not see any signs of the influence of Puro's works. Using such Western religious themes as Adam and Eve as his theme, he certainly focused on something beyond social reality.

In the autumn of 1931, Li Keran's fiancee, Su E (1911-1938)[64] came to join him at Hangzhou. Su E had left Shanghai with her father, Su Shaoqing (1890-1963) [65], a

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[59] Uchiyama Kanzo (1885-1959), Japanese owner of Neishan Book Shop in Shanghai, sold mainly Japanese books, and was a friend of Lu Xun.

[60] First published in the Shanghai *Literature and Art Press*, 14th issue, 15th June 1931, included in *Er Xin Collection, Complete works of Lu Xun*, Vol.4, Beijing: The People's Literature Press, 1981, p.308

[61] See Chen Guang and Lu Hongji 'The Whole Story of Yiba Yishe', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1981, p.5

[62] See Chapter 3, Note [1]

[63] Shanghai *Literature and Art Press*, 15th issue, 22nd June, 1931. See *Autograph Album of Yi Ba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1981, p.80

[64] Su E (1911-1938), also known as Su Muhan, had attended the Shanghai Xinhua Art Specialty School, and studied painting. Influenced by her father, she was also expert in Beijing opera performance. She married Li Keran in Xuzhou in 1932, became mother of one daughter and three sons: Yu Qin (daughter), Yu Shuang, Xiu Bin, Su Yuhu, and died of scarlet fever.

[65] Su Shaoqing (1890-1963), a native of Xuzhou, Jiangsu, an actor of modern drama in Shanghai during his youth, later on changed his study to Beijing opera. He was one of the four great amateur performers of the Tan school in that period. He was also a playwright and drama critic, having edited *Shanghai Drama Fortnightly*, and taught Beijing opera lessons in Shanghai Broadcasting Station. In 1955, he accepted a teaching offer at Beijing Opera School, and settled down in Beijing.

playwright, and moved to Xuzhou in order to stay away from the chaos in 1927. There she met Li Keran. Sharing a mutual interest in Beijing opera and painting, the two fell deeply in love. Four years later, they were reunited in Hangzhou. In early 1932, they made a trip back to Xuzhou to get married.

With all members forced to leave the school, Yiba Art Society was closed down in the summer of 1932 (66). Li Keran was removed from his assistant's post. Lin Fengmian sent him sixty *yuan* through an intermediary and told him to leave immediately (67). Wang Zhaomin (1908-)and Wang Zhanfei (1911-) went to see him off at his house on behalf of the rest of the members of Yiba Art Society (68). Li Keran kept his connection with those progressive students in the later years when he came back to Xuzhou. Ever since the beginning of his life at NAA in Hangzhou, Li Keran had made friends with some progressive students and some Communist Party members through Zhang Tiao. He began to be involved in the arts movement led by the Communist Party, yet he did not ever join the Party.

1.4 RETURN TO XUZHOU (1932--37)

At the beginning of 1932, Li Keran returned to Xuzhou which he left three years before. He found a job in the Xuzhou People's Education Institute as a clerk in charge of fine arts, concurrently holding another teaching job in Xuzhou Art School, a private school. He took another teaching job in the Xuzhou No.3 Girl's Normal School from September 1936 to 1937.

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[66] See Chen Guang and Lu Hongji 'The Whole Story of *Yiba Yishe*', *The Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, edited by Wu Bunai and Wang Guanquan, p.4, The People's Fine Art Press, 1981

[67] refer to Hua Xia, 'Recollections of Li Keran in his life in the Art School', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.83. The source of the author's historical data on this point differs from that used in *Paintings and Politics in the People's Republic of China*. See Julia F. Andrews, *Paintings and Politics in the People's Republic of China*, London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1994, p.94

[68] Wang Zhanfei, 'A Note on the Friendship by the Bank of the West Lake', collected in Sun Meilan's *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.281

After the September 18th incident in 1931, Japanese troops had completely occupied the three north-eastern provinces of China, and further invaded and occupied Shanghai on January 28, 1932. The anti-Japanese sentiments of the Xuzhou populace ran high. Li Keran and his colleagues of the Education Institute started to publish an *Anti-Japanese Lithographic Pictorial*. Together with his colleagues at the Art School, in September he established a Black and White Print Society, with Li as the supervising teacher, to promote the woodcut movement in Xuzhou. Wang Zhanfei, a former member of Yiba Art Society who had afterwards been transferred to the Western Painting Department of the Art College affiliated to Beiping University, recalled that in 1932 he had received lithographic pictorials sent by Li Keran.(69) It could be seen from the lithographic pictorial of black and green chromatography that

> "very smooth and sparing techniques were used in the depiction of all his characters, including their muscular anatomy, which appeared to have been accomplished under conditions unaffected by interruptions. But the skill in his pictorial propaganda was already so proficient that not a single careless stroke could be found. It could also be seen that he was searching after a succinct technique of expression." (70)

In the years between 1933 and 1934, Li Keran, with the assistance of another young man, had opened an anti-Japanese exhibition hall in the Education Institution. It produced a number of oil paintings, watercolour paintings and cartoons which reflected happenings from the naval battle of 1894-1895 to the 18th September incident of 1931, vividly exposing Japan's encroachment of China for 40 years. Toward the end of the summer of 1934, Wang Zhanfei, on his way back to Beijing from his native place Guixi of Jiangxi Province, paid a special visit to Li Keran when passing by Xuzhou. He saw those watercolour propaganda

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[69] Wang Zhanfei used to correspend with Li Keran in 1932. He often received lithographic pictorials from Li. In 1933 he also received several photographs of paintings, "among which, one of a landscape and another of a portrait showed Li's high and compact artistic style; they also demonstrated his farsighted and resolute search". (See Wang Zhanfie's 'Friendship by the side of West Lake', *Northwest Art, Collected Works of Art*, 1989; Sun Meilan, *Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.284). Shen Fuwen, another schoolmate of Li Keran also received in April, 1933, the photographs of several oil and watercolour paintings sent to him from Xuzhou by Li Keran. Shen and Wang Zhanfei had at the same time been dispensed with by the Hangzhou Art Academy, and transferred to the Department of Western Painting of the Art College of Beiping University. In 1972, Shen Fuwen returned these photographs to Li Keran who was then painting in the hostel of the Foreign Ministry. The photograph of the *Wife's Portrait* was one of them. Shen Fuwen had only kept a photograph of Li Keran's oil painting *The landscape of West Lake* which was published in San Meilan's *A Study of Li Keran*, plate 7; for a description, see p.313.

[70] Wang Zhanfei, 'Friendship by the side of West Lake', op. cit.

paintings and large oil paintings made by Li. He recalled that

> "There propaganda paintings are on display in the big exhibition hall of the Education Institution. Most of the frame are about 2 metres high, 2.5 metres wide large oil paintings as well as some watercolour propaganda paintings of smaller size. The contents of all of them are devoted to making propaganda to explain and arouse the people for the War of Resistance against Japan and for saving the nation from extinction, a part of which are to expose the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese aggressors. The first time when I saw the general appearance of these works, I was more than astonished for I was upset by the powerful artistic appeal, almost the same as when I first saw the etching and woodcut by K. Kollwitz, the great German painter. The big colour oil paintings that stood one by one in the big exhibition hall were like one and another mountains, imposing and lofty." (71)

Wang Zhanfei made special remarks on the appearance of Japanese military officers in the oil painting, saying that they were more deep-going, more typical, that after incisive artistic refinement and exaggeration, the feature of their innate character had been reflected more authentically.(72)

In accordance with the written record of Wang Zhanfei, it can be seen that Li Keran's skill in sketch modelling and the principle of the early modern art learned in Hangzhou Art Academy had given full play to his feelings when reflecting the subject matter of social realities. In his remaining years, Li Keran recalled:

> "To me, what influenced me most was the publication of Kollwitz's picture album by Mr. Lu Xun not long after I left Hangzhou. After I saw it, I recognised that it was a pioneer painting of socialist realism. I was filled with admiration. After I left Hangzhou, I painted a great number of propaganda drawings of the War of Resistance Against Japan in my home town and in the Third Bureau of the Political Department, most of which bore the influence of Kollwitz..." (73)

In May, 1935, Li Keran and Chen Xiangping, a colleague of the Education Institute (an underground member of the Communist Party and a specialist in social science) made a sightseeing tour to Beiping. On the way, they visited Mount Tai. After the two arrived in Beiping, they visited the National Palace Museum, where they viewed and enjoyed the great collection of paintings through the ages, which deepened Li's understanding of traditional painting. When in Beiping, Li Keran visited many old friends including Wang Zhanfei and

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[71] ibid., pp.284-285

[72] ibid.

[73] Li Keran's letter to Wang Zhanfei, April 8, 1980, *Northwest Art. Collected Works of Art*, 1989; Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.284

Wang Zhaomin. In Wang Zhanfei's lodgings, he saw a motto carrying the words "have to give up" which deeply impressed him, finally becoming his admonition for self-encouragement.(74). He returned to Xuzhou in July.

The large Chinese painting *Zhongkui* painted by Li Keran in 1936 had been selected to take part in the second session of the All-China Art Exhibition held in the Nanjing Central Art Gallery in April, 1937.(75) Actually, after he left the Hangzhou school, he started his new work in two directions: one was to carry out the creation of important realistic themes using skills and techniques of western painting. The second was to begin the study of traditional Chinese painting. It was only the outbreak of the full-scale War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression that caused him to suspend this second kind of work.

After the July 7th Incident of 1937, Japan started its all-out invasion of China. Li Keran and his colleagues at the Education Institute, and the teachers and students of Xuzhou Art School threw themselves into the creation of anti-Japanese propaganda paintings. He drew the outline with seven of his students putting on the colours. The painting was done on light blue cotton cloth, and altogether they finished about a hundred large propaganda paintings which were exhibited in a circuit tour of Xuzhou city and its suburban area. In the same year, the well-known dramatist and poet Tian Han (1898-1968) came to Xuzhou for a survey of the big Jiangsu embankment. He was received by Li Keran on behalf of Xuzhou's literary and art circles. During visits to the big embankment and while gathering materials for a play written to reflect the flood, Li Keran got acquainted with Tian Han.(76)

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[74] See Li Keran's letter to Wang Zhanfei, 1st July, 1988, *Northwest Art, Collected Works of Art*, 1989; Sun Meilan, *Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.270

[75] Wan Qingli, "Li Keran's Position in Chinese Painting History of 20th Century", Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.43, p.21; see also Wan Qingli, 'Biography of Li Keran' mentioning that Li "Went to Beiping in May, 1935..., returning to Xuzhou in July. The big *Zhong Kui* was painted that year ..." *Brush and Ink*, No.26, pp.108-110. The time recorded in the two places disagree, and I use the time mentioned in the previous text "according to the chronological table made from Li Keran's oral account in 1981" as its basis.

[76] See Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran* Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.54

1.5 STAFF MEMBER OF THE THIRD BUREAU TRAVELLING FROM WUHAN TO CHONGQING (1938--40)

On 12th December, 1937, Nanjing fell; the flames of war closed in on Xuzhou. Towards the beginning of 1938, Li Keran hurriedly left Xuzhou, bringing with him his fourth younger sister Li Wan. In his later years, Li Keran recalled:

> "During this period, the railway service between north and south was suspended, and Xi'an was the only place to go. At that time I wanted to go to the rear to continue my propaganda work against Japanese aggression. I therefore hurriedly brought my fourth younger sister Li Wan with me to Xi'an, and as we were complete strangers in Xi'an without any relations or friends, we had to live in a refugee camp located at the upper floor of a closed cinema hall to the east of the Drum Tower.(77)

On 1st April, 1938, as a result of the cooperation of the Guomindang and the Communist Party, a Political Department of the Revolutionary Military Commission of the Guomindang government was set up in Wuhan with Zhou Enlai acting as the deputy minister of the Political Department, and Guo Moruo (1892-1978) as head of the Third Bureau of the Political Department. They led a large number of patriotic people in a common struggle against Japanese aggression. A Literary and Art Office was set up under the Third Bureau with Tian Han as its head. As soon as Li Keran heard this, he wrote to Tian Han, expressing his wish to take part in the work. The moment he received a reply from Tian Han, he left for Wuhan. (78) By then, the Literary and Art Office of the Third Bureau had gathered altogether several hundred literary and art workers who excelled in

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[77] Li Keran "Autobiography, Outline", Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.54

[78] See Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.55. Wan Qingli, "Biography of Li Keran" says: "In October, 1937, Li Keran received a letter from Ni Yide inviting him to take part in the anti-Japanese propaganda work of the art section of the Third Bureau under the lead of the Political Department of the National Government Military Commission. Li brought his fourth younger sister Li Wan with him, they arrived in Wuhan by way of Xian." (Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, P.110.) According to the record of the author who visited Professor Wang Qi (1918-) on 11th February, 1996, Ni Yide was in Chongqing in the winter of 1937. He left Chongqing for Wuhan in February, 1938. In March, 1938, Wang Qi received a letter from Ni Yide, exhorting him to go to Wuhan to take part in the anti-Japanese propagande work of the art section of the Third Bureau. Wang Qi and Ding Zhengxian left Chongqing, arriving in Wuhan on 28th March. Li Keran had not yet arrived at that time. Therefore it was improbable that Li Keran had received Ni Yide's letter in October, 1937.

literature, music, drama, and art. Ni Yide was appointed as the head of the Fine Art Section under the Literary and Art Office. The section members included Lai Shaoqi, Ye Qianyu, Wang Shikuo, Li Qun, Lu Hongji, Luo Gongliu, Zhou Lingchao, Wang Qi, Li Yang, Huang Mengtian, Ding Zhengxian and others. As soon as Li Keran arrived in Wuhan he was immediately informed that there would be a propaganda painting exhibition two days later. He took part in the work at once and painted *The Blood of the Innocents* and *The Bombs of the Aggressors* as two separate cloth propaganda paintings.

While working in the Art Section of the Third Bureau, Li Keran had unexpectedly met a very good old friend of his, Li Yang, a school mate of Hangzhou Art Academy and member of the Yiba Yishe. They became work partners with Li Keran doing the painting work and Li Yang writing the headline words. Together they created many War of Resistance propaganda paintings. Cai Yi (1906-92), an aesthetician, recalled:

> "I arrived in Wuhan in May, 1938. Up to July, I used to travel between the two banks of Changjiang. The many big anti-Japanese propaganda paintings hung on the city wall of Wuchang's road junction and on the high walls along the riverbanks of Hankou. By virtue of the prominence of the figures and images that appeared on the paintings, wide attention was attracted among the passers-by. I myself was deeply impressed. I learned later on that some of them were the work of Li Keran." (79)

He mentioned in particular *Japanese Enemies in Sorry Plight* (1938), a painting by Li Keran, of which he said:

> "It was of typical significance that this image of the Japanese enemy which appeared rather early in anti-aggression paintings had given prominence to the militarist image of the Japanese enemy. As a result, this art image had, in the years of the anti-Japanese war, repeatedly appeared in periodicals and on the stage." (80)

The image of the Japanese enemy that appeared in this propaganda painting created by Li Keran in 1938 must have been a further development of the military officer depicted in the large oil paintings done in the years between 1933 and 1934, seen by Wang Zhanfei when he was in Xuzhou in 1934. Wang had also said:

> "Later on, during the performances by the various most famous theatrical troupes in Wuhan, the faces, carriage, expressions, etc. of the military officer in these large oil paintings had all been used as the bases for

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[79] Cai Yi, 'The pursuit of Li Keran', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Research Institute Correspondences*, 1991/3, p.12

[80] ibid. [illegible] refers to the article of Cai]

makeup and performances."(81)

Li Keran's skill in portraying typically strong and outstanding images in his anti-Japanese propaganda painting was repeatedly exhibited later on in his ink and colour figure paintings during the 1940s and the landscape sketches in the 1950s, as well as in the mature landscape paintings of his remaining life. His pursuit of the power to express image types in art was deeply rooted in his love of the power of expression in Chinese operatic characters.

Wuhan fell in October, 1938. During the moving of the Third Bureau from Wuhan to Changsha, painters divided themselves into groups to work on wall paintings around street corners and in the streets. Li Keran cooperated with Li Yang, and together they painted six works on the walls. (82) Some of the wall paintings which Li Yang photographed on the spot have now become precious historical data. Judging from the photos, figures in the paintings were one and a half times the size of real persons and all of them had distinct features, so they were very convincing and appealing.

Before the big fire on 13th November, the Third Bureau withdrew from Changsha, and its personnel travelled on foot all the way, via Xiangtan, Hengshan, Hengyang, boarded the newly-built railway and reached Guilin in Guangxi Province. A large number of writers and artists from Shanghai, Wuhan, Guangzhou and other cities had gathered in Guilin at that time. The city of Guilin became overnight an important centre of literary and art activities in the War of Resistance. In Guilin, Li Keran continued his activities in the creation of propaganda paintings. Painter and theorist Huang Mengtian recalled:

> "At that time I was a member of the cartoon propaganda team that was living in a middle school in Guilin. One morning when I passed by an empty classroom on my way back from outside, I saw someone inside the classroom painting a propaganda picture on a large piece of a cloth. That man was none other than Mr. Keran. The cloth painting was very large in size, more than twice that of the one he later drew on rice paper which was 12 *chi* in size. I leaned on the last window of the classroom and looked in stealthily. Winter in Guilin was very cold, I was shivering even with my cotton coat on. Mr. Keran was without assistants, without a brazier, and he climbed up and jumped down all alone." "The theme of his painting

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[81] Wang Zhanfei, "Friendship by the side of West Lake", *Northwest Art, Collected Works of Art*, 1989,; Sun Meilan, *A study on Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.285

[82] 1). *Arise, Fellow Countrymen, Defend Our Motherland*, 2). *Winter Clothing Needed at the Front*, 3). *Good Common People Love Soldiers, Good Soldiers Love Common People*, 4). *Contribute Winter Clothing, Give Relief to Refugees*, 5). *Compromise Halfway means Total destruction*, 6). *Don't Become Traitors Nor Docile Citizens, Be Heroes in the War of Resistance* (Li Keran had his picture taken in front of this wall painting).

depicted a scene of Japanese bombers in a wanton raid on innocent people, the material came from the touching image of his own experience."(83)

As to the method used in painting, Huang said

"First, Keran used crayon to draw a rough draft. Then he put on ink lines -- this is the main way in the formation of an image and also the place most capable of showing the hand of a master in sketching. The coloured dressing is very thin or sparing. Appearing like a rugged, forceful large sketch-style cloth painting it highlights the main theme with intense power."(84)

After a short stay in Guilin, the staff of the Third Bureau started their trek to Chongqing via Guiyang. They travelled on trucks, crossing over mountain after mountain and going through dangerous zones. In this journey Li Keran had personal experience of how difficult it was to travel in Sichuan.

Towards the end of 1938, the Third Bureau followed the move of the Political Department of the Military Commission into Chongqing.(85) The setup was unchanged though the staff was reduced somewhat. Li Keran remained as a member of the Fine Art Section, continuing his work in the creation of War of Resistance propaganda paintings. In the summer of 1939, due to the heavy bombing of the city by enemy planes, the major part of the staff of the Third Bureau moved from the city's Lianglukou to Jingangpo, 30 *li* to the west of the city.(86) There were about six or seven painters living in the Jingangpo

[83] Huang Mengtian, 'Thinking of Mr. Li Keran', Hong Kong: *The Artist*, No. 73, 1990,

[84] ibid.

[85] Concerning the time of Li Keran's arrival in Chongqing when he followed the Third Bureau, Professor Sun Meilan and Dr. Wan Qingli differ. *A Study of Li Keran* by Sun Meilan mentioned "arriving in Chongqing in the spring of 1940", see P.56, Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991; *Biography of Li Keran* by Dr. Wan Qingli said he "reached Chongqing at the beginning of 1939. In April, Li received letters from home through a Shanghai refugee ...", see P. 110, *Ink and Brush*, No.26. The author paid a visit to Professor Wang Qi (1918-). He took part in the anti-Japanese propaganda work of the Fine Art Section of the Third Bureau under the Wuhan Political Ministry from April to August, went to study in the Fine Art Department of Lu Xun Art School in Yan'an from August to December, returning to Chongqing from Yan'an a few days after 20th December, 1938. According to Professor Wang Qi, when he returned to Chongqing, he found that the staff of the Third Bureau had all arrived in Chongqing. Therefore the time when the Third Bureau arrived in Chongqing should be December 1938. Aocording to the record of *Guo Moruo Chronological Life* (edited by Gong jimin, Fang Rennian, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House, 1982, vol.I, pp.337-338), Guo Moruo on the morning of 2nd December, 1938 left Hengyang for Guiling, arriving Guilin the next morning. According to Guo's own remarks, "After arrival in Guilin, the main task was to keep one-third of the staff of the Third Bureau behind to take part in the work of the Political Department of the field headquarters," "the other part of the staff was to proceed to Chongqing by trucks." Another record showed that Guo Moruo together with his wife Yu Liqun flew to Chongqing from Guilin on 27th December. This data also showed the time when Li Keran along with the Third Bureau arrived in Chongqing should be December 1938.

[86] See Cai Yi, "The pursuit of Li Keran", Beijjing: *Chinese Painting Institute Correspondence*, No.1, 1991, p.12. In addition, according to a record of talks between the author and Professor Wang Qi during a visit on

dormitory, [87] including Li Keran and Fu Baoshi, (1904-65) secretary of the Third Bureau under the charge of Guo Moruo.

It was only sometime after their arrival in Chongqing that Li Keran heard from a fellow villager that his wife Su E had in 1938 given birth to their fourth child, Su Yuhu. She herself died of illness in Shanghai not long after. Later on he also heard that the seven or eight members of his old family in Xuzhou were being supported by his eldest brother who had become a pedlar hawking for sale wares carried in a basket on a shoulder pole, later on changing to selling soya-bean milk in front of his house door. He changed his trade again to selling clay toys. But none of the above enabled him to make ends meet. He had no alternative but to send Xiu Bin, Keran's third son, and Zheng Yuhe, the son of his second sister, to serve as apprentices in a grocery. In a word, the whole family was struggling along on the verge of starvation. National humiliation and family disaster combined made Li Keran terribly upset. He was in deep grief. He created a propaganda painting under the title of *Who Caused the Ruin of Your Happy Family*. Thereafter he suffered insomnia and hypertension. [88]

In March 1940, Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) formed a bogus government in Nanjing. The masses in the rear area launched a movement with a parade against Wang and against surrender. Li Keran created a large cloth painting entitled *Wang Jingwei, Traitor and Collaborator* for the contingents of marchers. He painted, one after another, *Today's Qin Gui*, *Monkey show*, *A Two-man Comic Show*, etc., propaganda paintings with themes that voiced opposition to compromise and surrender.

Statistics show that from 1938 to 1940, about two hundred War of Resistance propaganda paintings came from the hands of Li Keran. Excepting a few works which were preserved in valuable photographs or historical materials in writing, the majority of them

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11/2/96: On 3rd and 4th May, 1939, after the heavy bombing of Chongqing by Japanese planes, many offices moved to the countryside, and the Third Bureau moved to Laijiaqiao a village in suburban Jingangpo in the summer of the same year.

[87] See Huang Miaozi, 'Recollections of Shiniu Tang', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, P.130.

[88] See Li Keran, *Autobiography Outline*; Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, pp.57-58.

have disappeared.

1.6 THE YEARS IN CHONGQING AND TEACHING IN THE NATIONAL ART ACADEMY (1940--46)

In September 1940, the Guomindang closed the Third Bureau, replacing it with a Cultural Work Council, and appointing Guo Moruo as its head. Official business was dealt with in two places. The one in the countryside remained at Laijiaqiao Village in Jingangpo, that in the city was set up at No.7 Tianguanfu Street. Li Keran was despatched to work in the Cultural Council. After the Wannan Incident in January 1941, the Cultural Council found it very hard to continue its original work in the War of Resistance, and it therefore made a decision to let the Staff do research work connected with their own specialized subjects. At that time, a greater part of the staff members lived in Laijiaqiao Village, so they had time to learn from each other or exchange views on academic questions. Guo Moruo and Hou Wailu made research reports on ancient history for all of them, Jian Bozan (1898-1968) talked on the general history of China for more than a month, Xia Yan lectured on journalism. Later on when Guo Moruo was busy editing *The Bronze Age*, Li Keran had found from the National Art Academy Library and helped him copy 'A Study of the Imagery of Sacrificial Vessels', a preface to an old work by Guo Moruo now reportedly lost, *An Illustrated Series of Inscriptions on Ancient Bronzes of the Two Zhou Dynasties*.(89)

According to the recollection of art historian and calligrapher Huang Miaozi (b.1913)

> "Every time we met, when Li Keran entered the city, he was always dressed in the same manner, a suit of old Western-style clothes enveloped in a faded yellowish mackintosh and with an old beret on his head. At that time he was carrying on with both oil and Chinese painting, of course he also did anti-Japanese propaganda paintings." "When he was in town, he sometimes lived in Lianglukou Street (*sic*; this should be Tianguanfu Street), at the office of the Cultural Work Council.„I remember that I often went to see him and he gave me many of his works."(90)

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[89] Guo Moruo mentioned this matter in the Preface (dated 21st February 1945) of his work, *The Bronze Age*, Beijing: The Science Publishing House, 1957, p.2

[90] Huang Miaozi, 'Recollections of Shiniu Tang', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.130; In the

Cai Yi recalled that it was after the Third Bureau moved to Jingangpo in the outskirts of Chongqing that he and Li Keran got to know each other. After the reorganizaton of the Third Bureau, Cai Yi and several others were among the first group that moved from the original office of the Third Bureau at Jingangpo to the former address of the Japanese Anti-War Alliance. These people organized their own canteen which attracted some people who formerly ate at the canteen of the Third Bureau, including Li Keran. By chance Li found that there was a long table in a large room of the conference hall which could be used for painting, he therefore went there every day and in this way he and Cai Yi worked in the same house. Together they worked there for more than a year, until towards the end of 1942 all of them moved out of that house. During this period, Cai Yi began to write his manuscript *Theory of New Art* and Li Keran began his research on traditional Chinese painting. (91)

It should be said that beginning from 1941, Li Keran had started the most important period of his art career. Not only had he concluded the stage of extensive study and absorption and returned to his research on the tradition of Chinese painting which he had aleady started during his Xuzhou period, but he had now commenced a project to reform traditional Chinese painting in a planned way, step by step.

Later on he recalled:

> "At the beginning of the forties, my determination to study Chinese painting was as strong as the proverbial saying, 'how can you catch tiger cubs without entering the tiger's lair'. I had written down two sentences as my motto to maintain my vigilance. The two sentences were 'break into tradition with the greatest skill' and 'break out of tradition with the greatest courage'. I had also shown these two sentences to some of my friends. After I strode across the realm of Chinese painting, I was astonished by the ability of the Chinese people in their cognition and manifestation of natural phenomena. At the same time I felt its charm in art, as a result of which my mind felt actually a bit intoxicated. At this juncture, a few of my good friends came forward reminding me of the two sentences I wrote down. Mr. Cai Yi was one of them. This was something which I could never forget."

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quotation, he mentions, "The office of the Cultural Work Council in Lianglukou Street". According to the information provided by Professor Wang Qi during a visit by the author, Huang Miaozi was wrong in his recollection. Lianglukou Street had once been the location of the office of the Third Bureau which was afterwards abolished. After its change into the Cultural Work Council, its office in the city was set up in Tianguanfu Street and its suburban office at Laijiaqiao.

[91] See Cai Yi, 'The Pursuit of Li Keran', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Research Institute Correspondence*, 1991/3, pp.12-13

Cai Yi and Li Keran worked on their own in the same house. Cai Yi recalled,

"What Keran wanted to study and practise at this period was Chinese painting. When I saw his rough sketches, I noticed that he was quite well-grounded in that area. Keran seldom talked about his past, and at the beginning, I only knew that he had learned Chinese painting. He liked it very much. Gradually I knew that though he studied Western painting for over ten years, in the end he still wanted to engage himself in Chinese painting, and though quite serious in learning Western painting, eventually it was in order to develop Chinese painting."[93]

Cai Yi remembered that at that period, Li Keran had painted an ink and colour picture portraying a village south of the Yangzi river with lush growth of apricot trees. Cai was so interested that he could not forget it when he returned to his own room, and two lines of a poem promptly rose in his mind: "the breath of spring stirs to the south of the Yangzi river in the second month of the year; the well-sweep sounds, soft apricot blossoms are delicate." He told Keran about it, and the latter gladly made an inscription of the lines on the picture [94]. This painting was probably the initial attempt on the theme of "apricot blossom, spring rain, south of Yangzi river" continuously repeated by Li Keran in his later years. It also reflected the spirit of painting which won his heart till his remaining years, imbued with poetic charm.

Huang Miaozi recalled that the freehand brushwork in Li Keran's figure painting at that period consisted

"mostly of figures of models free from vulgarity. *Enjoy the cool*, *Sporting with Geese*, *Bamboo Forest*, etc. were his often-used themes. It seemed as if at that period, he was in pursuit of the lingering charm of Shi Tao."[95]

Besides figure painting, most of his paintings were of buffaloes, which had become the theme he was expert in for Life. In 'A Brief Account in His Own Words':

"After 1941, the work of the Cultural Council was brought to a temporary close, so I had more time to revive my study of Chinese painting. At that period, I lived in a farmer's house in the countryside of Jingangpo outside Chongqing. Right next to the room I lived in was a cowshed. A bulky buffalo came before my eyes every day. It went out in the daytime to

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[92] Quoted in *The Life of Li Keran*, by Li Song, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Fine Arts Press, 1992, p.6

[93] Cai Yi, 'The Pursuit of Li Keran', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Research Institute Correspondence*, 1991/3, p.13

[94] ibid. [93] This now refers to the artical by Cai

[95] Huang Miaozi, 'Recollections of Shiniu Tang', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.130

> till the land and came back to graze in the evening. I could hear distinctly all the noises it made, including panting, gnawing its hoofs and scratching... I therefore made use of my neighbour as a model, and began to use ink and wash for painting a buffalo."(96)

As regards the time when Li Keran started his work on buffalo and buffalo boys, almost all research papers follow Professor Sun Meilan, fixing it in 1942. (97) Li Song says the same in his work *The Life of Li Keran*. (98) Dr. Wan Qingli in his 'Biography of Li Keran' earnestly declares that this is mistaken. He points out that the time when Li Keran began painting buffalo was in "September, 1940 when Li Keran moved to a farmer's house in Jingangpo, outside Chongqing, and the removal occurred after the Third Bureau was reorganized as the Cultural Work Council".(99) According to the investigation and study of the author, both versions are incorrect.

Professor Wang Qi recalls that the Third Bureau stationed in Lianglukou Street in Chongqing city had moved to Jingangpo in the summer of 1939 to escape the heavy bombing of the Japanese planes, the main staff of the Third Bureau, including Li Keran having also moved to Jingangpo(100). The earliest buffalo painting by Li Keran should date from 1939. Lao She had kept a buffalo painting by Li done in 1939. He wrote in 1944:

> "That buffalo painting is still hung on the wall of my study room which is also my sitting room and bedroom. How I adore that buffalo rendered with those few strokes!"(101)

Beginning from 5th April, 1941, Guo Moruo successively composed eight poems as inscriptions on Li Keran's paintings.(102) In the spring of 1942, Guo wrote a poem named

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[96] Li Keran, 'A Brief Account in His Own Words', August, 1977, from Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.260

[97] see Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.65

[98] Li Song, *The Life of Li Keran*, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Fine Arts Press, 1992, p.6

[99] Wan Qingli, 'Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.110

[100] Guo Moruo wrote a poem 'Chanting a Tragic Sight' on 12th May, 1939, original note recording "Heavy bombings on 3rd and 4th May, high casualties. I write what I have seen, lest we forget" (*The Complete Works of Guo Moruo, Literary Works*, Vol.II, p.398, Beijing: The People's Literary Publishing House, 1982). "Guo Moruo's house in the city was bombed in the later June, 1939, he moved temporarily to the outskirts in Laijiaqiao." (Gong Jimin, Fang Rennian, ed., *Guo Moruo's Chronological Life* Vol.I, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Publishing House, 1982, p.347)

[101] Lao She, 'Watch Painting', Chongqing *Sao Dang Newspaper*, 22nd December, 1944, already collected in *Collection of Lao She's Art Commentaries*

[102] *The Complete Works of Guo Morou, Literary Works*, Vol.II (Beijing: People's Literary Publishing House,

'An Ode to the Buffalo' (103). Li Keran extracted the first half as the inscription on his *Picture of Nine Buffaloes* in 1985, appending as a colophon, "the above inscription was dedicated to the poem 'An Ode to the Buffalo' made by Mr. Guo Moruo in 1942, recalling the years when Guo and I lived together at the foot of Jingangpo in the Chongqing countryside. I began painting a buffalo. Our revered Mr. Guo wrote this poem of 36 lines, speaking of the virtue of the buffalo in glowing terms, calling it a national animal. It further enhanced my interest in buffalo painting. This picture inscribes only half of the poem, noted by Keran in 1985, *yi-chou*"(104). Since then, the subject matter of buffalo and buffalo boy had developed into scores of different themes and compositions in Li Keran's painting, and right till his later years had, apart from landscape painting, become his major painting theme.

While studying and practising Chinese painting, Li Keran also started making landscapes from nature with ink and wash and watercolour. In the autobiographical outline which he drafted in his later years, he wrote,

> "In the past, I had felt that the scenery of the West Lake was nice, but when compared with the sceneries in Sichuan, the two were poles apart in grandeur and majesty. *Lanting Xu* talked about the scenery in Sanyin, saying that here we have lofty ridges and towering mountains, thick forests of trees and tall bamboos. Actually such scenery exist everywhere in Sichuan. One day when I strolled halfway up the mountain of Jingangpo to a place not far from my dwelling-place, pieces of paddy field that glistened with golden lights, much like scraps of a broken golden mirror, countless layers of misty trees by the side of the fields and in distant places were also bathed in sunlight rays which tended to broaden the minds of the people, it was indeed an astonishing sight! I had never seen such a picture before, and from then on, I soon began to use ink and wash and watercolour to paint landscapes."(105)

The moving scenery described by Li Keran here was manifested in his *Picture of*

1982), 'Two Inscriptions on Li Keran's Painting, 1, On Buffaloes Painting (5th April, 1941), 2, Sailing a Boat in the Gorges (5th April, 1941)'. pp.356-357; 'Xijiangyue, Shepherd and Buffaloes Singing a Chorus' (22nd August, 1942) p.262; 'Two Inscriptions on Li Keran's Painting, 1, Dongbo's Visit to Chibi, 2, Village Scenery' (21st March, 1943), pp.240-241; 'On Bo Yi and Shu Qi' (17th November, 1944), p.188; 'To Whom after Shi Tao' (17th November, 1944), p.189; 'On Liu Ling Got Drunk' (17th November, 1944) p.190. See also Wan Qinqli, 'Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No. 26, 1992, p.110

[103] *Selected Works of Guo Moruo*, Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press, 1979, p.237

[104] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.212

[105] Li Keran, 'Autobiography, Outline', quoted in Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.69

Green Hills and Dense Forest in 1965, an instance of the deep impression it made on him.

Li Keran was not the only one in Chongqing at that time who used ink and wash and watercolour for painting scenery. Zhu Dequn, a former student of the National Hangzhou Art School who remained as a faculty assistant in Chongqing Art Academy after graduation around 1942, recalled:

> "After arrival in Chongqing, I engaged myself in watercolours for quite some time. It was due perhaps to the inspiration of Mr. Li Jianchen who had returned from England. I spent my time every morning and evening near the banks of the Jialing River and the hilly city of Chongqing doing my painting, often accompanied by Wu Guanzhong. Others liked painting scenery under brilliant sunshine, but I preferred to paint the atmosphere of overcast and rainy weather. I was unaware of it in the beginning but later on I realized that this was the influence of Chinese painting. I was after the hazy feeling of the scenery, I painted its emotional appeal, I didn't like the lustre."(106)

Painting rainy weather and the hazy feelings of scenery was also a realm towards which Li Keran's landscape painting has tended, right up until his later works. When Li became a teacher in the National Art Academy, in 1943, he got along very well with Zhu Dequn. At that time, those who frequented Li's home included Zhao Wuji and Guan Liang.(107)

Li Hu, a student studying in the Art Department of the Central University, which then moved to Shapingba, in Chongqing, also used ink and wash to paint night scenes of Chongqing, the boat trackers towing boats up the Jialing River, etc.. Xu Beihong had praised him in 1942, saying:

> "Using Western ways of painting to do drawing from life with Chinese brush and ink, young Li Hu was the most successful since the setting up of the Art Department of the Central University after its removal to Sichuan."(108)

Spring Rain On Li River, an ink and wash painting done by Xu Beihong in 1937, must have been among the exhibition of his works held in the Central Library of Chongqing in the spring of 1943. Xu Beihong also used the brush and ink of Chinese painting to

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[106] Min Xiwen, Zhu Ying, 'Excerpts of letters from famous overseas painter Zhu Dequn', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988. p.100

[107] See *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.117

[108] Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection–The Life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, August, 1982, p.179

portray the hazy moonlight and night scenes in his *Moonlight Night* and *At Rise of Moon*. Under the guidance of Xu Beihong, his student Zong Qixiang had also tried to use ink and wash to paint night scenes, having painted street vendors in gathering dusk, exhausted sedan-chair bearers in dim lamplight as well as the fishing boats on the Jialing River with the reflections of lamplight glittering in the water.(109)

The ink and wash paintings and watercolours of these artists could be considered as the source of the ink colour painting which was very popular in the 1950s and once replaced Chinese painting. The attempts of Li Keran to do ink and wash and watercolour landscapes formed an important experience before he started his drawing from life with ink and brush in 1954.

In the summer of 1942, the Foreign Friendship Society made use of Li Keran's watercolour landscapes to decorate a room for a meeting. Xu Beihong was very pleased with them. He wrote to Li Keran, expressing his wish to exchange *Picture of Cat*, one of his paintings, for a watercolour by Li Keran. Li was much moved. It was through this that Li got to know Xu Beihong. In September 1942, a joint exhibition of contemporary Chinese painting was held in Chongqing. A Chinese painting entitled *A Buffalo Boy Pointing in the Direction of Apricot Village* by Li Keran was hung at the entrance to the exhibition hall. At the opening ceremony, Xu Beihong pasted a note in red on the painting with the words "reserved for Xu Beihong". Li Keran felt deeply grateful for Xu Beihong's high regard and the contacts between the two noticeably increased after that.

During this period, Li Keran often paid visits to Lin Fengmian, who was then living in a room of a warehouse of the Guomindang troops in a remote district on the southern bank of the Jialing River. Because of student unrest which arose when the Hangzhou Art Academy merged with the Beiping Art Academy, Lin Fengmian had in 1938 resigned his leadership post at the school, and since then had worked as a member of the Design Office of the Third Bureau, at a salary of 200 *yuan*. But after the closing of the Third Bureau caused the abolition of the Design Office, life had been very hard for him (110). He was no

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[109] ibid. [illegible] refer to the [illegible] by Liao]

[110] See Hua Xia, 'Li Keran's Recollections of the Art Academy', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang

longer the President of the Art Academy but a poor and lonely painter. His diet was the same as that of a soldier and he had to cook and wash clothes for himself. However, he had not changed his determination even in such adverse circumstances, but immersed himself all day long in painting. When in Hangzhou, he had begun to try ink and wash painting to give vent to his feelings after oil painting, whereas in Chongqing, where material conditions were extremely difficult, he found it impossible to continue his oil painting work, and turned therefore to the painting of large quantities of ink - wash and coloured ink works.

Towards the end of 1942, the situation of the Cultural Work Council further deteriorated, and Guo Moruo urged the staff to be mentally prepared for finding other jobs. It so happened that at this juncture, Chen Zhifo (1896-1971), who was appointed as President of the National Academy in the summer of 1942, happened to see Li Keran's works in an exhibition, as a result of which he invited Li Keran to work as a lecturer in the Department of Chinese Painting of the National Art Academy [111]. Chen Zhifo had in addition engaged Feng Zikai (1898-1975) as the professor of Introduction to Art and the Dean of Studies [112]. Li Keran accepted the offer and became a teacher at the National Art Academy in 1943, and moved to live in a dormitory behind the high black walls of the compound. At the beginning of 1944, Pan Tianshou was appointed as the President of the National Art Academy, and in the summer of the same year, due to his efforts, Lin Fengmian returned to the Academy to teach. Ni Yide was another who accepted the offer.[113]

During this period, a large number of noted painters were found in Chongqing, either attached to the National Art Academy at Panxi or to the Art Department of the Central University at Shapingba. They included Lin Fengmian, Xu Beihong, Fu Baoshi, Ni

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Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.85

[111] ibid., p.84

[112] See Feng Yiyin, 'Cherishing the Memory of My Mother School and My Father Feng Zikai', Hangzhou: *The Cradle of Art*, p.148, Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.148

[113] See Cao Zengming, 'Mr. Haiyan Talks on Past Events at the Art Academy', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.150

Yide, Guan Liang, Zhao Wuji, Zhu Dequn, Ding Yanyong, etc. In addition noted scholars who were also at that time living in Chongqing, such as Guo Moruo, Lao She, Jian Bozan, Cai Yi and others, were all friendly with Li Keran. These intellectuals frequently met each other. Together they probed into academic subjects, exchanged their painting experiences and ideas about art which resulted in the formation of a pluralistic cultural circle, which exerted a great influence on Li Keran's endeavours in Chinese painting as well as his subsequent development.

In 1943, Li Keran had once brought along with him to the China Art Institute a class of students then studying landscape painting in the Academy, to visit the painting collections of the successive dynasties on exhibition there. The Institute was founded with money from the Boxer Indemnity Fund appropriated by the China-Britain Board of Directors. Xu Beihong was appointed to be in charge of the preparations for its founding in the autumn of 1942, in the nature of an institute for art research [114]. Xu Beihong readily agreed to Li Keran's request, taking out his often-used seal for the students to have a view of it.

Li Keran also once invited Lin Fengmian, who was then living in Tanzishi, a remote countryside spot on the southern bank, to give a lecture to his students in the landscape class. As soon as Lin arrived, he was immediately encircled by the students asking to watch him doing the painting. Lin was in high spirits. He took up his paint-brush on the spot and gave a painting to a student as soon as it was finished. He produced more than twenty paintings altogether and every student in the class received a painting, to the satisfaction of all.

Li Keran also demonstrated his painting techniques for the students in the class. In 1985, he exchanged a new painting, for an old one, *A Lady Holding A Fan*, which he painted in 1943, with a former student in a classroom in the Academy in Chongqing. In the colophon, he sighed with emotion that in those years when he wielded a brush, the lines were like fine thread and gossamer, but he could not reproduce them in his later year, when

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[114] Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection--The Life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, August 1982, p.184

his eyes were dim and his hands trembling.(115)

During the period when he was in the National Art Academy, Li Keran changed the focus of his attention in the study and practice of Chinese painting to landscape. In 'A Brief Account in His Own Words', he said,

> "in 1943, I was offered a job teaching Chinese painting in the National Art Academy of Chongqing. I therefore had more time to probe and study the tradition and creation of traditional Chinese painting. I was then studying traditional ink and wash freehand brushwork. The objects of my study were mainly landscapes, supplemented with the paintings of buffalo and classical figures."(116)

Since the time of the Cultural Work Council in 1941 when he began to probe and study tradition, the influence of Fu Baoshi among his friends in art circles could not be ignored.

Fu Baoshi was the secretary of Guo Moruo when the latter was in charge of the Third Bureau during the years 1938--40. It must have been in this period that Li Keran got acquainted with Fu Baoshi. After the removal of the Third Bureau to Jingangpo, they both lived there at the same time. When the Third Bureau was abolished, Fu Baoshi left his post and returned to the Central University as a professor, devoting himself with great concentration to creative painting. Fu went to teach in the Central University every day and had to tramp over hill and dale on the way, and the hills and waters of Sichuan which he saw daily contributed greatly to his landscape painting creations. The period in Chongqing was the peak period of Fu Baoshi's creativity in Chinese painting. In September 1942, he opened his 'Personal Exhibition at Chongqing in the Year *Renwu*'. Altogether 100 works were exhibited including the *Dadi Cottage Picture* with a colophon by Xu Beihong which read "Vitality uninhibited, the supplication of a sincere human being", and *Qu Yuan* and *Portrait of Tao Yuanming* with poems by Guo Moruo on them. In 1943, Fu held his second exhibition in Chongqing and Chengdu. His name as a painter at that period was like the midday sun.

Both Li Keran and Fu Baoshi lived in Jingangpo for about four years; their two

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[115] See *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.205

[116] Li Keran, 'A Brief Self-narration', August, 1977, from Sun Meilan, *Study of Li Keran*, Beijing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.260

dwellings were about ten minutes walk from each other, and Li often went to visit Fu Baoshi. In the second half of 1943, Li Keran moved to live in "the courtyard with black walls" (a nickname of the Academy in Panxi), he continued his visits to Fu Baoshi.(117) Fu lived in Jingangpo continuously until October 1946 when he returned to Nanjing. His traditional Chinese painting *At the Foot of Jingangpo* was done in July, 1945.

Fu and Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), then a researcher at the China Art Institute under Xu Beihong, were ardent admirers of Shi Tao and Zhu Da. They echoed the trend of those thinkers and artists since the New Cultural Movement of May Fourth who bitterly attacked the restoration of ancient ways and the orthodoxy of the four Wangs, and this led to the tendency to worship the tradition of the Ming loyalists and early Qing monks Shi Tao and Zhu Da in Chongqing's Chinese painting circle. In such a cultural atmosphere, it is not at all surprising that Li Keran's landscape paintings during his period in Chongqing bore the strong influence of Shi Tao and Zhu Da. Li Keran said later,

> "Not a single modern landscape painter, such as Fu Baoshi, Zhang Daqian or myself, is free from the influence of Shi Tao."(118)

Besides Fu Baoshi, someone else who played a part in promoting Li Keran's intense study of tradition must have been Pan Tianshou, who was twice his teacher. In the spring of 1944, Pan Tianshou was appointed President of the National Art Academy in Chongqing, and Li Keran continued his work as a lecturer in the Department of Chinese Painting.

After Li Keran moved to live in the "courtyard with black walls", young bamboos were seen growing out of the bamboo grove behind his house and extended into his studio. Li named his studio "*you* (being) *jun* (a man of noble character) *tang* (studio)", and engraved a seal with the three characters *"you jun tang"* which he kept using till the years after he moved to Beiping in 1946.(119)

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[117] Gong Jimin, Fang Rennian, *Chronological Life of Guo Moruo*, volume II, says that on 17th October, 1943, Guo Moruo lunched at Fu Baoshi's home in Jingangpo. Li Keran was also present in the afternoon. Tianjin: Tianjin People's Press, 1982, p.445. See also Wan Qingli, 'Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, 1992, p.112

[118] Quoted in Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.33

[119] see Li Keran's handwritten comment, compiled by Wan Qingli, 'Chronology of Li Keran' Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.27, and 'Li Keran, a Chronological Table', compiled by Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.139. Again according to the notes from the author's visit to Zou Peizhu, "young bamboos extended into studio" occurred in Li Keran's studio at National Art Academy

In the summer of 1944, Li Keran married Zou Peizhu[120], a graduate of the Sculpture Department of the Academy. Zou Peizhu (b.1920) was a native of Hangzhou of the same age as Li Wan, Li Keran's fourth younger sister. The two were schoolmates and good friends. Zou Peizhu had once been the chairwoman of the student union. Her school record was excellent. She had a bright and cheerful disposition, and loved to sing the tunes of Beijing opera. The Academy in Panxi frequently held performances and Zou had performed and sung *'laosheng'* (old man) roles with Li Keran playing *huqin* accompaniment. [121]

In December, 1944, an *Ink and Wash Painting Exhibition of Li Keran* was held at the National Art Academy in Chongqing. Before the occasion, Li Keran had shown a few of his paintings to Xu Beihong who was very pleased with them and took the initiative in writing a preface for the exhibition which said:

> "Mr. Li Keran of Xuzhou is unique in bringing a new charm to painting. The romance which Xu Tianchi has spread over inanimate objects and flowers, Mr. Li has brought to all his figures. Brimming with unusual charm, high and mighty, his brush sings and his ink dances, without parallel in history. Given time, his achievements are bound to break all limits." [122]

Xu Beihong's commendation dwelt mainly on Li Keran's style in following that of Xu Wei (1521-93), an outstanding freehand flower and bird painter of the Ming Dynasty, and on the unique style of his figure painting that excelled even the ancients. Li Keran admitted that his figure painting at that period was trying to assimilate the "unconventional

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("Courtyard with black walls"). Wan Qingli wrongly recorded it as in Li Keran's house in Jingangpo. See 'Biography of Li Keran', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.110.

[120] According to Wan Qingli, 'Biography of Li Keran', Li Keran and Zou Peizhu got acquainted in February 1943, and married in May of the same year; Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.112. Sun Meilan's 'Li Keran, a Chronological Table' also records about Li Keran and Zou Peizhu got married in 1943; Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.139. The author confirmed with Zou Peizhu that after Li Keran moved into the "courtyard with black walls" in the first half of 1943, he became acquainted with her, and after her graduation in the summer of 1944, they married. They had two sons and a daughter: Li Xiaoke, Li Zhu (the daughter), Li Geng.

[121] See Yu Lu, 'Su Shaoqing and Li Keran', recorded originally in *Nanjing Political Consultative Conference* 1st issue, 1990, collected in Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.312

[122] Xu Beihong, 'Preface to the Painting Exhibition of Mr. Li Keran', recorded originally in Tianjin *Yi Shi Newspaper*, 12th September, 1947, collected in *Xu Beihong's Collected Works On Art*, Volume 2, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

grace of Liang Kai and Xu Qingteng." (123)

The writer Lao She was very excited after his visit to the exhibition. He said to Li Keran:

> "After seeing your paintings, I felt as if I had drunk *longjin* tea, tasted the "white and clear chicken" of Sichuan, enjoyed myself to the full!" (124)

He also wrote a commentary entitled 'Watching Painting' and published it in Chongqing's *Saodang Paper*. This commentary was a pertinent remark on Li Keran's achievements in his assiduous study of Chinese painting while he was in Chongqing during the 1940s.

1) Lao She made an overall appraisal of Li Keran's creative progress in Chinese painting since he came to Chongqing five years before, in 1939. Lao She said:

> "His painting is immensely better than that of five years ago! Five years ago, it seemed that he was deliberately scrawling to show that he was daring. But he could not set the minds of others at ease, his hand sometimes hesitated. But today, there is almost stroke that is not very bold, neither is there a stroke that is not confident. His painting is now entirely his own. It will not cause any worry to a spectator." (125)

Lao She was not talking in generalities, because five years before, in 1939, he had bought two of Li Keran's paintings, one of a buffalo and the other a landscape, and this time he "looked at them for two solid hours"(126). His commentary was therefore well-founded. Lao She's remarks revealed that Li's painting had experienced change from a rather juvenile to a more mature state, and it was after his arrival in Chongqing to study traditional Chinese painting that the change had occurred.

2) Lao She highly praised Li Keran's figure paintings. He said:

> "In figure painting, the works of Keran are no doubt the greatest in the country now." (127)

The reason was that

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[123] Hua Xia, 'Li Keran's Recollections of the Art Academy', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.85

[124] ibid. [illegible] the art [illegible] by Hua Xia

[125] Lao She, 'Watching Painting', recorded originally in Chongqing's *Saodang Paper*, 22nd December, 1944, collected in *Lao She Collection of Literary and Art Commentaries*, Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, pp.262-263

[126] ibid., p.262

[127] ibid.

"the figures of Keran are creations. When he says it is Du Fu, then Du Fu it is. If he wants to create a drunkard, then a drunkard it is, and the drunkard can be immortal like Du Fu!"(128)

On this point, he compared Li Keran's figures to those by Zhao Wangyun (1906-77). He said:

"Wangyun was famous for his figure painting, but, in fact, he has not faithfully painted the person. Wangyun's figures have neither eyes nor expression."(129) "Wangyun can only make his figures change their clothing. To date, he has not created character."(130)

His view was that when Li Keran created the typical images of Du Fu and the drunkard, what he depended on was not the clothing but their expression. He said that Li Keran was really clever,

"He did not pay much attention to which dynasty the clothing belonged, he focussed his attention on the face and eyes of the figure."(131) "He transferred the expressions of the figures in Western painting to Chinese painting, as a result of which the figures became alive. Some of his figures shut their eyes, some open one eye and shut the other, some raise their eyebrows, some have a twisted mouth. No matter how their eyebrows and eyes appear, their hearts and souls break out on their faces, pitifully and funnily alive on the paper, permanently alive!"(132)

Lao She obviously admired the humorous sentiments and sympathy in Li Keran's art. He said,

"In the creation of these figures, Keran has fully demonstrated what kind of a man he is -- he is enthusiastic, straightforward and humorous. It is because he sympathizes with these people that he painted them, even though they look a bit ridiculous."(133)

On this point, Lao She had indicated the greatest difference in the realm of figure painting between Li Keran and Fu Baoshi, i.e., Li's figures belong to those that are socially experienced, warm and humorous, whereas those of Fu Baoshi are people who keep aloof from worldly affairs and free from vulgarity. However, Li Keran's figure painting style showed "the beauty of the succinctness of the lines peculiar to Chinese painting", which more or less bore the influence of the figure paintings of Fu Baoshi.

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[128] ibid.

[129] ibid.

[130] ibid.

[131] ibid.

[132] ibid.

[133] ibid.

3) On Li Keran's landscape painting, Lao She's views were of profound significance. He said,

> "I am of the opinion that his (Li's) landscape painting is not as good as his figures. Landscape, having passed through the painstaking creations of so many generations, today seems unable to jump out of the old circle. Keran would like very much to jump out of the old cricle. No matter whether it is in the use of the brush, in mood, in colouring, in composition, all he thinks of is to create, not to copy. But he has succeeded only in part, because his mood is still the aloofness and seclusion of pastoral poetry: he does not dare to paint a 'new poem' on the paper. In this respect, though he is courageous, he is still not equal to Zhao Wangyun. But with Keran's talent and craftsmanship, should he be willing to try a 'new poem', I believe that he is sure to excel Wangyun."(134)

What Lao She said had three implications: 1) He affirmed that Li Keran wanted to jump out of the old pattern, and in every aspect of form, all he thought of was to create, not to copy. [This was in harmony with Keran's self-appraisal. He believed, at that period, that he was "breaking in with the greatest skill", devoting himself to the study of tradition, learning the standards of his predecessors, but "nowhere falling into the conventions of my predecessors."(135)] 2) He criticized the mood of Li's landscape painting for still bearing the aloofness and seclusion of China's pastoral poetry. 3) He advised him to try and show a new mood in his landscape painting, like a new-style poem and song which demonstrated the rich and complicated thoughts and feelings of modern people. Lao She enthusiastically placed his hope in Li Keran, believing that with his talent and skill, he was sure to succeed. Lao She's last suggestion typically reflected the mood of a number of post-May Fourth scholars and artists who yearned for the emergence of a modern pattern of Chinese landscape painting.

From the two commentaries by Xu Beihong and Lao She on the painting exhibition it can be seen that: 1) Li Keran's simple and unadorned style of figure painting had won full approbation as early as the 1940s. 2) How to create a modern system of traditional landscape as well as a new concept is a problem facing 20th century painters, and it was Lao She who directly revealed it to Li Keran.

Some time after 1944, Li Keran viewed and enjoyed more than 70 works by Qi

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[134] ibid.

[135] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.201

Baishi in the home of Xu Beihong.[136] Early in 1929 when Xu Beihong was President of the Art College under National Beiping University, he had engaged Qi Baishi to be a professor at the College and personally edited the first volume of Qi Baishi's painting collection and written a preface for it. He recommended it to the Shanghai Zhonghua Publishing House for publication at the beginning of the 1930s.[137] Qi Baishi had inscribed poems on paintings which he sent to Xu Beihong to express his gratitude for their close friendship. The poems, in part, read: "It's a pity to oppose the multitude so strongly, it made my poor face sweat with perspiration"[138]; "Xu is the only gentleman south of the Yangzi who pours out his heart"; [139] "With cane in hand visiting Xu Xi in a dream". [140] In 1930 when Xu Beihong returned south to Nanjing, he corresponded with Qi Baishi continuously, and whenever Qi painted a fine painting, he would send it to Xu Beihong, and Xu would remit to Qi Baishi the remuneration due to him.[141] Qi Baishi was in a mature period after his "reform at 60 years of age", full of vim and vigour. Xu Beihong bought for his collection a large number of Qi's works of this period, and it was these works that Li Keran saw at Xu Beihong's house. Before this, Li Keran had already read Qi Baishi's brief account about himself. Now that he saw with his own eyes these rare works by Qi Baishi, he simply worshipped him. Xu Beihong expressed that since Li admired Qi so much, he

[136] ibid., p.117

[137] See Liao Jingwen, *My recollections -- The life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 1982, pp.104-105; *Collected Paintings of Qi Baishi*, the Zhonghua Book Company, Shanghai, July, 1932; the Preface by Xu Beihong collected in the *Xu Beihong's Collected Works On Art*, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

[138] A poem inscribed by Qi Baishi on a landscape painting sent as a gift to Xu Beihong read: "Painting a landscape picture in my youth is for amusement, not out of any wish for fame; why risk the curse of thousands on my style, Xu is the only gentleman south of the Yangzi who pours out his heart; as for the claim that things grotesque issue from my heart and hand, it is ghosts and gods that cause it, not human beings; It's a pity to oppose the multitude so strongly, it made my poor face sweat with perspiration." Quoted on p.104, ibid.

[139] ibid.

[140] Qi Baishi's painting *Finding a way home on a moonlit night*, (1930) a gift to Xu Beihong with two poems inscribed on the painting. One of them read: "(Zhuge Liang) was duty-bound to reply to (Liu Bei's) three calls at his thatched cottage, let alone the trifling skill of an old painter. Light breeze and full moon above the sea, Cane in hand I visited Xu Xi in a dreamy state." Here the name Xu Xi is used with reference to Xu Beihong. Quoted on P.103, same as above.

[141] See Liao Jingwen, *My recollections -- The life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 1982, p.104

would introduce Li Keran to Qi Baishi when an opportunity arose.(142)

In the summer of 1944, Lin Fengmian returned to his teaching in the National Art Academy, also staying in the "courtyard with black walls"(143) at a distance of two to three *li* from Xu Beihong's dwelling house in Panxi. However, Li Keran noticed that the two masters "have never yet visited each other"(144), which made him very uneasy. One day, he asked Lin Fengmian to accompany him on a visit to Xu Beihong. Lin Fengmian was in high spirits and they went together. Three days later, Xu Beihong formally invited Lin Fengmian to dinner at his house, and Li Keran, Zhang Anzhi (1911-90), Li Ruinian (1910-1985) and others helped entertain the guest of honour. (145) In his later years, Li Keran twice mentioned this event, thinking it worth "having the occasion recorded in letters of gold in the history of art". (146)

In 1945, Li Keran together with Lin Fengmian, Ding Yanyong (1902-78), Guan Liang (1900-86), Ni Yide and Zhao Wuji (Zao Wouki; 1920-) held a Six-Man Joint Painting Exhibition in Chongqing.

In August of the same year, Japan declared unconditional surrender. The eight-year War of Resistance against Japan was over.

1.7 TEACHING AT THE BEIPING NATIONAL ART ACADEMY (1946--49)

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[142] See Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.35

[143] According to Li Keran's recollection, Mr. Lin lived in a "courtyard with black walls" and Mr. Xu lived by the side of the Jialing River, the distance between them being only two to three *li*. Li Keran had accompanied Lin Fengmian on a visit to Xu Beihong (see *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.85). Lin Fengmian's settling down in the "courtyard with black walls" occurred after his return to his teaching job at the Academy in the summer of 1944, see note (34), this Section. Therefore Li Keran's visit to Mr. Xu in the company of Mr. Lin must have occurred after the summer of 1944. Wan Qingli, in 'Biography of Li Keran' erroneously records it as 1943; see Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.112.

[144] Hua Xia, 'Li Keran's Recollections of the Art Academy', *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.85

[145] ibid.

[146] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.117

In 1946, Li Keran received two letters of appointment, one from the Beiping National Art Academy, the other from the National Art Academy in Hangzhou. He decided to accept the offer from Xu Beihong. This decision dramatically affected his artistic path in the latter half of his life, even influencing the realization and establishment of his personal objective of innovating Chinese painting with "knocking in" and "knocking out", which had taken root in the early 1940s. He remarked later,

"I had decided to go up north because Beiping is one of China's antique cultural cities, where there are paintings kept in the National Palace Museum."(147)

He further stated,

"We painters of this generation may have no problem in representing things in a form of our own, even excelling our predecessors; but our greatest shortcoming is in calligraphic brush-work. Here in Beiping we have master Qi (Qi Baishi) and master Huang (Huang Binhong). I have come just because of these two"(148).

He explained,

"I was then forty years old. I reckoned, if I did not learn ancient art direct from master artists, direct from tradition, I might have committed a historic blunder.(149)

This shows that in acquiring arts and knowledge the path pursued by Li Keran was in a way really traditional. He believed that "in acquiring tradition, it would be most valuable to acquire it direct, i.e., '*zhen chuan*' (handed down direct from the master)". (150)

In November, 1946, Li Keran moved his family up north to settle down in Beiping. The first two years he and his family lived in the dormitory quarters of the Beiping National Art Academy in the Gongyuan Xijie. Two years later, they moved to No.2, Dayabao Hutong, where they lived to the latter part of the Cultural Revolution.(151) In the same year, his fourth sister Li Wan, while on her way home via Kunming, organized and held an Exhibition of Li Keran's Chinese Paintings, displaying some forty paintings, most of which

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[147] From Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Jinc Fine Art Press, 1991, pp.35-36

[148] ibid.

[149] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, Beijing, 1990, p.33

[150] ibid., p.32 NB This

[151] According to notes taken by the author on a visit to Zou Beizhu, 28th Feb, 1996

have been unfortunately lost.(152)

Xu Beihong had come to Beiping from Nanjing by the end of August, 1946. He began to advocate his educational notions of innovation in Chinese painting while teaching at the Beiping National Art Academy. Coming with Li Keran to assume teaching posts were Ye Qianyu (1907-95), director of the Department of Chinese Painting, Li Kuchan (1899-1983), Jiang Zhaohe (1904-86), Li Hu and Zong Qixiang. Xu Beihong had invited the 83-year-old Qi Baishi and the 81-year-old Huang Binhong to be honorary professors of Beiping National Art Academy.(153)

Xu Beihong set up two years' sketching training as a foundation course in Chinese painting for his students. In the later professional training of three years, his pupils had to be able to

> "paint ten kinds of animals, ten kinds of feathers, ten kinds of trees or plants and paint a palace to the minutest detail. Further, they should be able to handle diverse implements to draw a circle, curve and straight line, to paint anything under heaven easily, be it figure, landscape, animal or plant, and architecture of any structure efficiently and easily".(154)

He further stated,

> "In sketching, we learn from nature which is comparable to an electric light bulb, and learn from the ancient masters which is comparable to candle light. Now we have fellows who imitate the works of Dong Qichang and the Four Wangs and feel elated as if riding on high horses. How can it be any brighter than the candle light?"(155)

A series of innovative measures adopted by Xu Beihong at the Beiping National Art Academy provoked an "Anti-Xu movement" in October, 1947. The Beiping Artists' Association accused him of "trampling on Chinese painting, a conspiracy to destroy Chinese Art". (156) Xu Beihong stubbornly refuted the attack. He held a press conference on 15th

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[152] Letter from Li Wan to Sun Meilan, 10th July, 1988. See *A Study of Li Keran* by Sun Meilan, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.70

[153] See Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection -- On the Life of Xu Bei Hong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 1982, p.329

[154] Xu Beihong, 'Steps In the Build-up of A New Chinese Painting', 1947, *Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume II, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987, pp.530-531

[155] Xu Beihong, 'The Art Situation of China Today', *Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume II, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987, p.537

[156] See Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection -- On the life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: China Youth Publishing House, 1982, pp.334-335

October, 1947. He made a written statement in which he pointed out,

> "To establish a new Chinese painting is not at all amelioration, neither can it be called a merging of Oriental and Occidental art. We obtain our art direct from nature alone. But to obtain from nature directly cannot be achieved by mere empty words. The calumny that any stress on sketching would follow the footsteps of Guiseppe Castiglione (1688-1766) or of the Japanese painters, is in reality no more than a repetition of prejudice voiced by people in the past. Just see the work of newly-rising painters like me and Jiang Zhaohe (1904-1986), Ye Qianyu, Zong Qixiang; one can clearly see the fallacy of such a prejudice, and be convinced that there are many paths to be blazed for our new Chinese paintings, which need people to develop....." [157]

Near the end of 1946, Xu Beihong brought Li Keran to pay a visit to Qi Baishi, mentioning Li's earnest desire to be Qi's pupil. But as Li did not bring any painting with him, his request did not arouse Qi's attention. As Li was really in earnest about becoming Qi's pupil, when he did not receive any response from Qi within a period of time, he went again early the next spring, bringing with him some twenty paintings. [158] Qi, reclining, took a glance at two paintings, then sat up, and finally stood up to spread the paintings on the table and scrutinized each carefully. After studying them carefully, he spoke with a smile,

> "Thirty years ago, I beheld the genuine painting of Xu Qingteng, never dreaming that thirty years later, I would behold yours, a young man." [159]
> "You should make prints of them! Use this kind of paper". Then he turned to take out a case of vellum paper from a cabinet, saying, "This kind! You haven't any. I have. Use mine to print your painting...." [160]

Obviously, Qi Baishi appreciated Li's paintings. That year, Qi was eighty-four while Li was forty years of age. One day, Qi Baishi suddenly asked Li Keran, "Don't you want to have a master?" Li Keran answered, "You yourself have been my master already." A few days later, Li learned that the old man was displeased because he had not formally acknowledged him as his master. Li Keran explained that because he was short of cash, he was trying to save more money in order to give a formal party as a ceremony

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[157] Xu Beihong 'Steps In the Build-up of A New Chinese Painting', 1947, *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume II, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987, p.531

[158] From notes by the author on a visit to Zou Peizhu, 28th February, 1996

[159] From Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.36

[160] From Huang Yongyu, 'A Sacrifice to Console the Soul -- No.2, Dayabao Hutong', Hong Kong: *The Nineties*, 1990/1

acknowledging Qi Baishi as his master. But Qi Baishi had his nurse telephone Li, saying, "You need not spend any money, come instantly!" That day, Li Keran and Qi Ziru, the third son of Qi Baishi, knelt down kowtowing to Qi Baishi as a rite of acknowledgement.(161) Thereafter, Li Keran was always by the side of Qi Baishi, rubbing the inkstick for him, observing while the master was painting, until Qi Baishi passed away ten years later in 1957. His master seldom talked. Li Keran could only silently observe when he was wielding a brush in creating a picture and imbibe the spirit he was exhibiting while he was painting. What he obtained and ruminated on were fully manifested in the diverse articles which he wrote about his master Qi Baishi. (162) In his articles, he expounded the vague discourses, correspondence and inscriptions into valuable and theoretical viewpoints, such as his motto "the subtlety of art is in-between likeness and unlikeness" which was his own discovery and propagated to society at large. Another example was his rectification of the misunderstanding of Qi's inscription "A brush by old Baishi" which gave people the impression that the works by the master artist were really too easy and frivolous, merely making brush splashes to create a painting. As a matter of fact, all the adoration of Li Keran for his master Qi Baishi was to become the platform from which Li made attempts to reform Chinese painting, and could be detected and felt in his artistic pursuits and achievements in the later half of his life. As a teacher at an advanced Art Academy, his conduct in formally acknowledging a master was incomprehensible to those left-deviationists among his contemporaries.

According to master Qi's janitor, a eunuch of the Qing Dynasty named Yin (Yin Ruchun), Li was the most diligent student and a frequent visitor. Though unlike those students who used to bring costly presents to the master, yet the master took a particular delight in dealing with him. Master Qi had been in Beijing for a long time. He had disciples and students aplenty. But in the later part of his life, the one who really inherited his artistic

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[161] See Li Song, *The Life of Li Keran*, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Fine Art Press, 1992, p.9

[162] Li Keran, 'Master Chinese Painter Qi Baishi', *People's Daily*, 8th April,1951; 'A Brief Biography of Painter Qi Baishi', *Collected Works of Bai Shi*, Rong Bao Zhai, 1952; 'On Master Qi Baishi and His Paintings', *Art*, 1958/5

legacy was none other than Li Keran.(163)

Master Qi was very fond of Li, holding him in high esteem. He bestowed some thirty paintings and calligraphies on him in succession. His first painting, *The Picture of Five Crabs*, had a humorous inscription which reads,

> "the articles of Sima Xiangru of yore ran amuck over the land, now the paintings of Li Keran will run amuck too." (164)

During the Cultural Revolution, Li Keran had to snip off the inscription, for the words "run amuck" were sufficient to constitute a crime, for which he could be punished as an anti-revolutionary. The five crabs are still in the painting.

Li Keran did a figure painting entitled *Old Man Under the Pumpkin Shed*, in which he painted an old man dozing in the cool under a pumpkin shed. Master Qi praised it highly as "supremely transcendent". Hence, he inscribed his praise:

> "This could be a painting by Qingteng; even had the old painter Qingteng painted it himself, I fear it would be not so transcendent."(165)

In his life, Qi Baishi adored Qingteng (Xu Wei). Comparing Li's painting with Qingteng's painting is evidence of master Qi's high esteem for Li Keran. In 1957, when Li Keran and Guan Liang visited East Germany and jointly held an Art Exhibition in Berlin, this painting became the property of the Premier.

In the spring of 1947, while still a disciple of Qi Baishi, Li Keran asked to be a pupil of landscape master Huang Binhong (1895-1955), but he did not perform the ceremony of acknowledgement. At his first interview, Li brought a few paintings to ask Huang's opinion. One of the paintings was *Zhong Kui*, the guardian god, and Huang praised it greatly. He instantly took out a painting *Guardian God Belabouring the Ghosts*, a Yuan dynasty work which he had kept as a prize. He wanted to give this to Li as a gift, but Li declined. But in the summer of 1948, following an invitation from the National Art Academy, Huang went south from Beiping and settled in Hangzhou. Li Keran failed to have the opportunity to learn as much from Huang as he had from Qi Baishi.

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[163] See Huang Miaozi, 'Recollections of Shiniu Tang', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.130

[164] See 'Li Keran, a Chronological Life', *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.223

[165] ibid.

At the end of the 1940s, Li Keran styled his studio *Shi Shi Zhai* (literally ten-master-study), signifying that he was studying and learning from the ten renowned traditional master painters. Apart from the two "direct instructors", Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, the other eight were: Fan Kuan of the Northern Song, Li Tang of the late northern Song - early southern Song, Wang Meng and Huang Gongwang of the Yuan dynasty, and the Four Monks at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty: Shi Tao, Shi Xi and Zhu Da, together with the *Jinling* painter Gong Xian.(166)

Li Keran also entitled his studio *Shiniu Tang* (Ox-Worshipping Hall) signifying that he would, like the ox, "give others more, take from others less"(167) .

During the summer and autumn of 1947, Li Keran held a personal exhibition in Beiping and Tianjin successively, using Xu Beihong's 1944 Preface to his exhibition in Chongqing.(ts

168) In 1948, he held a second exhibition of paintings in Beiping. Xu Beihong especially treasured some ten pictures, including *Boruan Tu*, *Huaisu Shujiao* and *Boyi and Shuqi*, and designed mounts for them personally, all of which are kept in the Xu Beihong Memorial Hall.

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[166] ibid., pp..32-34

[167] Li Keran, self-explanation of the seal "*Shi-Niu Tang*"; from Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.250

[168] Tianjin: *Yi Shi Daily*, 12th September, 1947

CHAPTER 2: REFORMING CHINESE PAINTING AND ACHIEVING LI-STYLE LANDSCAPE

This chapter continues to investigate Li Keran's artistic career in the second half of the century, i.e. the entire process of realizing his personal project of reforming Chinese painting, and his activities and thoughts at various periods. At the same time, this chapter describes the general problems arising in the development of the movement to reform Chinese painting, and also related to the difficulties that common artists of the time had to face and what they were thinking. The purpose of such a description is to make a comparison between Li and his contemporaries and to reveal the complexity of the relationship between art and politics in China today. It may be of help in understanding the path that Li Keran had traversed under the special historical and political conditions as well as the background in which a certain idea or an artistic style were produced.

2.1 THE EARLY YEARS OF TEACHING IN THE CENTRAL ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS (1950--53)

When Xu Beihong was appointed to head the National Beiping Art Academy, he was encouraged by Zhou Enlai. At that time he indicated that he meant to run a leftist school. (1) In the autumn of 1948, when Beiping was near to liberation, the Education Ministry of the GMD government had cabled urgently to various universities and academies in Beiping, including the National Beiping Art Academy, telling them to move south. But Xu Beihong refused to comply. In the winter of the same year, Tian Han had carried a message from Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to Xu, enjoining him not to leave Beiping no matter what should happen; further, to work as much as he could in cultural circles for the

[1] See Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection-Life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: Chinese Youth Publishing House, 1982, p.328

Communist Party. (2) Later, Xu Beihong convinced Qi Baishi to remain in Beiping. Consequently, Qi cancelled his projected trip to Hongkong. (3)

On January 31, 1949 Beiping was peacefully liberated. Masses of people ardently welcomed the Liberation Army entering the city. Li Keran and a majority of the teaching staff in the Art Academy followed the example of Xu Beihong and remained in Beiping to cheer in liberation. Before long, the military-controlled committee headed by Sha Kefu and including members Ai Qing, Jiang Feng and Wang Chaowen, entered and took over the Art Academy. As Li Keran had taken part in the students' leftist Yiba Art Society when he was in Hangzhou, and later had been working in the Third Bureau under Zhou Enlai and Guo Moruo, where he got acquainted with many communists, it was only natural that he should remain to welcome liberation.

In July, Li Keran was invited to take part in the First Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers, when he was elected to be a director, and Xu Beihong to be chairman, of the China Artists' Association.

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. All cultural and artistic circles had made a profound yet complex historic transition. 'The Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature'(4) by Mao Zedong had become the basic principles of policy and guidelines for the ideology of the Party. Experiences in the ideological reformation of the intellectuals and artists in Yan'an were propagated everywhere within China. According to the principle of the "Talks", there was only one direction in literature and art work, which was subordination to the needs of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Life was the only source of Art. Artists must take part in the work of the factory, the rural village and the army camp to be with the masses, tempering themselves in the social struggle, thus gradually adapting their minds and sentiments to become "popularized with the public", "revolutionized" and "labourerized". In the face of all these principles,

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[2] ibid., p.357

[3] ibid., pp.358-359

[4] Mao Zedong, 'Talks At the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art', May 1942, *Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) On Literature and Art*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960, pp.1-43

traditional landscape painting were confronting a very serious crisis hitherto unheard of.

In April 1950, the National Beiping Art Academy headed by Xu Beihong merged with the Third Section of North China University from the liberated area to become the Central Art Academy. In 1952, the private Jinghua Art College in Beijing was incorporated. Xu Beihong continued to head the Central Art Academy. Meanwhile the system of Party leadership began to appear within the administration. The Party secretary was Hu Yichuan (b.1910), a print-making artist in the liberated area who had entered Beiping in the wake of the army in 1949. In July 1951, Jiang Feng (1910-1982) was transferred from Huadong Sub-Academy of the Central Academy of Fine Arts to replace Hu Yichuan as the Party Secretary. (5) In 1953, Hu Yichuan was appointed to go to Wuhan to set up the Art Academy of Central South China and be its president; in 1958, when the Academy was moved to Guangzhou, and its name changed to the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Hu continued to be the president. The Huadong Branch Art Academy of the Central Academy of Fine Arts was formerly the Hangzhou National Art School, which had been taken over by the Communist Party in 1949. Some new art cadres from the liberated area were added to the original staff which fundamentally remained unchanged, after the reorganization. Liu Kaiqu was appointed its president, with Ni Yide as the 1st vice-president, and Jiang Feng as 2nd vice-president and Party Secretary. As far as teaching was concerned, both Chinese and Western painting were incorporated into the Painting Department. In November 1950, it changed its name to the Huadong Sub-Academy of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and in 1958 it became the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. (6)

After the establishment of the Central Art Academy, the length of courses in the Painting Department was three years. The object of education then was to turn out a great number of art workers, to be sent to various parts of the country, thus to meet the construction needs of New China. (7) Following the arrangements of the Central Committee

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[5] Refer to 'Chronicle of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Art Academy Press, 1988, p.28

[6] ibid., pp.25, 26, 28, 33

[7] Jin Shangyi, Sheng Yang, Zhu Naizheng, Du Jian, Chen Zhaoxiang, and Zhong Han, 'Forty Years of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Retrospect'. *Art*, 1990/4, P.9

of the Party, the Academy had, one after the other, organized the students to take part in the "Counter-revolutionary Suppression Drive" *(zhenya fangeming)*, the "Aid Korea, Oppose American Aggression Campaign" (*kang Mei yuan Chao*), "Land Reform" *(tudi gaige)*, and the "Three-Anti's and Five-Anti's Campaigns" (*san fan wu fan*), and in the drive for intellectuals to acquire Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. [8] In teaching and training, apart from paying due attention to chiaroscuro drawing and a small amount of oil painting, emphasis was laid upon sketching from life, and a method of line drawing and flat colouring which had been all the rage once in the liberated areas.[9] Throughout the whole teaching course, special attention was paid to lessons on creativity. Each year various departments inside the Academy organized the students to devote a considerable period of time to work in the country, in the factory and in the army, to know life, upon the basis of which they created and painted. At that time, stress was laid upon political criteria first, and artistic criteria second. Attempts were made to coordinate art with thought. The style thus adopted included New Year Painting and strip cartoon series, propaganda painting and leadership portraits. According to the recollections of graduates from 1950-1953, in six terms of those three years, five political movements were held. They used to go down to the countryside. What they studied most were sketching and line drawing. The entire educational course was concerned with carrying on political movements.[10]

Li Keran took an active part in the various political drives during the early Fifties. In 1950 and 1951, he was sent down to the villages of Dahongmen and Longzhuashu in the outskirts of Beijing, and down south to the village of Nanning in Guangxi Province to take part in the Land Reform Movement. In Nanning, he edited and drew twenty propaganda paintings under the title of *Look, compare, think, ponder*. He also created the New Year Paintings *Got a Giant Yellow Ox in Land Reform* and *At the Age of 88, Did I Find Out That*

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[8] See 'Chronicle of the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Art Academy Press, 1988, p.27

[9] ibid.

[10] Author's notes after visiting Professor Gao Yaguang of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, 7/3/1996

Soldiers and the People Are in the Same Family, and *The Grand Gathering of Model Workers in Beihai Pleasure Park* (1952).[11] His experience of producing propaganda paintings during the War of Resistance against Japan enabled Li Keran to fulfil political assignments without encountering any difficulty. Meanwhile, in taking part in the nationwide Celebration of Model Workers and Fighting Heroes in 1950, Xu Beihong painted many portraits in oils and made sketches of the delegates. All painters who could manage figure painting took part in the creation of New Year Paintings. For example, Zhang Longji and Fang Zengxian jointly created *West Lake of the People* (1952), [12] Shi Lu painted *Happy Marriage* (1952),[13] Li Xiongcai painted *A Visit to the Paternal Home of Chairman Mao* (1955),[14] and Ye Qianyu painted *Liberation of Beiping* and *The Unity of Our Various Nationalities* (1952).[15]

To adapt himself to the requirements of the time, Pan Tianshou, who was teaching in the Painting Department of Huadong Sub-Academy of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, attempted to paint portraits of subjects wearing modern costume. In 1950, he went with teachers of the younger generation to Yiqiao village in Yuhang county to study life and to discover topics for sketching from life. He could not paint modern people, neither could he sketch from life, so he found it very hard to paint. Even a tiny picture, he sketched and altered, altered and sketched. But finally he succeeded in accomplishing some figure paintings with fine brushwork, one of which was *Actively vying to pay the agricultural levy* (1950) [16].

As the aim of the art academies and colleges was to produce popular artists, many painters of landscape and flowers-birds had no classes to teach. For example, the well-

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[11] *The Selected New Year Pictures*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1961

[12] ibid.

[13] ibid.

[14] Beijing: *Art*, 1955/12

[15] Author's notes after visiting Professor Li Shusheng, one of the writers for the 'Chronicle of the Central Academy of Fine Arts', 8/3/1996

[16] Pan Gongkai, *Critical Biography of Pan Tianshou*, Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1986, p.30

known painter of flowers and birds, Li Kuchan, could only assist in miscellaneous works at the Central Academy, [17] whereas Pan Tianshou, who worked in the Huadong Sub-Academy, was for many years assigned to collect and register art materials. [18] According to the recollections of those who studied in the Central Academy of Fine Arts at that time, only those painters from the liberated areas like Hong Bo, Luo Gongliu, and Wu Biduan, together with the oil painters Ai Zhongxin and Feng Fasi who were Party members, had any prestige. The rest of the painters and professors meant nothing to the students, and among them, the Chinese painting artists were on the lowest rung of the ladder. [19] Li Keran, who taught watercolour and line drawing, encountered difficulty after difficulty. In an atmosphere where tradition was looked down upon, the students were unwilling to take courses in Chinese painting. During three periods of teaching line drawing, Li had to spend one of them telling and convincing the students of the importance of this subject. In directing the students to draw New Year Paintings, he said, "according to the conventions of New Year paintings, the colour on the face can be a little pale." But he never expected a student to retort, "So it sinks to the level of a Chinese painting!"[20] Chinese painting had virtually become a shameful occupation.

Beijing had been the stronghold of conservative influence in painting. The innovation and reforms of Qi Baishi had been met with assaults from the conservatives. They reviled his works as *"Yehuchan"* (crooked ways and practices, unorthodox). But at the beginning of the 1950s, after the establishment of the new political regime, tradition encountered hitherto unknown fierce assault. Chinese painting was considered to be the child of feudalism, unable to reflect modernity or to display real life, and a poison doomed to extinction. Such an attitude towards Chinese painting had a wide influence on the minds

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[17] From author's notes after visiting the vice-president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Professor Du Jian, 7/3/1996

[18] Pan Gongkai, *Critical Biography of Pan Tianshou*, Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1986, p.31

[19] From the author's notes of visits to Professors Du Jian and Gao Yaguang of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, 7/3/1996

[20] Li Keran, 'Jiang Feng, In Violation of Party Policy on National Tradition', *Art*, 1957/6, P.19

of the younger generation, who considered Chinese painting a synonym for "Decrepit Feudalism". Ancient calligraphy copying books looked like waste paper to them, and were on sale by the catty on roadside stalls and in old bookstores. Painting albums on rice paper were torn up to be used for wiping tables and paint-brushes. In the words of Li Keran,

> "After the people welcomed in the People's Liberation Army with unprecedented zeal and ardour, this famous historic city - the last fortress of feudal ideology - underwent tremendous changes. The Chinese painting market, formerly supported by the comprador class and bureaucrats, suddenly found itself cut off from its customers. Many painting stores switched to other lines of business. Many Chinese painters could not find any means of subsistence, and for the first time Chinese paintings were coldly neglected." (21)

People's Art, a periodical founded by the Chinese Artists' Association in February 1950, opened up a debate on the reform of Chinese painting in its first issue.

Li Hua, a professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and a wood engraver from Yan'an, voiced the most severe criticism of the reform of traditional Chinese painting over the previous thirty years on behalf of the Party's artists, keeping to the stand and viewpoint of Mao Zedong's talks. He said that, during the past thirty years, many painters had done a lot of work to reform Chinese painting, but they had only remedied some outward shortcomings in form and technique and had not transformed it basically or conceptually. He said that painters must give up the tradition of literati painting, completely wipe out the literati and officials thoughts and adopt a new attitude towards artistic thoughts and aesthetics. In a word, the painters must reform their minds before reforming their painting. He believed that since 1942, with the publication of Mao Zedong's Talks On Literature and Art, the correct direction for the development of the arts and literature had been pointed out and established, and from then on everyone had had a theoretical basis for discussing the problem of reforming Chinese painting. He emphasized that if they did so the new Chinese painting could be born and would certainly be a success![22]

Hong Yiran, a critic, analysed the differences between this transformation movement and previous ones. He said in his article: "The movement for reforming

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[21] Li Keran, 'On The Reform of Chinese Painting', *People's Art*, No.1, 1950; *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.3

[22] Li Hua, 'The Basic Problem of Reforming Chinese Painting', *People's Art*, 1950/1, pp. 39-41

traditional painting did not begin today. But previous movements were spontaneous and scattered, without plan, principle and correct guiding thoughts, and only paid attention to the transformation of artistic forms. Today's movement is under united leadership. The programme is *Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* and other instructions. Painters will soon be organized by organizations which are about to be set up, like the Beijing Research Society for New Chinese Painting."[23]

In fact, the debate should rather be called a verdict, because it admitted no difference of opinions on the main points. It reflected the Party's policy and view of traditional painting at that time. The substance of the criticism was considered as a struggle between the new and the old.

As Li Keran recalled, as early as the First Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers in 1949, at the artists' forum, Jiang Feng had given his opinion on traditional Chinese painting. He said that except by "line drawing and flat colouring" it would be inappropriate to develop ink-brush painting. Qi Baishi's painting was excellence, but even it had come to a termination, and could not be developed any further. (24) In recalling his sentiment of that period, Li Keran said in 1957,

> "I had devoted myself to ink-brush painting for years and would have liked to develop such art further. For I had spent decades studying this kind of Chinese painting. On hearing such a remark, it seemed to me that I had received a capital sentence. My sorrow and vexation can be imagined." (25)

But in 1950, in the first issue of the periodical *People's Art*, Li Keran published his important article 'On the Reform of Chinese Painting" which was written with ardour and a positive attitude. This was the only active response by a traditional landscape painter in the face of a grievous challenge.

In the article, his analysis demonstrated a 'go-with-the-tide' attitude.

> "Chinese painting sustained a fierce attack from New China, and seemed to fall into adversity. But such misfortune had been coming long before the establishment of New China." (26)

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[23] Hong Yiran, 'On the Reform of Chinese Painting and the Consciousness of Painters', *People's Art*, 1950/1, pp.42-43

[24] Li Keran, 'Jiang Feng, In Violation of Party Policy on National Tradition', *Art*, 1957/6, p.19

[25] ibid.

[26] Li Keran, 'On The Reform of Chinese Painting', *People's Art*, 1950/1; *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: People's

He summarized the decline of traditional Chinese painting, which had been subjected to bitter attack for nearly half a century since Kang Youwei, into two points: One was the formalism of imitating ancient painters, which was seriously estranged from the reality of life. Such a trend was represented by the Four Wangs of the Qing Dynasty, and by the *Jieziyuan Hua Pu*. The second was the subjectivism which sacrificed objective "likeness" and stressed the "elegance" of the literati, as represented by literati painting since the Yuan dynasty .

In his article Li proposed two means of reforming Chinese painting. One had been pointed out by Chairman Mao in his "Talks", which advocated "a penetration into life" and a linking up of art with life. Li said,

> "This is a fundamental condition for reforming Chinese painting".(27)

Again he raised the question by saying,

> "How can we produce a powerful 'form' from the new 'content'? Are we to start anew? Or at the same time to accept the experience of our predecessors?"(28)

Here he tactfully raised the problem of the succession of heritage. He quoted the viewpoint of Chairman Mao in his "Talks" -- "There should be a distinction between being civil or uncivil, rough or fine, high or low and quick or slow" in the acceptance or refusal of heritage.(29) Thus he drew the conclusion,

> "We must accept our inheritance with discrimination. This is the second important condition in the reform of Chinese painting."(30)

He pushed a step further ahead in talking about the acceptance of inheritance. He proposed an important idea of laying "stress on generalized principle, not on the minor issues of technique and device."(31) He considered,

> "The principle of generalization is a relatively permanent truth, which will develop as life develops. Therefore, it is possible to enrich and promote

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Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.3

[27] Li Keran, 'On the Reform of Chinese Painting', *People's Art*, 1950/1; *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts press, 1990, pp.6-7

[28] ibid.

[29] ibid. p.7-8

[30] ibid. p.8

[31] ibid.

our creative work."(32)

He gave an example: The difference between the expression of lines in Chinese painting and various kinds of "*miao*" is in a way the difference between "principle" and "technique".(33)

In 1950 and 1952, Li Keran twice visited the Yungang Grottoes in Shanxi Province on tours of inspection. He published his article "Impressions of the Yungang Stone Sculptures" in the periodical *Meishu* (Fine Arts). From the stone sculptures of the Northern Wei period (the beginning of Shenrui, 415 A.D. - beginning of Zhengguang, 520 A.D.), he discerned "how the external influence of an alien race merged with the basic pattern of Chinese art."(34) He took this as support for his persistence in taking the traditional Chinese art heritage as the basic notion of his projected individual style.

In 1952, Li Keran joined the Investigation Corps led by the head of the Social Culture Bureau of the Ministry of Culture, Zheng Zhenduo, to inspect the Binglingsi Grottoes in Yongjing County, Gansu Province. On the way to the Northwest, the Investigation Corps visited the Longmen Grottoes in Shanxi, the Forest of Steles in Xian, the Tomb of Huo Qubing and the Maoling Mausoleum in Xingping County and the Shunling Mausoleum in Xianyang City, Shanxi Province.

In 1953 the Central Art Academy changed its training courses to five years, including oil painting, colour-ink painting and print painting in the Painting Department. In 1956, the Departments of Oil Painting, Colour-Ink Painting and Print Painting were set up. In 1958, the Department of Colour-Ink Painting was again entitled the Department of Chinese Painting.(35) The choice of the title 'Colour-Ink Painting' rather than 'Chinese Painting' reflected the conceptual attitude of the Party towards Chinese painting at the beginning of the 1950s and the policy of rapidly setting up a new style of Chinese painting.

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[32] ibid.

[33] ibid.

[34] Li Keran, 'Impressions of the Yungang Stone Sculptures', *People's Art*, 1950/5; *Li Keran On Art*, The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.56

[35] Author's notes after visiting Professor Li Shusheng, one of the writers of the 'Chronicle of the Central Academy of Fine Arts', 8/3/1996

According to the recollection of Xu Beihong's widow, Liao Jingwen, prior to the Second National Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers (1953), she accompanied Xu Beihong to Zhongnanhai to see Zhou Enlai, when he conversed with Xu in his reception room. Xu mentioned the condition of artistic circles at that time. When he came to the problem of the heritage of Chinese painting and the knowledge to be acquired, he also mentioned that sketching was the very foundation of all creative arts. Premier Zhou nodded his approval and remarked with a smile,

> "All arts must develop with the time, any stagnation would result in the loss of vitality. Absorbing the strong points from Western painting will certainly enrich ours considerably."

He even said,

> "From now on, we may not always use the term 'Chinese painting' to refer to the traditional style, as it would seem to be a little self-centred and arrogant in the face of other kinds of painting."

Xu Beihong answered,

> "In the Central Academy, we have called it Colour-Ink Painting." Premier Zhou nodded his approval and smiled.(36)

This episode demonstrates the close link between Party policy and the transformation of artistic circles. As to the transformation of the term "Chinese painting", Xu Beihong was actually helpless, and had to go with the tide.

On September 23, 1953, the Second National Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers was convened in Beijing. The Conference issued a call for all writers and artists to penetrate deeply into life to demonstrate the new life, new society and new events of the time. Xu Beihong took part in the Conference and was its executive president. During the Conference, Xu suddenly suffered a cerebral haemorrhage, which robbed him of his life on the 28th of that month in Beijing.

When Beiping was liberated in 1949, Xu Beihong had painted two pictures of galloping horses. The inscription on one read:

> "A century of sickness has been healed. Lift one's head to confront the dazzling brightness."(37)

This was to express his delight at seeing China, having suffered so much since the

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[36] Liao Jingwen, *My Recollection - Life of Xu Beihong*, Beijing: The Chinese Youth Publishing House, 1982, p.403

[37] ibid., pp.361-362

Opium War, rise again to behold a bright future. On the other picture he inscribed:

> "After a hundred battles the land returns to Democracy, Levelling all the rugged ground to become a smooth path". (38)

It demonstrated his trust in and longing for the new political regime. But after the establishment of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the experiences of art work from the liberated areas reigned supreme, and the management of the Academy was in reality in the hands of the Party cadres from the liberated area. The teaching order in the classroom was abnormal. His student-elite, his most admired painters and friends failed to secure reasonable assignments and to be rationally employed. (39) The pressure and emotions suffered by Xu Beihong in his last three years can easily be imagined.

Li Keran attended the Second National Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers, and was again elected as a director of the Chinese Artists' Association.

That same year, Qi Baishi had his 90th birthday and received the honorary award of "Artist of the People" from the Ministry of Culture. He was elected to succeed Xu Beihong as Chairman of the Chinese Artists' Association. He held a painting exhibition in Beijing the next year, and was elected as a representative at the First National People's Congress. In 1955, he obtained the honorary title of a Correspondent Fellow of the Arts and Sciences Academy of the German Democratic Republic. The Peace Award of the World Peace

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[38] ibid., p.362

[39] For example, Li Kuchan had been a student under his guidance and instruction when he was tutor in the Painting Research Society at Beijing University in the Twenties. In 1923, Li became a pupil of Qi Baishi. Later on his flower-bird painting was much respected in painting circles. In the Thirties, Li Kuchan was a professor in the Hangzhou National Art Academy. In the War of Resistance against Japan, Li worked for the Communist Party as an underground revolutionary in the guise of a painter. In 1940 he had been arrested by the GMD government. In 1946, he was invited by Xu Beihong to become a professor at the Beiping National Art Academy. But after Liberation he had nothing to do, and had to paint bowls in the Ceramics Department and to work at miscellaneous jobs in the labour union of the Academy. His salary was eighty catties of maize, equivalent to 12 *yuan* a month in RMB. With a family of five to feed, he had a very hard time. In the summer of 1950, Li wrote a letter of complaint in *kuangcao* ("grass script", rapid writing cursive hand) on a sheet of paper ten feet in length to Chairman Mao, who instantly sent his secretary Tian Jiaying to his abode at No.2, Dayabao Hutong, the married quarters of the Academy, to investigate. When Chairman Mao had listened to his secretary's report, he wrote a letter to Xu Beihong on August 26, 1950, entrusting him with the job of finding a solution to the problem (Author's notes after visiting the painter Li Yan (b. 1943), son of Li Kuchan, an associate Professor of the Central Academy of Arts and Design, 10/3/1996). The letter which Xu Beihong wrote on behalf of Li Kuchan to obtain some teaching for him is now in the Xu Beihong Memorial Hall. But Li Kuchan had to wait until 1958, when Chinese painting had been restored as a Department, for a class to teach. Huang Jingwan, who was the early benefactor of Xu Beihong, continued to work at miscellaneous jobs in the labour union. His pupil, Dai Ze, an oil painter, was assigned to be a keeper of teaching equipment.

Council was conferred on him in 1955.

At a time when Chinese painting was suffering severe criticism and verbal attack, Qi Baishi had been held in high esteem by the government, becoming the only counter-example when the position of Chinese painting was at its lowest. Some Chinese painters even made so bold as to say: "If the government does Qi Baishi so much honour as to celebrate his birthday, then his crabs and shrimps are progressive," (40) -- meaning that since Qi Baishi apparently did not require to be reformed, should other aged Chinese painters need reforming? In his 'Rambling Talk On Chinese Painting', Ai Qing explained thus:

> "The government celebrated the birthday of Qi Baishi to encourage him. I would consider such an honour is because Qi Baishi not only successfully inherited the tradition of our national painting, but has also outstandingly demonstrated what he wanted to demonstrate. He has created many fine artistic paintings. He is not an ordinary scholastic painter, he is a valiant creative painter."(41) "Recently, he has painted a *Lotus Flower* with its shadow reflected in the water. He said he had never painted such a picture before. Our government gave its award to Qi Baishi to encourage such creative labour."(42)

Without doubt, Li Keran was greatly inspired by the weighty honours heaped on Qi Baishi.

2.2 LONG-DISTANCE SKETCHING TRIPS (1954--59)

In the spring of 1954, supported by the periodical *New Observer*, Li Keran, with one hundred *yuan* paid to him in advance by the magazine, went on a sketching trip to the south of the Changjiang river, accompanied by Zhang Ding and Luo Ming. Li Keran had become acquainted with Zhang Ding in Wuhan in 1938. Later, Zhang went to Yan'an. In 1949, he was responsible for the planning of the inauguration ceremony for the New China.

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[40] Ai Qing, 'Talk on Chinese Painting', Beijing: *Literary and Art Monthly*, 1953/15; Shen peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., *Collected Essays On Fine Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.92

[41] ibid.

[42] ibid.

In 1954, he was in charge of the Colour-Ink Section of the Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Art. Luo Ming was a teacher in the same Section of the same Department.

They carried their home-made painting tools, and travelled to Wuxi, Suzhou, Shanghai, Taihu, Hangzhou, the Fuchun River, and Shaoxing, then to Mount Huang. They attempted to sketch from nature using traditional media and techniques. The trip took three months and became a new turning point Li's artistic career, and was in fact a decisive step in the course of his "breaking into" and "breaking out of" tradition since his time in Chongqing. For Li Keran, this step had a profound conceptual background and could be considered a consequence of his mature thinking.

As a matter of fact, as early as 1954, after the Second National Delegates Conference of Literary and Art Workers, the Beijing Chinese painting circle had already started its sketching activities. In 1954, some painters sketched in the suburbs of Beijing, an activity organized by the Beijing Research Institute of Chinese Painting [43]. In April the same year, the Research Institute together with the Chinese Artists' Association, arranged for the painters Wu Jingting, Hui Xiaotong, Dong Shuping, Zhou Yuanliang and Wang Jiaben to go on a sketching trip to Wuxi, Huishan, Taihu, Hangzhou, the Fuchun River and Mount Huang. The elderly painters were not accustomed to sketching, the situation for them being reflected in a report:

> "Despite the fact that many of the Chinese painters are considerably skilful in traditional ways, they have been estranged from reality for a long time and had little chance of practising sketching from nature, hence, they are unable to shake off the customary practice of their predecessors when sketching to reflect the real life of today." [44] "Some painters when sketching in front of an actual vista, can only paint the same old stuff."[45] Some even complained of being "Unlike the old mode, insufficiently like the new style; not only unprogressive, but in fact going backwards." [46] Or "When a sketch resembles the landscape, it does not look like a painting. When it is a painting, it does not look like the real landscape."[47]

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[43] Xu Yansun, 'Sketching Activities of Beijing Landscape Painters', Beijing: *Art*, 1954/7, p.46

[44] ibid.

[45] ibid.

[46] ibid.

[47] ibid.

The greatest contradiction in this case was when real scenery came into conflict with the traditional model. The elderly painters were used to the latter but lacked the ability to sketch from nature. So some of their sketches only "showed pictographic symbols of hill, stone or tree"[48], some others just "researched the structure of hills, and when back in the studio, the same regal model of Wang Shigu's appeared".[49] Take one picture for example: it had the inscription "Pines of West Suburban Park, in the style of Dai Wenjing (1388-1462), March, 1954". [50] Some of these painters painted real objects in a limited part of their painting, but imitated traditional techniques in the overall composition, so that the picture continued to look like an old one. For example, they would adopt "the familiar textural strokes to paint hills" then add some boats drawn from life, [51] or borrow stones and springs from the old style of painting forming "an ancient model of a complete wilderness", then add some flowers sketched from life.[52] Some master artists of the old generation, out of a desire to evince their willingness to be abreast of the times, to appreciate new life and new events, painted railway trains, steamships and electric posts in their picture. [53] Some old artists simply added new titles to old-style pictures, such as painting six wild geese with the inscription "Long March of Over Ten Thousand *li*", or painting a cockerel with the inscription "Standing on solid ground" [54]. "There seems to be a tendency towards a new way of plagiarizing, not from antiquity, but from modern figures or from pictorials." [55] The traditional painting circle of the time had to sustain heavy

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[48] Wang Xun, 'A Few Suggestions Concerning the Creative Works in Modern Chinese Painting', *Art*, 1954/7, Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., *Collected Essays on Fine Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.101

[49] ibid. This now refers to the article by [illegible]

[50] ibid.

[51] ibid

[52] ibid., p.99

[53] ibid., p.100

[54] Ai Qing, *Collected Works on New Literature*, Shanghai: New Literary Publishing House, 1955, p.36

[55] Wang Xun, 'A Few Suggestions Concerning the Creative Works in Modern Chinese Painting, *Art*, 1954/7, Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., *Collected Essays on Fine Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1986,

blows from the ultra-leftists who "completely negated" traditional Chinese painting; at the same time, they had the inveterate habit of copying from the ancients, lacking the perseverance to study the heritage of art painstakingly. Moreover, they lacked the new world viewpoint, new experience of life and even the ability to sketch from real life. (56) In fact, they were unable to answer the reprimands of society.

In the face of the harassment that confronted the Chinese painting circle, the art historian Wang Xun (1915-1969) in his article "My Opinions on Chinese Painting" made clear his suggestion. He said,

> "If the techniques of our national painting can only draw certain objects and express fixed types of sentiment, it will remain no more than a lifeless instrument, to be a pillory and not a weapon for us. Compared with the scientific and realistic techniques of Western painting, a wide margin of difference is apparent.Using scientific and realistic techniques we can paint any real object that greets our eyes. Therefore it is a technique with vitality. Those who have a mind to improve the present situation of Chinese painting must acquire direct sketching method to display real life. Using this scientific methods to rectify our traditional technique, we may preserve its strong points of accuracy, ingenuity, and elegance, and thus convert lifeless means of drawing into skills full of vitality. (57)

Wang's article triggered a huge debate which was published in twelve articles in issues 1-9 of *Art* for 1955. (58) The essence or substance of the debate concerned the reform

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p.98

[56] The veteran painter Huang Jun, a professor of the Central Academy at Fine Arts, acknowledged in his 'On the Problem of Inheritance from the Angle of Creative Practice', "In the past, many Chinese painters had to sell their paintings to earn a living after only a short period of acquiring art. In such a condition, we lacked sufficient time and even had no time at all to penetrate the lore of inheritance with a correct attitude ... Because of holding exhibitions in order to sell paintings, we were after quantity and speed in producing pictures. Hence we had to adopt several ways of making pictures: Copying, joining old works into new ones, or 'creating' from one's own imagination. We seldom had the time to sketch, to study sketching techniques. Even when we did sketch, which was not actually sketching because we merely copied from others, such as paintings of cats or horses. In painting cats, we mainly took Western painting as our chief source and then made some changes. In drawing horses, we mainly copied from Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766). We seldom took the pains to study real cats or horses. In painting a lady, we used to paint the frail morbid type of belle (I am some one who drew belles for a long time). We lacked full comprehension of character, feelings, even the anatomy of the figure we drew. We did not even know *why* we should comprehend them (including the strong points of ancient figure painting). For these reasons, our traditional painters lacked both the study of inheritance and new techniques and a new world outlook. All these constitute the occurence of various problems in our way and the obstacles we have to encounter on our path to improve the creation of Chinese painting (Beijing: *Art*, 1955/8, p.47).

[57] Wang Xun, 'A Few Suggestions Concerning the Creative Works in Modern Chinese Painting', *Art*, 1954/7; Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed., *Collected Essays on Fine Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, pp.102-103

[58] Qiu Shiming, 'Some Opinions Concerning the Inheritance of Chinese Painting', 1955/1, p.37-41; Xian Tianchang, Pan Shaotang, 'A few suggestions as to "Some Opinions Concerning the Inheritance of Chinese Painting"', 1955/2, p.9-11; Xu Yansun, 'My Opinion In Accepting the Heritage of Chinese Painting', 1955/2,

of Chinese painting, how to handle the relationships between inheritance of tradition, the acquisition of ancient techniques and the acceptance of alien sketching from reality. The debate was a richer academic discussion than that which took place in 1950. Qiu Shiming's viewpoint that Chinese painting should cling tight to its traditional heritage and persist in national style, maintaining the rationality and distinctive character of traditional techniques, offered a gradualist approach to reform within the old system. Meanwhile, Qiu's article evinced an anxiety and worry that Chinese painting might lose its essence in the process of reform. However, Wang Xun's idea that reforming Chinese painting should involve acquiring techniques from the West and that sketching from nature should replace imitating antiquity had obviously prevailed.

The ideological preparation of Li Keran when he was on the way to Jiangnan in 1954 was evidently far above the level of both sides in their debate in 1955. In his notebook, he wrote,

> "I am considering offering a solution to the contradiction existing between reality and Arts" (59).

He wanted to borrow the Western method of directly sketching from nature, but he would never be trapped in "the realism of Western painting" which had been howling vociferously since the May Fourth Movement, particularly since the inauguration of New China. He specially asked Deng Sanmu to engrave two block seals on which were the characters for "what we prize is guts, what we want is soul" *(ke gui zhe dan, suo yao zhe hun*), these showed his determination to break through tradition, to encourage himself to create the new and to show off the new spirit of the modern era. Li Keran later explained that "guts" meant the boldness to break through the traditional limitations that lacked

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p.12-14; Wang Qi, 'Painters Should Pay Attention to Real Life", 1955/4, p.37-41; Qin Zhongwen, 'Discussion on the Problems of Chinese Painting', 1955/4, p.42-43; Fang Ji, 'On the Conservative Viewpoints Toward the Heritage of National Painting', 1955/4, p.44-47; Cai Ruohong, 'Concerning the Problem of Development of Chinese Painting', 1955/6, p.14-16; Zhang Ding, 'Concerning the Problem of Inheriting the Excellent Tradition of Chinese Painting', 1955/6, p.17-20; Huang Jun, 'On the Problem of Inheritance From the Angle of Creative Practice', 1955/8, p.47-50; Theory Research Section of Arts Faculty of the Northwest Arts Academy, 'A Discussion on the Inheritance of Chinese Painting', 1955/8, p.51-53; Students of Senior Class of the Art Faculty of Nanjing Normal College, 'Our Opinions In Regard to Inheritance of the Excellent Tradition In National Painting', 1955/8, p.54-55; "Some opinions on Inheritance and Creative Practice' (Abstract from contribution), 1955/9, p.38-42

[59] From Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.41

vitality, and that "soul" was to create a realm in accordance with the spirit of the time. (60) At the time these two slogans carried no definition, and were therefore regarded as a heretical revolt against the orientation of "serving politics". At a time when publications were full of flattering and ingratiating works meeting the needs of politics, these two slogans advocating that art should have its own realm of ideas and work should have a character of its own, were indeed an inspiration to all.

One of the most important events in his sketching trip of 1954, which finally exerted a very profound influence on his art, was his visit to Huang Binhong at Xixialing, where Li Keran stayed for six days.(61) This was his most important chance to acquire instruction from his master, and was his last chance of seeing Master Huang.

Huang Binhong was not merely the best master in landscape painting, but was also an excellent theorist in art history, an erudite scholar of the time. He was a great collector, good at connoisseurship. As Li Keran recalled later, he viewed Huang's entire collection of treasures. Master Huang had installed a tiny pulley by the wall. He could pull up the paintings one by one for appreciation. Li had spent two whole days viewing them all.

Huang Binhong had said to him,

> "All these paintings are my friends. When one has many friends, his view of the world can be broadened. They have their strong points which I would like to assimilate to be my own." (62)

In his later years, Li Keran had several times mentioned the viewpoints of master Huang with respect to acquiring knowledge and making friends. (63)

Though Huang Binhong was already 89 years of age in 1954 and had serious cataracts in his eyes, as recalled by Zhang Ding,

> "His response and reaction was in sharp contrast with the tardiness and taciturnity of Qi Baishi. He was good at discourse. When asked a question, he would respond at great length as if he was an electronic database, omniscient in Art." (64)

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[60] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.98

[61] ibid., p.185

[62] ibid., p.32

[63] ibid., p.138

[64] Zhang Ding, 'Li Keran's Acquisition and Exploitation of Art', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies*, No.6, The People's Fine Arts Press, 1993, p.3

After each discourse, Li Keran would debate with Zhang Ding for a long time. Li took great interest in important issues, which they would repeatedly analyse with zeal. For example, Master Huang had several times mentioned the Two Shis of the Qing Dynasty. He did not agree with the eulogy of the time about the Two Shis. He considered Shi Tao to be too self-willed. He greatly admired the richness and haziness exhaled in the style of Shi Qi's painting. It is discernible that Huang's appreciation of the beauty of richness and luxuriance, which he had pursued in his painting, was nearly identical with that of Shi Qi. He also adored the unique brushwork of Cheng Sui (1605-1691)'s *jinshi huapai* style. Master Huang used to imitate Cheng's brushwork to form a style of his own.

During the visit, they had several chances to witness Master Huang drawing pictures. Every stroke of his brush in making hooks and texture was definite and clear. He demonstrated to them the reason that lines should be "full of twists and turns", repeatedly reiterated the reason for neither erasing nor rubbing, even in colouring, and why it should be done with clear brush strokes.(65) Li Keran was greatly influenced by Huang's brushwork theory and practice.

As recalled by Zhang Ding, he and Li Keran were once painting a hill by the West Lake. On top of the hill was a store, inside which hung a picture by Huang Binhong. It was probably a work done when he was over seventy, when he had eye-trouble and could not see clearly. The lines were all double, but the picture exhibited Huang's features. Li took an immense interest in that small-sized picture by Huang Binhong. When they took a break during sketching, he would go into the store to admire it, gazing carefully in appreciation. (66) Later, Li said,

> "In painting a landscape, the layers should be deep, using the technique of 'ink accumulation' (*ji mo*) which is the most important yet the most difficult." (67) "Addition of the second layer should not be a repetition of the first one. Sometimes one has to use a different texture stroke technique, alternating brushwork strokes. The way is like a kind of multiple print-making in which the second edition does not come down exactly against the

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[65] ibid.

[66] From Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.46

[67] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.44

first." (68)

That small landscape painting by Huang Binhong with double-lines must have directly opened Li Keran's mind to his way of brushwork.

In the week when Li Keran was with Master Huang in Hangzhou, Huang gave him one of his paintings every day, and urged him to study and appreciate. One evening, with his own eyes, Li Keran saw Huang paint some seven to eight pictures at a stretch, and yet he said, "Today, I did not paint much." (69) Though he had nearly lost his eyesight, he continued to grope and view pictures. Sometimes he painted on the back of the picture and in his inscriptions, the second line would coincide with the first. Every day he sketched so many pictures, without ceasing. (70) Before taking leave of Hangzhou, Li Keran bade farewell to Master Huang, who gave a pair of scrolls to him and saw him off for a very long distance. The next year, in 1955, Master Huang died.

In Hangzhou, Li Keran specially paid a visit to the renowned Beijing Opera master Gai Jiaotian (1888-1970). At a gathering in a teahouse by the side of the West Lake, Li Keran once discovered that Gai Jiaotian had stuck his leg in between the horizontal bars of the table, training the strength of his leg. Gai Jiaotian said,

> "We should regard the practice of our skill as being as weighty as Mount Tai. Laziness and ease can never achieve anything in art." (71)

After returning from his sketching trip, Li Keran, Zhang Ding and Luo Ming held an exhibiton of their water-ink painting in September 1954, in Beijing. About 80 paintings were on exhibition, of which 40 were Li Keran's. Apart from what he had sketched in the south, they also included works done in Beijing, such as *The Garden of Harmonious Delight*, *Summer Palace*, etc. Qi Baishi, who was 92 years old then, wrote the title for the exhibition and was personally present to appreciate the paintings as a gesture of his great support for his disciple's new attempts in Chinese painting. The exhibition elicited various responses from diverse circles. Students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts visited it and

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[68] ibid.

[69] ibid., p.185

[70] ibid.

[71] ibid., p.13

were strongly touched by the works. When Jiang Feng discerned the breath of new life in the pictures, he gave his approval too. The chairperson of the Beijing Chinese Painting Research Society, Xu Yansun, an old artist who had considerable influence, remarked: "In what way are these Chinese paintings? They were merely painted by a Chinese." (72) Another critical opinion was that "they were all mere Formalism", "poisoned by traditionalism" (73).

That same year, the periodical *New Observer* published sketch works by Li Keran, accompanied by an article written by the print-making painter Huang Yongyu (b.1924) which was the first to be written in support of Li Keran's sketching.

In the summer of 1956, with the support of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and accompanied by the postgraduate Huang Runhua, Li Keran began his second long sketching trip. They went to the Southern part of China and travelled up the Changjiang River via the three Gorges, and reached Sichuan, from where they travelled along the Baocheng Railway and made their way back. Altogether they travelled through Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Hunan, Sichuan and Shanxi provinces, taking a period of eight months. Counting the first sketching trip, Li had spent the four seasons admiring the kaleidoscopic changes of nature across the landscape of China.

On the 1956 sketching trip, Li Keran had made an important advance from "sketching in front of scenery" (*dui jing xiesheng*) to "creating in front of scenery" (*dui jing chuangzuo*). He boldly applied the traditional means of artistic processing such as exaggeration, cutting off, the traditional method of composition -- "viewing the small from

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[72] Li Keran, 'Violation of the National Traditional Policy of the Party by Jiang Feng', Beijing: *Art*, 1957/9, p.19

[73] ibid. Further criticism from two sides appeared in Beijing: *Art*: "We have found the unhealthy tendency in the introduction of the Trio-Sketches, such as *Three Ponds Reflecting the Moon* by Li Keran; *Enbo Bridge in Fuyang* by Zhang Ding (Beijing: *Art*, 1954/10). What were the painters wanting to impart to us? Any educational meaning? Using so-called interesting brushwork, lines and techniques they just paint all these rubbishy pictures, imparting sentiments and notions that are definitely unhealthy." ('Opinion on the leadership of the China Artists' Association and the Monthly *Art* from the Arts Circles in Guangzhou', Beijing: *Art*, 1955/1, p.8). Again: "The painter (Li Keran) may acquire a certain scientific sketching skill but be extremely poor in traditional painting techniques, at most borrowing skills from Shi Tao and Ba Da or Western water colours instead." Huang Jun, 'On the Problem of Inheritance from the Angle of Creative Practice', Beijing: *Art*, 1955/8, p.48

the great" *(yi da guan xiao)* and "perspective of moving the visual point" (*yi wei toushi*) -- to sketching. He said,

> "Landscape sketching can be called 'creating in front of scenery'. The objects before one's eyes provide the materials for creating but not the entirety, which can be summoned up or wafted away at will. Only seventy percent of the whole sketching work can be based upon the object-materials, whereas thirty percent should rest upon the needs of the picture." (74)

Also in this trip, Li Keran began to try Huang Binhong's ink-accumulation technique. He sought to unify the profound expanse of the brushwork with the concreteness and richness of nature. In sketching the foggy landscape of the Three Gorges, he invented his unique method -- "From nothing to something, then from something to nothing" (*cong wu dao you, cong you dao wu*). He recalled sometime later:

> "Two years ago, I and a youth came to Sichuan to sketch. When we passed through the Three Gorges on a boat, I perceived the evening scape was really beautiful. As the sun was getting down to the horizon, the whole of nature became blurred in the reflective glow of the setting sun, and a myriad of trees, hills and houses were all faintly visible. The landscape in rain and fog was beautiful too, rich and profound in inner content, but outside enveloped by a layer of haze. How to describe such a landscape? Very hard indeed. Sometimes we may express it with a few brush-strokes, but very poorly and listlessly. After many attempts, I finally found a way. Sketch everything that meets the eye first, the more detail the better. Then cover it with a diluted inky brush, so that the original outline gradually vanishes, then touch up the tonal unity. When the outlines look as if they are vanishing and reappearing, the whole picture will be very close to the natural scene. We describe this technique as 'from nothing to something, from something to nothing'." (75)

On Mount Huang, he again discovered the fascination of the landscape in backlighting, which closely resembled the misty blur scene of hills or river at dawn and at dusk. Backlighting forms an integrated image of the scene.

During the trip, Li Keran travelled over twenty thousand *li*, sketching some two hundred water-ink paintings, producing the most representative works of this stage of his life.

In 1957, the periodical *Art* (issue 6) published four of his works done in Sichuan and south of the River. In the next issue, a critical article 'There Is Passion and There Is Scenery' by Wang Zhaowen was published. (76) The article considered that nature in the

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[74] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.143

[75] ibid., pp.78-79

[76] Beijing: *Art*, 1957/7, p.14, Wan Qingli in his 'Biography of Li Keran' said: "the article by Wang Zhaowen

works of Li Keran has "an entirely different atmosphere in each one, having characteristics that cannot be replaced and a realm that cannot be repeated."(77)

In May 1957, while commemorating the 15th Anniversary of Chairman Mao's Talk at Yan'an Forum of Art and Literature, the Movement of "Hundred Flowers Campaign" was unfolded, which became an Anti-Rightist Struggle two months later. Jiang Feng, whose artistic thought was actually "ultra-left", was labelled a rightist. One of his offences was national nihilism, opposing Chinese painting, violating the Party's national policy. Thereafter, his leadership in art circles and in the Central Academy of Fine Arts disappeared. It was only after the Cultural Revolution that he was allowed to resume his leadership again. Xu Yansun, the chairperson of the Beijing Chinese Painting Research Society, who was considered a representative of the conservative forces of the old artists, was also labelled a rightist, with charges of "opposing the reform of Chinese painting, purporting to draw Chinese painting back to the feudal era". That same year, the Beijing China Painting Studio was established, with Qi Baishi as its Honorary President. Premier Zhou Enlai attended the inauguration ceremony in person. It followed that the national style of art was positively recognized, just as had been concluded at the meeting which stated, "Our socialist arts are surely to be established upon the foundation of the national character." (78)

Thereafter, post-liberation Chinese painting seemed to have won a "battle of turning the tables". Following the great debate of 1955, in the conflict between tradition and the West, tradition had the upper hand. Not merely did Chinese painting have to talk about tradition, even in oil painting the problem of "nationalization" had been brought up. The new policy encouraged Chinese style, Chinese air, and artistic works that gladdened the hearts of the Chinese people. The Colour-Ink Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts very soon re-adopted the name of Chinese Painting Department. In 1958, the

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did not appear in the press" (See Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.26, p.118). This is not correct.

[77] Beijing: *Art*, 1957/7, p.14

[78] from Zhang Shaoxia, Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Modern Chinese Painting*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.263

Huadong Sub-Academy of the Central Academy of Fine Arts switched its name to Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, headed by Pan Tianshou.

The same year, under a Cultural Exchange agreement with the German Democratic Republic, the Ministry of Culture held a Grand Exhibition in East Germany. Li Keran and Guan Liang were assigned as members of the delegation to take part in the inauguration ceremony in East Berlin. They went together and sketched and painted for a period of four months. In sketching the landscape of East Germany, Li Keran continued his search for the effect of backlighting and the method of displaying light and colour. He continued his attempts with the ink accumulation technique and variation in the shades of ink.

Li Keran made a visit to the Dresden Museum, and even entered West Berlin several times and visited museums there.(79) He carefully studied and appreciated the original oil paintings by Rembrandt (1606-1669). He highly admired his modelling ability and achievement in employing light in painting.(pl.433-434)

In their joint exhibition at the Berlin Art and Science Institute, Li Keran and Guan Liang were warmly received. One-third of the exhibits were for sale with prices attached, and two-thirds of the exhibits were donated to various units. (80) The Museum reprinted seven paintings by Li Keran.

On September 16, while Li Keran was visiting East Germany, Qi Baishi passed away in Beijing at the age of 94. Li Keran felt much grief and regret at not being able to attend his master's funeral. On January 1958, he delivered a speech at the posthumous exhibition of Qi Baishi's works. He defined the special features of the path pursued by Qi Baishi as "the unification of folk arts with classical art; fine elegance with popularity and form with spirit." (81) The same year, Li Keran's article 'On My Teacher Qi Baishi and His Paintings' was published in *Art* (issue 5), revealing the spectacular discovery of the spirit of Qi Baishi's art by Li Keran.

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[79] *A Recollection By Guan Liang*, Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Books and Paintings, 1984, p.110

[80] ibid., p.105 : JE Tuis ... refers to ... by G...

[81] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.117

In 1959, Li Keran led his students to Guilin, Guangxi Province. It was the fourth time he went on a sketching trip, creating the first batch of works displaying the landscape of Guilin. In 1962, he led his students to sketch there for the second time. From the 1960s to his later days, the landscape of Guilin became one of his important subjects.

The rise of Chinese painting at the end of the 1950s was advantageous to its development. Political ideology was very strong, for example, the slogan "when politics is in command, brush and ink will be very different" put forward by Fu Baoshi in 1959 was really very childish. [82] Pan Tianshou approved the viewpoint that "the object of flower-bird painting is to serve politics".[83] Under the howling of the political tocsin, artists were very cautious. However, the reform of Chinese painting had shaken off the precarious dilemma that confronted it at the beginning of the 1950s, and it had made great progress. Especially as the Tenth Anniversary of National Day in 1959 approached, the completion of the ten major buildings in Beijing was accompanied by orders for Chinese paintings of landscape and flower-bird of great dimensions for their interior decoration. This could be considered as a high honour with some political pressure. Such orders hastened the birth of enormous landscape and flower-bird paintings with expansive views, perfect technique and national style. Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue together painted the giant landscape pictu*re Such Great Beauty as This in All Our Landscape* (1959) for the Great Hall of the People. The title is a line from one of Chairman Mao's poems and the calligraphy of the title is in Chairman Mao's handwriting. He Tianjian painted another giant work entitled *When the River is Clear* (1959) for the Shanghai Room in the Great Hall of the People, and for the Shanxi Room Shi Lu painted the picture *Horses Drinking By Yan River* (1959).

To celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of New China, the *Selected Works of Chinese Painting (1949-1959)* was published. [84] The landscape paintings were by Fu Baoshi, Guan Shanyue, Li Xiongcai, Qian Songyan, He Tianjian, Hu Peiheng, Wu Jingting, Wu

[82] Beijing: *Art*, 1959/1

[83] from Zhang Shaoxia, Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Chinese Modern Painting*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, p.218

[84] *Selected Works of Chinese Painting (1949-1959)*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1961

Hufan, Zong Qixiang, Li Keran, Luo Ming and Zhang Ding. They had all adopted new topics, while using traditional techniques. It can be seen that new themes and contents had to a large extent been united with traditional techniques. By the beginning of the 1960s, most of the landscape painters had had experience in sketching from life. For example, since 1956 Qian Songyan (1899-1986) had been financed first by the Wuxi Artists' Association then by the Jiangsu Chinese Painting Studio to make sketching trips. Fu Baoshi, as the president of the Jiangsu Chinese Painting Studio, led a work-team on a 25,000 *li* sketching trip to Sichuan, Henan, Shanxi, Hunan, Hubei and Guangdong. In 1961 Fu Baoshi went with Guan Shanyue (b.1921), then vice-president and professor of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, to sketch in the northeast. The Shanghai painter He Tianjian (1890-1977) had been to Foziling and Meishan reservoirs to do sketching. The Beijing painter Hu Peiheng (1891-1962) took a sketching trip to Hunan, Guizhou and Guangxi in 1956. The Guangzhou painter Li Xiongcai (1910-) had several times been to the south and the north of the Changjiang River to make sketching trips. At the beginning of the Sixties, several selections of sketches had been published, such as *Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue's Sketching Works in the Northeast,* [85] and *Selected Sketching Paintings in Guilin by Hu Peiheng.* [86]

The 1950s was the most important sketching period in Li Keran's artistic career. Meanwhile, he devoted most of his energy to teaching landscape in the Chinese Painting Department and studying painting theory. Not a few of his works were painted during the time when he led students on sketching training courses. Teaching, creative work and theoretical studying had become a trinity in his activities of this period.

In 1958 and 1959, Li Keran matured in both creativity and research. His teaching notebook of this period, together with his lectures entitled 'The Peculiarities of Chinese Painting' (1958)[87]; 'On Brushwork' (1959)[88]; and 'On Artistic Conception' (1959) all

[85] Beijing: The people's Fine Arts Press, 1961

[86] Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1962

[87] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, pp.121-129

[88] ibid., pp.130-136

showed that by the end of the 1950s he had already built up a complete practical and theoretical method of sketching from nature for Chinese painting.

In 1959, Li published his important article entitled 'Random Talk On Landscape Painting' in the periodical *Art* (issue 5). The article is based upon his teaching notes for the students of the Chinese Painting Department. On June 2 the *People's Daily* printed an abstract of the article under the title of 'The Artistic Conception of Landscape Painting'. The article lay emphasis on

> "The most important question in landscapes, artistic conception, is the soul of a landscape painting".(89) "Artistic conception and artistic craftsmanship are the two important keys ... We must pay full attention to artistic craftsmanship in order to create a language that will touch the very depth of human hearts." (90)

All these viewpoints had a very strong impact on the prevailing condition in art circles where personality had been ignored in the creative arts and the unique character of the artist's language had been overlooked.

From September to October 1959, as one of the activities celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Founding of New China, the Chinese Artists' Association held an art exhibition by Li Keran entitled *Such Great Beauty as This in All Our Landscape*, containing 121 paintings, four of which were pre-liberation works. This exhibition obviously marked official approval of the path pursued by Li Keran in his search for innovation, and was a summary of his sketching period in the 1950s. The Exhibition was well received by the public. But there were still some who criticized it as "such great blackness as this in all our landscape". As to criticism from the public, Li Keran would not conceal his viewpoint that "our artistic demands are far away from those of the public". (91) Later, the Exhibition went on tour to Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Chongqing and Xi'an.

Most of the exhibits in this exhibition were included in *The Collected Sketching Works of Water-Ink Landscape Painting by Li Keran*, published in 1959 by the People's

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[89] ibid., p.82

[90] ibid., p.84

[91] From Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.44

Fine Arts Press in Beijing. The preface was written by the writer Fang Ji, who was an admirer of Huang Binhong's art. He was much interested in Li Keran's exploration of Chinese painting and most appreciative of Li Keran's style which was full of poetic sense and picturesque sentiment. He said,

> "in the past, people merely spoke of giving vent to the poetic sentiment of one's mind. In this way, the content of a landscape painting became very abstract. Recently, there have been people who consider that landscape painting cannot exist alone or independently. Drilling machines for prospecting for mines must be added to the picture, or trucks for transport. Is it really so? It is worthy of our studying."

These questions seem in reality to be a defence of the landscape paintings by Li Keran.

2.3 RETURN TO THE STUDIO (1960--66)

Since the beginning of the 1960s, Li Keran had started his new phase of creation. During this period, though he was still engaged in sketching activities (which continued into the 1970s), he concentrated most of his attention on creative work in his studio. He called the creative activities in this phase "mining once and refining ten times"[92], which meant that one has to experience ten times more hardship in refining than in mining. Sketching from life is only a process similar to that of mining, whereas the creative phase is similar to that of steel smelting. The iron ores have to be refined and processed repeatedly. His task proceeded from sketching from life -- to grasp the vividness and abundance of natural objects and creating landscapes with distinctive features of their own, turning to refining his personal artistic language -- to the pursuit of stylized modes, modelling vocabulary and brushwork characteristics as well as the formation of individual styles.

In October 1963, Wang Zhanfei went to Beijing from Xi'an and paid a visit to Li Keran after a separation of eight long years. He recalled that on the question of creation in Chinese painting, Li Keran "only stressed the importance of surmounting the basic

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[92] *Li Keran on Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.225

modelling difficulties in Chinese painting. Li said, not only is it necessary to continuously observe and comprehend the object, one must also put in enough time and energy practising brushwork. For example, every time he painted a buffalo, he used a pile of *yuanshu* paper. It was only in the later stages that one was able to notice some water vapour on the nose of the buffalo which actually appeared moist"(93). These materials show that after Li Keran's return to his studio, he made great efforts to explore and practise the skills of his own modelling vocabulary.

From his teaching diary in Guilin in 1962, we are able to notice that besides the series of principles and methods in drawing from nature pointed out in the 1950s, he also talked about characteristics in form and brushwork of hills, stones, trees, houses, boats, ridges, shadows, and staffage(94). He explicitly pointed out the necessity to break free of the ancient conventions and to set up a new system of modelling brushwork vocabularies. Besides the question of the renewal of modelling vocabulary, he mentioned composition, saying, "we can find some typical compositions from sketches, painting and polishing them repeatedly until the moment we are able to learn them by heart"(95), that is, to repeatedly refine and deliberate those typical compositions that come from sketches to form significant models with an individual style. In clear-cut terms, he said that "it must be like Qi Baishi painting shrimps and Zheng Banpiao painting bamboos"(96), which means stylization. In the diary, he mentioned the concepts of "stylization" (*chengshi*) and "abstraction" for the first time. He said:

> "Stylization must be combined with reality, otherwise there will be no life"(97). "There are many abstract things in art; abstract things are often most generalized things, they come from objects, and again are different from formulism."(98)

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[93] Wang Zhanfei, 'Friendship by the side of West Lake', Xi'an: *Northwest Art, Collected Works of Art*, Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing, Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.292.

[94] ibid., pp.165-167

[95] ibid., p.161

[96] ibid.

[97] ibid.

[98] ibid., p.164

In the summer of 1961, Li Keran went to Beidaihe for the first time to paint, and in three successive years he spent his summers in Beidaihe and his winters in the Conghua springs of Guangdong province, for recuperation and painting. Up to the period before the Cultural Revolution, he had created a number of landscape paintings with more abstract elements, more traditional style and features and more freehand brushwork, which were closely linked to but sharply different from his works during the stage when he was drawing from nature. He applied many methods of artistic craftsmanship formed in drawing from nature, but abandoning at the same time scenery and objects depicted in the 1950s. He concentrated on the basic subject matter of traditional landscape painting -- the organization and construction of hills, water, trees, houses etc., and on setting up a corresponding modelling brushwork language. Representative works include *Mists and Clouds on the Mount Huang* (1962), *Sunset Reflecting on the Mountains* (1962), *Sunset on Rong Lake (1963)*, and *Li River* (1963).

The period of severe difficulties caused by the natural calamities during 1961-1963 was one when the Party's policy happened to be least severe on literary and art circles.

In 1961, the National Art Education Conference put forward a demand that the higher institutions should set up separate speciality teaching. In Chinese painting, teaching was divided into the three areas of figure, landscape and flowers-birds. The Central Academy of Fine Art set up two studios within the Landscape Speciality, one under Zong Qixiang and the other under Li Keran. (99)

In the same year, the Chinese Artists' Association took charge of the film *Landscape in Painting*, a documentary introducing the art and creative activities of three painters, Pan Tianshou, Fu Baoshi and Li Keran.

During this period, academic discussion within Chinese painting circles appeared very active. A prominent claim was that in creative works extolling and propagating new life the status of tradition had been raised by being crowned with "realism"(100) as opposed

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[99] Specialized teaching was suspended as a result of the assaults made by the "socialist education movement" in 1964 and was revived in the 1980s.

[100] Michael Sullivan noticed this phenomenon and remarked in his article: "Natural pride in China's cultural heritage led to all old works of art being cherished and protected, even those of a kind which one would think

to the "naturalism" then in vogue. For example, Cai Raohong wrote an article in 1961 proposing renewed discussion on the relationship between sketching from life and imitating. He held the belief that sketching from life was a solution of the problem of "art comes from life"; imitating was a solution of the problem of "skill and technique come from the experiences of one's predecessors". He maintained that in basic training courses, sketching from life and imitating should be applied and used concurrently.

After returning from the 25,000 thousand *li* drawing trip of 1960 Fu Baoshi published an article in which he wrote:

> "We visited Mount Hua, famous for its towering cliffs. When we saw its incomparably grand west peak vanishing into the clouds, a sheer ascent of thousands of feet, we were wildly exhilarated. We naturally thought of the painting of Mount Hua by the fourteenth century artist Wang Andao (b. 1332). His picture seemed to be there before our very eyes, for it truly conveyed the grandeur and appearance of this mountain. When Wang Andao did his painting, he first made careful observation of Mount Hua. While he was at work on it, he made meticulous studies of his subject and revised his ideas many times before finishing the painting. This is an example of the great attention outstanding Chinese artists in the old days paid to reality. Through observation of actual life, they produced works of art unique in composition and superb in technique." [101]

In 1958, Qian Songyan visited Mount Hua. He described how on the cliffs he saw for the first time a real specimen of *heye cun*. He said,

> "The ancients did not concoct these 'wrinkles' (*cun*) out of their imagination but from the need to represent what they saw in real life. Later artists, however, copied these 'wrinkles' slavishly and did not look around them to study nature so that gradually these 'wrinkles' no longer represented the real thing. It is correct to carry on tradition but this should be linked with close observation of reality around us. As soon as I saw Mount Hua I realized that the 'lotus-leaf wrinkles' as shown in painting manuals have lost their authenticity; they should be refashioned by checking

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ideologically unacceptable -- for example, the painting of the literati and eccentrics, and academic painting, which are perfect examples of bourgeois formalism and, in the case of literati painting, was the exclusive province of a class elite. But the Party theorists, being Chinese, were too sophisticated simply to flatten history with an ideological hammer. Instead of clumsily attacking traditional art, they sought to show that it is, in fact, highly 'realistic'. For the Chinese painter, these critics said, seizes not upon accidentals but upon the essence." (Michael Sullivan, 'Orthodoxy and Individualism in Twentieth-century Chinese Art', in Christian F Murck, ed., *Artists and Traditions: Uses of the Past in Chinese Culture*, Princeton, 1976, P.202) The author thinks Sullivan was right, but there was something else. By claiming traditional art was highly "realistic" the painters and theorists could advocate a return to tradition and to art itself as a means of objecting to the use of art as mere propaganda, and by describing the characteristic of traditional art as being essentiality and abstraction they were able to avoid the "naturalism" which had described the new life in too mediocre and trifling a way. The key point to make tradition politically acceptable was "realism", which was defined in traditional forms as being "not about accidentals but about the essence", so that "realism" became a bridge leading art from propaganda back to tradition.

[101] Fu Pao-shih (Fu Baoshi), 'The New Face of Our Land', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1961/8, p.122

against the rocks of Huashan."[102]

Qian's words suggested two points: the first was that the *cun* method came from the ancients need to represent the real thing, in other words, came from drawing from life, which, therefore, could be affirmed as techniques of "realism". Consequently, traditional techniques could still serve the modern demand for reality. The second was that the old method needed to be refashioned by checking against nature. In this way, new stylistic practices could return to tradition.

In the summer of 1961 the Beijing *Literary and Art Monthly* organized a forum on the question of developing China's heritage of art theory. One contribution by Zong Baihua, Professor of Philosophy at Beijing University and well known scholar in aesthetics, was published in *Chinese Literature* of the same year. Zong Baihua started his article by citing a line written by Xunzi in the third century B.C. which reads:

"Both wholeness and essentiality are needed to achieve the beautiful."

He further explained that

> "Art, on the one hand, must comprehensively reflect real life and nature and, on the other hand, represent them by discarding the chaff, the inessential trivia, and preserving the kernel, their essential content, thereby raising them to a higher level, making them more typical and imbuing them with greater universality. The abstraction (the 'essentiality') of reality is achieved in artistic expression as a result of this process of 'distillation', this discarding of the chaff and extraction of the essence of things and phenomena through the elimination of all impurities."

He pointed out that in Chinese painting the creative method of correlating abstraction (essentiality) and concrete reality had been applied since very early times and he cited ancient masters Gu Kaizhi (c.348-409), Yan Liben (?-656) and Li Longmian (1040-1106). He went on to account for the common characteristic of Chinese arts -- the striving to encompass essentiality as well as the wholeness of concrete reality -- by taking Sichuan opera and tales about ancient painters as instances. He warned in his article that

> "If, however, attention is concentrated solely on the striving for 'wholeness' and the search for 'essentiality' is neglected, this will lead to what we today call naturalism."[103]

He Tianjian, an old painter of traditional landscape, published three articles

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[102] Chang An-chih (Zhang Anzhi), 'The Painter Chien Sung-yen', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1964/9, p.107

[103] Zong Baihua, 'The Abstraction and Reality in Chinese Art', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1961/12, pp.82-86

discussing the aesthetic problems of landscape between 1961 and 1962[104]. In one of them, he carefully discussed the traditional framework, pattern and terms. From the point of view of the Chinese landscape paradigm, he explained the relationship between concepts and nature. He gave as an example that although mountains were inorganic things, Chinese landscape saw them as organic things: just as the parts of one's body could never be considered as separate parts but interrelated with each other, so a group of mountains was interpreted as a living whole in its origin and development. He went on to say that in Chinese landscape theory, *zheda* and *yingdai* are concepts for understanding different constructions and movements of mountains. He ended his article with 'five avoidances':

> "In Chinese painting, 1, form and spirit had better not be similar to those of a photograph; 2, composition had better not be similar to that of western water colour; 3, texture had better not be similar to the pattern of marble; 4, taste had better not be that of a peep show; 5, the overall effect had better not be similar to a colourful carpet."[105]

It was obvious that he was attempting to restate and reestablish the advantages of traditional methods of observation and expression in their own logical way, and he was worried lest the new experimental styles had gone wrong and moved too far away from tradition.

On April 26 1961, the *People's Daily* published an article by Li Keran, *Art is Achieved by Hard Work*. In it Li used a large number to vivid examples to illustrate that traditional Chinese art "attached great importance to basic training and to the important link of a protracted period of practice and tempering." (106) He criticized the practice of

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[104] He Tianjian, 'How to Improve the Creative Level of Chinese Painting', Beijing: *Art*, 1961/3, PP.30-32; 'Aesthetic Problems of Chinese Landscape', Beijing: *Art*, 1962/1, PP.21-24; 'My Opinion of the Subjects of Landscape in the Future', Beijing: *Art*, 1962/4, pp.46-50

[105] He Tianjian, 'Aesthetic Problems of Chinese landscape', Beijing: *Art*, 1962/1, pp.24

[106] *Li Keran on Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990) pp.11-20. In the article he pointed out, "basic skill means that an artist, throughout his very heavy and complicated art training, should extract the most fundamental, difficult and crucial parts, which correctly reflect the law of objective reality, and give them a concentrated tempering. This is a great reserve of the basic potential for an artistic creation, and also a serious and arduous battle in storming heavily fortified positions." "Basic skill is summed up from rich artistic experiences. It is an achievement of earlier talented artists in their long search for a regular pattern and knack. It could be said, therefore, that it is a very precious part of the cultural tradition." He cited as an example the movements of an actor in a traditional opera when practising his basic waist and leg skills which are different from his performance movements on the stage. He pointed out that "basic training is the foundation of creation, it is not creation itself. Its link with creation is a basic inner law, which can be dissimilar in appearance. Its service to creation is therefore sometimes not visible but inward, not only present but also in the future." He criticized the creative works of that period, saying that to serve politics, "instant results and their direct use are

utilizing politics in assaulting vocational work which "caused many art workers to discontinue their use of the brush for months and years." His article drew a heated response, because his viewpoints served as strong and salutary advice in discrediting the universal tendency towards boasting and exaggeration and eagerness for instant success and quick profits which had developed this century, especially since 1958. The views systematically expounded in this article were the foundation of his "painstaking school" put forward at the end of the 1970s.

As a result of government orders which required works for the Great Hall of the People and the Museum of Revolutionary History to be finished before the end of the 1950s, it became fashionable at the beginning of the 1960s to paint weighty subjects. A large number of oil paintings depicting the themes of revolutionary history were produced.(107) Not only did the subjects, their contents and the themes become the representative work of the era, artistic expression and oil painting techniques also reached their highest levels in that period. In Chinese painting, besides *Such Great Beauty as This in All Our Landscape* (1959) by Fu Baoshi and Guan Shanyue; *Horses Drinking By Yan River* (1959) and *Turning to Fight in Northern Shanxi* (1961)(108) by Shi Lu, landscape paintings using the sacred places of revolution and the well-known phrases of Chairman Mao as themes had all of a sudden become the order of the day, for example *Red Rock Village* (1960)(109) by Qian Songyan, *Comrade Mao Zedong in the National Peasant Movement*

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required everywhere. It is the wish of those people who, having learned a bit in the morning, want to use it in the afternoon, and if it can't be used immediately, it will be taken as of no use." On the steps of learning, they are disorderly and superficial, "not patient enough to proceed according to set laws and procedures, but seeking help at the last moment, using a bit, asking for a bit, adopting a piecemeal approach which results in a very narrow absorption."

[107] Luo Gongliu, *Comrade Mao Zedong in Jinggangshan* (oil painting), Zhan Jianjun, *Comrade Mao Zedong in the National Peasant Movement Institute* (oil painting), Hou Yimin, *Comrade Liu Shaoqi and Anyuan Miners* (oil painting); Bao Jia and Zhang Fagen, *Huaihai Great Victory* (oil painting); Wang Xuzhu, *Jintian Uprising* (oil painting), see Beijing: *Art*, 1961/4; Jing Shangyi, *Chairman Mao in December Meeting* (oil painting), see Beijing: *Art*, 1961/6; Lin Gang, *Struggles in Prison* (oil painting); Quan Shanshi, *Unyielding Heroism* (oil painting), see Beijing: *Art*, 1962/1; Zhong Han, *On the Brink of Yan River* (oil painting); Liu Qing, *A Country of 3,000 Li* (oil painting); Wen Lipeng, *The Internationale will Certainly Be Realized* (oil painting), see Beijing: *Art*, 1963/5

[108] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/3, p.16

[109] *Selected Modern Landscape Paintings*, edited by Qin Lingyun, Beijing: the People's Fine Art Press, 1964, front cover picture

Institute (1961)[110] by Yang Zhiguang, *On the Way to Nanniwan* (1961) [111] and *Dawn Is Breaking in the East* (1961)[112] by Shi Lu, *Chairman Mao's Former Dwelling in Dajing, Jinggang Mountains* (1961)[113] by Wu Qi, *Hu Tiao Gorge on Jinsha River* (1961)[114] by Zong Qixiang, *Ten Thousand Hills Crimson All Over* (1961)[115] by Xiu Jun, *Whip the Galloping Horses* (1963)[116] by Guan Shanyue and the two versions (1962-3) of *Ten Thousand Hills Crimson All Over*[117] by Li Keran, etc... Though the themes of Chairman Mao's poems and the sacred places of revolution augmented political acceptibility, the visual aesthetic value of the paintings could not be increased or reduced in this way. The disparity in the artistic quality of these works was still quite apparent.[118]

The two Chinese painting exhibitions which came to Beijing in 1961 had developed into two schools of Chinese painting -- the Jiangsu School and the Chang'an School. In the beginning it was the painters of Jiangsu Province who, having finished their sketching from nature in their 25,000 *li* travels across several provinces in 1960, held a painting exhibition in Beijing in spring 1961 entitled *The New Face of Our Motherland*. *Art*, in its third issue of 1961, published some of their works, including the works of Fu Baoshi, Qian Songyan,

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[110] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/1, p.9

[111] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/4, p.17

[112] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/6, p.14

[113] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/4, p.38

[114] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/6, p.15

[115] exhibited in *An Exercise Work Exhibition of Chinese painting by Xi'an Artists' Association*, Beijing, 1961, not published.

[116] *Guan Shanyue's Painting Collection*, Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 1979, pl.82

[117] Li Keran, *Ten Thousand Hills Crimson All Over* (1962), *Li Keran's Landscapes*, Beijing: Rong Bao Zhai, 1993, p.22; *Ten Thousand Hills Crimson All Over* (1963), Beijing: *Art*, 1963/6, p.64

[118] Sensitive to the change of the use of red in contemporary Chinese landscapes, Chuang Shen wrote a paper discussing this phenomenon between 1959 and 1979, and called it the "the red landscapes" (see Chuang Shen, 'Art and Politics: Study of a Special Relationship in Contemporary Chinese painting', in Meiqing Gao ed., *Twentieth Century Chinese Painting*, Oxford, 1988, p.186) convincingly pointed out that the use of red was no longer as a colour indicative of autumn, but took on new connotations, to incorporate a political theme. He successfully analyzed the "red landscapes" of Shi Lu, Li Keran, Qian Songyan and Guan Shanyue to support his points. However, he did not further distinguish the different artistic value of the paintings.

Song Wenzhi and Ya Ming. The themes, compositions and the techniques of all of them showed distinct traces of interaction. Later on, towards the end of the same year, Xi'an painters came to Beijing to hold the *Exhibition of Exercise Works of Chinese Painting*. In 1961, the 6th issue of *Art* published seven works by six painters including Shi Lu, Zhao Wangyan, Fang Jizhong and He Haixia. During the exhibition period, Beijing Chinese painting circles and art theory circles held an academic forum to discuss the question of bringing forth new ideas and of the inheritance of tradition [119]. In the discussion they affirmed the new ideas brought forth in recent years on the expression of technique and skill, such as Shi Lu's Chinese paintings that displayed the features of the faults in the loess plateau of the Northwest, never before seen in Chinese paintings.

In the discussion, the question of "stylization" in Chinese painting was also mentioned. Wang Zhaowen said,

> "In Chinese painting, there are certain patterns. Without a specified pattern it cannot be called a Chinese painting. For example, it should be fit to be looked at from afar as well as from nearby; every stroke of the brush should be form and structure as well as calligraphy. Without a specified convention in the use of a brush, seeking to copy the image true to it, then it would be very hard to differentiate between the brush technique of a Chinese painting and a non-Chinese painting. The search for stylization is therefore understandable." [120]

The questions of brushwork, stylization, style and form touched upon in the discussion were precisely the points at issue which Li Keran tried his best to solve in the early 1960s.

As the discussion continued, the new works suffered rigorous nitpicking from traditional quarters. The 4th issue of *Art*, 1962, published 'A Letter from A Reader' signed Meng Lanting who queried the validity of Shi Lu's stand -- whether or not his brushwork corresponded to traditional requirements. Meng Lanting's letter touched off a big debate in *Art*, published in nine papers between issues 1 and 4 in 1963.[121] The focus of the debate

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[119] Beijing Painters and theorists taking part in the forum included: Wang Zhaowen, Ye Qianyu, Hua Junwu, Hua Xia, Wu Zuosen, Li Kuchan, Li Qi, Yu Feng, Qin Zhongwen, Cai Ruohong, Guan Songfang and others. The Forum used 'New Conception and New Sentiment' as its title, which was published in Beijing: *Art*, 1961/6, pp.21-29

[120] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/6, p.27

[121] 'A Summary of Incoming Manuscipts', 1963/1, p.33; Li Nen, 'A Discussion with Mr. Meng Lanting', 1963/1, p.37: Jiang Zhaohe, Zhang Anzhi, Xin Mang etc., 'What is New, How to Bring Forth New Ideas',

was concentrated on the question of what and how tradition was going to inherit, in other words, it was a contention between new and old within Chinese aesthetic thought. Art historian Yan Lichuan criticised the new landscape paintings of Shi Lu and Li Keran as "wild", "strange", "reckless", "black"[122]. He criticized certain compositions by Li Keran as

> "having almost put the central viewpoint and the line of the visual level as low as the bottom of the foot (actually it is high up somewhere outside the picture -- author), with the result that the earth's surface is set high up, the rivers flow straight up and down rather than coming near from far off, and look like 'the waters of the Yellow River coming from the sky'. It makes people feel strange and uncomfortable looking at it." [123] Again, "there were some which are painted too black, as if they were painted with the same ink colour. It seems to be trying to create a feeling of vastness and profundity. Actually it appears rather unenlightened, its tones unconnected."[124]

Yan Lichuan's opinion may represent a criticism proceeding from a traditional demand for routine practices to be followed more closely. Conversely, it can also be seen that the efforts of Li Keran in his "fantastic" composition and "black" concept may be taken as bold attempts which surpassed conventional opinion. On the other hand, in actual fact Li Keran's works in the 1960s were far behind the perfection of the works of his later years. Speaking from the angle of skill and technique, the criticisms of Yan Lichuan were reasonable.

In 1964, the political atmosphere in the realm of ideology was unusually pronounced. It required that art was to reflect class struggle and serve the "three great revolutions", calling for artists to learn from amateur worker-peasant-soldier painters. In the autumn of 1964, certain parts of the country carried out the Socialist Education Movement. The Central Academy of Fine Art was designated as a trial unit for Socialist Education, and

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1963/2, p.2; Xu Yiming, 'I Like Very Much to Hear the Opinions of Painters', 1963/2, p.7; Zhou Shaohua, Liu Gangji, 'Brief Talk on Brushwork and Bringing Forth the New', 1963/2, p.10, 1963/3, p.33; Duan Qianhu, 'Model Oneself After a Master and Sacrifice the Failings', 1963/2, p.13; Huang Duwei, 'View on Inheritance of Tradition and Innovation in Chinese Painting', 1963/3, p.38; Yan Lichuan, 'On "Wild", "Strange", "Reckless","Black"', 1963/4, p.20; Cheng Zhidi, 'Concerning Artistic Concepts', 1963/4, p.24

[122] Yan Lichuan, 'On "Wild", "Strange", "Reckless", "Black"', Beijing: *Art*, 1963/4, p.20

[123] Beijing: *Art*, 1963/4, p.22

[124] Beijing: *Art*, 1963/4, p.23

all normal teaching work was suspended. The Academy unfolded a movement for exposing reactionaries. It denounced the right-deviationist opportunism of the Academy's Party Committee. In fact, it marked the prelude to the Great Cultural Revolution.

In 1964-5, apart from publishing four of Qian Songyan's works and two related articles [125] as well as a small amount of work by professional artists like Zhang Ping's *Green Hills Like the Sea, the Setting Sun Like Blood*[126] , a Chinese painting using Chairman Mao's poems as its theme, *Art* was flooded with images of workers, peasants and soldiers and slogans of revolution. The works of professional artists were quickly replaced by those of amateur worker-peasant-soldier artists. Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to the Army's art exhibition was headline news in the 4th issue of *Art*. In 1964, Li Keran also wrote an article commending the amateur art works in the Army's exhibition, [127] the viewpoints of which were obviously contradictory to his consistent artistic taste and thinking. It could only be regarded as a declaration made under pressure of the political situation.

By the mid-60s Li Keran was nearing sixty years of age. He was then thinking about a new reform in his art style, from "tightening up"(*shou*) to "free wheeling"(*fang*). But not long after, the Cultural Revolution broke out and put paid to his original artistic thought, postponing for ten years the "reform at sixty years of age" he once expected. His *Picture of Green Hills and Dense Woods* (1965) and *Picture of Sichuan Hills in Spring Rain* (1966)[128] became an epilogue to his exploration of stylized artistic language during the 1960s.

2.4 THE YEARS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION (1966--76)

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[125] Qian Songyan's four Chinese paintings: *Harvesting Paddy Rice*; *Iron Hill, Steel City*; *Paddy Fields in Changshu*; *Qinling New Town*, see *Meishu*, 1964/3, pp.60-63, Qian Songyan, 'Painting Socialist Bumper Harvest Farms', *Art*, 1964/3, p.22, Wang Jingxian 'Delighted to see Qian Songyan's New Landscape', Beijing: *Art*, 1964/3, p.18.

[126] Beijing: *Art*, 1964/6, p.57

[127] Li Keran, 'The Third P.L.A. Art Exhibition', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1964/10, pp.80-85

[128] See Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No,4., May, 1990

The Cultural Revolution was launched in June, 1966. As a "reactionary academic authority", Li Keran was criticized and denounced. His house was searched and his property confiscated and he was locked up in a "cowshed". Those thrown into the "cowshed" included the leading personnel of the Party and administration, heads of departments and professors of the Central Academy of Fine Art and the Chinese Artists Association. But Li Keran had a clean personal record and took part in anti-Japanese propaganda work in his early years. The anti-war propaganda pictorials and photographs confiscated when his house was searched were proof of his revolutionary history. In consequence his examination was unable to proceed, and he and Gu Yuan, a print artist, were the earliest to be "liberated" from the "cowshed" and "to return to the masses to be subjected to supervision and reform". In this period, he was deprived of the right to do painting. However, he devoted all his energy to the study and practice of the calligraphy of the Han Dynasty and Northern Wei Period which he had been unable to do before. He followed the principles laid down by Kang Youwei in *Guang Yizhou Shuangji*, and copied, read silently and savoured in a systematic way more than 100 kinds of steles and rubbings from the Han Dynasty to the Northern Wei Period, the beginning of his phase of study and practice of calligraphy in the ten years of the Cultural Revolution.

In 1969, he was summoned to Beijing to do paintings for the Beijing Hotel, but was not allowed to sign his name on them.(129)

In 1970 and 1971, Li Keran and a number of other old artists were sent to a cadre school in Danjiangkou in Hubei province for re-education. To do manual labour in the countryside at that time implied a form of "liberation", a way to "remould" oneself, a kind of resolve that one would not vainly hope to do painting any more -- to thoroughly uproot 'the black root'. At first, Li Keran was sent to the farmland to pull up weeds; later on he was detailed for duty in a janitor's room to relay telephone calls and to look after bicycles. His wife Zou Peizhu, professor in the Sculpture Department of the Central Academy of Fine

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[129] in the 1980s, he was requested to go back to fill in his signature.

Art, was sent to do manual labour in Ci County in Hebei Province along with the teaching staff and personnel of the Academy. Of their three children, the eldest boy became a worker in a factory, their second son and their daughter went to the grassland of Inner Mongolia and to a poverty-stricken village in Ningxia province to be a herdsman and a peasant respectively. A major part of their house in Dayabao Hutong was occupied by another family: many of his household effects were stacked in the kitchen and books were found everywhere in the corridor.

In 1971, by order of Premier Zhou Enlai, some of the painters were transferred back to Beijing to do painting work for the Foreign Ministry and for a number of hotels and guesthouses. The National Hotel in Beijing sent a member of its staff to Danjiangkou to make arrangements for Li Keran's return. But after Li Keran returned to Beijing, he could not live in his own house for the reasons mentioned above. He therefore lived temporarily in the hostel of the National Hotel. It was only after a year that he was able to move into a flat in a block outside Fuxingmen. In 1972, Li painted a huge *Li River* for the National Hotel. In the same year, he drew another huge landscape *The Scenic Spot of Yangshuo* which took him three months. Again in the same year, he painted *Springs among Trees* as a national gift for a visiting head-of-state. During this period when Li Keran was able to resume his painting work, he was very grateful to Premier Zhou Enlai. He tried his very best, changing his sketches several times and making versions refined and developing the mode and style repeatedly in the 1960s. The finished picture was full of grandeur, solemnity and commemorative style. Though he gave priority to the use of ink colour, he increased the quantity of colour used, and the details were carefully worked out as if it were a handicraft article. One could feel that he was painting with reverence and awe.

In the summer of 1973, Professor Zhao Haosheng of Yale University paid a visit to China. When in Beijing, he called on Li Keran and Wu Zuoren. Later he sorted out a number of tape recordings which led to an article in which they talked about Qi Baishi, published in the 12th issue of the Hongkong monthly *Seventies* in 1973. The article unexpectedly angered Jiang Qing who ordered investigation and criticism. In the spring of 1974, the Central Academy and art circles began to criticize Li Keran and Wu Zuoren, and

this was followed by a movement to criticize "black paintings". Li Keran's *The Scenic Spot of Yangshuo* and Huang Yongyu's *Owl* were treated as typical "black paintings", to be "ferreted out and put before the public". Li Keran was unaware of the fact that the series of political movements like "criticizing black paintings", "struggles between Confucianism and Legalism", "criticizing Lin (Biao) and criticizing Confucius" were attacks on the seriously ill Zhou Enlai, and he therefore argued his case in earnest. Liu Boshu, a lecturer in the Academy's Chinese Painting Department at that time, said later on,

> "Mr. Li Keran did not give in to the criticism, maintaining that all his pictures came from life. To substantiate what he said, he took out his sketches and showed them to all those present who were astonished at seeing them."(130)

It showed that Li Keran had never stopped drawing sketches during the Cultural Revolution. As he was not allowed to go to other parts of the country, he frequented parks in the outskirts of Beijing. When he was not allowed to leave his own house he drew sketches from magazines. He sketched as a means of practising his basic skill.

The movement to "criticize black paintings" forced Li Keran to be present at all criticism meetings. He could only remain silent. Great political pressure had accentuated his high blood pressure and he suffered a recurrence of his heart disease so severe that he lost his speech. In 1974 and 1975, he could only communicate with his family in writing. During this period, he practised calligraphy as usual, persisting in writing neatly big characters in *kai* style daily. After writing the black characters, he would use light ink to go back over them performing an exercise of "horizontal level, vertical straight" strokes and lines. Later on he recalled: "I not only practised Yan (Yan Zhenqing, 708-784) characters and Wei steles, I also wrote exceedingly stiff and awkward scripts which I myself invented. I called them jokingly 'Jiang Dang style'(*jian dan ti*), that is, the rigid standardized form of Chinese characters frequently seen written on the walls of sauce and pickle shops and pawnshops of the old society."(131) He trained himself this way so as to avoid 'slipperiness'(*liuhua*) in his brushwork.

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[130] Li Song, *The Life of Li Keran*, Tianjin: The Tianjin Fine Arts Press, 1992, p.15

[131] ibid., p.40 [INK This note refers to the book cited by Song]

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, people were astonished to see the emergence of a sudden maturity in Li Keran's calligraphic art. His early landscape paintings had rarely been inscribed and his calligraphy in the 1960s was also in a subordinate position. However, following the close of the Cultural Revolution, in the last ten years of his life his calligraphic art had become the soul of his artistic world. The mixed *zhuan* (seal character) , *li* (official scipt) and *cao* (grass script) style of his calligraphy brought about changes in his later landscapes, buffaloes and figures, returning to a certain degree to the literati tradition with its emphasis on the interest and charm of brushwork.

In 1976 Li Keran was 69 years of age. He suffered from overlapping toes on both feet which hampered his walking, but as he was keen on travelling to revive his sketching, he made up his mind to undergo an operation which resulted in the amputation of a toe from his right foot and two toes from his left. In the same year he painted two huge landscapes, *Li River* and *Mount Jinggang* for the General Association of Overseas Chinese in Japan.

In 1976, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Mao Zedong died one after the other. In October, the Gang of Four was arrested and imprisoned, and the ten years of the Cultural Revolution came to an end.

2.5 NEW ORTHODOXY AND REFORM IN THE LATER YEARS (1977--88)

In 1977, Li Keran was seventy years old. In a self-retrospective way, he drafted his "Summary at Seventy", raising the curtain for the reforms of his later years and the coming climax of his art. In the notebook on his desk he wrote,

> "The idea of my painting is not elegant enough, the composition too stiff, the artistic conception poor, and there is a deficiency in creativeness."

He summarized his defects in seven characters, and planned to rectify with another seven characters:

> "Industry overcomes slothfulness; modesty defeats self-satisfaction; courage vanquishes timidity, broadmindedness prevails over narrowmindedness, the new subdues the old, rapidity remedies slowness, and finally, replacing stolidity with flexibility. But the most important of all

is to have a brand-new idea." (132)

The same year, he asked painter Tang Yun in Shanghai to engrave two seals. One read "white-haired, I learn from a child" *(baifa xue tong)* and the other "at seventy, I realize my ignorance" *(qishi shi zhi ji wuzhi)*, manifesting his will to start all over again. Evidently, Li was not satisfied with his own work during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, he had awoken to the fact of the damage done to him by the political impact of the Cultural Revolution.

In the summer of 1977, accompanied by his wife Zou Peizhu and the painter Li Xingjian, Li Keran went on a trip to the Lu and Jinggang Mountains in Jiangxi Province, where he went up three times to Huangyangjie. There he made many sketches. After returning to Beijing, Li began his work of drawing a huge landscape entitled *Jinggang Mountains -- the Revolutionary Cradle* for Chairman Mao's Memorial Hall. He recalled in 1978 that policy towards art was rather tolerant at that time. He himself had been received twice by Hua Guofeng, then Chairman. He was greatly touched, for there was no restriction on their creation at all. (133) In July 1977, *Art* invited all the painters working for the Memorial Hall of Chairman Mao to a forum(134). There Li Keran said,

> "In Chinese painting, emphasis has been put upon brush and ink, especially the latter. Brush and ink are developing all the time. But the Gang of Four would not permit people to paint with ink, denouncing it as 'black painting'" (135).

In accomplishing the political mission entrusted to him after the Cultural Revolution he attempted to use mainly ink with only a sparse proportion of green colour. Among the voluminous paintings by landscapists harping on the main theme of revolutionary holy places, Li's painting was the most black (136), whereas the rest of them took either red or

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[132] From Sun Meilan 'The Contents of Seals and footsteps -- further Discussion on the Aesthetic Thoughts of Li Keran', *Winter Jasmine*, Feb./1985, Tianjin: Tianjin Fine Arts Press, 1985, p.6

[133] 'National People's Congress Inspired Writers, Artists Plan Many New Works', Beijing New China News Agency in English, in *Daily Report*, March 10, 1978, p. E.8

[134] Beijing: *Art*, 1977/6, p.13

[135] Beijing: *Art*, 1977/6, p.11

[136] Beijing: *Art*, 1977/5, pages of plates

green as their colour tones. [137] On a surviving draft version there are lines of encouragement that he wrote:

> "Too timid, the contour lines too clear; looking rather mechanical, without containment; a mere glance takes in everything, without the rich flavour of a painting". "Be bold, avoid being mechanical, be bold at wielding the brush, overbrimming with ink; full of meaning, paint as much as one can, rich in reserve, with endless meaning; pay attention to the main tone, so it can be viewed from afar."[138]

Although this painting was painted with obvious restraint, his paintings done in the same year such as *The Jinjiang Pavilion in Guilin*[139], *Wonderful Scenery on the Li River*[140] and *The Li River In Rain*[141], all of which displayed an air of composure and confidence, in comparison with his works in the early 1960s. They manifest a maturity in brushwork and pattern.

To fulfill the mission of decorating the east and west wings of the rest hall in the Memorial Hall to Chairman Mao, the most effective strength of the traditional landscape circle who had survived the historic calamity of the Cultural Revolution were convened. Among them were the old painters Qian Songyan, Guan Shanyue, Li Xiongcai, and Wei Zixi, besides Li Keran, together with middle-aged and young artists such as Song Wenzhi, Ya Ming, Chen Dongting and Qin Jianming, some twenty altogether. Their styles of painting closely approached one another, reflecting the fashion -- mimic techniques; realistic images; a taste of popularity; a commemorative style -- a grandiose view and a revolutionary romanticism. This could be described as "possessing Chinese National style", the result of reforming traditional landscape since 1950s. In the later 1970s, this fashion supplanted the traditional old-fashioned landscape painting to become the new orthodoxy. Most of the old painters who had been active in the 1950s and 1960s, who had contributed

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[137] Beijing: *Art*, 6/1977 pages of plates: Li Xiongcai, *Morning Shaoshan*; Wei Zixi, *Huangyang Border*; Lin Fengsu, Chen Dongting, Liang Shixiong, *Dawn at Zunyi*; Guan Shanyue, *Jinggang Mountain*; Wu Linshen, Shang Junli, *Eulogy to Zunyi*; Qian Songyan, *Dawn at Date Garden*; Ya Ming, Qin Jianming, *Beidaihe*

[138] from Liu Xilin, 'Wading from Nature to Art', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, 1991/5, p.129

[139] *Li Keran's Complete Painting and Calligraphy Works*, *Landscape Volume*, Tianjin: Tianjin Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.251

[140] ibid., p.242

[141] ibid., p.246

much in laying the new foundation for this new orthodoxy, had died, including Fu Baoshi, Hu Peiheng, He Tianjian, Wu Jingting, Zhao Wanyun, Qin Zhongwen and Wu Hufang. Shi Lu was seriously ill and died in 1982. Obviously, the influence and position of Li Keran in the reform of traditional landscape painting and his status in the setting-up of the "new orthodoxy" was not to be replaced by anyone in the 1970s. The repeated reforms promoted by Li Keran in his art in the 1980s and the summit he attained in his later years fortified his position as the foremost master painter of modern traditional landscape painting, a symbol and representative of the new orthodoxy.

In the summer of 1978, Li Keran began another sketching trip to Mount Huang and Mount Jiuhua and the Three Gorges.(142) He stayed on Mount Huang for more than a month, watching and observing at dawn, in the twilight of the evening, ruminating and sketching from nature. Many works of his later years brooded during this stay in the renowned mountains. Leaving Mount Huang, he visited Mount Jiuhuan. When he reached Wuhan it was already mid-summer. He felt rather exhausted. A physical check by the physician found him to be in the grip of a cardiac disease, and he was forced to cancel his tour to the Three Gorges. While recuperating in Wuhan, he was invited by the Light Industry Bureau to give a lecture to the Landscape Study Class. This was the first time he had given a public lecture since the Cultural Revolution. The content of this lecture was very rich. It was a systematic summary and exposition of his artistic thoughts and technical experience accumulated since the 1950s (143).

In 1978 Li Keran had been elected as a member of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Sessions of the National Political Consultative Council. In November, 1979, he was elected to the post of vice-chairman of the Chinese Artists' Association. That same year, as approved by the Ministry of Culture, a production team was organized by the Central Arts Academy and the Beijing Science and Education Film Producers to produce educational and entertainment films about Li Keran's art. By 1983 the production team had turned out the

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[142] Refer to Li Xingjian, 'Learn in a Circuitous Way, Be One of the School of Industrious Labour', *Winter Jasmine*, 1985/2

[143] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, pp.21-51

film of *No Smooth Path to the High Summit -- the Art of Li Keran in Landscape Painting* and two short films: *Creating Monuments to Mountains and Rivers* and *Li Keran Draws Buffalo*. Of the three films, *Creating Monuments* won the International Silver Dragon Award in the 20th International Short Film Competition held in Warsaw, Poland.

In the autumn of 1979, the Central Academy of Fine Arts for the first time took in landscape painting postgraduates to the Chinese Painting Department. Li Keran and Liang Shunian were assigned to be the supervising professors. From a multitude of candidates the Academy took five. In 1980, in his talk to the class, Li pointed out for the first time,

> "In acquiring the art of painting, the most important thing is to read 'two books' painstakingly first. The first is Nature (including society), the second tradition (including history). Any scholar must read these two, no creative success can be achieved if we depart from macro-nature and tradition."(144)

These 'two books' should be read equally painstakingly, but Nature is of the first significance, whereas tradition comes second.(145)

In this talk he coined the term "painstaking school". He stated,

> "I do not rely on any genius or talent, I strive my utmost, I am of the painstaking school". (146)

Soon after 1979, art circles welcomed in a new era which has been termed "the Spring of Arts". "Bringing order out of chaos" in the political ideology field enabled creative art work to break through one "forbidden area" into another. For example, there appeared the picture-story of *Maple* (147), *Wound* (148), the oil paintings of *Snow of x day x month 1968* (149) and *Why*(150) which reflected the experiences of youth in the Cultural Revolution, also the oil paintings *Inerasable Memory* (151) and *Defence* (152) which were a

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[144] ibid., p.170

[145] ibid.

[146] ibid., p.173

[147] Chen Yiming, Liu Yulian, 'Maple', *The Picture-story Periodical*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1979/8

[148] Chen Yiming, Liu Yulian, Li Bin, 'Wound', Beijing: *Art*, 1981/4, p.28

[149] Cheng Conglin, Beijing: *Art*, 1980/1, p.24

[150] Gao Xiaohua, Beijing: *Art*, 1979/7

[151] Du Jian, Gao Yaguang, Su Gaoli, Beijing: *Art*, 1979/11, front cover.

record of the April 5 Tiananmen Incident in 1976, together with the mural at Beijing Airport which had elicited a dispute (153) and the Stars Exhibition held at the end of 1979. (154) Theoretical art circles had also discussed and argued over the problems of "beauty in form", "abstract beauty", "realism", "self-expression" and "abstract art".(155) At a time when society was undergoing profound change in the political and ideological fields, the concept of traditional Chinese painting and its ability to reflect profound social changes were again questioned by youngsters. As for the Western arts that rushed in when the door which had been closed for 30 years was suddenly thrown wide open, the young artists were ardently attracted. "Complete Westernization" and "all-round anti-tradition" became a general psychology among the younger generation and a focus of discussion in art circles.

In 1981, the Research Institute of Chinese Painting was established. Li Keran was appointed President.

From 1981 to 1983, Li Keran twice visited Japan. On his second visit, in order to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty, his personal Chinese painting exhibition was held first in Tokyo, then in Osaka.

In September 1983, the Art and Science Institute of East Germany conferred on Li Keran the honorific title of "Communicating Fellow" which had previously been accorded to Qi Baishi.

In 1985, the New Tide Movement in Art surged across some of the main provinces, signifying that the youngsters'artistic movement after the Cultural Revolution had merely flitted over the stage, imitating a shadowy outline of modern Western art and Post-Modernism. In the July issue of *Jiangsu Pictorial*, Li Xiaoshan published his article entitled 'My Opinions on Modern Chinese Painting' in which he stated,
"Traditional Chinese painting has reached its termination".

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[152] Ai Xuan, Beijing: *Art*, 1979/2

[153] Beijing: *Art*, 1979/11, 1979/12

[154] Beijing: *Art*, 1980/3

[155] See Beijing: *Art*, 1979/5, 1980/10, 1981/2, 1981/6, 1982/3, 1983/1,

He criticized Li Keran's work for

"including more rational elements"; "not daring to transcend the orbit of traditional Chinese painting; endeavouring only to discover some new subject in the midst of life"; "exaggerating certain techniques - paying too much attention to elaborately wrought senses, thus affecting the direct expression of emotion in painting." (156)

He complained,

"The achievements of Li Keran in Chinese painting have exerted an inevitable influence on posterity which is more negative than positive."

The defects in his works are "magnified twofold in the works of his pupils".

"In this way, the path they traverse in art is getting narrower and narrower." (157)

It is not hard to apprehend that Li Xiaoshan's criticism really echoed the rebellious mood *(nifan xinli)* of youth in the post-Cultural Revolution period, criticising art from an attitude of drastic anti-traditionalim and anti-routinism. Li Keran's generation had contrived to set up a new orthodoxy to transform the classical-literati style into a modern popular one amidst an entirely political atmosphere. This was just the kind of tradition which the youth directly and instantly felt and wanted to revolt against at the outset. Their "Revolution in Painting concepts" signified that they wanted to cast off traditional values together with traditional style. They were after the modern Western philosophical concepts to manifest their strong individuality, self-expression, fanaticism and a cynical attitude towards life. In an article published later, Li Xiaoshan suggested that traditional painting should be exhibited in museums as a kind of antiquity, and called on artists to make all-round innovations and explore an entirely new model instead of making "minor patches and repairs within the old system".(158) The Invitational Exhibition of New Chinese Painting sponsored by the Hubei Branch of the Chinese Artists' Association in Wuhan in December 1985 exhibited new Chinese paintings by the advanced guard who were all estranged from the new orthodoxy of Li Keran and Shi Lu; for example, the

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[156] *China Fine Arts Weekly*, carried the abstract with the title changed to 'Chinese Painting Has Come to its Termination', first page of 1985/14, October 26 1985

[157] ibid.

[158] Li Xiaoshan, 'A Prerequisite for the Existence of the Chinese Paintings', *Tide of Arts*, No.7,; 'Chinese Paintings As a Kind of Preserved Tradition', *Jiangsu Pictorial*, 1986/1. *China Fine Arts Weekly* had abstracted the two above-mentioned articles into one, changing their titles to 'Tradition, Dividing and Preserved Painting', 1986/1, January 6 1986, p.1

Stationary Features of the World(159) by Gu Wenda who had manipulated various styles of calligraphy and interpolated characters to form the picture, and Zhu Xinjian who rather "preferred 'the cosmetic odour'*(zhifen qi*) to 'the intellectual atmosphere' (*shujuan qi*) within the Chinese painting tradition(160). As such, he painted the nude body of a female with bound feet. (161)

At the end of January, 1986, an old painters forum on the "crisis in Chinese painting" was convened jointly by the Research Institute of Chinese Painting, the Beijing Painting Studio and the Editorial Board of *Chinese Painting*. The old painters present (162) considered that

> "The long history of tradition is the result of innovations over generations. The innovation of today will surely become the tradition of tomorrow; they are an inseparable pair." (163) "The arts of every nation contain that nation's own 'soul',... So long as the Chinese nation exists, so long as the country exists, this 'soul' will live forever. Hence, any negation of the tradition, any attempt to start all over again is impossible."(164)

Being ill, Li Keran did not attend the forum, but he asked Liu Boshu to pass on his opinion,

> "The young men of today refuse to study tradition, to have life and to have the high culture of poetry, calligraphy and painting -- all these amount to nothing." (165)

As the controversy over the current situation and the future of Chinese painting was at its height, a posthumous exhibition by the painter Huang Qiuyuan (1913-79) of Jiangxi was inaugurated in February 1986 in Beijing. The 120 works of this long-ignored painter from a remote province created a sensation in Beijing art circles. Critics and specialists

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[159] See Beijing: *China Fine Arts Weekly*, 1986/1, January 6, 1986, p.2

[160] ibid., 1986/8, February 24, 1986, p.1

[161] ibid., 1986/1, January 6, 1986, p.1

[162] The old painters who attended the forum were: Ye Qianyu, Pan Jiezi, Liu Boshu, Wu Zhuoren, Wang Xueshi, Liu Lingcang, He Haixia, Zhang Ding, Xiao Shufang, Chang Anzhi, Yu Feng, Zhou Huaimin, Wu Guanzhong, Huang Miaozi, and Liang Shunian. Because of illness, Li Keran and Wang Zhaowen were not present at the forum, but sent their deputes to submit their opinions.

[163] Beijing: *China Fine Arts Weekly*, 1986/8, February 24, 1986, p.1

[164] ibid.

[165] ibid., 1986/8, February 24, 1986, p.2

considered them to "be on a par with those of Shi Tao and Shi Qi"[166] , even to be rated as "very masterpieces if they had been stored in the Palace Museum". [167] Li Keran twice visited the Exhibition, getting very excited and emotional, exclaiming that "It was a shame that we were ignorant of the existence of such a great talent".[168] He said,

> "Nowdays some young men oppose tradition while knowing nothing about it." [169] "Huang Qiuyuan said nothing, but his works said everything".[170]

In April 1986, the *Exhibition of Chinese Paintings by Li Keran* was opened under the joint sponsorship of the National Union of Literary and Art Circles, the Chinese Artists' Association, the Central Academy of Fine Arts and China Research Institute of Chinese Paintings, displaying some 202 exhibits including Chinese paintings, calligraphy, sketches and water colours done by Li over nearly half a century, from 1943 to 1985. In his foreword *(My Words*) to the Exhibition, Li said,

> "I am now near eighty, but I have never been satisfied with my own work. I used to think that if I could live to be a hundred, maybe I could draw well. But as I ponder again, even two hundred would not do, maybe a little better than I have done so far. 'Wisdom is limitless'. The development of any matter is without end, interminably expansive. Absolute perfection will never exist." [171]

From the exhibition, one can see that in the 1950s Li's works were increasingly tinged with the imprint of sketching from nature. In his exploration of individual style and language between the 1960s and 1970s, he emphasized painstaking design. By the end of the 1970s, he began his "freewheeling" reformation by shaking himself free of external forces and self-pressure and overcoming the rational bondage arising from over-designing, thus approaching automatic creative states. In the 1980s, he had reached the very summit of his creation, accomplishing the pattern of Li-style and turning out a whole series of

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[166] Sun Ke and Ji Jingzhong, ed., *The Collected Essays on Chinese Painting Master Huang Qiuyuan*, Hongkong: Moqu zhai, 1988, p.6

[167] ibid., p.5

[168] ibid., p.105

[169] ibid., p.113

[170] ibid., p110

[171] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.98

masterpieces, which transcended reality and put the emphasis on imaginary vision, the brushes and ink merging as one and reaching the very border of self-will in such paintings as: *Ink and Wash Rivalling Colour* (1981) ; [172] *Enjoying the Coolness in the Thick Forests*(1982) [173]; *Spring Rain South of the Changjiang* (1984) [174]; *Enjoying Coolness by the Lotus Pond* (1985)[175]; and *Listening to Waterfalls After Rain* (1985)[176].

After the Exhibition, a publisher outside mainland China suggested publishing Li's Collective Works under the title of "Chinese Impressionism", but Li Keran would not consent. In 1987, in the postscript to *A Stream Flowing through High Mountains and Thick Forest* (1987) he solemnly stated his reason,

> "My painting takes root in the soil of my homeland, based upon tradition, and develops objectively. The people of the world may see my painting as Chinese impressionism, but I cannot agree with such a statement. In the early days of my life I studied Western painting for a few years. I am still very respectful towards those great painters of the West. But I have always been aware that we have our own glorious cultural system, unique in our pattern of expression. As for learning from abroad, first we must learn the strong points of others in order to enrich ourselves. If in learning from others, we belittle ourselves, discarding our tradition, I should say this is a deep disgrace." [177]

This statement clearly manifested his viewpoint on the origins of his art, and his unequivocal stand on the problem of the cultural relationship between East and West. He believed,

> "Tradition is a blood relation to us ... anything coming from abroad is our nutrition, which is necessary, but which should not be substituted for our blood relation." [178]

The last three years of his life, from 1987 to 1989, were the years of the New Period, full of challenges and new artistic tides. Li Keran had no aversion to such a

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[172] *Li Keran's Complete Painting and Calligraphy Works, Landscape Volume*, Tianjin: Tianjin People's Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.271

[173] ibid., pl.115, p.293

[174] ibid., pl.122, p.317

[175] ibid., pl.128, p.334

[176] ibid., pl.127, p.332

[177] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.208

[178] ibid., p.186

situation. As he said in 1986:

> "From a historical viewpoint, the more developed the culture, the wider the divergence." (179)

The call in artistic circles for a style of individualization and diversification was apparently a stimulant to his reform in later years.

In 1984 and 1985, Li Keran had inscribed the saying by Zong Bing of the Six Dynasties "Clear up one's mind and observe the *Dao*" (*cheng huai guan dao*) on his calligraphic scrolls. This was the earliest aesthetic exposition concerning the meaning and function of landscape painting. In 1987, he specially expounded his reason for inscribing these four Chinese characters. He said,

> "As to the meaning of landscape painting, due to prejudice it had not been expounded clearly. This is a problem we should study seriously and deeply."(180)

In 1958, he had linked the concept of "landscape" with that of the "homeland" (181). Later, he had taken "creating monuments to mountains and rivers of homeland" as his motto. No doubt, it was an explanation that was acceptable in the political atmosphere of the time, defining the function of landscape painting as the kindling of feelings of patriotism. In his later years, he was plainly not satisfied with such an explanation. He picked out Zong Bing's idea to demonstrate that he wanted to reconsider the value of the landscape painting from another angle which was:

> "From the relationship between modern people and Nature, from the relationship between landscape art, human mentality, and the *dao* of the universe."(182)

Correspondently, his painting style became simpler, more integrated and more implicit.

In 1986, he summarized standards of "excellence" in landscape painting in a 'Five-word Rhymed Formula', as follows: vivid spirit resonance; implicit with limitless messages; rich and pleasant to behold; elegant brushwork and remarkable ink; magnificent

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[179] ibid., p.184

[180] ibid., p.118

[181] ibid., p.128

[182] ibid., p.120

and broadminded. [183] His first principle recalled the tradition since the Six Dynasties of appraising the 'soul' of a painting, which had various meanings and explanations until in the Ming Dynasty it was explained as a demand on the temperament and knowledge of painters, who should be excellent both in personality and in consequent painting style and brushwork. Li Keran did not explain the meaning of "vivid spirit resonance", but in explaining "implicit with limitless messages"and "rich and pleasant to behold", he said, "not only should this refer to the appearance", but it should be a source of "everlasting rumination". [184] As for "magnificent and broadminded", his explanation was "such qualities are decided by the self-cultivation and temperament of painters." [185] All these criteria put emphasis on subjective beauty. Compared with the idea that the "artistic conception is the soul of a landscape painting", which he used to promote from the 1950s to 1970s, [186] in which he stressed objective beauty, it was indeed a significant change.

> In talking with his students in 1987 he said,
> "Chinese painting is fully-versed in the abstract, and in the union of abstract and concrete. It would never do without the abstract." [187]

Here, his "abstraction" comprised twin meanings; one was the rules of abstract beauty within form and brushwork; the second was abstract concepts in painting theory and meaning. He said,

> "There is a process in understanding and acquiring traditional Chinese painting. Without the greatest patience and exertion, wanton talk of studying will bring one nowhere and will be incomprehensible." [188]

He began to reconsider and re-apprehend the tradition represented by Dong Qichang and the Four Wangs which had been under severe attack ever since the May Fourth Movement. He said,

> "In the very beginning I could not comprehend Dong Qichang and his painting. I failed to see his excellence. Of course, his artistic conception is

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[183] ibid., p.182

[184] ibid.

[185] ibid., p.183

[186] ibid., p.82, p.45

[187] ibid., p.187

[188] ibid., pp.187-188

> nothing particular, but his painting is really excellent. I take pleasure in the painting of Ba Da, and gradually I perceived the shadow of Dong Qichang in the painting of Ba Da, which comes entirely from Dong. I began to view Dong's painting and perceive that he was unsurpassed in wielding his brush. Very 'limpid' indeed. All the objects he painted were just like the world in moonlight, all transparent, like a crystal palace."(189)

Here, Li Keran acknowledged that there had been a process in his comprehending tradition. In the last three years of his life, he stressed the comprehension of the deep intrinsic value of Chinese painting. This remained the ideological core that directed his reforms.

The last three years of his life witnessed his attainment of the very summit of art. In his colophons for some paintings of last three years, one can clearly perceive that Li Keran could hardly conceal his delight at his own new breakthrough. In his colophon for the painting of *Landscape* (1988) Li Keran wrote,

> "I have toyed with ink since I was a child; sixty years have rolled by already. From morning till late in the evening, brush and ink were always with me. In old age, I painted at random but profusely; my brush did not need to touch the paper, but it had the weight of a thousand catties. Only those with clairvoyant eyes and diligence in practice could comprehend." (190)

He always had in mind that Beijing opera possesses diverse schools, and each school has its own tradition and style. He rested his hopes in his students and disciples. In his foreword for the exhibition held in Japan in 1987 by his three students Huang Runhua, Zhang Ping and Li Xingjian, he raised the issue of schools for the first time and designated his own school as the "Painstaking School"(*ku xue pai*). He wrote,

> "Like Beijing opera, Chinese painting puts emphasis on inheritance and development. In respect to time, a school is in reality an individuality. I am now over eighty years old. In my working and teaching life, I have reared many students whose influence on the life of our society naturally form a school which I would call the "painstaking school". (191)

However, Li Keran had done so much that none of his disciples could shake off his strong influence and surpass him. This was perhaps the ground upon which Li Xiaoshan criticized him as "having a negative influence" on posterity. But the system of instruction and sketching methods set up by Li Keran for the transition from the traditional to modern

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[189] ibid., p.188

[190] ibid., p.207

[191] ibid., p.52

landscape model has become a solid foundation for the system for teaching landscape painting in the fine art academies of contemporary China. Through the bridge set up by Li Keran the young generation are able to move freely between the traditional and the Western, and the traditional and the modern. No doubt this was his great contribution to tradition and to modern Chinese art. As to whether posterity can surpass the teacher, the responsibility rests on the posterity and not on the teacher.

2.6 THE LAST YEAR AND ACCIDENTAL DEATH (1989)

In May 1989, Li Keran contributed one hundred thousand *yuan* in RMB donated to his personal academic foundation by a Philippine Chinese for his painting *The Wonderful Scenery of Li River*, [192] to fund the Second Section of the China Art Festival.

That same year, he again contributed the forty thousand US dollars which he had obtained through the auction of his landscape painting *The Gurgling Spring is Rapid after Rain* to the International Committee for Restoring the Great Wall and Rescuing Venice.

In the summer of the same year he donated thirty thousand *yuan* in RMB to the students who fasted in Tiananmen Square.

In December, two days before his death, he donated one hundred thousand *yuan* in RMB to the Foundation Committee of Ma Haide to fulfil his desire of "exterminating Leprosy".

On November 2nd, at a forum on Lin Fengmian's art Li Keran delivered an address entitled "A Genuine Artist" [193], expressing his gratitude and respect for his teacher. On November 15th, accompanied by his wife Zou Peizhu, he attended the inauguration ceremony of the *Exhibition of Lin Fengmian's Painting* where he presented a floral basket to congratulate the Exhibition, and to offer congratulations on Mr Lin's 90th birthday.

On November 23rd, in response to a request from the Hong Kong periodical

[192] ibid., p.110

[193] ibid., pp.115-117

Shoucang Tiandi, Li Keran invited some of his students to discusss contributions to the magazine. This was the last long discourse of his life with his students.(194) From the subjects he touched on, it could be seen that to the very last minute of his life, he was greatly concerned with the problems that had long been in his mind:

> 1) Concerning the special manner of expression in Chinese painting. He said,
> "The foreign way of observing nature is usually limited to the extent of their vision, they can hardly appreciate our particular way of observing nature and the intrinsic beauty of Chinese painting." (195)

Again he admitted that his slow comprehension of Dong Qichang was through Ba Da; and that it had been through the influence of Huang Binhong that he gradually came to realize the abstruse excellence of the paintings of Yun Nantian(1633-1690) and Ni Yunlin (1301-1374).

> 2) Concerning the development of the Li School, he said,
> "the landscape painting of the Li School should make a breakthrough from sketching from nature to real creative work, this is a great difficulty."(196)

He said,

> "The development of students is upon the foundation they acquire from their teacher. They have their own individual features, not similar to each other. Their object is the same, but they have to develop on their own. If everyone were the same as Li Keran, it would be meaningless."(197)

Evidently, he was criticizing his students for lack of their own unique style.

> 3) As to the future of Chinese painting he said,
> "I have asked Wang Yong to engrave the seal of 'The East has dawned', from the last sentence of Su Dongpo's poem *Qian Chibi Fu* which says 'ignorant of the dawn in the East'" (198) "I would predict that in the near future, only the Orient can vie in excellence with the Occident. This does not mean that we should play the upper dog over the other, but it does imply that we should give something to the other." (199)

On December 3rd, Li Keran spoke at his home to his disciple Li Baolin and said

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[194] ibid., pp.189-192

[195] ibid., p.191

[196] ibid., p.191

[197] ibid.

[198] ibid., p.189

[199] ibid.

that the Ministry of Culture was sending someone to see him in two or three days, wishing to hear his opinion on the work to be carried out in the Research Institute of Chinese Painting. He said,

> "As to the routine work of the Research Institute, I myself cannot manage it ... but as to the present state and development of Chinese painting, I really give it a lot of thought. In my present situation I really have a mind to do something for our Chinese painting ... I really hope that the Research Institute has a definite aim and policy to be of service and use in studying and invigorating Chinese painting." (200)

On the morning of December 5th, after washing, Li Keran went downstairs to do some *taiji* boxing. He was in high spirits. At about ten, three men and one woman came from the Ministry of Culture. They talked for only a very short time. (201) Suddenly, Li Keran slouched down against the back of the sofa, his face turning white. His wife Zou Peizhu rushed in from the next room, calling the physician, who diagnosed the disease as a sudden irretrievable cardiac failure. At ten to eleven, Li Keran passed away into his eternal sleep in his studio *Shiniutang*, at the age of 82.

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[200] Li Baolin, 'A Talk Before Eternal Separation', Beijing: *Art*, 1990/3, p.21

[201] The content of the talk has not been officially revealed pending textual research. It has been reported the officials were questioning his contribution to the students in Tiananmen Square, and enquiring about the attitude and demeanour of Liu Boshu, the vice-president of the Research Institute, towards the Tiananmen Incident.

CHAPTER 3: THE FORMATIVE PROCESS OF LI'S LANDSCAPE STYLE

This chapter will make a general survey of the style of Li Keran's works together with their formative process, in chronological order. Such an analysis of style may strike us as dull and ponderous, but is a necessity. Although it may be possible to derive a general impression of the style of Li's work by merely taking a brief look at all his works, the author will attempt to make a closer investigation of the works themselves. She is convinced that without a definite number of Li's works as the solid foundation for analysis, simply sampling a few pieces of Li's artistic work to verify a fore-settled conclusion, or proceeding with classification of Li's works at various periods from a general impression, is no difficult task, yet it is very unreliable, for the conclusion thus drawn will probably be paradoxical, even far-fetched.

The objective of form analysis is to reveal secrets in Li's paintings; to reveal problems Li came across when expressing himself, and the strategies with which he solved the problems; to reveal evidence of the evolution of the style in his "chain of works" and the internal relations among them. On this basis, we may be able to make a further step to summarise, and at the same time intensively experience the artistic style of Li's works, including his language features and his temperament, and we may be able to conduct further discussion about the intrinsic cultural value of his work, and the original factors that affect his style. Therefore, in this chapter, the author will purposely avoid discussing the aesthetic and spiritual content of the works, but focus all attention on the evolution of style.

Most of Li Keran's works that the author has seen, besides a few photographs which have been preserved (mainly early period oil paintings and War of Resistance propaganda paintings, some of them published in magazines, newspapers and periodicals after 1990) and early period publications already discovered, were original Chinese paintings. After *An Album of Li Keran's Ink and Wash Landscape Sketches from Nature* (published by the Tianjin People's Fine Art Press in 1956), *Collected Works of Li Keran's*

Ink and Wash Landscape Painting from Nature (published by the Beijing People's Fine Art Press in 1959), and *Li Keran's Album of Paintings* (reproductions of works mainly from the Czech State Museum and private collections, published in Czechoslovakia in both Czech and English in 1959), various editions of albums of Li Keran's paintings have been published one after another in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the PRC (after 1990). The four volumes of *Li Keran's Complete Painting and Calligraphy* published by the Tianjin People's Fine Art Press in 1991 are the most extensive collection of Li's representative works and include landscapes, buffaloes, figures, sketches and calligraphic works. A small number of works from the Cultural Revolution period which were not collected in albums were seen in *Chinese Literature*, an English-language periodical published in the PRC, in the 1960s and 1970s. Some paintings in private collections have been published in *Brush and Ink*, a Hong Kong monthly magazine which started publication in 1990. These publications served as the main source of material for the author in her study of Li Keran's works.

3.1 THE ECLECTIC ATTITUDE (1929 - 40)

So far we have not discovered any sketch works done by Li Keran during his stay in the National Arts Academy in Hangzhou [1]. The black and white photos of his oils,

[1] Li Keran's three exercise works, two pieces of *Male Nude* and *Paradise Lost*, took part in the Yi-Ba Art Society's Exercise Works Exhibition held in Shanghai on 11th-13th June, 1931 (Sun Meilan wrongly recorded it as 21st May, 1931, *Study of Li Keran*, p.14, Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991). Two black and white prints of Li's works were published in *The Picture Album of the 1931 Yiba Art Society's Exercise Works Exhibition*. According to Yu Hai's commentaries in 1931, the works of Li Keran included in the exhibition were "three large pieces" (Shanghai: *Literature and Art Press*, 15th issue, published on 22nd June, 1931, see Wu Bunai, Wang Guanquan, ed. *Autograph Album of Yiba Art Society*, p.80, the People's Fine Arts Press, 1981). Yu Hai's article did not state to which kind Li Keran's works belonged. Wan Qingli said in 'The Formation of Li Keran's Painting Style' that these two works were sketches (Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.25, p.41). Both Li Song's *Brief Biography of Li Keran* (Tianjin People's Fine Art Press, 1992, p.4) and Sun Meilan's *A Study of Li Keran* (Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.14) recorded that the three works of Li Keran in the exhibition were oil paintings. Wang Zhanfei's article entitled 'Friendship by the side of West Lake' (collected in Sun Meilan's *A Study of Li Keran*, Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991, p.268-300), mentions that "Li Keran's oil painting composition exercise work *Paradise Lost* of 1931 comprised the first trial of his abilities when he was at Hangzhou Academy ..." (Ibid. p.283). The oil painting mentioned above was very likely the *Paradise Lost* which took part in the Yiba Art Society's Exercise Works Exhibition in Shanghai on 11th - 13th June, 1931. The author wrote a letter to Professor Wang Zhanfei of the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts to clarify the facts.

including *Male Nude* [2] and *Paradise Lost* [3], and his landscape *Avenue* [4], *West Lake Scenery* [5], and *Yulong Shan* [6] done in the 1930s, however, feature clearly the integrity of the work and presentation of grouping of masses, with artistic exaggeration and summary of slightly rounded arcs and triangular geometrical forms, as well as the condensation of black, white and gray scale of objects in reversed light or in sidelight. In terms of form, Li Keran preferred post-impressionism and the simple and summarizing style of early modern Western paintings such as Fauvism and expressionism. The artistic conception of his works, however, was quite different from those of modern paintings which were usually intense. Li's works were more in Chinese style, and were poetic and beautiful. The five photos of Li Keran's oils revealed little of his characteristics in applying colours. He obviously exploited condensation, with bold strokes and thick tones. The investigation and analysis now rest solely on the composition and on form characteristics of some works mentioned above.

The oil painting *Paradise Lost* (1931) (pl.1) drew its subject-matter from the *Bible*, but apart from a little snake depicted in the lower left hand corner of the picture which hinted at the subject, it was basically an exercise in painting the female nude. The form of the figure used distinct contours both exaggerating and understating circles and curves. Clear and definite black, white and grey areas covered the female figure and its background, the hills and stones. The succinct plane form and the slightly deformed treatment of this

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According to Wang Zhanfei's letter to the author, dated 12th May, 1996, that Li Keran's *Paradise Lost* and two *Male Nudes* which were in the Yiba Society's exhibition in Shanghai in 1931 were all oils, and the *Paradise Lost* mentioned in his article entitled 'Friendship by the side of West Lake' was the only one shown in the Exhibition. This picture was unique, with no reproductions.

[2] published in *The Picture Album of the 1931 Yi-Ba Art Society's Exercise Works Exhibition*; see Wu Bunai, Wang Guanquan, ed. *Autograph Album of Yi-Ba Art Society*, p.94 and p.96, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1981

[3] ibid.

[4] Li Keran, *Avenue*, dated 1929, published in Shanghai: *Art Style*, 1933, Vol.1, No.2

[5] The black and white photograph of this work was sent by Li Keran from Xuzhou as a gift to Shen Fuwen. It was collected and preserved by Shen Fuwen and was first published in *A Study of Li Keran* by Sun Meilan (plate 7; refer to Shen Fuwen's letter to Sun Meilan, 26th May 1987, in the same book, p.313, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Art Press, 1991.

[6] Li Keran, *Yulong Shan*, (the 1930s), published in Liu Xin, *An Illustrated Hundred-Year-History of the Oil Painting in China*, Nanning: Guangxi Fine Arts Press, 1996, p.24

painting was obviously due to the influence of the modern painting styles of the early period in the West as well as the influence of Lin Fengmian's early oil paintings.(pl.2)

Male Nude (1931) (pl.3) demonstrated a strong painting style with the tableau filled up with a single figure. By a sidelighting and backlighting treatment, its tones became thick and strong, stressing the mass structure of the body and giving a sense of the whole, thus reflecting the characteristics of sketching of the Hangzhou school as well as the influence of the intense painting style of Li Keran's supervisor, Claudot (pl.4). Such strong and dark tones under sidelighting and backlighting treatment appeared repeatedly in Li Keran's subsequent War of Resistance propaganda paintings, which showed an inner correlation with the black landscapes painted in his later years.

West Lake (pl.5) was very close to *Paradise Lost* in style, its composition plain and succinct, with the hills, trees and houses tending towards round, curved and triangular forms, and with a high simplification in the relations of the black, white and grey areas. The inverted reflection in water was like a mirror. In a formative sense, the painting was obviously influenced by the modern painting style of the West. But in emotional appeal, it pertained to the romantic style of a quality suggestive of poetry and painting of the East.

From the indistinct black and white printed reproductions of these oil paintings, it can be seen that there still existed immaturities in his skill and technique, for example, in the treatment of the hands, feet and face of the female body in *Paradise Lost* and that of the legs of the male body in *Male Nude*. However, it is also quite obvious that Li Keran had keen perception in the formative sense of the modern painting of the West, having also manifested great interest in the experimentation and study of modern painting styles. This perception and interest were manifested again during his quest for the new language and mode of traditional landscape between the 1950s and the 1960s.

Li's early ink and wash painting *Landscape* (signed "Keran" and dated 1932) [7] (pl.6) seems quite childish. As Dr. Wan Qingli has pointed out:

> "It seems that there is no clear trace showing that Li Keran learned the orthodox tradition of the Four Wangs from Qian Shizhi when he was a

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[7] Li Keran, *Landscape*, signed "Keran", dated 1932, ink and colour on paper, Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.25, p.41

teenager. Also, from the inscriptions written on the two works (*Landscape* and *Guan Yuchang*), it can be barely be seen that he had learned the calligraphy of Zhao Mengfu in his childhood."[8]

This remains the only reproduction known of an ink and wash landscape by Li Keran before the 1940s.

Another ink and wash painting entitled *Guan Yunchang* (signed "Ran" and undated) of Guan Yunchang, a general in *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (pl.7), was published in 1934 in *Yifeng* (Art Style) magazine in Shanghai [9] and could be looked upon as a work of about the same period. The contour of the figure in this painting has the appearance of an arc, easy and smooth, swift and rapid, very much like Lin Fengmian's ink and wash painting style (pl.8) and quite different from the figure paintings he did himself in more traditional style in the 1940s.

From a black and white print [10] of an ink and wash work painted by Zhou Peihua who was in the Hangzhou school with Li at the same time, it is clear that his paintings were influenced by Pan Tianshou in every respect from theme to composition, modelling and brushwork. Therefore, there should be no doubt that Li Keran had some access to Pan's paintings at that time, but Li's two Chinese works mentioned above bore no influence of Pan Tianshou, and no signs of following *Jinshi huapai* painting (The Painting School of Bronze and Stone Scripts).

From the five works dating from his period in the Hangzhou Art Academy, it can be seen that certain formative elements in the three oil paintings have internal correlations with the expressive characteristics of his later landscapes, but the trend close to Lin Fengmian's ink and wash style was very soon abandoned in his subsequent creations.

Li Keran recalled that in 1936, he painted a Chinese painting, *Zhong Kui*, which was selected for the Second Session of the National Art Exhibition sponsored in Nanjing in

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[8] Wan Qingli, 'The Formation of Li Keran's Painting Style', Hong Kong: *Ink and Brush*, No.25, p.4

[9] Li Keran, *Guan Yunchang*, ink and colour on paper, Shanghai: *Art Style*, 1934, Vol.2, No.6, on illustration page (no page number),

[10] published in *The Picture Album of the 1931 Yi-Ba Art Society's Exercise Works Exhibition*; see Wu Bunai, Wang Guanquan, ed. *Autograph Album of Yi-Ba Art Society*, p.94, 96, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1981

April, 1937.

"Some newspapers of that period carried special introductory articles which set a high value on the painting."(11)

It is a pity that this work is no longer extant. However, according to Dr. Wan Qingli, another Chinese painting by Li Keran in 1937, *Liu Hai Playing with a Golden Toad* (signed in the twenty-sixth year of the Republic of China) (pl.9), can be found among the collection of Robert Hatfield Ellsworth (12) , the style of which was drastically different from the style of his ink and wash paintings during his student days in Hangzhou. Li seems to have completely changed direction towards the painting style of Liang Kai of the Southern Song Dynasty who was appointed an official of the Imperial Art Academy during the Jiatai reign period (1201--1204). Liang was well known for the figure painting style of reducing strokes and splashing with ink. (pl.10) This change occurred in 1934 after Li started to pursue ink and wash figure painting in the traditional great freehand brushwork style, especially after his tour to Beiping in 1935 when he saw a great number of painting collections of past dynasties in the Palace Museum, which increased his knowledge of traditional Chinese painting. This painting was the earliest instance we have seen in which Li used a large volume of ink. Beginning from the mid-forties to his later years, Li Keran made untiring efforts in the use of ink in his landscape painting, and after he began to learn from Huang Binhong, he became more concerned with the use and development of the ink accumulation method, and ultimately attained unusual achievement in the method of using ink.

From the mid-1930s, Li Keran began studying traditional ink and wash figure painting. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to learn of the high commendation heaped upon his figure painting achievements in the forties. Li Keran's son-in-law Yu Lu recalled:

"At that time, we were still able to find in Su Shaoqing's family some of Li Keran's early paintings, most of which were landscapes. I have seen as many as four or five pieces. Later on, the lives of his family members in Shanghai worsened and they were forced to trade paintings for rice. This

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[11] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.,222

[12] See Wan Qingli, 'The Formation of Li Keran's Painting Style', Hong Kong: *Ink and Brush*, No.25, p.45

was a pity!" (13)

The early paintings mentioned by Yu Lu which he saw in the house of Su Shaoqing must have been works from 1932, when Li and Su E were married, up to 1938, before Li left Xuzhou. It is very likely that Su E brought them to her parents home in Shanghai. According to Yu Lu, "most were landscapes". It was a pity that a second early landscape painting in traditional style by Li Keran prior to the 1940s has not yet been found.

In the years between 1938 and 1940, Li Keran created nearly two hundred anti-Japanese propaganda paintings. From the preserved photographs of the works (themselves now lost), it can be seen that all of them were creations of figures reflecting social realist themes. Those works fully demonstrated Li Keran's achievements during his time at the Hangzhou Art Academy, when he learned sketching and the artistic expressive skills of Western painting and was exposed to the influence of the painting style of his supervisor A. Claudot in particular.

A comparison of Claudot's charcoal sketches (pl.11, 12) made in Beiping streets in 1928 with the charcoal pencil propaganda sketch, *Who Destroyed Your Happy Home?* (pl.13) and charcoal propaganda sketch, *Who Murdered Your Child?* (pl.14) by Li Keran shows that Li Keran's form of figures followed entirely that of Claudot. Both of them stressed bone structure; the movements of the figures appear rather stiff; their forms tend towards straight lines and geometric forms, adding some washes of ink or shadows to dark portions. The other propaganda paintings of Li Keran include those painted on walls and on cloth, such as *Don't Become Traitors Nor Docile Citizens*, *Be Heroes in the War of Resistance*, (pl.15) *Please Provide Relief to the Refugees* (pl.16), *Innocent Blood* (pl.17) and *After the Bombings by Japanese Bandits* (pl.18), all of which show the same characteristics in form. As for the treatment of the heads of the figures, Li Keran frequently resorted to the use of side and back lighting to accentuate the thickness of tones (pls. 14,15,17,18), a method which also came from Claudot (pls.4,19). Besides, from the movements of the old man and the exaggeration of the old man's body in *Who Murdered Your Child?* (pl.14), as well as from the movement of a man holding his fists high in *After the Bombings by*

[13] Yu Lu, 'Su Shaoqing and Li Keran', Nanjing: *Nanjing Political Consultative Conference*, 1990/1

Japanese Bandits (pl.18), one can see the exaggerated movements of the human body as well as the symbolic and monumental sentiments found in the work of the German print artist Kathe Kollwitg (pls.20,21).

If we compare Li Keran's propaganda sketches with the new woodcuts of the same period in China, we find great similarity in their sketching method and artistic style (pls. 22,23,24). Both were influenced by the early modern painting and the prints of the West. In fact, most of the youths engaged in the early woodcut movement were Li Keran's schoolmates in the Hangzhou Academy and members of the Yiba Art Society. The difference lay in the fact that Li Keran's images were entirely Chinese, and rich in expression, whereas some prints of the same period still showed to some extent the traces of direct copying from foreign works (pls.25, 26). The images of soldiers fighting the Japanese, traitors and the common people portrayed by Li Keran demonstrated a kind of treatment that was not purely individualized, but in a way very typicalized. Such a capacity for high simplification and adequate exaggeration on the foundation of realistic representation was close to characteristic of Chinese theatrical roles. In *Japanese Enemy in Sorry Plight*, (pl.27) such a technique made the image of the Japanese soldiers exceedingly conspicuous, and this served as reference material for the make-up and performance of War of Resistance theatrical troupes as well as the initial creative idea of the image of the Japanese soldier in Chinese films.

One can say that the works of Li Keran in this period abundantly reflected what he had learned during his studies at the Hangzhou Art Academy. He constructed a bridge between the principle of expressiveness and typification of Chinese traditional opera and that of moderate deformation on the foundation of realism in modern Western painting. He made flexible use of chiaroscuro for modelling; the sidelighting and backlighting to accentuate the blackness, thickness and intense effects and elements of geometric graphs for simplification and exaggeration of the image. Such treatment did not only satisfy the special demands for the eye-catching effect of poster art, it also became a common characteristic in Li Keran's later landscapes, stressing expressive power and the sense of form as well as the typical distinctive image.

Creating Anti-Japanese propaganda painting was only a response to the needs of social reality, it did not reflect Li's personal artistic aspirations nor his interests. But where such principles as artistic expression, modelling and composition were concerned, propaganda paintings exhibited an internal relationship with his mature landscape style. Therefore, this phase of Li Keran's artistic career should not be ignored, especially because from it one can see the sketching technique which he learned at the Hangzhou Academy as well as the source of the influence of Western art reflected in his efforts to reform Chinese painting in his later years.

3.2 INVESTIGATING TRADITION (1940 - 53)

Among Li Keran's existing works from the 1940s, with the exception of a small number of watercolours, the majority consist of traditional-style Chinese paintings, which include pictures of figures, buffaloes and landscapes. To use Li Keran's works as a basis for dividing his formative process into different periods, fits well with his personal description of an old work from the 1940s, *Watching a Waterfall at the Foot of Pines*, in 1979:

> "When I started studying Chinese painting, I wrote two phrases for self-encouragement, 'use the greatest skill in breaking in', 'use the greatest courage in breaking out'. This painting was done in Sichuan when I was over thirty years of age, forty years have slipped by since then. At that period, I studied tradition with great concentration. Though I used the brush randomly, I had not in any way fallen into the set pattern of predecessors, which was 'to use the greatest skill in breaking in'. Since 1954, I have travelled over all the famous mountains and waters, and gone through all kinds of hardships and difficulties, and this has caused great changes in my painting style, utterly different from this work. The ancients said that it was very hard for fish caught in a net to pass through the net and escape, but I intend to use the greatest courage in breaking out. I wonder whether, in thirty years, I can become a fish that breaks out of the net. I found this painting among some waste paper, and the feelings of the present and the past have overwhelmed me. I therefore write a few words to mark what I think. Keran."(14)

The meaning of this was that, from 1954, Li Keran had started on his long journey to paint from nature, reforming the model of traditional Chinese painting and pursuing his

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[14] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.,201

personal style, whereas before that, from the beginning of the 1940s, Li Keran's earlier works exhibited extensive and profound study of tradition.

Traditional figure-painting was the earliest theme and study material dealt with by Li Keran in the 1940s.

His *Beautiful Woman with Round Silk Fan* (pl.28) painted in 1943 was done in quiet, elegant colour, with lines which were succinct and firm, easy and smooth. If one compares it with *Beautiful Woman* (1944) (pl.29) by Fu Baoshi, it is clear that the basic linear type of both painters came from that of Gu Kaizhi (348-409): sturdy, continuous and elegant and rich in rhythm scheme (pl.30). But if we take *Two Old People Looking at Plums* by Li Keran in 1944 (pl.31) and compare it with Fu Baoshi's *Tong Trees Washed by the Rain* (1943) (pl.32); or Li Keran's *Listening to the Wind among the Pine Trees* (pl.33) and *Sleeping under a Pine Tree* (pl.34) done in the 1940s, and compare them with Fu Baoshi's *Wen Tianxiang* (1943) (pl.35) we can readily see that although both of them were influenced by Shi Tao's free, natural and unrestrained figure style (pls.36,37), in lines, forms and style, they were obviously different. Li Keran's lines were gentler and rounder, Fu Baoshi had more dramatic changes and conflicts, such as the linear pattern of "nail head and rat's tail" (*ding tou shu wei*) and intersection of lines; in modelling, Li Keran had more that came from folk-art, like the free and humorous elements of earthen figurines and china vase figures which were childish and round and spontaneous, whereas those of Fu Baoshi had more of the independent flavour of classical elegance of the literati.

Li Keran's figure paintings in the 1940s, just as *Dong Bo Washing His Ink-stone*, *Xizhi Fondling Geese*, *Mad Mi Saluting Stones*, and *Zhong Kui* had, from subject-matter to interest and charm, all manifested the countless relations of the edifying influence of folk art during his childhood days as well as the oral folk culture passed down from his father. An inclination towards the simplicity, boldness and vigour of folk art was something that Li Keran and Qi Baishi had in common. The *Rolypoly* (pl.38) by Qi Baishi, according to his student Xu Linlu, the flower-and-bird painter, was created with reference to small folk clay figurines.(15) In the inscription on *Zhong Kui* (pl.39), he pointed out that he painted it with

[15] Hua Xia, 'See The Change of Method from Painting Drafts', *Baishi Painting Drafts*, Beijing: Culture and

reference to the Zhong Kui drawn on a china vase. In Li Keran's *Afternoon Nap* (1948), (pl.40) the head of the old man dozing off had an exaggerated forehead exactly like the image of the charming and humorous folk god of longevity. *Cooling Off* (around 1947) (pl.41) also exhibited a similar flavour. *Zhong Kui* (pl.42) painted by Li Keran in 1947 showed that the lines became thick, heavy and forceful, obviously close to the lines of Qi Baishi (pl.43).

Among Li Keran's early buffalo paintings, *Autumn Pasture* (1947) (pl.44), which had postscripts by Qi Baishi on the upper part of it, showing two children holding a cricket fight was painted with ease in a natural and lively way. The characteristics of the lines looked similar to *Cooling Off* (pl.41), and thick and thin ink blocks were used in the formation of the buffalo, which was analogous to the fallen leaves in *Cooling off.* The disparity appeared to be that the lines in *Autumn Pasture* were more forceful, for example in the sketching of the lines or contours of the buffalo horns and those of the rope tied to the buffalo, all of which exhibited the staid, slow and heavy sense reminiscent of Qi Baishi's influence. In expressing the pleasure of the lives of the farmer's family and child interest, Li Keran was in nature very close to those of Qi Baishi (pl.45). This was probably one of the reasons why the two admired each other and were close in their relations.

Those Chinese paintings that were highly appreciated done by Li Keran in the 1940s consisted almost entirely of freehand brushwork figures and buffaloes. For example, Lao She wrote an article commending the works in Li Keran's personal exhibition in 1944 and in the preface of the exhibition Xu Beihong also made commendatory remarks, and it was Li's figure paintings that both of them praised; the works of Li Keran autographed by Qi Baishi were mostly figures and buffaloes; when Li Keran called on Huang Binhong for the first time, among the works on which he asked for advice, one that was highly praised by Huang was also figure painting. The figure and buffalo paintings of Li Keran during this period stressed the use of lines in form, with lines which were succinct, smooth and easy and compositions which were empty and natural. Most of the figures were rich in Shi Tao's

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Art Publishing House, 1981, p.2

unconventionally graceful lingering charm, while at the same time exhibiting the distinguishing features of the childish, clumsy and humorous influences of folk art. His works after 1947 even exhibited traces of the influence of Qi Baishi who wielded the brush heavily and slowly with lines which were heavy and forceful.

The earliest extant examples of Li Keran's landscape paintings in the 1940s comprise a few works done in 1943 after Ba Da and Shi Tao's style: *After Ba Da and Shi Tao* (1943) (pl.46); *After Ba Da* (1943) (pl.47); *Mountain Pavilion in Crisp Fall* (1943) (pl.48) and *Watching Waterfalls at Foot of Pines* (1943) (pl.49). The first three works mentioned above closely resemble the style of Zhu Da's landscape painting regardless of their composition, brushwork, modelling or style. (pls.50,51,52) One can also find traces of Shi Tao in some tree and figure methods. (pls.53,54,55) However, in the last work mentioned above, the style and painting methods of the pines, waterfalls, hills and stones and figures were all similar to Shi Tao's work (pls.56,57,58,59). All these works gave priority to the use of lines in form and the use of light ink, by which the artistic conception appeared unconventionally graceful, delicate and pretty, sparse and simple, pale and elegant. It is evident that when Li Keran devoted himself to the study of tradition at the beginning of the 1940s, he adored above everything the style of Shi Tao and Ba Da. However, his achievements and his comments on himself were identical: on the one hand one was able "to see the standard of my predecessors" in his paintings, while on the other, he had "nowhere fallen into the set pattern of my predecessors".

New factors in his pictures appeared in two 1944 landscape works *Retreat* (pl.60) and *Plum Blossom Study* (pl.61). In *Retreat*, the modelling of hills and stones in square forms and straight lines resembled the style of Shi Tao (pl.62) as well as that of Qi Baishi (pl.63). The lower margin of the house joined in a straight line resembled closely the method of Qi Baishi in painting houses. The two full and straight palm trees which appeared in the painting are not found in Shi Tao's paintings. The ideas very likely came from the inspiration of the actual scenery of Sichuan as well as probably from the works of Fu Baoshi (pl.64). In the *Plum Blossom Study*, the structures of the house possibly had something to do with the buildings in Sichuan, and it also looked like a simplification of the pattern of Fu

Baoshi's house. (pl.65) If the use of the image of the fence did not come from life, then very likely it came from the influence of Qu Baishi's works (pls.66,67). The figure method in the painting looked very much like that of Shi Tao (pl.68), and also like that of Qi Baishi (pl.69). The painting of the plum blossom was identical with that in the figure picture *Two Old People Looking at Plums* (pl.31) painted by him in the same year. These two works merged many kinds of technique from both ancient and modern times but with little trace of copying. Though the artistic conception was still close to the ancient, the ability to synthesize and the creative spirit were evident in the two landscapes. This new change of style when Li Keran was studying tradition might have something to do with his visit to Xu Beihong's house in 1944 when he saw more than seventy works by Qi Baishi in Xu's collection.

It would appear that the four works marked clearly as having been done in Sichuan in 1946 were the last Li Keran did during the period when he was in Chongqing. These few works reveal that Li Keran, in his determination to break into tradition, aimed at getting advice from several schools, and not rigidly adhering to a particular sect or a school. *Poetic Flavour of Song People* (pl.70) represented the mood of Song poems in Ba Da's painting technique and style. On *Thick Forests on Autumn Hills*, one understood from the postscripts that the original wish of the painter was to copy the painting style of the Song Dynasty, but when finished, it looked more like the style of Huang Gongwang of the Yuan Dynasty, with peaks rising one upon another and in the brushwork of *pima cun*. He therefore sighed with feeling that he himself was "a fish caught in a net which found it very hard to pass through the net and escape." It could be inferred that Li Keran had made a serious study of the works of Huang Gongwang while also paying attention to the style of Song painting. In *Chatting in a Hill Pavilion* (pl.71), the lines suddenly became very thick and heavy and the modelling of the leaves changed into heavy blocks of ink; the calligraphy of the inscription on the picture also became square and upright, thickset and straight, showing the influence of Qi Baoshi and the *Jinshi* school on his brushwork. Quite obviously, in *Playing the Qin in the Shade of a Plantain Tree* (pl.72), the palms in the foreground were entirely influenced by Qi Baishi (pl.73). The appearance of plantains came very likely from the inspiration of

Fu Baoshi's work (pl.74), whereas the method of painting resembled more that of Qi Baishi (pl.75).

From the few works which Li Keran painted towards the end of the 1940s and which are to be found among the collections in Xu Beihong's Memorial Hall, *Return in Evening* (pl.76); *Three Gorges in Wind and Rain* (pl.77); *Half the Mountain Covered by Cloud in Spring* (pl.78); *Village Ferry* (pl.79); and *Chanting Poems Among Waternuts and Lotuses* (pl.80), one can see the personal interests of Li Keran towards the end of the 1940s when he concentrated on the study of tradition as well as his inclinations in the selection of traditional subjects. The noteworthy characteristics of these works were:

1) The lines were rough and hairy, vigorous and powerful, especially in *Return in Evening* and *Three Gorges in Wind and Rain*. This meant an affirmation of the change from quick and unrestrained lines to rough and powerful lines started by Li Keran from the mid-1940s on, that is to say that in brushwork, he was more intent on following the tradition of the calligraphic school. Another outstanding proof in keeping with this change was that beginning from *Pavilion for Setting Free Cranes* (pl.82) (painted in 1945), obvious changes occurred in the style of calligraphy of the inscriptions on Li Keran's pictures, the calligraphic style having changed from dignified and pretty to peculiar and abrupt, childish and clumsy, and the inscriptions increased in number. Such a change clearly reflected the influence of Qi Baishi's calligraphic and painting style on Li Keran. Judging from his existing works in 1946 -- 1948, most of them had many lines of inscription copying the calligraphic style of Qi Baishi, a fact which could almost be regarded as a clue to identifying the period when these works were painted. But these changes stopped from the end of the 1940s until his later years, after the study of epigraphic tablets for ten years in the period of the Cultural Revolution, when Li Keran ultimately attained maturity in his brushwork. It was only then that his inscriptions on pictures became longer and increased in number again.

2) The concurrent use of splash-ink and break-ink, water and ink free from inhibition, especially the painting method of hills in *Three Gorges in Wind and Rain* was almost similar to the splash-ink method of Qi Baishi when he painted lotus leaves (pl.81).

This meant an affirmation of the experiments in using ink blocks for modelling to replace linear modelling. *The Pavilion for Setting Free Cranes* (pl.82), painted in 1945, was the earliest of these experiments. These few works conspicuously reflected Li Keran's great interest in the use of ink. The earliest instance of this interest was discernible from *Liu Hai playing with a Golden Toad* (1937) (pl.9). In the 1950s Li Keran learned the ink-accumulation method from Huang Binhong and combined it with splash-ink, the combination ultimately becoming the outstanding feature of Li's landscape style.

3) Forming major mountain peaks in pictures, and underlining them with three-dimensional effect, admittedly these were an approval and return to the traditional pattern of the Song Dynasty (pl.83). For example, for the highest peak in *Village Ferry* Li used long line wrinkles and dyed it with ink blocks. It is very likely that this specific painting method was inspired by Qi Baishi (pls.84,85). Such a style became the principal pattern of Li Keran's landscapes in his mature period, which led to a further change in his pattern of the eighties. The two works Li Keran painted at the end of the 1940s in which he copied the style of Shi Tao and Ba Da, *Copy of Shi Tao's Landscape* (1947) (pl.86) and *Watching the Hills After Rain* (1948) (pl.87), also reflected the above-mentioned changes. A comparison with his works of 1943 which also copied the style of Shi Tao and Ba Da (pls.45-48), reveals significant differences in brushwork and form.

To summarise, Li Keran's efforts in the 1940s "to break into tradition" took Shi Tao and Ba Da as the point of departure without rigidly adhering to a particular school or a sect. After 1947, when he formally became a pupil of the two masters, Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, Li drew closer to the brushwork tradition of the *Jinshi* school on his own initiative and started to augment his skill in ink method. Although his landscape style in the 1940s and in the later years were entirely different, his interest in artistic problems of traditional art exhibited in his works from the 1940s to later periods coincided internally.

3.3 BREAKING AWAY FROM TRADITION BY MEANS OF SKETCHING (1954 -- 59)

Between 1954 and 1959, Li Keran four times set out on long trips to sketch from nature with Chinese ink and brush, devoting himself to reforming traditional landscapes. The first occasion occurred in the spring of 1954, when he, accompanied by Zhang Ding and Luo Ming, spent more than three months in regions south of Changjiang and Huangshan; the second occasion occurred in 1956 when he visited regions south of Changjiang and later on travelled up the river to Sichuan and Shanxi in the company of his student, Huang Runhua, spending eight months away altogether; the third trip was in 1957, when he and Guan Liang were invited to pay a visit to East Germany for four months where he did landscape sketching; the fourth occurred in 1959, when he took some students to Guilin to sketch for a period of around two months. These four trips altogether took seventeen months, and resulted in more than 200 single-picture ink and wash landscape sketching drafts and a large number of pen and pencil sketches. From these works, one can see Li Keran's efforts "to break out of tradition with the greatest courage" as well as the real significance of his maxim: "what we prize is guts, what we want is soul".

Li's sketches of 1954 showed distinctly new artistic conceptions. However in techniques of expression they still betrayed vacillation between the painting methods of the Chinese and of the West. For example, from *The Street View of Shanghai* (pl.88) and *Geling Ridges in the Spring* (pl.89), a flavour of contemporary life came blowing on your face, and the influence of Western watercolours on the composition and expressive technique was evident. *Rain Also Wonderful* (pl. 90) and *Tai Lake* (pl.91) also came from sketching, but the techniques of treatment came more from the influence of Qi Baishi (pls.92,93). *Tian Du Peaks* (pl.94) was a product of sketching in Huangshan, the wrinkle method of painting the hills clearly reflecting the brushwork characteristics of Huang Binhong's "full of twists and turns" *(yi buo san zhe)* (pl.95). The painting of *Spring Rain on Sichuan Hills* (pl.96) demonstrated the close relationship of some of his paintings in the 1940s which were after the style of Shi Tao and Ba Da. *Every Household Looks Like in*

Pictures (pl.97) was an example which showed that he ideally combined real scenery sketching with traditional technique. Many layers of colour and ink were applied on the green mountains and trees. Although in technique, traditional lines in sketching the contours and the "boneless method" (*mo gu fa*) were used together, with borrowings from the methods of watercolour painting , the combination appeared quite natural. In this work the characteristics of fullness and thickness in composition are shown. *Setting Sun After Rain* (pl.98) gives indications of a mature pattern of the 1960s.

Important changes in the style of Li's painting occurred in sketching from nature in 1956, characterized by the fullness of composition and the darkness of tones, which replaced the simplified brushwork and gentle colour treatment in his works of the 1940s, and also swept aside the hesitation and vacillation in ways of expression he showed when he began to sketch from nature in 1954. All of these exhibited his bold originality in expression of artistic ideas and his pursuit of vigour and luxuriance.

In *The Plum Blossom Garden, Wuxi* (pl.99) and *The Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou*, (pl.100), one noticed that the lines for drawing branches and twigs, with thousands of postures, spread over the whole picture and evolved into a strong sense of form. *The Tiger Hill, Suzhou* (pl.101) proceeded from the foreground of the riverbank to the top of the pagoda on the hill in the distance. This was the traditional method of Chinese traditional composition: "look at the small from the large" (*yi da guan xiao*) as well as the method of moving the point of vision up and down *(shidian shang xia yiwei*). But Li Keran, at the same time as he was doing his utmost to reduce the differences of the perspective of the scenery in front and behind, far and near, and showing the scenery stage by stage on the plane, also produced a visual effect in the picture which did not contradict the sense of perspective, and made it finally very different from traditional landscape patterns. The unity of such "position-move perspective" *(yiwei toushi)* with real visual effect became one of the mysteries of Li Keran's landscape compositions. It can also be said that it was a further development of master Qi's principle of form that, in the creation of scenery, "the ingenuity lies between likeness and unlikeness".

A Thousand Year Old Ginkgo in Suzhou (pl.102) revealed his interest in the

backlighting effect created by sunlight penetrating through the crevices of leaves.

In *The Zigzag Bridge at Three Ponds Reflecting the Moon, West Lake* (pl.103), *A Corner of Wu Mountain, West Lake* (pl.104) and *A Teahouse at the Lingyin Temple* (pl.105), Li Keran started to try the ink-accumulation method which he learned from Huang Binhong, applying it to the portrayal of branches and leaves in a forest. This experiment led to a series of important changes in his style, the first of which was that the "denseness" of lines changed into the "denseness" of ink; the modelling style from the linear pattern became the pattern of circular blocks. The repeated use of dark and light ink and the application of colours in painting of branches and leaves, resulted in thick and vigorous modelling and dark and strong tones. Second, the repeated use of ink and colour for the accumulative dyeing of the forest trees resulted in a further reverse of the substance (*shi*) and void (*xu*) and black and white relationship of the composition which had belonged to the pattern of fullness. Repeated accumulative dyeing caused a great part of the secondary position to become hidden in the shades of ink and colour, with only a small area of white becoming a substantial space striking to the eye, for example the white walls of cottages, white brooks at the foot of a mountain and bright leaves among trees. And in *Looking Far Into the Distance From Qiantang River* (pl.106) and *Cottages at the Foot of Yandang Mountains* (pl.107), the effect of the pictures was changed to a state as if the black ink was the base colour of pictures such as a seal cut in intaglio.

In *The River in Wanxian* (pl.108), Li Keran developed the ink-accumulation method into the "from nothing to something, from something to nothing" method, to seek in the first place to depict the scenery clearly and richly, with everything included, and then to use ink and colour to adjust the tones, making the picture become gradually blurred in order that it might produce an effect that was rich and profound in details but reserved and simple as a whole. The invention of this method further determined a thorough change in the traditional relationships between substance and void; black and white in pictures, culminating in Li's mature pattern of landscape characterized by "fullness" and "blackness".

If we look at *The Summit of Lingyun Mountain* (pl.109) and *The Great Buddha, Jiading* (pl.110) for example, we notice that when Li Keran used ink shades to regulate the

tones, he made a bold simplification in the black-white-grey relationships of the complicated scenery. The black-white-grey region carved up in his painting showed geometric figures (pls.111, 112), demonstrating the influence of the awareness of plane construction in modern Western art. This was directly related to the foundation laid when he was at the Hangzhou Art Academy taking lessons from A. Claudot. Furthermore, his treatment of the black-white-grey relationships was linked with another subject, "layers" (*cengci*), in which he felt very interested. He used the method of relief for the treatment of "layers",[16] using many layers to show the sense of space in landscape painting. In his works, one can see clearly the pattern of this sort of "relief type" *(fu diao shi)* inclining towards the plane in the treatment of layers. In *The Great Buddha, Jiading* (pl.110) for example, the first layer was the steps on the left side; the second layer was the Great Buddha; the third layer was Leshan mountain; and the fourth layer was water and the sky. Each layer was relatively on the same plane, forming a careful and precise composition. However, the significance of substance and void of each layer was relative, for instance, to the Great Buddha, the black mountain was "void", but to the water and the sky, it was "substance"; to the mountain, water and sky was "void", but to the boats, they were "substance", and so on. Therefore, each part of the whole painting had a double meaning, the "substance" (*shi*) and the "void" (*xu*), which extended the volume of information of the painting. This was another implication of the "fullness", which was one of the characteristics of Li Keran's landscape painting.

A small amount of white with a great area of black tone produced a voluminal and illuminative sense of the mountain in backlight in Li Keran's landscape. The warm colour applied on the white area gave the whole painting a sunset feeling, like *The City of Lueyang* (pl.113).

Among his sketches of 1956, there were many pictures showing the effect of backlight by the linking of the ink accumulation technique with a feeling of light, for example *Hilly City Under the Sunset* (pl.114), and *Emei Mountain in Autumn* (pl.115). He also utilized the sense of light on the "eye of the picture" *(hua yan)* which is the essence of a

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[16] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.152

picture (as Li Keran [17] put it), as with the gurgling mountain spring in the painting *The River in Wan County* (pl.108); the glistening creek in the painting *The Thatched Hall of Du Fu* (pl.116) or the terraced fields in the painting *In the Foothills of Yandang* (pl.117). The effect, just as Huang Binhong said, was that

> "the far away receding hills, the light of a torch, they are all like a point in the eye, entirely void, but there is substance in the voidness, which can attain the state of sublimation (*hua jing*)." [18]

In his 1957 sketches from nature, Li Keran continued to develop and experiment with the techniques of layers, light sensation and ink accumulation. As in *Dusk in Dresden, Germany* (pl.118), he used ink accumulation technique to show a vast expanse of scenery at dusk. The buildings and trees were treated very indistinctly. To the slightly more distinct small figures, the background appeared "emptiness", but the pinnacles of the towering architectural complex were painted very distinctly which enabled this vast expanse of indistinct building to have a substantial feeling and a hint of entity. The feeling of light in *A Mill in Germany* (pl.119) was exceedingly strong, but it was due entirely to an "artificial" light source similar to stage lighting which helped to give the entire picture a mysterious glamour. In *The Weimar Bridge, Germany* (pl.120), the warm colour flashes in the woods and the reflection in the water below the bridge reinforced the sense of depth and penetration. In the sketches from nature in Germany, the effect of Li Keran's ink accumulation appeared much more sleek, glossy and restrained, in some ways like an oil painting (pls.121,122). In fact, this was also one of the elements of "profundity", an aesthetic characteristic which Li Keran sought after.

With regard to the sketches from nature in 1959, a fact worth special attention was the emergence of a modelling type of a single tree which in the 1960s and in Li Keran's later years became a basic form for a single tree. (pls.121, 122, 123).

From 1956 to 1959, a number of sketches using mountains as their principal image provided a basis of sketching from nature for various brushwork vocabularies in matured mountain patterns, such as outlining with the tip of the brush "full of twists and turns",

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[17] ibid., p.142

[18] *Quotations of Huang Binhong*, p.7, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961

wrinkling in short parallel lines in a horizontal direction in *The Hundred Step Ladder at Wushan Mountain* (pl.124); outlining in *wulouhen* brushwork ('drawing lines like traces of raindrops on a leaking roof), wrinkling and rubbing in smooth and adverse brush strokes in *Spring Rain in Guilin* (pl.125); splashing ink and breaking ink plus wrinkling and rubbing in dried strokes in *The Meishan Bridge* (pl.126); and using the Mi dotting method (*Mi dian fa*) and the "boneless ink technique" *(mo gu fa)* in *Apricot Blossom and Spring Rain South of the River* (pl.127).

In the 1950s, Li Keran created a series of landscapes with new artistic conception and distinctive nature by sketching or creating in the face of scenery. At the same time that he was making bold reforms, he never deviated from the study of traditional subjects. For example, on the basis of Huang Binhong's study of ink accumulation, he developed a style of more realistic painting; on the basis of traditional composition which brought a vast expanse of mountains and rivers into a small scroll, he attempted to inform the sense of an integral whole. It was precisely because Li Keran discovered the point of combination between traditional subjects and the common aesthetic standard at that period that he was able to carry out his work from a relatively high academic starting point, which on the one hand harmonized his painting style with the needs of the time, and on the other guaranteed the quality of his artistic reform, and increased his distance from the painting style in vogue in the 1950s.

3.4 SCHEMATIZING A PERSONAL ARTISTIC LANGUAGE (1960 -- 66)

Li Keran returned to his studio in the sixties to carry on with his creative work, commencing a change to a new style which was closely linked with, but utterly different from, his sketches in the 1950s. The direction of this change can be analysed from the characteristics of a series of his works in the 1960s.

Fishing Boat in Willow Creek (1960) (pl.128) can be looked upon as a signal of the beginning of this new phase. Though it derived from a sketch of 1955 (pl.129), one can find

no trace of sketching from nature, a fact which shows that Li had to some degree returned to his simple and elegant style of the 1940s. The patterns of distant hills, trees and water were close to traditional freehand brushwork models. This work clearly showed the painter's initial attempt to extricate himself from traces of sketching from nature and create a new traditional pattern.

In the Midst of Ten Thousand Plum Blossoms (pl.130), painted in 1961, was a re-creation of *The Plum Blossom Garden, Wuxi* (pl.99) and *The Humble Administrator's Garden, Suzhou* (pl.100), painted in 1956. In this new work, the branches and trunk of the plum-tree, the winding covered path and the hills and stones were treated with a more distinct and traditional drawing technique which augmented the aesthetic value of brushwork itself. The point of vision of the picture was elevated, to prevent the scenery in the foreground from blocking that in the background, which was a common sight in Western painting. In the postscripts, Li Keran wrote, "In this picture I took plums from the Plum Garden in Wuxi and planted them in the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou", demonstrating explicitly his principle of upholding the authenticity of not being too punctilious in a particular scene, and "painting according to intent"(*yi yi wei zhi*, creating it according to comprehension and aspiration) to construct an artistic conception richer in personal style.

Both the above-mentioned works showed that Li Keran's subject for study was no longer the liveliness and richness of nature. Instead, he turned to a more traditional way of creation and of tempering his personal artistic language. In harmony with this change, the series of sketches done in the 1950s which made a great impression on people, including *Tiger Hill, Suzhou*; *The Hilly City, Chongqing*; *The Great Buddha, Jiading; The Summit of Lingyun Mountain* and *A Teahouse at Lingyin Temple*, did not become a basis for his re-creation works in the 1960s. The subject matter which he felt interested in and used repeatedly until his later years became rather concentrated and limited. During the course of his repeated treatment of these subjects, he never ceased deliberating over an ideal composition, leading gradually to the formation of several basic schemata, from which, even in his reforming style in later years, he did not depart. From the process of working

out his personal schemata, we can understand the real meaning behind Li Keran's so-called "to mine once and refine ten times" *(cai yi lian shi)* and "find several typical compositions from sketching, paint repeatedly, temper repeatedly and improve them over and over until one is able to write them from memory",[19] painting them "like Qi Baishi drawing shrimps and Zheng Banqiao drawing bamboo".[20]

The following is an attempt to analyze several basic schemata drawn up in the 1960s:

[1]: The Mode of the Li River

The subject matter of the Li River was one of the themes which Li Keran repeatedly created, from the time he started making sketches from nature in Guilin in 1959, until his later years. As his main theme, he also painted it on a large scale.

The Li River (pl.131), painted in 1963, eventually established the basic pictorial pattern of this subject matter. That was, mountain and water had equal shares of space with the mountains appearing like upright tablets and water like bright mirrors. From the foreground into the distance, the rocks criss-crossed, layer upon layer pushed far back, making the water area appear exceedingly wide. The dark black hues of the rocks made nature seem indistinct and gloomy, whereas the inverted image in the water and the small boat sailing on the river showed nature's calmness and serenity.

The formation of this basic mode had emerged from a difficult exploration. In the sketches of Guilin in 1959, the viewfindings and compositions in works like *The Xiaodong River, Guilin* (pl.132)*; On the Bank of the Li River* (pl.133); *Water Wheels in Guilin fields* (pl.134); *Yang River, Guilin* (pl.135) and *Householders by the River* (pl.136) stressed openness and prettiness, and the artistic conception was rather insipid. It was only in the mountain method in *Spring Rain in Guilin* (pl.125) of 1959 that one saw the embryonic form of his matured pattern in later years. *Misty Rain On the Li River* (pl.137) of 1962 used the techniques of splashing ink and ink accumulation in painting the black mountain, thus achieving the imagery of the hills around Li River after rain. *A Ferry Crossing At Yangshuo* of 1962 (pl.138) used the image of hills to fill up the picture, ink accumulation and

[19] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.161

[20] ibid.

colouring to stress the sense of the mass of the hills, their verdancy and luxuriance as well as deepening. Only in this picture was a matured pattern of the hills around the Li River achieved. However, none of the three compositions had solved the relationship between hills and water. *The Li River* of 1963 (pl.134) eventually achieved an ideal mode by using the darkness, the bulk and the constriction caused by crowded arrangement of the hills, to form dramatic conflicts and contrast with the brightness, the openness and calmness of the water area thus giving the subject of the Li River a miraculous artistic conception and strong charm. In the postscripts on this painting, Li Keran confessed his gladness at having achieved this composition. He wrote:

> "I visited the Li River three times, and though I felt that the landscape there was wonderful, it was not easy to work out a composition. I now use the traditional method of 'looking at the small from the large' to paint it. Standing on the bank of the Li River one is not able to see this scenery."(21)

The formation of this mode basically solved the treatment of the composition, the tones, the technique for painting mountains, and that for water and so on, of this theme. Most of the changes of his Li River subject in his later years occurred in this mode, as further efforts were made to perfect brushwork and the expression of different emotional appeal and atmosphere. Li Keran stressed the sense of depth very strongly, but in fact, only the Li River subject proved to be a successful example in his exercise of the depth perspective method during the 1960s.

[2]: The Mode of City and Town

This mode, full of creative originality, had already been produced in *Lu Xun's Old Home, the City of Shaoxing* (pl.139) and *Looking far into the distance from the Qiantang River* (pl.106), two works of sketching from nature in 1956. Li Keran reduced the difference of size and colour shades in perspective caused by objects in the different distances, put the houses of the town on a plane spread out in full, with roads and rivers passing through the picture from top to bottom, and the river in distant view lying across the uppermost part of the picture. The whole painting united in a dark tone, achieving balances between horizontality and perpendicularity as well as among dots, lines and planes.

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[21] ibid., p.199

This pictorial pattern was used again in *Lu Xu's Old Home, the City of Shaoxing* (1962) (pl.140); *Morning Market at Jiangcheng* (1965) (pl.141) and *Morning Fog in Jiangcheng* (1965) (pl.142), the latter two paintings in light ink tones which created a fresh and lyrical artistic conception.

[3]: The Mode of Using Paper-cut Silhouette Style Mountains as the Main Body.

This was a mode never seen in Li's sketches during the 1950s. It was a form which blended most of his achievements in the sketches of the 1950s with his later most typical and changeable mode. It made use of typical subject matter from traditional landscape painting -- hills, trees, buildings and waterfalls as elements in forming his unique style of composition, as in *A Ferry Crossing at Yangshuo* (1962) (pl.138); *Ronghu Lake At Sunset* (1963) (pl.143); *A Mountain Pavilion at Sunset* (1963) (pl.144) and *Ten Thousand Hills Crimson All Over* (1964) (pl.145). In this mode, the usual method was to use a papercut silhouette style of mountain in thick and heavy tones to fill up the picture, with trees, houses, waterfalls (or water) arranged in different layers in front of the mountain, leaving a blank space in the right/left upper corner of the picture for showing layer upon layer of distant hills and space behind the main mountain. Such spatial treatment was characterized by the combination of "dividing the plane" and "pushing forward in depth". The trees, waterfalls, pavilions, etc in the scenery appeared to be high and low in relationship, while these elements were at the same time arranged in different spatial layers, hence, the flat and thin layers in front and behind appeared like layers of relief sculpture pushed forward in depth. The formative process of this composition was visible in Li Keran's sketches in the 1950s, *The City of Lueyang at Sunset* (pl.146) and *The Great Buddha, Jiading* (pl.110).

This mode was easily adaptable to many kinds of themes. One can see that changes in most of his works in Li's later years occurred on the basis of this mode. The two main themes which Li Keran liked all his life were also included in versions of this mode.

The first was the theme of a pavilion and trees that came from the sketch *A Maple Grove at Suzhou* (pl.147) of 1956. If one compares it with *A Fine Sunset Scene* (1963) (pl.148), one can see that the latter was a version of the former. But the picture of 1963 was entirely free from traces of sketching. It used a papercut silhouette style mountain as the

background, with the addition of a waterfall on its left side. The painting method of the pavilion and trees caused people to associate it with his early landscape paintings in the 1940s that copied the style of Ba Da (pls.46,47). The whole painting used ink methods of splashing, accumulating and dyeing which made the picture dripping wet. It had the neat formation of the 1960s' patterns and the natural randomness of the brushwork of the 1940s. This subject almost became his special lesson for practising the unrestrained style in various periods when he reviewed his brushwork of the 1940s. In later versions of this subject, from the 1970s to the 1980s (pls.149-154), one soon notices his relaxed style when he freely used his brushwork on this subject.

The second was the theme of "apricot blossom and spring rain south of the River" which he painted from childhood days till his later years. He used light ink to do the painting (pls.155, 156), then in 1963 used thick ink to do it (pl.157), and in his later years, he painted it using different shades of ink and different painting techniques in order to develop and change on the basis of this fundamental mode. (pls.158-162)

[4]: The Mode of the Gorges

Mountains at Sunset (1962) (pl.163) provided a mode depicting chains of hills facing each other on opposite banks of the Three Gorges, with the Yangzi River flowing through the narrow waterway. When compared with the pictures of *The Gorges* by Jiangsu painters Fu Baoshi, Qian Songyan, Song Wenzhi and Ya Ming (pls.164-167), obvious differences can be detected. Apart from the application of accumulating ink and reverse lighting methods to paint the chains of hills, Li Keran paid more attention than the painters mentioned above to the simplicity of the formative construction -- from the whole down to the details, he repeatedly used vertical and level lines. On the basis of dividing the plane, and in neat formation, attention was also paid to the relationship of spatial layers, so that the hills in the foreground and those in the middle were entirely different in their shades of colour, thus stressing the sense of space of the hills facing each other across the Yangzi River. The result was, that although no lighthouses, steamers or other things pertaining to modern times appeared in the painting, in artistic treatment it nevertheless seemed richer in modern significance. The pictures of the Gorges which Li Keran painted in his later years,

on the basis of this mode, appeared many times in different versions.

[5]: The Mode of Mount Huang

Mists and Clouds over Mount Huang (1962) (pl.168), *Mists and Clouds in Twilight, Mount Huang* (1963) (pl.172) and *Mist and Clouds over Mount Huang* (1963) (pl.173) of 1963 produced the basic characteristics of the mode of Mount Huang: 1). A section of a chain of mountains is cut off as the principal part of the picture; 2). The composition assumes the form of an S-shaped curve, both the mountain and the shape of the clouds tending to repeat the curve. 3). The unoccupied part of the mountain is occupied by clouds, the mountains and the clouds connecting together and filling up the picture; 4). The body of the mountain is represented as a heavy and colossal black mass, contrasting strongly with the bright and light curve pattern of the clouds, forming the artistic conception of the mountains tranquil and at rest, the cloud floating and moving.

While Li was searching for typical compositions of certain subjects, his works in the 1960s also gradually formed a system of modelling language in his personal brushwork. For example, the technique of painting mountains gradually formed a standardised modelling language: the inherent structure of the body of the mountain assumed the shape of a square in a circle. In the rectangular structure, Li made use of horizontal parallel lines and vertical *fupi cun* ("axe-chopping" wrinkle technique) to wrinkle and rub, doing the work repeatedly with colour, ink, light ink, thick ink, dried brush and wet brush in order that every stroke of the brush criss-crossed and each layer changed, attaining the effect of an integral whole, thick and heavy (pls.171,172). Using the same techniques, he combined the splash-ink method with the "boneless method", changing again to the mountain pattern which represented the mountains covered by green vegetation (pl.173) as well as the more humid effect of southern mountains (pl.174). The light and shade treatment of the mountain was rather close to that in the sketches where Li was studying changes in the brightness and darkness of mountains (pls.175,176), both adopting backlighting and sidelighting treatment to give full play to the effect of the ink accumulation method. This kind of "mountain language" became the basis of Li Keran's further efforts in the pursuit of the abstract beauty of brushwork in his later years.

Compared with the sketches of the 1950s, the modelling of trees showed obvious stylized characteristics. The first was the use of the paper-cut silhouette method in drawing connected and individual trees, with the contrast of different tones to form different spatial layers (pl.177). The second was that in the form of individual trees produced in sketches in 1959, the shapes of the branches and the stems assumed the constitution of parallel lines, exceedingly rich in decorative sense (pl.178). The third was the use of the technique of scattered tips in dotting the leaves of trees in the foreground, which method came very likely from the inspiration of Fu Baoshi (pls.178,179). All these forms were consolidated and developed in the works of his later years.

From the 1960s on, waterfalls became an important constituent element in Li Keran's landscapes. *The Waterfall on Cangyan Mountain* (pl.180), the first of his works in the 1960s where the waterfall played a leading role, already showed Li Keran's basic pattern in painting waterfalls. In *A Mountain Pavilion at Sunset* of the same year, the typical brushwork technique with its strong calligraphic charm was shown even more clearly (pl.181). Through vertical strokes in different shades of ink, with the addition of a few horizonal strokes, Li expressed the relationship between the water and the structure of hill and stones. Because there were very little blank spaces on the dark bottom, the waterfall appeared brighter and faster-flowing. The forms of waterfall and its branch streams were sharp angles besides vertical and level lines, showing a decorative flavour with those geometric elements (pl.182).

The modelling of houses showed even more Li Keran's interest in level lines and geometric figures and in the constituent factors of decorative forms of black roofs and white walls (pls.183,184). Like other images where the painter paid special attention to connecting and constituent clusters or groups, Li Keran connected houses into groups so as to create a certain rhythmic sense and a sense of wholeness (pl.185).

Another interesting discovery was that Li Keran used the image of small figures in the depths of the forest in his sketches in 1957 (pl.186) as an image unit in his creations in the 1960s (pls.187,188). Li Keran was obviously aware that this was an effective method of penetrating a new spatial depth in an all-over composition, so that, as an expressive

language, it repeatedly appeared in his works in later years (pls.189-193). It did not only increase the spatial layers of the scenery, it also formed the so-called "air hole" *(qi yan)* of the picture, producing a sense of penetration in the blocked-up areas.

The principal aim of Li Keran's reform in the 1960s was to draw close to tradition, including a concentration of theme and subject matter, the schematization of composition and form. In the process, he did not exclude the merging of formative factors and constitutional rules from Western art into traditional compositional and formative techniques, but combined the effects of the light, colour, shadow and so on of Western painting with specially traditional brushwork, introducing them into his schemata, thus enabling his quest to return to tradition in the 1960s to include many factors of "breaking away from tradition", ultimately creating an individual style and the new model of traditional landscape.

Compared with those from the 1950s and in his later years, his works of the 1960s exhibited a very strong sense of design. In a sense, they lost the visual resemblance to nature which was evident in the works of the 1950s, and neither did they possess the full charm of brushwork which appeared in the works of his later years, but appeared a little rigid and overcautious. Such a situation was unavoidable in the course of a search for new modes and stylized language.

By comparison with his landscapes, Li Keran's figure and buffalo paintings in the 1950s and the 1960s were very few in number, but were obviously influenced by the style of landscape in fullness, richness and blackness. For example, in *Zhong Kui Escorting His Sister* (1962) (pl.194), he used thick blocks of ink for the modelling of Zhong Kui, which formed a marked contrast with the linear modelling of his sister. The conception of such a contrast between forcefulness and gentleness came originally from a sketch done in 1956, *A Thousand Year Old Gingko in Suzhou* (pl.102). By comparing *Admiring Lotuses* (1962) (pl.195) with *Cooling off by Still Lotuses* (pl.196) and *Cooling Off* (pl.41) (all from the 1940s), one can see that the composition became the all-over type; the lotus leaves forming big patches of thick and heavy ink blocks and the lotus stalks being represented as parallel lines in the 1960s. The changes seen in the buffalo paintings were closer to the style of

landscape painting. The images was more realistic and the composition was plump and full and formed large dividing and contrasting parts(pls.197,198). *Evening Harmony* (pl.199) done in 1965 showed a mature pattern of buffalo painting, the accumulated dyeing of vast tree shades and the blocks of ink for shaping the buffaloes were similar to the painting technique Li used in landscape painting.

3.5 STUDY OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS (1966 -- 76)

Since the end of the 1940s, Qi Baishi's influence had made Li Keran turn towards the brushwork style of the *Jinshi* school. The reforms of the 1950s and the 1960s stressed the pursuit of a precise, dignified and profound style. As a result of this, corresponding changes in the style of calligraphy in the inscriptions on pictures had occurred. For example, the calligraphic style of the inscriptions of *The Garden of Harmonious Delight* (1963) (pl.200) showed that Li was then studying the *zhuan* (seal character) and *li* (official script) calligraphic style, which was identical with the schema of a square in a circle, and the strong lines of the brushwork of the picture. It showed that he was making efforts to study the skill of calligraphy in order that it might become a mainstay of his brushwork expression in landscape painting. However, this wish of his was not realized until the days of the Cultural Revolution.

Among the existing drafts of his calligraphic exercises during the period of the Cultural Revolution one notices that Li Keran was engaged in the basic practice of brush-strokes with "horizontal, level; vertical, straight" as well as the block characters of the "soy sauce and pawnshop style" (*jiang dang ti*)(pl.201). He said that when he was a little boy living in his home town, he learned Zhao's (Zhao Mengfu) style from a tutor, studying it blindly in pursuit of the beauty in appearance. But only later on did he understood that it would easily breed the malpractice of "slipperiness"(*liuhua*). His purpose in practising the "soy sauce and pawnshop style", by which is meant the very stiff and mechanical calligraphic writings by craftsmen on the walls of the sauce and pickle shops or the

pawnshops of the past, was to correct his own style and to prevent "slipperiness".[22]

A comparison of the calligraphic style of Mao Zedong's poem *Shuidiaogetou, Up Again on Jinggang Mountain* (pl.202) written out by Li Keran in 1976, with that of Mao's poem *Kunlun Mountain* (pl. 203) inscribed by Li Keran on his painting of the same title in 1965, shows that the latter assumed a neatly lettered regular style, whereas in the former, one can clearly observe the influence of the offical script style in tablets from the *Baishi Shenjun Bei* (183 A.D) of Eastern Han (pl.204) to the *Cuanlongyan Bei* (458 A.D) of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (pl.205). During the Cultural Revolution, Li Keran concentrated all his time and energy on the study of a few hundred copies of tablets which he began to collect in his middle age. As his method of study, he rarely tried copying, his main task was to "look" -- to read silently and savour, which he called "seeing through the cowhide." However, the calligraphic works of Li Keran in the 1970s still showed some traces of works which he had taken as models. For example, *A Trip to the West of Gansu, Though the Tortoise Lives Long* (pl.206) a poem by Cao Cao (155-220) which Li wrote out, distinctly bore traces of the *Si San Gong Shan Bei* (117 A.D) of Eastern Han (pl.207) which he commended as "characters which seemed to be cast in iron".

Most of the few paintings Li did in the period of the Cultural Revolution were of the kind done as a political duty. For example, when comparing the *Shaoshan* (pl.208) which he painted in 1969 with the sketch *Shaoshan* (pl.209) painted in 1956, it can be seen that the former has many additions, such as red flags and pines to give it some political significance. The large landscape painting *Ten Thousand Torrents and Crags* painted for the Foreign Ministry in 1971 was a version of *The Idle Boast of An Impregnable Pass* (pl.210) painted in 1964, which title came from a line in a poem by Mao Zedong. Another large landscape painting which he painted for the Foreign Ministry in the same year was a version of *Galloping Horses* (pl.211) done in the 1960s in accordance with the implied meaning of another Mao's poems. Though these paintings showed characteristics typical of Li Keran's landscapes, the weaknesses (as evidenced in overcautiousness and inflexibility brought

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[22] Li Keran, 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.13

about by over-designing in the 1960s) were much exaggerated. The large landscape painting *The Wonderful Scenery of Yangshuo* (pl.212) which he painted in 1972, although it successfully conveyed the sense of space, also enumerated the details, taking in everything at a glance, as a consequence of which it lost the simple and reserved artistic conception of Li's landscapes. The very last of Li's large landscape paintings was *The Revolutionary Cradle, Jinggang Mountain* (pl.213) painted for Chairman Mao's Memorial Hall in 1977, when the Cultural Revolution was drawing to a close. Though its scenery was clear in layers, and the realm was grand and magnificent, it was rather too stiff, and the artistic conception appeared inadequate.

The earliest source of such a rigorous, grand, ornamental and commemorative style could be traced to Li Keran's New Year painting done in 1952, *A Grand Gathering of Model Workers in Beihai Park* (pl.214), which gave expression to a plain ornamental style. *Shaoshan* (pl.208), painted in 1969, used an almost identical painting style to that of the New Year Painting. This kind of style frequently appeared during the formative process of Li Keran's individual style, and was directly related to the political pressures of ideology. On the one hand, it merged into the achievements of Li Keran's personal research subjects, while on the other it was stiff and overcautious.

There was yet another type of painting which Li undertook during the Cultural Revolution, which was entirely different from the above mentioned works. These reflected the thought of Li Keran when he was in a state of free creation. *The Sketchy Landscape* (pl.152) of 1973 showed his departure from the over-elaborate style prevalent in the 1970s. It appears that he returned to the simplified brushwork and gentle colour style of the forties, due perhaps to the painter's wish to refresh and relax himself. A version of this painting (pl.153) in 1974 which used the same subject matter and mode was done most vividly, in a natural and carefree way, exhibiting a detached, free and random attitude toward the prepared mode. The maturity of brushwork was unprecedented in the 1960s, and for the first time reflected the fruit of his calligraphy studies during the Cultural Revolution. In *Terraced fields on the Hilltops* (pl.215) of the same year, from the structure of the inscriptions to the composition of the painting, as well as the brushwork technique, all were

in harmony with the poise and refinement of *Burial of The Crane* (514 A.D.) (pl.216) which Li so greatly admired. Though *The Mountain Village Waterfall* (pl.217) of the same year used the typical mode of paper-cut silhouette-style mountains of the 1960s, the treatment of the layers appeared free and relaxed, using many layers of light ink and accumulated ink, the light seen out of the darkness, and the whole picture appeared deep and veiled. The trees in the foreground were painted with the charm of the calligraphic technique of seal characters, highly resilient. The equilibrium between bold, vigorous strokes and plumpness in brushwork was completely absent in Li's works from the 1960s.

During the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, Li Keran studied various kinds of steles and models of calligraphy and did not concentrate on a particular school or sect. When the Cultural Revolution was over, his calligraphy showed a clear-cut individual style. One can see that he based it firmly on the steles, in addition absorbing the strong points of the models and mixing in the charm of *zhuan*, *li*, *xing* and *cao*, thus achieving an integral whole. The maturity of his calligraphic brushwork gave his schemata and artistic language which he sought in the 1960s a firm foundation in brushwork, thus facilitating the entry of his landscape painting into maturity in his later years.

3.6 LI'S STYLE REACHES MATURITY (1977 -- 89)

Towards the end of the 1970s, although Li Keran continued to use the typical mode and formative language worked out in the 1960s, such as the mode with a paper-cut silhouette-style mountain as background (pl.151, 218), and the schematized language of trees, waterfalls and houses, owing to the maturity of his brushwork and the effect of his calligraphic style on his painting, he also exhibited many new developments and changes in both compositional modes and modelling language. The expression of these changes were already quite conspicuous and marked in the works of the eighties. These characteristics marked the arrival of the summit of Li Keran's creative work.

[1] The painting technique for the portrayal of a thick forest:

In the documentary film *To Write a Biography for the Mountains and Rivers of Our Motherland -- Introducing Painter Li Keran*, completed in 1983, one can see that in *Spring Among Trees* (pl.219), Li Keran had skilfully used a creative method of his own in painting mountain forests which he later on termed "the painting technique for the portrayal of thick forest enveloped in mist" [23] . Such a technique was obviously a development of a technique of painting mountains of the 1960s which used ink accumulation skill in painting mountains covered with green vegetation (pls.173,174). An early indication of the technique was already visible in *Wonderful Scenery on the Li River* (pl.220) of 1977. This technique was based on proficiency in the utilization of brushwork quality and the ink accumulation method, through accumulating thick ink and light ink layer-upon-layer, portraying an image of mountains covered with forests of luxuriant vegetation, which were deep and serene, dense and thick, and this was quite different from any kind of *cun* method (wrinkling skill) for crags and rocks painted by the ancients (pls.228-230).

[2] Dispersed-tip leaf-dotting technique *(sanfeng dian yie fa)*:

In the above-mentioned documentary film, one can clearly see that Li Keran was using dispersed-tip brushwork, with the strokes falling rapidly and vertically on the paper, in painting the leaves on trees in the foreground to form a backlighting tree crown which engendered a feeling of intense illumination. The earliest examples of similar results could be found in his works of the 1950s (pl.123). This method was believed to have originated from Fu Baoshi (pls.224, 225). But Fu made use of an old hard brush, and after dipping it in ink, brought it down on the paper vertically with the tips of the brush scattered in a natural way forming thick and thin, big and small and sparse and close dots. However, Li Keran resorted to the use of a goat's-hair brush, letting the scattered tips fall on the paper, putting forth his strength evenly, highly resilient achieving an entirely different result. Li Keran's leaf-dotting skill was inspired by Fu Baoshi, but nobody has ever pointed this out. Such a technique of dispersed-tip leaf-dotting, as a formative language for an individual tree crown, became the typical language for Li Keran's trees in the later years (pls.226, 227).

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[23] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.207

[3] Half Tone Method:

The use and controllability of moisture content in a painting brush have been problematic in brushwork techniques. From the works of Li Keran in the eighties, one could observe a very rich series of changes occurring from heavy to light gradations of water and ink. Li Keran's command of the technique of ink and water led to developments in his painting style in his later years.

First of all, the fine and smooth joining of the ink shades brought about an exceptionally sleek and moist effect, which was rarely seen in his works before the 1980s. However, it was universally highlighted by Li Keran in his works of the 1980s. (pls.153, 228)

Secondly, the use of the rich gradation of ink colour expressed the depth of space, replacing the distinct divisions between far, middle-distant and near scenery as well as the "relief method" of pushing forward layer by layer. From a comparison of *Enjoying the Cool in a Thick Forest* (1982) (pl.229) with *Ronghu Lake at Sunset* (1963) (pl.143), one can observe this point clearly. In the new works, the black, white and grey regions were not spatial divisions: within each region, there were rich intermediate colour tones which caused the foreground and the distant view to look farther apart. The rich ink colour demarcation and interpenetration made the picture a unified entity, and demonstrated the painter's excellent brushwork technique as well as the freedom of his treatment. The desired effect did not depend mainly on planning or arrangement beforehand. Such a change was universally reflected in Li Keran's works in his later years (pls.230-232), and resulted in a great weakening of the feeling of design in Li Keran's compositional modes but a great strengthening of the free element of calligraphic brushwork. This was one of the reasons why Li Keran's works in his later years were richer in traditional romantic charm.

At Lin Fengmian's painting exhibition of 1989, three weeks before Li's death, Li expressed his admiration for the intermediate colour tones in Lin's painting. This commendation can be considered to serve as an explanation of his own use of the half-tone method:

> "In a painting, the most important thing is the amount of intermediate colour gradation, for it determines the number of layers -- its richness and

degree of depth which were expressed in your painting. The key to this depth lies in the treatment of the intermediate gradation."[24]

Thirdly, Li used rich intermediate tones of ink colour in modelling mountains, thus a strong sense of mass appeared in the representation thereby, which replaced the paper- cut silhouette style mountain and brought about changes in the compositional modes. For example, *Clouds and Mists in Lofty Mountains* (1982) (pl.233), *Landscape* (1984) (pl.234), *Lofty Ridges and Thick Forests, a Distant Source and a Long Stream* (1987) (pl.235), and *A Thousand Cliffs Vying for Elegance, All Valleys Struggling for Flow* (1989) (pl.236) were all painted using the mode of mountains, trees , buildings or waterfalls, but mountains were no longer background in a paper-cut silhouette style, but had changed to an expressive centre rich in an intense feeling of uneven masses. By comparing his two compositions entitled *Spring Rain South of the Changjiang River*, one from the 1960s and the other from 1980s (pls.157, 161), or his two compositions entitled *The waterfall in Mount Huang*, one from the 1950s and the other from 1980s (pls.237, 238), one can also see the obvious changes of the above-mentioned characteristics. Similarly, the compositional mode of the Three Gorges all of a sudden changed from a horizontal spreading out of layers of hills (pl.163) into a longitudinally developing series of hills (pl.239). The S-shape composition of the compositional mode of Mountain Huang changed a step further into an enormous encircled space. The treatment of the "relief type" mountains changed into a "sculpture type" bulkiness (pls.169, 240). The imagery of mountains protruding forward was produced initially in the 1940s, but the bulkiness of mountains realized in the 1980s could not be equated with that in Li's works of the 1940s.

[4] The influence of his calligraphy style on his painting:

First, influenced by the calligraphy theories of Kang Youwei and Huang Binhong, Li Keran had, beginning from the 1950s, said of the *wulouhen* brushwork technique that in exerting oneself, the hand should be regular and steady, like "using an awl to draw on sand", and that when using a brush, it was necessary to hold back, accumulating the dot to form a line, "like the traces of water seeping slowly in through a crack in a leaking house".

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[24] Beijing: *Art*, 1990/3, p.12

(25) However, the results of his practising calligraphy showed that, if we compare the works of the 1960s with those of the 1980s, there were very great differences in the skill of his brushwork. For example, the form of houses (pls.241, 242) and that of boats (pls.243, 244) of the 1980s were all due to the roundness and thickness of the brushwork, and the more natural combination between lines and forms of the 1980s caused the lines of brushwork to be more aesthetically valuable, at the same time causing the images to be richer in three-dimensional effect.

Second, with regard to the relationship between the strokes and structure of a character, Li Keran had already begun to expound his viewpoints in the 1950s:

> "The strokes should be as metal and stone, and the stucture as in motion. The knack of calligraphy is to reach a unity of movement and stillness." (26)

Such a viewpoint was successfully demonstrated in his calligraphy works of the 1980s, as in the six characters on a scroll "*The Treasure of Leshi Study*" (pl.245). The lines of the stroke belonged to the styles of seal character *(zhuan)* and official script *(li)* on tablets (pls.246, 247), whereas the forms blended with the characteristics of running script *(xing)* and cursive script *(cao)*, for example the character *"wen"* (pl.248). The character *"zhi"* was entirely in the form of a cursive script (pl.249). Thus from the calligraphy scroll emerged touches of natural agility in the style of sedateness and heaviness. In harmony with this calligraphic style, it often happened in Li Keran's landscape compositions in the 1980s that the focus was diverted from the central axis, with a thick and heavy mountain body on one side and free and natural floating clouds and water on the other (pls.161,230,233,234). Compared with the square and upright and steady characteristics of the compositional modes of the 1960s, Li's compositions of the 1980s paid more attention to the contrast between movement and stillness; substance and void; regular and irregular.

Third, from the works of Li Keran in the 1980s, especially those of the last three years (1987-89), one notices the great number of inscriptions discussing the charm of ink

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[25] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.146 and p.132

[26] ibid., p.135

technique and brushwork.[27] The points on which he concentrated his efforts in his painting inclined more and more to the changes of brushwork and ink technique. For example, in *The Poetic Flavour of Shi Tao* (1987) (pl.250) and *Landscape* (1988) (pl.251), a conspicuous change was the clarity and activity of the brushwork which to a certain degree drifted away from the form and structure and spatial relationships of the objects, contributing to the independent aesthethic value of the brushwork itself. It was exactly like the abstract black dots in Huang Binhong's painting, which bore little significance in the spatial distance but required liveliness of brushwork. The brushwork portrayal of the luxuriance of nature had turned more and more to the expression of the luxuriance of the brushwork itself. This obviously showed approval of and a return to the tradition of literati painting, which was an important phenomenon in Li Keran's works in his later years.

After the end of the 1970s, the buffalo paintings of Li Keran entered a period of maturity, in harmony with his style of landscape painting. The composition of buffalos was also characterized by fullness and darkness. He used big areas of ink for painting a buffalo, with scorched ink lines to delineate the horns of the buffalo and the buffalo boy; criss-cross dots and lines were used to do repetitive accumulated dyeing on thick forest and dense leafy shade. Occasionally the painting gave priority to intermediate tones (pl.252), being exquisite and expressive of emotion; sometimes it used heavy ink as its keynote (pl.253), with intense contrast containing activity in stillness. In his later years Li Keran used the lines of the cursive script style to paint tree trunks, breaking away from the original compositional mode and exhibiting the strong charm of the brushwork of the *jinshi* school (pl.254).

The figure paintings of his later years also clearly showed the influence of his mature style of landscape painting as well as the style of his calligraphy. In *Painstaking Composition* (1982) (pl.255), the lines in the painting were identical with those in the calligraphic inscription, all striving for liveliness and flexibility in the midst of dullness and heaviness; for romantic charm amidst rules and changes. By comparing the two paintings *Admiring the Lotus* of the 1980s (pl.256) and the 1960s (pl.195), it can be seen that the half-

[27] ibid., pp.202-208

tone is used in the former, and the effect of brushwork achieves both vigorousness and smoothness.

To summarize, in the 1950s, Li Keran relied on sketching from nature in the hope of extricating himself from the bondage of tradition, and, with the inspiration gained from the observation of nature as well as the nutrition obtained from Western painting, he strove to push forward traditional subjects to new development and resolution. His search in the 1960s was for a personal stylized language. In his later years, supported by the maturity of his brushwork, he sought for new changes to break away from his own rules, in pursuit of the realm of traditional romantic charm. Li Keran provided answers that would meet the demands of the time, but never deviated from the essence of tradition, and therefore finally established his position in the ranks of creative masters, not only having formed a mature personal style but also achieved the transformation of traditional landscape painting into the modern style.

CHAPTER 4: LI KERAN'S OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPE PAINTING

It can be said that Li Keran is a very spectacular "phenomenon" in twentieth century China. He was deeply involved in the diverse ideological trends of the May Fourth mainstream tradition, but seemed to have distanced himself from the confusion of secular affairs, devoting himself entirely to moving within the sphere of his own artistic world. He was not only the disciple of two masters, Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, who were totally different in style, disposition and background masters; but he was also the friend and student of Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, the two reformist master painters who were distinctly different in artistic thoughts and the assimilation of the East and the West in art. He was friendly with the elite painters of diverse schools, artistic inclinations and ages, but persisted in pursuing his own artistic path, keeping close to his own ideals and way of life. He seemed to be scrupulous in moving ahead step by step and not appearing to be aloof or acting willfully, but he finally rose up like an enormous hill, standing aloft at the inter section of traditional landscape painting and modern life. This is the most surprising of all. So what revelation can be derived from the final success of Li Keran?

After a historical survey of his personal life and artistic works, we are fully aware that there are many valuable questions worthy of our logical analysis and discussion. The five questions discussed in this chapter are: The question of problem-solving, which in substance is the special way artists have of handling the relationship between art and society; the question of sketching from nature, which is Li Keran's historic contribution to traditional landscape painting; the question of schematizing a personal artistic language, which is a key link in the formative process of Li Keran's individual style; the question of method and attitude in the acquisition of tradition, which is a question touching the individual personality of the artist; and the question of qualities of style, which is the comprehensive manifestation of the personality, temperament, spirit, thought and artistic

culture of an artist. In these five entirely different questions, one may discover that the criticism and analysis made by the author have persistently involved and encompassed a common core, which is, what is Li Keran's concept of the combination of the East and the West? How is this aim to be attained? Searching for a solution to this question is also the purpose of this chapter. The way adopted by Li Keran in blending the artistic traditions of the East and the West was one of most profound mystery, by which Li Keran achieved success and was also the most spectacular and meaningful contribution made by Li Keran to traditional landscape painting and to modern Chinese art.

4.1 A KEY POINT --- SOLVING PROBLEMS

As with the development and transformation of all artistic styles, the process of the transformation of traditional landscape painting arose from the squeezing and pushing of two forces. One was the autonomous problem of Art itself, which can only arise from Art. A good creative artist is capable of grasping the key problems, and solving them according to his or her own formula. According to the theory of K. Popper and E.H. Gombrich,

> "most of the problems of the sciences and arts arise within the sciences and the arts themselves. It is the tradition of the sciences and the arts that is, quantitatively and qualitatively, by far the most important source of our problems--and of our knowledge, or craftsmanship."(1)

Popper believed that

> "great art always changes under the influence of its own autonomous problems".(2)

The second is the variation of conception in value and spirit created by the vicissitudes of society and the age which together pose challenges to traditional artistic concepts and constitute a pressure on and even a threat to the development of art by artists. Popper and Gombrich both disagreed with emphasising art as an expression of the spirit of the changing times, but they agreed

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[1] K. Popper, 'Gombrich on Situational Logic and Periods and Fashion Art', *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed., P. A. Schilpp, pp.1177-1178, Open Court, 1974

[2] ibid., p.1178

> "how difficult it can be for the artist to escape social and personal pressures inherent in the logic of the situation"[3] and the situation "constitute a serious menace to art".[4]

"The logic of the situation" referred to by Popper and Gombrich did sometimes create a void and falsified art problems which would be pursued by some artists, whose works might arouse a commotion of some sort for a time, but with the lapse of time, they would surely vanish, and vanish forever. Such phenomena have not been infrequent in the history of art, particularly nowadays. The danger of the phenomena

> "consists of the eclipse of the purely artistic standards or values by standards or values--perhaps admirable ones--extraneous to art itself".[5]

The artists who can amalgamate the problems of two kinds (the problems of art itself and those arising from the social challenge) into one are really very rare and worthy of esteem. Under the guidance of novel aesthetic notions, they proceed to work on the foundation of tradition. Any new meaningful discovery in their creative work may even lead to a renovation and transitional change of an entire artistic style and mode. Such intentional efforts at reforming traditional modes with explicit subjects can be seen very clearly in the cases of masters in the history of modern Chinese art, for example the reform introduced by Qi Baishi at the age of sixty, which resulted in the birth of modern traditional flower-bird painting. Similarly, the pursuit of luxuriance of style in landscape painting by Huang Binhong in his later years enabled him to be a traditional master taking the first steps towards the modern styles, and Lin Fengmian blazed out a new path between the oriental and the western style, creating a new branch in modern Chinese painting. However, Li Keran was the most successful in switching traditional landscape painting to a modern mode.

No one would deny that the landscape pattern of Li Keran is entirely at variance with tradition, no matter whether from the point of view of concept or that of technique; equally, no one would deny that Li Keran was a master of traditional art. As for Li's critics, they lauded him in the 1950s as a reformer of Chinese painting, but in the 1980s, the new-

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[3] ibid., p.1176

[4] ibid., p.1175

[5] ibid.

tide school attacked him as a defender of traditionalism.

The specific dual character of Li Keran's art between the "New" and the "Old" is actually the fundamental characteristic of modern traditional painting. But this does not mean that Li's art is merely a weird assortment of the "New" and the "Old". The art of any creative painter must meet two requirements in artistic quality: the first is the integrity of his individual spiritual world and his artistic style; the second is a close link with the traditions of art, which means to meet the objective criterion established by the works of the masters through the generations. (6) In modern Chinese traditional landscape painting, as a specific pattern, the substantial manifestation of the requirement on the two above-mentioned aspects are: 1) To shake off the aesthetic and emotional frame of literati Chinese painting, as an individual spiritual world, to demonstrate new passions or aesthetic views, such as more popular and secular ones, at the same time linking more extensively with traditional concepts of value or cultural connotation; 2) In form, the artist should have a unique artistic language and style, at the same time meeting the demands of the most principled traditional criteria for technique, such as calligraphic brushwork. It was in the two above-mentioned aspects that Li Keran had created the most original, the most general and the most persistent value in art that had accomplished the transition of traditional landscape painting from the classical mode to the modern one.

It has been mentioned in Chapter 2 that the transition of the traditional landscape pattern to the modern one had terminated in the establishment of a new orthodoxy, largely through the exertions of several generations, among whom, as the representatives of the contemporaries of Li Keran active in art circles from the 1950s to the 1960s, were the landscape painters Fu Baoshi, Qian Songyan and Shi Lu. It may be of some significance if we make a simple comparative analysis of the work of the artists in terms of the solution of their problems.

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[6] On the objectivity of art standards, K. Popper said: "These standards are objective in more than one sense. They are shared, and they can be criticized. They can change (and far be it from me to say that they should not). But alterations should not be arbitrary, and even less should they be hostile to those great old standards by which we once grew, and outgrew ourselves. It is, after all, these "old" standsards which represent art, and by which art must be judged at any moment in its development; and an artist who hates all the old standards is hardly an artist: what he hates is art." ibid., p.1176

There is no doubt that Fu Baoshi was a creative genius. His mature style came through rational experiments in reforming the traditional painting style. The seal he was accustomed to use was engraved with the Chinese characters "*qi ming wei xin*" (which literally means "Its mission is new", and was a phrase he had excerpted from the line "Though old was Zhou *(Zhou bang sui jiu*), its mission was new" from *Shijing*)[7]. This was to demonstrate that he would take the reformation of traditional painting as his mission. Confronting the "indolence" and "nothingness" - an overly passive and concessive notion in traditional landscape painting, he had racked his brain to find a way to invigorate the "old" landscape; to enliven the "weak" landscape; to activate the still calm hills and waters, [8] and from this came the "wrinkles of Baoshi". On rice paper (which is very sensitive to water), he splashed his brush, increased the speed of wielding the brush, and reinforced the variation of heavy and light in rhythm. All these had become his new forms of the language of art. But due to his profound knowledge and the strong scholar's temperament he possessed, he could never extricate himself from the traditional literati sense of aloofness and superiority; in artistic conception, he therefore continued to be involved deep within the traditional frame of literati painting.

After Liberation, Fu Baoshi made three long trips to sketch from nature. Despite all this, his style experienced no radical change compared with his style in the forties. In the 1940s, his work had been imbued with his own characteristics in expressing the effect of obscure scenery, especially hills and streams seen through rain and mist, in sweeping strokes with big brushes. His post-Liberation paintings were new in composition and were nearly square, but his artistic taste had always been lyrical, stressing the conveying of emotion. This could still be seen in the new works, such as *Wild Geese Alighting on a Sandy Shore* (1955) (pl.257), *Early Spring* (1957) (pl.258) and *Watching the Waterfall* (1953) (pl.259). Reviewing his artistic career, it is inaccurate to say that Fu Baoshi's art

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[7] *Shijing, Daya, 'The King Wen'*, see *The Complete Translation of Shijing*, translated and annotated by Jin Qihua, Nanjing: Jiangsu Guji Publishing House, 1984, p.613

[8] refer to Fu Baoshi, 'preface to the *Renwu* Chongqing Exhibition', *Fu Baoshi's Collected Art Works*, p.457, Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986

reached its peak after Liberation since he had already finished some of his most attractive works, such as the landscapes *The Picture of Dadi's Thatched Cottage* (1942) (pl.260) and *Pattering of Evening Rain* (1945) (pl.261) and the figure paintings *Traveling with a Lute* (1944) (pl.262) and *Ode to Fair Ladies* (1944) (pl.263). Compared with these, his new works done after Liberation seemed not to give full play to his disposition or individual talent. After Liberation, with stress laid on sketching from nature and reflecting reality, the situation became difficult for him. His works which obviously bore traces of sketching from nature, such as *Yellow River Clear* (1960) (pl.264) and *Today is Better than Yesterday* (1962) (pl.265), etc., were not his best works. He died in 1965, rather prematurely. People noticed with regret that the realism and the popularization encouraged after Liberation had stifled the development of his individual style.

Being six years older than Fu Baoshi but far less famous than him, Qian Songyan (1898-1986) was fifty-one years old at the time of Liberation. By then, he had assimilated much from the techniques of the old masters by copying reproductions of their works. Sensitive to the transformations in the times and in the life around him, his style too underwent a tremendous change. Following the fashion he painted figures in the early years of Liberation, as he himself said that figures were much more popular than other kinds of painting.[9] Later he returned to landscape with new themes. The historian, Chang Anzhi, commented on him:

> "Qian Songyan is extremely industrious. He sketches assiduously when travelling and is an avid reader and questioner. As the horizons of his life have broadened, new themes and new subjects have appeared in his paintings and he has evolved new techniques as well to express them."[10]

Fully understanding political requirements, making appropriate adaptations from traditional techniques, learning much from his contemporaries too, and adapting himself and his art as far as possible to the circumstances, Qian Songyan became a painter very much in vogue with a high output in 1960s (pl.266-268). His principle of creation was, as he himself claimed, to "trim your sails" (*kan feng gua fan*). He said,

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[9] Qian Songyan, 'Let My Art Come Back to Life', Beijing: *Art*, 1962/3, P.11

[10] Chang An-chih (Zhang Anzhi), 'The painter Chien Sung-yen', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1964/9, pp.107-109

> "In the course of study I also realized that political content was the first thing to consider in any work of art. I began to regard my painting as a political task assigned to me by the Party and the people."[11]

Qian Songyan's accounts in his own words had reflected the exceedingly prevalent creative attitude at that time -- excepting the use of art as a skill to pander to fashion, there was no personal art principle or pursuit that could not be given up. However, it could not be denied that this was a deadly weakness to a master artist. Even the comments which praised him so highly had also exposed this question from the negative side. The lines read:

> "Chien Sung-yen's landscapes have none of the former limitations of narrow individual perspectives and the sentiments of the literati. He has brought revolutionary elan and the fresh breath of contemporary life into his magnificent landscapes which reflect socialist construction, a change greatly welcomed by the masses."[12]

An other case is about Shi Lu. Born into a landlord's family and trained in traditional Chinese painting for three years from the age of fifteen to eighteen, Shi Lu then went to Yan'an to join the Red Army, contributing to the war propaganda programme by acting in dramas and drawing cartoons. After 1954 he decided to devote himself to traditional landscape painting and favoured subjects to do with the north-west loess plateau, expressing a revolutionary heroic spirit which had never been seen in traditional art (pls.269, 270). Disregarding the conventional rules, his compositions were always novel and succinct. In his *Reporting to Duty* (pl.271) for instance, with a little contrast between foreground and background, a massive plateau confronts the eye and recedes into the far distance, painted in ink and colour to produce a rich and powerful range of tones. Shi Lu did not hesitate to cut his subjects with the edges of the frame and, sometimes wrote his inscription at the bottom, to emphasize the feeling of vastness of the huge, bare plateau. In the corner of the picture there is a path winding through at the foot of the plateau with a row of people coming along it. The figures are not only small and indistinct but also pushed off-centre, despite being the only hint of narrative and of realism. Shi Lu preferred to express the spirit of tenacity and toughness by depicting the barren loess plateau in a wide perspective, and making the form rather abstract and symbolic. Even in subjects connected

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[11] Chien Sung-yen (Qian Songyan), 'Creating New Painting in the Traditional Style', Beijing: *Chinese Literature*, 1972/11, p.112

[12] Beijing: *Peking Review*, No.30, 27 July, 1973, p.22

with leadership, he still revealed the hardest situation and indomitable spirit which came from his personal understanding of the Chinese revolution, or rather, from his artistic disposition. Emphasizing the distinction and the originality of the artist's mode of thought, Shi Lu said,

> "artistic creation does not start with putting forward questions and 'life' does not start off with unfolding a reference letter or unpacking luggage."[13]

His words were directly contrary to the common tendency among painters towards following popular subjects and themes whether or not they themselves had personal experience of them or real interest in them. A common phenomenon at that time was that painters started their work with questions such as

> "What should I paint to greet National Day,"[14] and "I want to describe a good harvest, but how can I manage it."[15]

As a result of stressing an artist's individual idea and its dominating effect on his artistic creativity, his *Turning to Northern Shanxi to Fight* (1959) (pl.272)[16], on a revolutionary historical subject connected with Mao Zedong, caused a big argument and attracted differing comments: one view claimed that Mao Zedong and the north-west plateau were linked in a rational and coherent manner, while the opposite view considered that Shi Lu's brushwork was coarse, rustic and immature.[17] This work got him into terrible trouble in the Cultural Revolution because, by painting Mao standing alone on top of a cliff, he implied that Chairman Mao and his revolutionary career had reached a dead end. Being aware of the importance of traditional attainments he had tried to improve his calligraphic brushwork, but unfortunately after suffering dreadfully in the Cultural Revolution he died, and lost forever the opportunity to overcome his weaknesses in painting and to develop his art as he should have done. However, his art, more than that of Li Keran, affected his successors strongly by its novel composition, artistic flavour, abstract expressiveness and

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[13] Li Jiang, 'The Quest to Turn Life into Art', Beijing: *Art*, 1961/3, p.21

[14] Qian Songyan, 'Painting the Socialist Rich Fields', Beijing: *Art*, 1964/3, p.22

[15] Li Jiang, 'The Quest to Turn Life into Art', Beijing: *Art*, 1961/4, p.16

[16] Beijing: *Art*, 1961/4, p.16

[17] 'On Problems of Originality and Brushwork in Chinese Painting', Beijing: *Art*, 1963/1, pp.33-36

his interest in subjects connected with the north-west loess plateau.

In summary, the artistic talent of Fu Baoshi, which in fact did not conform to the trends of new traditional landscape painting -- popularization in particular, was not able to play its full role, thus ending in the stagnation of his artistic development. Qian Songyan, who was overanxious to pander to the artistic fashion of the moment, never found valuable subjects in art itself which he should have as an artist, as a result of which his art was lacking in lasting artistic value. Shi Lu, relying on his personal understanding and creative fervour in treating revolutionary historical themes, created an artistic style and language of rather rich originality and individuality, but, due to his early death as a result of persecution in the Cultural Revolution, lost the time necessary to perfect his art. In comparison, Li Keran was obviously much more fortunate than Fu and Shi in that his personal disposition and artistic talent did not conflict with the tendency towards realism and popularization. He won a historic opportunity to develop his personal art style. Owing to his comparatively long life, he also won relatively ample time to perfect his personal art. Compared with Qian Songyan, Li Keran was far-sighted. Though his art had also been highly approved and his art orientation seemed to be quite close to the fashion, the definite problems of art he had chosen for himself had in fact caused him to maintain a fair distance from the fashion. He continuously and consciously tried to approach his personal objective, and despite the fact that occasionally he had to make some compromises due to circumstantial pressures, he never lost his way.

In a series of anti-traditional landscape painting censures caused by social upheavals and the rushing tide of the times, Li Keran had taken the stand of "reality", which was the standard May Fourth spirit, and which he viewed as a target for reforming traditional Chinese Painting.

> "How to switch the essence of Chinese tradition into the aspect of expressing reality?"(18)

This sentence had pointed out the focus of his problem. For Li Keran, "reality" consisted of two aspects: one is to adopt the means and spirit of approaching to nature and

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[18] Li Keran, 'A Recollection of the Past', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.16

the reality of life as well; the other is to adopt the style of likeness of form.

Taking the "sense of reality" as an aesthetic problem that goes with the new conceptual tide of the time, is not to be wondered at in the history of modern Chinese art, for there had been a great number of innovative artists working for this very aim, i.e., attempting to reflect reality by Chinese painting. But the most valuable point in the reforms undertaken by Li Keran was that at the very first instant he had linked this "reality", an aesthetic problem arising from the demands of the time, closely with the problems of art itself. In other words, his reforms were not to abandon, or to be estranged from the "traditional essence", but, to usher in the new aesthetic problem within the problems of traditional landscape painting and to push to get them solved together. This would probably greatly heighten the degree of academic difficulty of the problems, i.e., the requirement of academic quality. The motto "breaking into tradition with the greatest skill and breaking out of tradition with the greatest courage" proposed in the 1940s by Li Keran coupled with his motto in the 1950s "Courage, the most commendable; Soul, the most desirable" can both be considered as footnotes to his determination and purpose in searching to develop the new aesthetic ideology within tradition.

The conviction of Li Keran as to the expressive power of traditional painting and his infatuation for it was not less than that of Fu Baoshi and Pan Tianshou, but his way of reforming Chinese painting was definitely not always similar to theirs. Apart from the divergence in the aesthetic problem as mentioned above, the latter two were guardians trying to preserve the purity of traditional Chinese painting. They would oppose any indiscreet introduction of Western painting methods to reform Chinese painting. But Li Keran, having painstakingly learned Western painting in his youth, and having had experience of propaganda painting during the Anti-Japanese War, was prevented from becoming a mere adorer of traditional painting when he finally returned to the field of Chinese painting in the 1940s. When he was trying "to break in" to and "to break out" of tradition his training in Western painting had naturally pervaded his way of thinking, his style of creating and his taste of appreciating. Besides, he purposely borrowed Western methods to shatter the formula and rule of the "all complete system" in traditional landscape

painting. Such an intention is very clear in his works and in his opinions on painting. In his opinions when he touched on traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts, he very naturally employed the professional terms and concepts of the West. For example, in dealing with the Chinese landscape concept "greatness" (*da*),[19] he often explained it as "the sense of space" frequently used in Western painting; in discussing Huang Binhong's concept of "layers" *(cengci)*, "volume" and "intermediate tone", concepts from Western painting, were always mentioned.[20] He considered that the traditional theory of "a rock has three phases" (*shi fen san mian*); the wrinkling methods (*cun fa*) and the dyeing methods (*xuanran fa*) developed since the Song Dynasty and the requirement to show a concave or a convex shape as soon as the brush touches the paper (*xia bi bian you aotu zhi xing*) all coincided with the Western painting theory of the relationship of light and shade. [21] In discussing "the sense of wholeness" he employed the same viewpoint for its appreciation whether it was manifested in the landscapes of Huang Binhong or in the sculptures of A. Rodin. [22] These examples show that Li Keran, in the process of solving traditional problems, had abundantly introduced the viewpoints and methods of the West. This is enough to distinguish him from any painter of the purely traditional school, such as Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong, Fu Baoshi or Pan Tianshou. Li Keran acknowledged that his purpose was

> "to absorb what is good in the West and to amalgamate it with our tradition, so as to promote the tradition of our Chinese painting."[23]

This is also to say that in the selection and solution of the problems of art, Li Keran had made a channel between the East and the West.

But it must be pointed out that in the amalgamation of the East and the West, Li Keran maintained oriental aesthetic notions as the framework of his artistic thoughts and the expressive principle of traditional Chinese painting as the core of his art. This was evident

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[19] ibid., p.152

[20] Beijing: *Art*, 1990/3, p.12

[21] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, pp.92-93

[22] ibid., p.142 ' \B This now refers ◦ the book by Li;

[23] Beijing: *Art*, 1990/3, p.19

too in his works and opinions on painting. Differing from Lin Fengmian's solution to the problem of "blending East and West", which had abandoned the traditional expressive framework and the principle of aesthetic appreciation which took calligraphic brushwork as a nucleus and used the language of Western painting to pursue the poetic sense of the East and create a new species of Chinese painting, Li Keran wanted to harmonize East and West within the system of tradition itself. As to the perfection and tenacity of the system of traditional Chinese painting and the difficulty of merging external elements into it, Li Keran had deep conviction. He had once said,

> "Beijing Opera is not easy to understand, its level is rather high. Alter a bit, and it would get a bit worse. The situation is the same in traditional Chinese painting. If, without understanding, one attempted to alter it, the result would be worse. Hence, it would be rather difficult to improve or alter traditional Chinese painting."(24)

In the history of modern Chinese art, there was no lack of pioneers who sought for a reformation within the system of traditional Chinese painting through "a merging of the Chinese and the Western". Particularly worthy of notice were the Lingnan School's attempts to introduce Western methods of perspective and light and shade into Chinese painting in the twenties; Xu Beihong was determined to amalgamate the objective sketching of the West with the brushwork of Chinese painting. However, owing to their failure to correctly find and solve the problems, their "New Chinese Painting" resulted in a miserable combination of Chinese and Western styles. Li Keran had unmistakably said,

> "We have to learn from those works with defects and even from failing works."(25)

His sensitiveness to the defects of unsuccessful works was not less than that to the strong points of successful works. Their failure to grasp the essence of the traditional arts and to correctly solve definite problems were a lesson, which must have somewhat enlightened the mind of Li Keran in reforming traditional Chinese painting.

His attitude to tradition had been extremely cautious. During his life, Li Keran had begged many master artists of traditional arts to take him in as a student. Apart from the two renowned master painters, Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, he had begged to be taught

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[24] Li Keran, 'A Recollection of the Past', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.16

[25] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.138

under Sun Zuochen, the remarkable player of the Chinese *huqin*; Gai Jiaotian and Cheng Yanqiu, the brilliant actors of Beijing Opera, and Zhang Boying, the master calligrapher. Li believed that from the "direct instruction" of these masters he could understand and grasp the quintessence of genuine traditional knowledge, which were the precious experiences of the masters in solving artistic problems. Li Keran once confessed that for brushwork alone, he had watched by the side of Qi Baishi for over ten years. In pain and diligence in acquiring tradition, none of the painters who professed to devoted their energies to experiments in "merging East and West" could compare with Li Keran.

His diligence, sagacity, modesty and cautiousness enabled him to correctly discern and solve his problems under the enlightenment of his predecessors. He successfully introduced the volume, light and colour of the West into the accumulating ink technique; stretched the Western rules for inducting black, white and grey parts and of constructing forms into the traditional method of "viewing the small from the large"; (26) adopted the inverted shadow of Western painting into traditional landscapes to produce the new "water method"; introduced the objective sketching of the West into the oriental way emphasizing the subjective, the spiritual, the abstract and the "inner beauty". In this way, the oriental and occidental elements met and merged together without leaving a trace. None could use the language of criticism which had been used in criticizing the new Chinese painting, claiming it was "against the spirit of Chinese painting", "forsaking the quintessence, pursuing the insignificant", (27) to criticize the new pattern of Li Keran. In essential quality, his landscape paintings were purely traditional, but were not exactly the same in their traditional features. Not only in technical language, but also in aesthetic conception, Li's landscape painting had some Western artistic elements merged into it.

From his own description of his working situation, we can clearly perceive the

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[26] (Song) Shen Kuo said: "most landscape paintings are based upon viewing the small from the large, just as people are viewing the rockery". From *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol.II, p.27, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981

[27] Qiu Shiming, 'On the Struggle of the Old and New Chinese Painting', 1947, from Shui Tianzhong, 'Looking back at a Dispute in the Reformation of the Chinese Painting', Beijing: *History and Theory of Fine Arts*, 1983/2, p.197

spiritual tension of his labour. He said,

> "In drawing landscapes, I have the feeling of being on a battlefield, among the whizzing of the bullets and the glinting of bayonets. For I cannot make any corrections on rice paper. Therefore, no negligence or mistakes are permitted. Every stroke I put on the rice paper must solve the problem of image, the problem of emotion, the problem of remoteness and nearness, the problem of void and substance, the problem of thick and thin of the ink. So I have to concentrate all my mind to show off the substance of the objective world, and to work out a sphere of art full of emotions and scenery. It is really not easy. Just as my predecessors said, 'In battling against the elephant, the lion has to fight with all his strength.'"[28]

In his exhibition at the age of eighty, Li Keran pointed out in his preface the complexity of his problems which he had done his utmost to solve for several decades. He said,

> "Creating on the foundation of life and tradition, I have to overcome many contradictions: the contradiction between new life and old tradition, the contradiction between our tradition and alien tradition, the contradiction between real life and the artistic realm..."[29]

Li Keran was a very rational artist, none of his contemporaries could compare with him in the complexity of the problems and in the long duration of solving those problems. His dreams, switching the essence of tradition into an expression of reality, finally came true after fifty years of unremitting efforts, by which he established an individual style and pattern while accomplishing the conversion of the classical pattern into a modern style for traditional landscape painting. In a speech which clearly evinced his sincerity and earnestness in solving the problems, he said,

> "I often asked myself, am I drawing or am I studying and learning painting? My conclusion is, I am learning and studying painting. I am studying and learning all my life."[30]

4.2 AN APPROACH TO NATURE

Concurrent with his selection of problems, it was quite natural that Li Keran should choose sketching from nature as his basic route for the solution of his problems. He

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[28] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.47

[29] ibid., p.98

[30] ibid., p.173

exhorted painters to study by heart "the two books", "Nature" and "tradition". On the relationship between the two, he was of the opinion that

> "Nature was of primary significance"; [31] "Compared with nature, tradition was next to nothing".[32]

Such a viewpoint reversed the relationship of Nature to tradition in the traditional creative mentality. He advocated

> "Setting foot on the basic point of tradition in surveying nature, discovering things which one's predecessors had not yet discovered, leading to the emergence of creation", and said that "the new creation was contribution."[33]

Li Keran was the first of the modern painters who really solved the problem of reestablishing direct and close links between Chinese landscape painting and nature. The great importance attached to sketching from nature by Li Keran as well as his efforts in the practice of sketching were unmatched. There was not a single painter of the traditional school who could compare with him in this respect. Compared with the influential painters of this century who stressed sketching from nature, such as Huang Binhong, Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian, Fu Baoshi, and Zhao Wangyun, his theory was more thorough and his practical requirements were more concrete and strict. Compared with his contemporaries who were sketching from nature in the 1950s and 1960s, his sketching had clearer academic problems, with clear academic tradition, and therefore a higher academic starting point. It could be said that his theory and practice system of sketching from nature was the most exhaustive system of sketching in the history of Chinese landscape painting.

His practical system of sketching from nature could be divided into two parts: sketching of special objects and creating before scenery.

1) Sketching of special objects:

Li Keran's opinion was:

> "Sketching from nature represents a process of cognition and re-cognition of objective matters as well as one of uninterrupted intensification."[34] "Only by sketching from nature can one figuratively, genuinely and concretely have a deep understanding of the objective world,

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[31] ibid., p.170

[32] ibid., p.86

[33] ibid.

[34] ibid., p.36

> enrich and raise one's thinking in images." [35] To a landscape painter, the aim of sketching from nature was to elevate " his ability to make a thorough study and a precise depiction of the object shown".[36] For example, "a painter must make a special study of mountains, water, trees, rocks, clouds and scenery-adornment figures, and make a thorough observation and study of the organizational rules of the natural scenery, at a degree of cognition surpassing that of the common people." [37]

As to the method of sketching from nature, Li Keran's opinion was that there could be many styles, but he chose the sketching method of Western painting for monographic studies. His belief was that

> "the sketching method of Western painting is a science in the study of image, it summarizes the basic law of painting language. The scientific principles shown in sketching, such as accuracy; volume and surface; light and shade and light source of the objective world can only do good and nothing bad to the development of Chinese painting."[38]

However, his aim in sketching was a thorough study of the modelling rules of objective images, and he was never bound by of the strict system of Western sketching.

The nearly one thousand sketches left by Li Keran when he died clearly showed the significance and characteristics of his monographic study sketching. For working on such sketches he used pencils most of the time and fountain pens occasionally. Basically he used a treatment of linear form, and sometimes he used effects similar to the light and shade tones of Western sketching for expression. He was very careful and precise, no matter which sketching method he used. For example, in the case of landscape sketches, he would stress the study of the structure of mountains and the gradations of trees (pls.273, 274); for the sketches of trees, stress was laid on organization in the case of many trees, wheres in the case of a single tree, importance would be attached to the crisscross of branches and stems in front and behind (pls.275-279); in the case of boats, emphasis would be on structure and form from different angles (pl.280); in the case of a waterfall, emphasis would be on the relationship between water and rocks (pls.281. 282); in the case of houses, stress would be laid on the structure and their organization (pls.283, 284); for the sketches of figures, stress

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[35] ibid.

[36] ibid., p.29

[37] ibid.

[38] ibid., pp.27-28

would be laid on movement (pl.285), etc. Among these sketches, *A Study of Light on Mountains* (pls.286, 287) belonged to the works copied from photographs during the period of the Cultural Revolution, which used lines, light and shade tones in a subtle portrayal of structure, range of mountains, the changing appearance of peaks under backlighting and sidelighting, as well as the atmosphere of mountains shrouded in mist and cloud.(39)

To summarise, these monographic study sketches had contributed to the definition of the characteristics of form of the various "roles" played by rocks, trees, boats etc. in Li Keran's landscapes, some of them even to spatial gradations, tones and artistic effects.

2) Creating in front of scenery:

Li Keran initiated by using traditional media to create a landscape painting directly before the scenery. The various steps of making a draft, wrinkling with ink and completing the whole work were all carried out before outdoor scenery (pl.288). This was very different from the practice of the painters of the traditional school such as Huang Binhong and Fu Baoshi, who followed the traditional way of doing sketches from nature outdoors, only delineating the sketch and not wrinkling with ink, drawing only the general outlines without finishing the whole painting. (pls.289-294) In the process of doing sketches from nature, Li Keran merged the Western method with the traditional concepts and methods of creation -- drawing not only "what he saw", but also "what he knew and thought of", carrying out the artistic treatments of organization, cutting out and exaggeration before the scenery, (pls.295-300) which was widely different from the ordinary sketching methods close to those of the West, as practised by Xu Beihong and in many sketches of the 1950s. (pls.301-305)

Li Keran's belief was that the crux of the problem of creating before scenery lay in "the originality of artistic conception *(yijing)*". He believed that "artistic conception is the soul of landscape painting", (40) "without artistic conception or when the artistic conception is indistinct, it will be

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[39] Liu Xilin, 'Wading from Nature to Art', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, 1991/5, p.129

[40] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.76

impossible to produce a good landscape painting". (41)

What then was artistic conception? He thought that

"artistic conception means the integration of scenery and sentiment, the description of scenery means the expression of sentiments." (42)

How then could one acquire artistic conception? The specific requirements of Li Keran consisted of the following:

[1]

"It is necessary to have an all-round and thorough knowledge of the objects you want to express, one must be personally on the scene, and spend a long period in observation in order to grasp the spiritual essence of the objects." (43)

He demanded at the same time that when making an observation, one must treat oneself as an "extraterritorial" being, "as if it was the first time that he saw nature, and that everything was fresh to him." (44) That is to say, in observing nature, first of all one should avoid "common sense", and secondly one should avoid "preconceived ideas". (45) An artist should

"see things that are invisible to the ordinary person, and discover beauties which were unknown in the past." (46)

[2] In the process of observing nature, he emphasized that

"the first lesson in sketching from nature is to keep calm"; (47) "imagery naturally emerges from looking calmly on all things"; (48) "calmness breeds wisdom, stability engenders wisdom"; (49) "only when one's mind is like a clear mirror can he discover the exuberance of life in scenery". (50)

When one is thinking of an artistic conception,

"he should sit for a long time before the scenery, look long and

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[41] ibid.

[42] ibid.

[43] ibid., p.77

[44] ibid., p.148

[45] ibid., p.159

[46] ibid.

[47] ibid., p.147

[48] ibid., p.141

[49] ibid., p.155

[50] ibid., p.141

steadily on it and meditate on it." (51)

[3]

"An artistic conception comes from intense and sincere thoughts and feelings of the painter." (52) He said, "In the case of a landscape painter, he must have intense and sincere feelings towards the scenery he depicts, it would not work to tell lies. There are some painters who, having no experience or impressions worth mentioning, no wish or desire to express their own feelings, always repeating those of others, will be disqualified from talking about originality of artistic conception." (53) He said: "Let's look at the spiritual essence of a tree, or a mountain, which, after being exaggerated by the thoughts and feelings of the painter, will become more distinct in its artistic conception. A thoughtless artist cannot produce a good painting." (54)

[4]

"To express artistic conception, one should try his utmost to process the artistic design, (55) so as to "find an artistic language that would touch one's heart". (56)

According to Li Keran, there were three principles for artistic processing in Chinese art: the first was cutting out (*jiancai*), which meant, to give prominence to the principal portion, cutting down the portion of secondary importance to "zero"; the second was exaggeration *(kuazhang)*,

"to exaggerate means to give people the greatest satisfaction in sentiments". (57) "Art demands a grasp of the essential characteristics of the object, expressing it strongly and emphatically". (58)

The third was organization *(zuzhi)*, arranging the objects anew according to the needs of the expression. A picture was not limited to the "sense of sight", one should move on from "what you have seen" to "what you have known and what you have thought."(59)

[5] According to Li Keran, there are four techniques directly connected with the

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[51] ibid., p.37

[52] ibid., p.81

[53] ibid., p.78

[54] ibid.

[55] ibid., p.81

[56] ibid., p.78

[57] ibid., p.79

[58] ibid., p.80

[59] ibid.

formation of artistic conception:

> "the first is composition; the second, image; the third, layers and space and the fourth, atmosphere." (60)

Li Keran discussed each of these extensively, for example, on the principles of composition he spoke of: "viewing the small from the large", "the equilibrium of a steelyard", "set to rational composition that which looks queer"; (61) the "hammering nails method" at the start of a draft, which means to fix all important parts at the beginning to form a frame. (62) In the portrayal of an image, one should "grasp the essentials" and "steadily, accurately and ruthlessly" express the most important parts. (63) In the course of painting, one must "go to detail first and put into order afterwards", (64) which is the same as the method of "from nothing to something, then from something to nothing". (65) "Give priority to nature (the object being painted) in the first seventy percent of the painting, and then give priority to the requirement of the picture itself (subjectivity). (66) The treatment of layers was concerned with the expression of the depth of space and the richness and generosity of artistic style. (67) For creating an atmosphere, one should keep the spirit in every stroke and link every stroke with the whole, only thus could the atmosphere be lively and forceful. (68)

In Li Keran's system of sketching from nature, Western sketching methods as a basic means of studying the visual characteristics of natural objects had been fused into the creative process of Chinese painting. These imported methods were like a new weapon,

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[60] ibid., p.149

[61] ibid., p.150

[62] ibid., p.151

[63] ibid., p.142

[64] ibid., p.151

[65] ibid., p.79

[66] ibid., p.151

[67] ibid., p.144

[68] ibid., p.145, 146

with which Li Keran was able to shake off the traditional symbolic system which was "fully equipped with styles and techniques", to obtain new visual knowledge of the objective world, and, furthermore, to build an individual language of form with brushwork. From the works of Li Keran in the 1950s to 1960s, we can easily notice the influence and traces of Western sketching methods and sense. Owing to his highly skilled calligraphic brushwork in his later years, such influence and traces were dissolved, and successfully mixed into the stylized language of Chinese landscape painting. However, we are still able to feel the influence of Western painting in Li Keran's mature works, in, for example, the sense of the whole, the feel of light, and the organization of black, white and grey parts as well as the accuracy of form and so on.

Li Keran's system of sketching from nature established as its core the creation of an artistic conception rich in the sense of realism. As soon as he started using Western sketching methods and had obtained the visual likeness of natural objects in their richness and liveliness, he changed direction and addressed the problems of Chinese painting itself. The connotation of artistic conception as he defined it, -- "the integration of sentiments and scenery" -- belonged to the Chinese style; the argument set forth in the method of creating, -- long observation and exaggeration of sentiments -- belonged to the Chinese style; the principles of artistic craftsmanship -- cutting out, exaggeration, and organization were also that of the Chinese style. Meanwhile, the problems of the Chinese and the Western were closely intertwined, ending ultimately in a traditional solution; for example, the technique of "from nothing to something, from something to nothing" was the result of a combination of the regulating tones method of the West and the ink accumulating technique of the Chinese. We can clearly see that the sketching studies of mountains in backlighting and sidelighting had suggested the effects of the ink accumulating technique (pls.306, 307); the sketching studies of mountains covered by thick forests had led to the invention of "the painting technique of the portrayal of a thick forest enveloped in mist" (pls.308, 309), and the sketching studies of waterfalls inspired the use of calligraphic brushwork of *wulouhen* (pls.310, 311, 312), etc.

Though "creating in front of scenery" included various links in the process of

artistic creation, as a kind of sketching from nature, it was still, according to Li Keran, different from the phase of "formal creation". This was because the phase of sketching happened prior to the highly stylized brushwork processing. Its task was to discover the beauties of nature, seize new artistic conceptions of landscape painting, and at the same time probe for a solution of the corresponding problems of expressive techniques. That is to say, Li Keran's system of sketching from nature, besides being treated as the basic skill for the study of the visual characteristics of nature, was at the same time looked upon as a training in "pushing real life into the artistic realm", [69] and was, therefore, looked upon as a basic project in an artist's lifework. It was precisely because of this that Li Keran advocated concentrating one's energy on solving problems one by one. He said,

> "in solving problems, it is necessary to solve them one by one. Whoever does the most, overcomes the most difficulties, the greater his achievements will be." [70] "It would be better to draw one painting in earnest, to solve one problem from morning till night, than to draw ten casually." [71]

Though Li's system of sketching was very personal, his experiences, views, methods, and the steps he took could be applied extensively. It has become the foundation of the teaching of Chinese landscape painting in the fine art academies of China, [72] and has exerted a far-reaching influence in contemporary landscape painting and in the transformation of traditional landscape painting into the modern style. In this regard, there is not a single painter of the twentieth century whose historical role can be compared with his.

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[69] ibid., p.148

[70] ibid., p.174

[71] ibid., p.175

[72] See Huang Runhua, *Sketching From Nature, Teaching Material No. 4 for Chinese Painting*, The Chinese Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts; Zhang Ping, *Landscape Painting, Teaching Material No. 7 for Chinese Painting*, The Chinese Painting Department of the Central Fine Art Academy, Beijing: Xueyuan Publishing House, 1993

4.3 A LINK BETWEEN SKETCHING AND MATURE STYLE -- STYLIZATION

In the long, strenuous course of the efforts made by Li Keran to transform traditional landscape painting from the classical model to the modern style, there existed a reverse course, which involved starting from sketching, approaching the visual characteristics of nature, and switching back to tradition. The target of this process was to set up an individual language system of pattern and brushwork and to return to a more traditional creative style. From the early Sixties, Li Keran spent more than ten years in accomplishing the process of stylization. Not until the later period of the Cultural Revolution did Li Keran gradually embark on a new reforming phase of free style.

In the case of Li Keran himself, the process of stylization was very distinct and particularly significant. But in studies of Li Keran up to the present, this rather important process has been either intentionally or unintentionally ignored by researchers. It has not been taken as a relatively independent stage in the separate phases of Li's artistic style, and there have not been any articles specially devoted to such a study. When touching upon the particulars of this process, researchers have mentioned it as "re-creation on the basis of sketching" [73]; "the conformity and sublimation" [74]; or "creating a landscape through imagination". [75] The causes of such "neglect" might be: 1) The technical process and its particulars were overlooked by researchers; 2) Chinese painting had been vehemently criticized since the beginning of this century as an art of formalism and formulism estranged from the reality of life, therefore, the mention of "stylization" as a feature of Chinese painting was purposely avoided. Meanwhile, owing to the prevailing custom of plagiarizing the ancients in recent centuries, "stylization" had also been considered as a restriction on original creative power and innovation.

Possibly for a reason similar to the second point mentioned above, despite the

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[73] Refer to Wan Qingli, 'The Formation of Li Keran's Painting Style', Hong Kong, *Brush and Ink*, No.25, p.48

[74] Lang Shaojun, 'The Landscape Painting of Li Keran', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, 1991/5, p.95

[75] Sun Meilan, *The Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, p.84, 1991

strenuous practice undertaken by Li Keran in forming his individual stylized language, which he called "to mine once and refine ten times", his experiences at this stage were seldom summarized in his treatises on art. This was of course due to the fact that his most creative and challenging work closely linked the tradition of landscape painting with the beauty of nature. The main content of his treatise on art concentrated on the problems of sketching from nature and creating artistic conception. In discussing the problem of stylization, he was really wary. For example, while complaining that "the dregs of Chinese painting is formulism entirely estranged from the reality of life", [76] he also stressed that "the essence of Chinese painting is the inborn opposition against naturalism. It not only pays attention to regulation but is rich in vitality." [77] Obviously to avoid misunderstanding, here he substituted the concept of "regulation" for the concept of "stylization". He said,

> "Any art attaining a higher level will have more traditions and more rules. We would be making a mistake if, for the sake of opposing formulae, we deny rules." [78]

Needless to say, traditional Chinese painting is a highly refined pictorial language, and just as in the performance of Beijing Opera, each gesture is highly stylized. In traditional Chinese painting, the concept of stylization has connotations: one is the techniques of artistic expression, which were distilled from repeated practice over many centuries until they became a relatively stable, systematic and complete set of artistic language and vocabulary. The other is the steps and methods used in a definite painting procedure. For example, the images of traditional landscape : rocks, trees, water, boats, houses and figures, all these demand that the wielding of the brush should follow a definite procedure in order that the dots, lines and planes can match and interweave with one another, attaining a certain degree of rhythm and regularization, evincing the diverse changes of light and changes of light and heavy, rapid and slow, thick and thin, void a manipulation of brush and ink. On the one hand, the language of brushwork should manifest

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[76] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.140

[77] ibid.

[78] ibid., p.131

the special feature of the object, but at the same time, each dot and each stroke should be forceful, just like the strokes in calligraphy, possessing the aesthetic value of relative independence without attaching to any representation of images. That is to say, the stylized language demands the aesthetic value should consist of two aspects, the concrete and the abstract. Li Keran remarked,

> "Chinese painting is most appreciative of the abstract. It is a combination between concrete and abstract. It is impossible without an abstract element." (79)

He was here emphasising the basic characteristics of the stylized language.

The remarkable stylized language of traditional painting originated from the same traditional source and the same logic as Chinese calligraphy as well as the special material medium adopted by both. It can be said that the fundamental expression of Chinese painting is through rational conclusion and not just through mere sensation. In Chinese painting, the freedom of expression is a result of a skilful wielding of the painting materials and tools as well as the stylized artistic language. Any creative artist must have his own stylized language. For instance, the master painters through the generations had created various wrinkling methods to manifest the structure of rocks and hills: Li Tang (1048-1130) of the Song Dynasty created the *dafupi cun* (pl.313) to manifest the stout hardness of rocky hills in Northern China; Dong Yuan (tenth century A.D.) of the Five Dynasties created *pima cun* (pl.314) just to cover up the earth slope in Southern China; Mi Fu (1051-1107) of the Song dynasty created *midian cun* (pl.315), using slanting big dots and light ink merged with heavy ink to demonstrate the moistness of the hills south of the Yangzi River; Huang Binhong used to manifest the richness and luxuriance of nature with a *cufu luantou cun* (pl.316). All such variety of *cun* were a hypothesized language for depicting the diverse features of rocky hills with brushwork, while forming the styles of various schools. Each of these traditional stylized languages influenced successive artists, were adopted and developed, thus establishing the historical position of its founder. While studying techniques of traditional landscape painting, the painters of traditional schools would generally start by copying masterpieces so as to grasp the stylized language of tradition. After acquiring a

[79] ibid., p.187

certain traditional technique, they would go to nature, to investigate and to verify, even to make some alterations and improvements, in order to develop conventional techniques, and to set up their own features. But in the highly stylized traditional language, despite the fact that painting styles had changed repeatedly throughout history, there were actually very few who could truly shake off traditional conventions and be really acknowledged or accepted by tradition. For example, Shi Tao (1630-1707) who was a remarkable master painter of the Qing Dynasty, was able to go against the fashion of copying the ancients and approached nature, creating many works full of fresh spirit and novel conception, occupying a prominent position in the history of art. But in studying and analysing his works, particularly his brushwork, the historians considered that his wrinkling technique "still failed to show originality". (80) From this, we can truly perceive that in highly stylized art, the development of pattern and techniques had been strictly restricted by its own tradition.

In the case of Li Keran, the reason the process of "stylization" possesses special significance is that it was a reverse route of returning to tradition after "breaking away from tradition". This was quite different from the route followed by traditional painters in general of grasping traditional techniques first, then looking for development. In fact Li Keran spent more than ten years on breaking into tradition before his sketching period, including acknowledging Qi and Huang to be his masters. However, when he confronted nature to do sketching in order to find a path to "break away from tradition", he emphasized that

> "We should lay aside the set of methods which came from copying or imitating the ancients. We should explore a new set of methods from observations on objects of painting". (81)

From the analysis we have made of his sketches during the 1950s, we may clearly see he was seeking to come as close to nature as possible through Western sketching methods. He did not blindly follow any traditional *cun* methods to depict a hill, neither did he follow the traditional *kaihe* (open and close) method to compose a picture. Hence, he thoroughly shook off the restraints of traditional stylized techniques, and forsook the

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[80] Wu Linsheng, 'A Master in Painting - On Fu Baoshi's Outstanding Achievement', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.19, p.68

[81] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.161

vocabulary to which painters through generations had firmly clung. Li Keran demanded himself that

> "in sketching, every stroke of the brush should be closely linked to the object being painted, which is to be the very extract of the essence of natural beauty." (82)

Thus, he set up a good foundation for the individual patternized language he formed later on. Meanwhile he foreshadowed in his sketches the re-emergence of tradition. In other words, he never once departed from tradition. Against the background of traditional concepts and principles, he was moving to a higher level in discussing the meaning of techniques and guiding the "sense of reality" to the problems of tradition and their solution. Hence, he was able to transcend the limitations of Western sketching methods in his sketches.

The greatness of Li Keran's project and his achievement in the reform of Chinese painting lay in his incessant quest to switch back to tradition after his success in sketching from nature. His endeavours in stylizing language and in brushwork were unmatched by any painter of the renovation school. As early as when he was a disciple of Qi Baishi, Li Keran had himself witnessed the power of the stylized language of Chinese painting. He stated,

> "The first time I saw the old master paint prawns, I was astonished that he did it in only a little over ten minutes. For him, drawing a prawn was as easy as writing down a Chinese character is for us. Where his brush passed, there the volume, texture, movement, and an enlivened atmosphere all cropped up vividly over that sheet of paper. To such an effect, would you not be surprised at the expressive power of his brushwork?" (83)

The creative state yearned after by Li Keran is the ultimate frontier of Chinese painting - "the perfectly free realm" (*huajing*), i.e.,

> "when one is painting, without seeing an object, not even a draft, just wielding the brush at will on 'the white sheet of paper confronting the sky', as if the myriad items of the universe could grow up out of one's hand, really attaining the realm of 'hills and dales within one's bosom'(84) and 'nature within one's palm'". (85)

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[82] ibid., p.36

[83] ibid., p.61

[84] [Song] Guo Xi, *Lin Quan Gao Zhi*, Yu Anlan, ed., *Pamphlets On Painting*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.21

[85] Dong Qichang, *Hua Zhi*, Yu Anlan, ed., *Serial Pamphlets On Painting*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.79; *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.19

He perfectly understood that the freedom of expression in Chinese painting was a result firstly of fully grasping the rules of objects and nature; and secondly, of skilfully grasping the stylized techniques and language. Hence he said,

> "The ability to sketch from nature cannot solve every problem". (86)
> "From the level of sketching to creating a painting needs a breakthrough, this is a very great difficulty indeed".(87)

It could be said that the key to realizing the breakthrough is to repeatedly patternize the language of brushwork. This was just the problem which Li Keran had striven his utmost to solve in the 1960s. Fu Baoshi had also said,

> "Even painting a tree or a stone, to reach the realm of perfect skill and show one's individual artistic feature cannot be attained accidentally, but requires one to undergo a strenuous course of practice and practice, until a state of perfect freedom is reached." (88)

Li Keran had once evinced his agreement to the statement of Xu Beihong - if you wish to paint a lotus, paint one to two thousand sheets of paper before you discuss painting lotuses. Li Keran told others of his experience in stylizing techniques and brushwork in painting buffalos, when each time he would use up a whole pile of rice paper. From the analysis of works in Section 4 of Chapter Three, we may clearly see that it was through sketching that Li Keran had obtained a huge quantity of nature's images, with which he proceeded to summarize and extract form, so as to form them into a certain brushwork language agreeable to the stylized demands of Chinese paintings. The images of mountain, tree, house and waterfall in his works of the 1960s had clearly shown the stylized peculiarities of his own style. The concentration of his subject matter and themes in the 1960s also formed typical corresponding patternized compositions. We may safely say that the real value of the process of Li Keran's return to tradition, i.e. of stylizing his individual language, was an entirely creative work. He created a new model -- the landscape of Li's style within the system of traditional landscape painting, which was unknown to his predecessors. This is the reason why Li Keran was an original creative master in the history

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[86] ibid., p.38

[87] ibid., p.191

[88] Fu Baoshi, 'Preface to the Renwu Chongqing Painting Exhibition', *Fu Baoshi's Collected Art Works*, Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986

of Chinese modern art.

After setting up his individual patternized system of language and vocabulary in the 1960s, and through further refining his calligraphic brushwork in the Seventies, Li Keran began his new reform by the end of that decade, gradually approaching and entering into the "realm of perfect freedom" in which he could paint and work at will without any restraints. At this stage, his ability to control the brush and ink had almost become a part of his physiological function. As he said to his wife in his later years, he could paint "pretty well", because he had "diverse devices". The "devices" meant his stylized techniques. His "painting pretty well" meant that in the process of painting he could freely produce, pass and develop from one stylized technique to another. In the highly technical art of Chinese painting, the formation of a stylized language, the grasp and manipulation of this language is undoubtedly an important link in creating.

The landscape of Li Keran in the 1960s reflected the characteristics of definite and strict rules, till in his later years, it reached a very high level of expressive power, possessing more meaningful and spiritualized peculiarities, becoming more implicit, natural and perfect, and attained the realm of "the highest law seems to be lawless"[89] .

The paragraphs below will take Li Keran's works and the video materials[90] of his painting process of *Springs among Trees* (pl.219) and *A Sea of Clouds, Mount Huang* (pl.240) as examples, to analyse the peculiarities of brush, ink, form and composition of his stylized language. From an analysis of the level of language construction one can see the fundamental work of Li Keran in the combination of Chinese and Western art.

1) Unique feature of brushwork:

In his later years, Li Keran wielded his brush forcefully to form dots, which joined one another to become lines, and plane was the expansion of dot. From the several dropping parallel lines used to depict weeping willows in *Pavilion by the Lotus Pond* (1985) we can

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[89] (Qing) Shi Tao, 'Quotation of Monk Kugua', *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol. II, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981, p.329

[90] The photographs taken by the author from the videotape of the film *Creating Monuments to Mountains and Rivers*, kept by the Department of Chinese Painting of the Central Academy of Fine Art

clearly see that what seemed outwardly to be straight lines, in reality consisted of innumerable dots joined together (pl.317). This characteristic can also be detected in the lines representing twigs and branches of the trees in *A Sea of Clouds, Huang Mountain* (pl.318). Because of the force used in wielding the brush, the friction of brush against paper naturally imparted a toothed shape to the lines (pls.319, 320). In his own words, his horizontal lines are formed by vertical lines, and the vertical lines by horizontal ones. (91) For example, in the painting *Sunset After Rain* (1986) we can clearly perceive this in lines representing the reflected shadows in water (pl.321).

Force or strength in wielding the brush had been emphasized in Chinese painting, but in the opinion of Li Keran, the key point was to be slow in wielding the brush. In drawing a line of dots joined together, the dots should be controlled one by one until they are all linked up. (92) It was the same as controlling the bow when playing the *huqin*, when the notes of the music should be "slow but dense, rapid but stable". (93) He distinguished these kinds of force in wielding the brush: raising force -- do not let the brush down, raise it up firmly without letting it drop down; pressing force -- the brush should be pressed down, with pressing force sixty percent and raising force forty percent, without letting the brush slip; dragging force -- the brush should be wielded continually without smearing. As the brush moves slowly over the rice paper, there appears a kind of resistance from the paper and results in a feeling of power from overcoming this. (94)

In his last ten years, due to the trembling of his right hand, the lines would accidentally break off, because his brush was temporarily separated from the paper. But he attempted as best he could to get his brush under control, to keep the line continuing as one. He thus remarked that every stroke should link and correspond with another stroke, they should not be scattered in any way, but be closely linked together. (95) Li Keran personally

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[91] Liu Wenjie, 'Authenticating Li Keran's Paintings', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.25, p.2

[92] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.146

[93] ibid., p.135

[94] ibid., pp.134-135

[95] ibid., p.135

appraised the authenticity of the forged painting *Mount Huang after Rain* (pl.322), in which the counterfeiter attempted to imitate the lines in toothed shape drawn by Li Keran, but such lines showed traces of having been purposely broken, which was entirely against the rules of forceful wielding of the brush. The fragility of the brushwork in the forgery can be easily discerned.

2) Unique feature of ink:

The achievement of Li Keran in using ink in his later years was great. He adopted the ink accumulation technique, applying thick and light ink, one stroke matched with another, once, twice then again, gathering up to an accumulated effect. In such a landscape painting, the ink would be accumulated at least several times, up to tens of times. He usually took several days to paint a picture, sometimes over ten days, sometimes as much as several months. At times, he could only finish a few landscape paintings in one year. His dark ink was rich, lively and transparent; whereas the light ink looked clear without being too thin or superficial. Both ways of using the ink were forceful, profound and rich. If we compare the light ink and the dark ink applied in the forgery mentioned above with those in an original painting by Li Keran, such as *Enjoying the Cool in the Dense Forest* (1982) (pl.229), we can easily see the vast difference of the skill in ink technique.

Li Keran considered it was easy to draw a line straight and strong, but not easy to draw it plump and with a brilliant lustre. (96) Generally speaking, a dry brush yields straight and strong lines, whereas a wet brush more easily shows lines plump and smooth. When the brushwork is strong, it is difficult to be sleek, and vice versa. The crux of the problem is the ability to control water content. In the works of his later years, Li Keran was able to wield his brush in such a way as to be both powerful and sleek with every stroke of his brushwork, as in his painting *A Song of Mountains and Forests* (1987) (pl.323), where the trunk was painted out stroke by stroke, and each stroke was not a dry and straight line but consisted of numerous twists and turns, and each stroke was full of elasticity, both powerful and sleek. On the one hand, these strokes agreed with the natural law (quoted by

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[96] ibid., p.152

Li Keran,) that "not an inch of the tree is straight" [97], and on the other hand, they fitted perfectly with the demands of calligraphic brushwork for *wulouhen* (the trace of a raindrop on the wall) and *zhechaigu* (the twisted, circular and forceful lines). To produce an effect both powerful and sleek, Li Keran considered:

> "The brush should not soak up too much water, but forcefully wielding the brush will squeeze out the water in it." [98]

If we scrutinize the forgery from this viewpoint, the lines representing branches and twigs were without any elasticity, were dry, insipid and lacking in force.

Li Keran attached extreme importance to the unification of tones of ink colour, and the abundance of intermediate gradation. He stated,

> "Changes of ink shades should be minute and gradual, partial changes should not be too prominent." [99] He further said, "The most important thing in a painting is the number of intermediate colour gradations, which determines the amount of layers, the richness and the degree of depth expressed in your painting. The key to the depth and thickness lies in the treatment of the intermediate gradation." [100]

In the works of his later years, Li was able to attain minute changes of ink colour in a black tone, such as manifested in the *Mountains and Rivers* (1988) (pl.324), in which a large sheet of dark ink showed a very rich, very deep and almost imperceptible sense of gradation. The manipulation of intermediate colour in ink was the prominent contribution of Li Keran to traditional ink methods. The forgery lacked entity in tone and was confusing.

3) Unique feature of modelling and the painting process:

[A] Mountain methods: The video materials of the two pictures *Springs among Trees* and *A Sea of Clouds, Mount Huang* by Li Keran recorded the painting process of his two typical mountain methods. The diverse images of mountains painted by Li Keran in his later years were the result of a comprehensive transformation based upon these two methods.

Rocky mountain method (pl.325). First, the brushwork of "lines accumulated by

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[97] ibid., p.132

[98] ibid., p.43

[99] ibid., p.44

[100] Beijing: *Arts*, 1990/3, p.12

dots" (*ji dian cheng xian*) was used to draft the outline, trend and structure of the mountain. (pls.326, 327) The second step was to use the ink accumulation method to wrinkle and rub in order to demonstrate the light and shade effect of the mountain under backlighting and sidelighting (pls.328-331). In the process of wrinkling with ink, different brushwork was used alternately so as to display the various textures of the mountain surface, which were caused by the different elements of the composition, such as rocks, earth, grasses and trees (pls.332,333). Finally, upon the foundation of very rich detail, the tone was adjusted to minimize the bright parts to the utmost, to enable the most clear-cut parts to fade into the intermediate tone (pl.334). In this way, the layers became more and more rich and deep, but the tone was getting more and more simple and unified, and gradually the volume of the mountain emerged and was enveloped in an atmosphere of space and light (pls.335-341). This is a peculiarity never seen in the patterns of traditional Chinese landscape painting.

In the forgery *Mists and Clouds on Mount Huang* (pl.342) the light parts of the mountain are displayed as homogeneous stripes, which is far different from Li Keran's mountain image under sidelighting. The latter emphasized the organic integration and single entity of light and shade. (pl.343)

Method for mountains covered by thick forests (pl.223). The *cun* methods (wrinkling methods) were for centuries the language supposed to represent rocky mountains or soil hills, but there had never been a patternized language displaying characteristics of mountains covered entirely by greenery. Li Keran was the first to create "the painting technique for the portrayal of a thick forest enveloped in mist" (*mi lin yan shu huafa*) to show the peculiarity of mountains in the South of China.

As the first step, Li Keran used the serrated shapes brushwork in an upward direction (pls.344-346). Each stroke of the brush would be a tree on the distant mountain, the part where the ink was light or absent is the side of the tree in sunlight. (pl.347) He applied the ink alternately in dark and light colours, crisscrossing each stroke of the brush, displaying layer upon layer of trees and the far distant space. (pls.348-351) The process of adjusting the tone enabled the colour of the ink to grow more profound, and the layers to grow richer, the effect of the illumination to be more lively and natural, finally forming the

mountain image with layer upon layer of hills and trees. (pl. 353)

[B] Tree method: The image of the broad-leaf tree under backlighting was Li Keran's most creative patternized language for trees. The branches were painted from the tree top downwards to the bottom. First a wintry tree was drawn (pls.353-357), then the brush was brought perpendicularly and rapidly down onto the paper repeatedly, letting the scattered tips portray clusters of leaves. (pls.358,359) Various ink shades of dots accumulated and formed the clustered structures with bright parts transiting to dark parts, thus showing the voluminous crown of the tree. (pls.360,361) The brightest part was the fringes of the tree top, as they were penetrated by rays of sunlight. Where the leaves were most dense was the darkest. Where the leaves were sparsely scattered, with sunlight filtering through, was the medium tone (pl.362). Against the darkness of the background mountain, the trees looked much lighter, showing a strong sense of light and space (pl.363). This way of painting trees had never been used in traditional landscape painting.

[C] Waterfall method: In the process of painting a waterfall, Li used the brush tip on one side and ran it with the power of the horizontal into verticality, from top to bottom one stroke after another (pl.364), so that the line naturally was thick ink at the top and light ink at the bottom (pl.365). Then he repeated it with altered brushwork to manifest the relationship between water and the structure of rock (pl.366). Finally, he left a minimal empty space among the basic dark colour, so as to make the waterfall appear brighter, even giving the impression of flowing down (pl.367). The source of the water was painted with the brush trailed transversely (pls.368,369). The distribution of the water on the rocks in the foreground was painted with a forked brush (pls.370,371). The abstract beauty of the brushwork and the sensation of the reality of the waterfall attained the highest degree of unification.

[D] House method: Using the brushwork of "lines accumulated by dots", Li Keran outlined the structure of houses, doors and windows, at the same time making the brushwork form various combinations of dots, lines and planes and giving the sense of rhythm between void and solid, light and dark, dry and wet, sparse and dense, thus displaying the differences of the houses between the primary and the secondary, brightness

and darkness, remoteness and nearness (pls.372-374).

The unique features of modelling in Li Keran's landscape language can be summed up as follows: (1) The close combination of characteristics of nature with the interest and charm of his brushwork; (2) For the first time in history, he enabled traditional landscape painting to possess the ability to express realistic visual effects in the light, space, volume and structure of the object. (3) The main formative technique from a linear pattern became a plane pattern of ink. (4) His forms had evident geometric elements, which, however, in his works of later years, became more implicit in the elements of rectangularity, straight and angle, evincing an inclination towards naturalness and roundness.

4) Unique feature of composition:

[A] In composition, Li Keran went against the traditional custom of leaving abundant empty space, and boldly minimized the space for the top and lower margins of a picture - which traditionally showed the sky and the earth - sometimes even cutting off the summit of a hill or the earth, placing the main body of a picture halfway up a mountain, which in traditional landscape was usually the rather empty part. He squeezed inscriptions and seals to the very margin of a picture, giving the whole painting a sense of expansion.

[B] The expression of traditional landscape painting was mostly concentrated on: momentum (*qishi*), framework (*jianjia*), sparsity and denseness (*shu mi*), thickness and paleness (*nong dan*). (101) Apart from this, Li Keran put forward his opinion that the hardest problem to be solved in landscape would be "layers". (102) He definitely introduced the spatial sense of the West into the traditional Chinese composition, emphasizing that the separate levels of near, medium and remote should be arranged in depth. He attempted to reach a compromise between the perspective method of the West and the traditional concepts of "moving perspective" (*yiwei toushi*) and "viewing the small from the large" (*yi da guan xiao*), so as to enable the composition to come nearer to visual reality than traditional compositions.

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[101] (Qing) Wang Yuanqi, 'Rambling Notes by the Window', *Pamphlets On Painting*, Yu Anlan, ed., p.206, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1960

[102] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.114

[C] With the aid of the formative rules about the relationship of black, white and grey in Western painting, he arranged the dark and bright parts of a picture leaving only a few bright parts, so as to bring out the most important part of a painting and to attain "a strong sense of entity and distinct layers in space and colour".(103)

[D] The ink accumulation method used by Li Keran had a significant effect on his compositions, causing a thorough reversal of the proportion of black to white in traditional landscapes. The dark parts of a picture in the past became the bright parts in Li Keran's painting; the white parts in a landscape of the past became the dark or grey parts in the paintings of Li Keran. He changed the traditional idea of "prizing the black as if it were gold" (*xi mo ru jin*) into "prizing the white as if it were gold". He said,

> "One inch of a picture is an inch of gold. We should prize the empty space. We should carefully consider how to arrange blank space as little as possible". (104)

His black landscape ended the "white hills" (105) that had ruled for over four hundred years through the Qing Dynasty, and opened a new role for ink to play in the landscape, which has resulted in a partiality for black tones in modern traditional landscape painting.

It was really reasonable that Li Keran's style of language in landscape painting, in his own words, "possesses tradition, but without any one traditional formula."

4.4 AN ATTITUDE TO LEARNING FROM TRADITION

As a result of its highly stylized language of expression as well as the consequent patterns of appreciation, traditional landscape painting in its developing history of more than one thousand years had acquired the force of a huge "net". It would be very hard for a

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[103] ibid., p.37

[104] ibid., p.162

[105] Huang Binhong described the landscape painting of the four Wangs as "white hills". *Quotations From Huang Binhong*, Wang Bomin, ed., p.26, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1978

learner to catch a glimpse of the profundities of the true essence of tradition unless he entered the "net". However, it would be exceedingly hard for one to escape once he entered the net. Fu Baoshi had confessed the headache that vexed innovators in Chinese painting, when he said:

> "If you want to paint a landscape, no matter which way you go, you are bound to face a hard and fast system; should you be discontented with things as they are, and make an effort to thrust upwards, there surely emerges something that will make you stumble and cause you to fall!"(106)

In his own case, Li Keran successfully gained useful experience in breaking into and away from tradition, especially after he formally followed the masters Qi and Huang. His two teachers were utterly opposed to each other in temperament and painting style. One of them was originally a carpenter, the other was originally a scholar; one was slow of speech, the other was a good talker; one was absolutely brief in brushwork, the other was extremely luxuriant in brushwork; one attached importance to original creation, "ashamed to hear reference to Jing and Guan", (107) the other talked frequently about the relationship of inheritance from masters, having made a close study of masters through several dynasties. However, both were able to dive into and jump out of tradition, eventually becoming great masters. Li Keran no doubt benefitted from the teachings of each, but his personal style and brushwork were, in the end, entirely different from those of his two masters. The core of his study method was "to lay stress on generalized principle, not on the minor issues of technique and device." (108).

What then was "the generalized principle" of Chinese painting? Li Keran's answer demonstrated the result of his comprehensive grasp of the spirit of the masters as well as the unique angle from which he cut into tradition. He said:

> "Art requires the solution of two problems, one is the problem of basic skill, the second is the problem of cognition" (109).

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[106] Fu Baoshi, 'Preface to the Renwu Chongqing Painting Exhibition, *Fu Baoshi's Collected Art Works*, p. 458, Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986

[107] Jing Hao (active about 9th century to the early part of 10th century), Guan Tong (dates of birth and death unkown), important painters of the Five Dynasties (A.D. 907 -- 960).

[108] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.8

[109] ibid., p.169

He summarized basic skill into two aspects -- moulding ability and the skill of brushwork [110]. For training in basic skill, his demands were quite clear, specific, strict and sequential. On the technique of brushwork which he considered to be the basic peculiarity of Chinese painting, he did some analytical work, stripping the calligraphic requirements of brushwork such as *wulouhen*, *zhechaigu* from the stylized language of the past dynasties such as the various kinds of *cun* method, abstracting the basic skill of brushwork into an exercise of one dot and one line, targeted for strength even and regular, and "every horizontal stroke, level; the vertical, straight". In order to improve Chinese painting's moulding capacity, he abandoned traditional symbols completely -- the concrete patterns of language and vocabulary -- the so-called "minor issues of skill and technique", and went so far as to absorb the experience of the shaping method of Western sketching. With the aid of the Western method, he set up a new language system for landscape painting. We can say that on this fundamental level, in the two aspects of basic skill, Li Keran strove to merge East and West as a new basic project for Chinese painting.

On the other hand, what Li Keran stressed was the "problem of cognition", that was, the project of artistic concepts which included the cognition and experience of life and art and the relationship between the two, as well as the comprehension of and accomplishments in the rich connotations of traditional culture, the purport of Chinese painting and the ideal way of expression. Li Keran insisted on using traditional views on aesthetics and painting as the core of his thoughts. For example, with regard to the term used for "landscape painting", Li Keran said:

> "Chinese painting entitled it '*shanshui*' (mountain and river) instead of 'landscape' (*fengjing*), for in our concept, rivers and mountains are tantamount to our Mother Country. What 'such great beauty as this in all our landscape' extolled was our Motherland." [111] "Rivers and mountains can provide for noble spirit and noble spirit can develop healthy atmosphere, making people become sincere." [112] "Landscape painting is not a geographical record, neither is it an atlas or diagram with explanatory notes, Chinese landscape painting and flower-and-bird painting embody the spirits of human beings, what is called 'having one's emotions aroused by

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[110] ibid.

[111] ibid., p.128

[112] ibid., p.120

the scene' (*jian jing sheng qing*) means describing scenery to express an emotion". [113]

These views showed abundantly that Li Keran's sense of landscape painting was closely linked with the cultural mentality, the ethical concepts and the artistic thoughts of Chinese tradition.

Beyond its central viewpoint, Li Keran's view of art in pursuit of expressive power was open in nature, and emphasized the communication between the various arts schools. He talked most about the strong artistic sentiments produced by the expressive power of various kinds of art. He gave examples, such as in an ancient Chinese poem the lines "The water of the Yellow River comes from the sky, flowing into the sea never to return", [114] which covered the space of the whole of China; the two lines "The people of today have not seen the moon of ancient times, but the moon of today has shone on ancient people", [115] which passed through the times of human history, showing how broad was the human mind contained in Chinese culture [116]; he mentioned the *"cun"* in the character "*shou*" written by Qi Baishi, in which the power of a hook stroke made people feel that it was possible to hang a mountain on it [117]; once you heard the singing of Cheng Yanqiu (an actor in Beijing Opera), his voice continued to vibrate in your ears for months [118]; a central scroll of landscape painting by Li Lan caused a feeling that the atmosphere of the whole room had been changed by it; the carved hands and feet by Rodin had not yet been stripped from the stone, yet their expressive power was already sufficent [119]; in *The Last Supper* by Leonardo Da Vinci all the people were sitting on one side of the dining table, which did not

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[113] ibid., pp.76-77

[114] "*huanghe zhi shui tianshang lai, benliu dai hai bu fu hui*", the two lines from (Tang) Li Bai's poem *'Jiang jin jiu'*, see *Selected Tang Poetry*, Beijing: The People's Literature Publishing House, 1978, p.145

[115] "*jinren bu jian gushi yue, jin yue cengjing zhao guren*", the two lines from (Tang) Li Bai's poem *'Ba Jiu Wen Yue'*, see *Selected Tang Poetry*, Beijing: The People's Literature Publishing House, 1978, p.180

[116] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.191

[117] ibid., p.134

[118] ibid., p.50

[119] ibid., p.143

conform to perspective, neither did it conform to conventional life, but was proper in artistic expression [120]; etc. As an artistic explorer and creator, there were innumerable cases and stories in his speeches and articles about the infinite profundity and subtlety in the world of art. The artistic expressive devices in the success of Chinese and foreign arts including painting, literature, music, drama and film had all become nutriment and inspiration for his own art. In other words, except for persisting in Chinese tradition at two levels -- the most fundamental idea and technique of brushwork as well as the most highly centralized artistic concepts, Li Keran had eliminated the barriers between all schools of arts at all times and in all lands, using all useful elements to become the supplement and reference for the specific expressive devices of Chinese painting.

Thus, what he adhered to within tradition as well as his way of "breaking in" and "breaking out" of tradition were very different from the painters of traditional schools as well as those of innovational schools. Not a single painter of any traditional school could be like him, who had, from the basic moulding language to the specific expressive device, absorbed for reference so much from Western art; neither was there a painter of any innovational school who could be like him, who had both created a set of new painting language and incorporated traditional aesthetic thoughts and the essence of calligraphic brushwork at the same time.

With relation to the focus of attention resting on understanding and on basic skill, Li Keran's attitude to learning from art stressed study and practising hard. He emphasized "Knowledge comes from study" (*xue er zhi zhi*) [121], "To know something after being perplexed" (*kun er zhi zhi*) [122], which meant to improve knowledge and accomplishment through continuous study, and to overcome difficulties through ceaseless efforts in order to grasp the essence of scholarship. That is to say, the object of study was to raise cognition, to find the right direction and path. He exhorted his students to follow the "right way"

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[120] ibid., p.126

[121] ibid., p.21

[122] ibid., p.158

(*zhengdao*), he defined the "right way" as "the way of realism -- the way having both form and spirit of the Chinese tradition -- the way to truth, goodness and beauty." (123) He said:"with a deep understanding of art, one could persist all his life in going towards a goal" (124), that was to say, one must persist in a direction and a way from beginning to end. However, he also pointed out again that "knowing something" was not equivalent to "being able to do something". Relatively speaking, "knowing something" was comparatively easy, but "being able to do something" was very difficult, one was able to "know" from studying, but to be "able", he must practise. Art required not only hard study, but also hard practice. (125) He expressed the belief that ideological concept was always a prerequisite for an artist, but without sufficient technique to express his ideological concept, it would be impossible for the artist to achieve a work which would touch people's feelings. (126) "To express consummately what you think in your mind with the brush in your hand, you must go through a long and protracted period of hard practice." (127) On the relationship between "knowing" and "being able", he held the belief that both are a ceaseless process requiring gradual improvement and advances in coordination. For example, when one was highly skilled, it could lead to formulism, thus losing creative desire. He therefore said: "A painter should have the feeling of something new about the objects quite familiar to him." (128) He said that he himself had drawn several hundred landscapes, but when faced with a new object, he still felt terrified, feeling that it would entail strenuous effort, and be very difficult. (129) He emphasized that the work of painting was a process of continuous study and research, and that the whole life of an artist was a process of study and research.(130)

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[123] ibid., p.179

[124] ibid., p.169

[125] ibid., p.140

[126] ibid., p.17

[127] ibid.

[128] ibid., p.155

[129] ibid., p.138

[130] ibid., p.39

The ideas of "painstaking study" and "painstaking practice" which Li Keran spoke of to his students again and again were precisely the theoretical basis of the "painstaking school" (*ku xue pai*) that he put forward in his later years.

In his thoughts concerning painstaking study and practice, one most outstanding characteristic was his emphasis on self-remoulding. Contrary to the general opinion that an artist should maximize favourable factors and minimize unfavourable ones, he stressed that one should "compel oneself", "control oneself" [131], "perceive one's weakness", "summarize one's shortcomings", and "pay special attention to the weak links". [132] He believed that it was dangerous to yield to one's nature, bringing one's strong points into play and forming a style prematurely: it showed that one's aspirations were not high, and though it might please the spectators, it would nevertheless appear thin and feeble. [133] He thought that "partiality" in art quality and style came from the inertia of the artist. For example, for a "strong" (*gang*) and "graceful" (*rou*) style, whereas it is not difficult to achieve either strength or grace, it is actually very hard to integrate the contradictions of the two. [134] If a picture appeared lively, it tended easily to appear frivolous, if dignified, it might appear rigid. Therefore in art, the more the problems between contradiction and unity were solved, the higher would be the achievement. [135] In the formative process of an artist's style throughout his life, he stressed "casting off one's old self when changing one's painting style". [136]

In the case of Li Keran, what we have seen was primarily such a process, one of his continuous struggle against his own weak points that he had been born with, one showing that all his life he was engaged in practising asceticism and remoulding and improving

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[131] ibid., p.159

[132] ibid., p.87, p.95

[133] ibid., p.160

[134] ibid., p.171

[135] ibid., p.168

[136] ibid., p.69

himself as well as the quality of his art. In reviewing Li's artistic experience one notices that when he was a boy learning to write in the calligraphic style of Zhao Mengfu, he was praised. Later on when his horizon broadened, he realized that "pretty" tended to produce "facile", and that simplicity and lack of adornment would be better in quality and taste, and he therefore resolutely corrected his calligraphic habits. He said: "Later on I felt disgusted with my writing, but in correcting it, it was harder than a beginner learning how to write. Whereas before I thought my brother's writing was clumsy, afterwards I thought his writing was better than mine, perhaps a bit clumsy but not facile." [137] Later on Li Keran practised writing in the style of Yan and the stele of Wei Dynasty very hard, he himself invented the "*Jiangdang* style (*ti*)", the purpose of which was to transform the "skilful" (*qiao*) into the "clumsy" (*zhuo*). Li Keran was born ingenious and elegant but at the same time admired vigorous and firm styles. This was evident in his early works. One can discover his ingenious and elegant nature in his oil paintings, *Paradise Lost* and *The Scenery of West Lake*. But the oil painting *Male Nude* and some subsequent Anti-Japanese War propaganda drawings expressed a style which was strong and thickset. However, the strong and thickset style was due more to designing than to nature. The style of his Chinese paintings in the 1940s, especially that of his figure paintings, appeared sparse and graceful, giving full play to his ingenious and elegant nature. But after he formally became the follower of Qi and Huang, his painting style experienced a radical change, beginning to make conscious efforts in pursuit of a dignified, unusual and profound style, which marked his first reform. In the 1960s, in accordance with the aesthetic ideal he selected, he made further efforts to restrain his nature, in pursuit of strict rules and the profound style, which was his second reform. Only in his later years did he open up his nature, seeking for the graceful in the profound, for the romantic in the dignified, arriving in a realm of perfect freedom in his mind.

The spirit of the great masters which touched Li Keran most was that of painstaking study, as indicated in the thoughts of Confucius that "when three people walk together,

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[137] Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.118

there's sure to be one who could be my teacher. Choose good things and follow them, take those that are not good as warnings" [138], or in Qi Baishi's belief that he was a lover of the grass script, but throughout his life, he wrote the regular script only, having walked only one-half of the journey of art [139]. Similarly, Lu Xun said he used the time others used in drinking coffee for his work [140]; Sun Zuochen practised *huqin* fingering on snowy ground during severe winter [141] and Gai Jiaotian's favourite phrase was "Considering the importance of practising the basic skills to be as heavy as Mount Tai" [142]. Someone whom Li Keran held in high esteem and used very often as a subject matter for his figure painting was Jia Dao, a poet of the Tang Dynasty, who was known for his painstaking spirit, his famous poem read: "Two lines of poetry in three years! Each time I sing, two streams of tears" (*liangju sannian de, yi yin shuang lei liu*). Among people of the same generation, he praised Huang Zhou, pointing out that Huang used up two thousand sheets of rice paper for painting in one year; Wu Guanzhong spent ten hours in a row, without resting, painting a picture [143]. Li Keran seldom talked about the natural endowment and talent of great masters, whose spirit he held in high esteem and praised time and again: "first, the way must be correct", "second, it requires painstaking work"[144].

Li Keran was certainly not a painter who happened to be in vogue. In his protracted artistic career, he had studied continuously as well as deepened his understanding of tradition; he had ceaselessly reformed and improved self-cultivation and the quality of his art, so as to get over closer to his individual aesthetic ideal. He spent his whole life in realizing the "right way" (*zhengdao*) for learning from tradition and developing art,

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[138] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.88

[139] ibid.

[140] ibid., p.22

[141] ibid., p.11

[142] ibid., p.13

[143] ibid., p.22

[144] ibid., p.11

therefore, in a sense, his art practice was primarily a process of cultivating his moral character. He was not "a talent who followed his own nature and then accomplished a kind of learning or truth" [145], like his teachers Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, but a great master and authority who "followed the correct direction and method in improving one's learning painstakingly, summarizing it further into a rigorous system" [146]. It is undeniable that the theory and practice of Li Keran's painstaking school has a particularly important significance in the art circles which had widely suffered from "a sickness of the century" of being eager for quick success and instant benefit, bred against the background of this century which had been filled with chaotic wars and political turbulence. It would indeed not be easy to cite a second example in the history of modern Chinese art, of an artist like Li Keran, who, for the pursuit of a noble ideal, has been so consistent in his direction and course, so firm in his emphasis on rational study and planning, so tough in struggling with his own weakness all his life, ultimately becoming an artist of great achievements.

4.5 THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF LI'S STYLE

A unique artistic style is manifested through unique artistic forms and techniques, language and vocabulary, and is at the same time closely linked with the artist's unique personality, inherent temperament and cultivation. Artistic technique can be imitated but it is utterly impossible to imitate an artist's inherent temperament. The discussion of this section will turn from the analysis of forms and language to one of style and aesthetic feeling, and strive a step further to search for profound cultural connotations and the significance of moral character in the special qualities of Li Keran's landscape style.

It can be said that the most spectacular characteristic of Li Keran's landscape

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[145] *Zhongyong, Tianming Zhang*,see *The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean*, Beijing: The Chinese Teaching Publishing House, 1996, p.3

[146] ibid. [TR: This now refers to *Zhongyong, Tianming*]

painting is its exceedingly enthusiastic representation of natural beauty. Approaching nature through sketching from nature, constructing a new language system supported by Western elements, all of these were no doubt aimed at the emergence of a new pattern of landscape painting richer in the sense of visual resemblance. He created a series of landscapes with clear-cut artistic conceptions in his world of art, such as the landscape of Guilin with hills like steles and water like a mirror; the image of Mount Huang with lofty peaks and clouds and mist curling up; the scenery south of Changjiang river with apricot blossom and hazy spring rain, etc. These obviously are a deviation from the tradition of recent centuries which indulged too much in interests of form and brushwork and neglected the expression of natural characteristics of landscape, and serve as a new departure from the framework of literati painting embodying a more widespread nationalism and popularization in the evolution of the traditional landscape painting style. Of his landscape paintings, an analysis can be carried out from three artistic levels.(147)

His approval of and return to natural beauty can be seen in his depictions, imbued with romantic poetic grace, of his visual impressions of the natural landscape. He stressed that the soul of art consisted of the integration of sentiment and scenery. In the "representation of nature", as the first artistic level, Li Keran's art had been prominent in his strong sentiments. However, Li's sentiments were entirely different from the aesthetic feelings of the traditional ideal such as "Abandoning common worldly likings, making an inquiry purely into the fertility of rationality" (*qi shisu zhi gong hao, qiong liqu zhi du yu*); (148) "A state of solitude, having no way out, is most worth thinking by people" (*jimo wukenaihe zhi jing, zui yi ren xiang*); (149) "The spirit of aloofness, where fame and wealth are not sought, is a realm difficult to paint" (*xiaotiao danbo, ci nan hua zhi yi*). (150) The

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[147] The idea of "there artistic levels" comes from Cai Xiaoshi of the Ming Dynasty. He described the three artistic levels of Chinese *ci* in the preface to his *The Ci written at Baishishan Fang*. Zong Baihua made an elucidation of it in his *A Stroll in Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981, pp. 63-64

[148] (Qing) Shen Zongqian, 'Jiezhou On Painting', *Pamphlets On Painting*, Yu Anlan, ed., p.346, Beijing: People's Fine Art Press, 1960

[149] (Qing), Yun Nantian, 'Nantian On Painting', *Pamphlets On Painting*, Yu Anlan, ed., p.177, Beijing: People's Fine Art Press, 1960

[150] (Song) Ouyang Xiu, *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol.2, p.9, Beijing: Zhonghua

sentimental characteristic which Li Keran lodged in these landscapes was the happiness he felt when having his body and soul thrown into nature, it reflected a satisfactory feeling of life and the feeling that was most appealing to modern people. The landscapes he painted are not the lonely wooded and hilly lands where scholars of great sanctity built their cottages for a life of seclusion, neither are they barren hills and withered trees betraying traces of the bitterness of a conquered people, but are places where modern people work and live. In the depths of the forest in a green mountain, one sees white-walled, black-tiled farmhouses, firm and solid stone bridges and indistinct paths leading to a village. There are fishing-boats and fishermen punt-poling across the lake surface, where seemed to be a crystal palace. There are tourists ascending a height to enjoy a distant view in a dreamlike world of sea of clouds of Mount Huang. As described by Li Keran, there are no desolation or loneliness, no uninhabited places, his nature is brimming with the exuberance of life, always hinting at a close and inherent link between humans and nature and between nature and life. The two lines of poems extolling the autumn which he repeatedly used as the topic of his paintings read: "Frosty leaves are redder than flowers in the second month" ([Tang] Du Mu, "*shuang ye hong yu eryue hua*") and "An autumn breeze wafts a shower of red" ([Qing] Shi Tao, "*qiu feng chui xia hong yu lai*"), best showing his sentimental characteristics. In the picture whose title is the line of Shi Tao mentioned above (pl.254), the autumn wind carries down flakes of red leaves, they are dense like rain; when moving up and down among the black twigs and branches, they appear exceptionally bright and resplendent, just like the pulsation of life. It makes people feel that it is not the bleak and chill atmosphere of autumn but an atmosphere of joy and happiness. Confronted with his artistic conceptions of landscape, what people felt is substance, self-confidence, and a keen sense of the joy of life.

On perceptual depiction, the requirements of Li Keran consisted of "abundance, abundance, and abundance again"; he went into details and a profusion of brushwork in depicting the lushness and exuberance of nature. A seal reading "subtlety in essence" (*zal*

Publishing House, 1981

jing wei) which he used very often indicated his intention in the treatment of all small parts. For example, in *The Ginkgo Tree of a Thousand Years* (1956) (pl.102), *The Summit of Lingyun Mountain* (1956) (pl.109), and *The Great Leshan Buddha* (1956) (pl.110) the portrayals of the objects are very detailed, subtle and rich in a visual sense of reality, and this has rarely been seen in traditional landscape paintings through the ages. His pursuit of the richness of nature consequently gives his style its characteristics of "depth" and "fullness".

The elaboration of his thousands of brush strokes led to profundity in brushwork, and voluminousness of objects and layers of space. The "depth" of brushwork was abstract and plane, the "depth" of mass and space was illusory and three-dimensional, the latter coming from the influence of Western painting. Any attempt to integrate the spatial sense developed on a plane of Chinese art and that of Western painting in pursuing three-dimensional illusion was a very difficult and even dangerous one. Zong Baihua had asserted that due to the "difference of world outlook" of these two kinds of art, any attempt to merge Chinese and Western painting methods in a single picture was bound to fail. [151] But Li Keran cleverly combined the essence of the two without forfeiting the "world outlook of Chinese painting". For example, in *A Stream Flowing through High Mountains and Thick Forest*,(pl.235) the water of a cataract seems to flow down from the horizon of the clouds, flow upon flow, passing distant, high mountain peaks and deep valleys, the thick forests and the dimly visible houses in the middle part of the scenery, and ultimately emptying into the stream under a stone bridge by the side of the forest in the foreground. On the one hand, the mountains and trees tend to show the mass and bulk, a sense of sculpture from Western painting, while on the other hand, one's eyes seem to be able to "move back and forth and reach anywhere between heaven and earth" *(fu yang wang huan, tian di ji ye)*, a feature which belongs entirely to the spatial consciousness of Chinese art.

To find the greatest emotional satisfaction, Li Keran gave exaggerated expressions to the landscape conceptions, which was achieved through a strong visual shock force of a

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[151] Zong Baihua, *A Stroll in Aesthetics*, p.124, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981

"filled-up style" composition. He always made his compositions cut directly into the main theme, without leaving any room, so as to allow the mountains and waters in a picture to surround spectators' sense perception and experience. Firstly, such a "fullness" is the sense of substance in vision caused by a crowded arrangement in composition, which is far different from the traditional idea of "emptiness" in composition, that "the most miraculous spot is where no brush has ever touched" *(wu hua chu jie cheng miaojing)*. [152] Li Keran's landscapes are, in the first artistic level, the visible and substantial, vivid and dramatic natural mountains and rivers.

After the artistic conception had reached the state of abundance and substance, Li Keran turned to the pursuit of restraint and simplicity. He could not tolerate something producing feeling of jumble and noise in his world of landscape. He used the ink-accumulation technique to weaken the effect of clearness, in search of a "restrained and simple" abundance. In the course of his thousands upon thousands of brush strokes, he accumulated ink, image and feeling. The abundant details of all things of nature, along with stroke upon stroke and layer upon layer of ink colour, became submerged, hazy and unfathomably deep and serene. The originally bright world darkened, the originally noisy things quietened, the originally distinct details became indistinguishable, gradually all things became one and integrated into one restrained, deep and serene kingdom. Li Keran said:

> "I like black most, black can unite with all things", and he added: "in beautiful ink and wash places, colour makes no contribution"; "a pool of ink contains the whole world". [153]

Before the Tang Dynasty, there was already talk of "the best colour of ink looks green" (*gao mo you lü*), and the colour of ink had long ago become green; there was also talk of "ink consists of five colours" *(mo fen wu se)* in the Tang Dynasty, when the world of ink colour had been a colourful world of life. The black in Li Keran's landscapes does not make spectators feel bleak, solitary, depressed or lonely, instead, it appears as a realm of

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[152] (Qing) Da Chongguang, 'On Painting', *Pamphlets On Painting*, Yu Anlan, ed., p.171, Beijing: People's Fine Art Press, 1960

[153] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.153

natural beauty in dream-like luxuriance. If we say that images painted by lines mean an expression of an over-rational, cold and still state, then the images painted by ink tend to become an expression of sentiment and warmth. The ink-accumulation method of Li Keran not only makes lines dissolve in planes, it makes the black and white relationship in traditional composition experience a thorough reverse. The layer upon layer of accumulative colouring makes the originally exposed and separate natural scenery establish contact into an integrated whole until it becomes very hard for one to clearly make out any single leaf, any single piece of rock, any single house, hilly path or any single ray of light from his painting. Li Keran firmly grasped the charm of colour black, using ink to its utmost, in search of simple, restrained and integrated landscape conceptions.

On this second artistic level which transcends an objective description, the style of Li Keran's painting shows "blackness" and "wholeness". On this level, what he emphasized was "spirit-consonance, being life-motion" (*qiyun shengdong*), [154] or with ink charm in searching of "spirit resonance" (*shenyun*) [155]. His world of blackness does not signify deathly stillness, its aim is to unify the limitless concrete creatures of nature into a dusky muddled state and transform them into a thriving universe where there is life-motion. In his paintings, the few bright spots which contrast with the black show most active vitality. These bright spots may be the setting sun on the tips of a forest; the lustre of backlighting on a chain of mountains; waterfalls that flow very fast; the jumping bright spots in a little creek; reflections in water; the white walls of farmhouses, or mountain paths. Their appearance is like the lustre of the stars in the sky of a dark night, being lively and lovely.

Li Keran said,

> "Black is to exhibit brightness", "the clear place exhibits the most interesting parts, the veiled place is for exhibiting richness, images that are just distinct and not veiled are not connotative, whereas those that are just veiled and indistinct are weak and powerless." [156]

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[154] ibid., p.182. The English translation of *qiyun shengdong* here is according to sullivan's traslation: "spirit-consonance, which is life-motion", see Michael Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, Berkeley, 1959, p.32

[155] The English translation of *shenyun* here is according to Susan Bush, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting, Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)*, Glossary and Chinese Terms, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p.353

[156] *Li Keran on Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.153, 143

In the contrast and the unity between the bright and the dark, the distinct and the veiled, the rich and the simple, Li Keran transmitted the active life stored in the world of nature. On this artistic level, between the concrete and the abstract, Li Keran's art had been prominent in spirit-consonance.

The final and also the supreme artistic level of Chinese art is an enlightenment of spirit and mind, an expression of philosophy and moral quality.

The "depth" and the "fullness" of Li Keran's landscape style bring about richness and substance in visual impression, again the impression is transformed through the "blackness" and the "wholeness" of the style into feelings of restraint and simplicity that suggest the universe in life-motion. In attaining unity between abundance and simplicity, richness and restraint in vision and mind, the sense of beauty conveyed by the artistic conceptions of Li Keran's landscape is tranquillity and abstraction. As Zong Baihua once said, "tranquillity" (*jing*), as an aesthetic concept, means the moment when the mind is free of worries, "abstraction" (*xu*), as an aesthetic concept, means the space where thoughts and inspiration come and go.[157] Only in a "tranquil and abstract" (*jingxu*) artistic conception can a visual landscape image be raised into an abstract awareness, mental state and imagination; only then can it attain "greatness" of artistic conception on the level of spirit and mind.

"Greatness" (*da*) is the final concept of the 'Five-word Rhymed Formula' which Li Keran put forward as a standard for appraising landscape painting.

> He said: "'Greatness' means 'magnificent and broadminded' (the greatness of spiritual connotation) ... This is determined by elements in the cultivation and character of the painter himself."[158]

In the discussion of the special features of the various aspects of the social and the philosophical, the traditional and the Western, the individual and the general contained within the spiritual connotation of Li Keran's landscape style, we can approach this question from a convenient channel, that is, by analyzing the two definitions he gave of the functions

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[157] Zong Baihua, *Stroll in Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1981, p.24

[158] *Li Keran on Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.183

of landscape painting in different periods.

"To create monuments to the mountains and rivers of our motherland" was the spiritual programme put forward by Li Keran in the fifties for reforming traditional landscape painting. Doubtless, this was a slogan of utilitarianism with a strong and pronounced flavour of the times. But it reflected an aspect of the quality of Li Keran's landscape style. This slogan put stress on the socially and politically utilitarian significance of landscape painting, suggesting at the same time the patterned characteristic of new landscape painting. It can be said that this embodied also Li's understanding of the "sense of reality" which he put forward in his task "to turn the traditional essence into the sense of reality".

From an historical point of view, in Chinese academic development in the twentieth century, it has been a common phenomenon to link academic undertakings with the great cause of saving and vitalizing the nation. Depending on their social and political utility academic undertakings pursued rights of existence and development of their own. Similarly, consciously attaching to personal academic practices the sense of a historical mission to save and vitalize the nation has been a common moral quality of intellectuals of several generations since the May Fourth Movement.

Li's insistence on the political and social significance of landscape painting suggested it as a spiritual symbol of the nation and the country. No doubt it encouraged Chinese landscape painting very much when it was suffering a bitter attack and was at its lowest ebb at the beginning of the 1950s. For Li Keran himself, who was a member of the mainstream of the new China's literary and art circles, had eight years experience in the movement of resistance to Japan and national salvation, and had also, in his early years, been baptized by the new learning and the May Fourth ideological trends, it seemed quite natural that his personal artistic aspiration was stamped with the distinctive sense of historic mission of the times.

Under such a spiritual programme, "to create monuments to the mountains and rivers of our motherland", his landscape painting became not only an individual expression, but also gave expression to the sentiments of the nation as a whole; no more the "spiritual

oasis" of the literati, but a "spiritual monument" of the masses. The distinctive features of his landscape painting, rich in natural beauty and the sense of visual resemblance, were also the general character of the times. Here, the significance of the transformation of the function and distinguishing features of traditional landscape painting resembled his appraisal of Qi Baishi's art, when he said

> "For the establishment of new Chinese painting, it has played a role in the opening up of a broad, straight and even road".(159)

However, Li Keran's landscape style differed from the art of superficial political utilitarianism prevalent in the 1950s and the 1960s in containing at the same time richer and deeper spiritual connotations, including personal charm as well as deep inherent links with the most general aesthetic thoughts of everlasting value in traditional art. To elucidate the content of this aspect, we may make an analysis of another definition of the function of landscape painting made by Li Keran in the 1980s.

"Clear up one's mind and observe the Tao" (*cheng huai guan dao*) was a new explanation of the function of landscape painting borrowed by Li Keran from the sayings of Zong Bing of the Southern Dynasties. However, this did not mean that it was a revision of his previous creative direction but a supplement to his past theoretical explanation. Working from this definition, one may perceive another aspect of the quality of Li Keran's landscape style.

As a general concept of the traditional aesthetic, "clear up one's mind" means that an artist, when facing nature, should get rid of distraction and become broad-minded and clear; "observing the Tao" means that in observing nature, one should be able to comprehend the law of the universe and nature and have tacit understanding of it. According to the Chinese philosophy of *tian ren heyi*, the natural world and the human world as well as the world of learning are in perfect harmony. When one has a tacit understanding with nature, he will have a tacit understanding of life as well as the basic principle of learning. When Mind (*xinyuan*, the subjectivity of artists) and Nature (*zaohua*, objective laws) coordinate by tacit agreement, one will be able to make use of a limited life,

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[159] ibid., p.62

a limited picturesque scene in realizing and exhibiting the unlimited natural "Way" (the law of nature).(160) Therefore, the proposition "Clear up one's mind and observe the Tao" reveals that the profound significance of Chinese traditional landscape painting lies, on the one hand, in examination of oneself, and is a continuous process of self-examination and self-cultivation for a painter. In the process of continuously approaching nature and appreciating the "Way" of the universe, it is necessary that a painter should continuously carry on purifying his moral quality; to use the words of Li Keran, "Rivers and mountains are able to cultivate a noble spirit and sentiments",(161) i.e. "clear up one's mind". On the other hand, the ultimate significance of Chinese traditional landscape painting lies in searching for the essence of nature and of human life. As Li Keran put it, it means "the discovery of nature" and "the discovery of oneself", (162) i.e. "observing the Tao".

The traditional aesthetic idea of "Clear up one's mind and observe the Tao" was elaborated in three respects in Li Keran's speeches and articles.

First, as regards the way of life, a piece of calligraphy which Li Keran often wrote reads: "Show high ideals by simple living, keep tranquil for higher aspirations" (*danbo ming zhi, ningjing zhi yuan*). This revealed his attitude to life and showed he was willing to lead a lonely and frugal life without the desire for fame and gain, concentrating his efforts on artistic creations in order to achieve the steady development of his art. In other words, on the one hand, with regard to the temptations and disturbances that come from society, he advocated simple living and "tolerance" (*huajie*), he said:

> "one should try to tolerate unsatisfactory matters. 'The sea contains a hundred rivers, it's big because of its tolerance' (*hai rong bai chuan, you rong nai da*); 'Beam with joy and laugh, laugh at all the laughable people in the world' (*kai yan bian xiao, xiao shishang kexiao zhi ren*) means tolerance." (163)

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[160] Li Keran's *"dao"* consisted of at least three meanings: 1) Generally referring to the Universe itself and to its origin, according to Zhuang Zhi, the *"dao"* possesses "the most supreme and absolute beauty that exists objectively"; 2) As an intrinsic content of learning; 3) the path and method of pursuing and acquiring art (Refer to *A Study of Li Keran* by Sun Meilan, p.110, Published by Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991).

[161] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.120

[162] ibid.

[163] Beijing: *Art*, 1990/3, p.9

On the other hand, with regard to the question of art, he advocated the necessity of principle and a sense of historical mission. His calligraphic scroll bearing the words "cherishing lofty aspirations, not afraid of immediate difficulties" *(xiong huai yuan zhi, bu wei jin nan)*; and "A strong wind is unable to move the moon in the sky" (*ba feng chui bu dong tianbian yue*), showed his uncompromising stand in his artistic ideals.

Second, with regard to the approach in academic pursuits, he advocated the devotion of one's mind to a single academic direction, believing that "only with a high level of understanding can one persist all his life in an endless undertaking"; [164] he advocated a continuous summing up of one's own shortcomings, overcoming weaknesses and learning and practising painstakingly.

Third, in the process of observing nature and creating, he advocated that one should keep calm and tranquil. When painting, "one should throw in all his vitality, spare no effort, with energy highly concentrated." [165] When one's artistic craftsmanship reaches the sublime, "he will be able to create like God, his work will be as wonderful as creations of nature." [166]

The artistic conception of Li Keran's landscapes conveys a very deep stillness. In his pictures, not only hills are still, mountain villages are quiet, even lofty waterfalls exhibit a quality of stillness. Without this stillness it would be like many new Chinese paintings, appearing gorgeous, full of distracting thoughts. Passing through this stillness, the artistic conception reaches the highest border of traditional aesthetics, "blandness and naturalness" (*pingdan tianzhen*). At the same time due to this stillness coming from the beauty of richness and profundity, it is not deathly stillness, but brims with many-sided contradictory movements and activities of life. His landscapes, under the influence of both Chinese and Western art styles, exhibit a double-sided cultural connotation. His "blackness" creates the visual sensation which comes from the form and colour of the material world often seen in

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[164] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art's Press, 1990, p.169

[165] ibid., p.137

[166] ibid., p.161

Western painting, while it is a sublimation into a realm of "returning to blandness from utmost splendour" (Su Shi, *"xuanlan zhi ji guiyu pingdan"*); his "fullness" manifests the spatial consciousness of modern Western painting, while it pertains to the traditional oriental realm of searching for the post-substantial free and natural, and for turning the real into the abstract; his "depth" is imbued with the Western scientific spirit in expressing the visual reality of three-dimensional space, while it returns again to the spatial sense of Chinese art, travelling freely back and forth between heaven and earth, seeing the unlimited space in the limited; his "wholeness" bears the Western sculptural and architectural aesthetic sense, while by his thousands upon thousands of strokes remaining as simple as one stroke it embodies the Chinese philosophical thought "things may change time and again, yet stay much the same" ("*wanhua guiyi*"). He pursued the contradiction and unity of aesthetic feelings in his painting style, having achieved the unity of vigour with elegance; the unity of rectitude with flexibility; the unity of vastness with subtlety; the unity of the traditional aesthetic view with the aesthetic sense of Western art. Among these the most important point was the realization of transforming substance into abstraction, realizing the unity of "abundance is beauty" (Meng Zi, *"chongshi zhi wei mei"*)[167] with "Various kinds of the beautiful are inferior to the quietly elegant" (Zhuang Zi,"*danran wuji er zhong mei cong zhi*"). [168] It was precisely owing to such a richness of spiritual content that the artistic realm finally enlightened by Li Keran's landscape painting was "greatness" -- a thorough spiritual understanding, purification and enjoyment.

Li Keran was an artist, not a philosopher, and the greatness of the spiritual connotations of his works does not come from any analogy, symbolism, theoretical elucidation or any hint of social or political content. His landscape painting does not have the metaphor of the life agony of Ba Da's style, neither does it have the suffering and the literati's aloofness from politics and material pursuits of Fu Baoshi's style; his picturesque scene is mild and appealing, it suits both refined and popular tastes, it shows a glow of

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[167] *Meng Zi, 'Jinxin Zhang Ju Xia', Selection of Historic materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol.1, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981, p.23

[168] *Zhuang Zi, Keyi*, Wang Fuzhi, *Zhuang Zi Jie*, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1964, p.133

happiness, yet turns thoughts to the far distance, it is socially experienced, but also unconventional; it is visually realistic while being ideal and romantic; its spirit-consonance is life motion, while full of tranquillity; it presses close to nature, yet transcends nature; it is merged with the expressive elements and aesthetic sentiments of Western painting, yet is deeply rooted in traditional cultural mentality and artistic spirit. In a sense, his artistic style is also his self-portrait, a fitting expression of his individual character, from which we see the charm of a gentle and kind man who was intelligent, fond of learning, assiduous, serene, humorous, tolerant, reserved, persevering, a man with deep thoughts but who would not go to extremes, with ardent sentiments yet gentle and sincere. Therefore, in the final and also the supreme artistic level, Li Keran's art triumphs in spirit and personality.

CHAPTER 5: LI KERAN'S ART IN RELATION TO TRADITION

The original artistic achievement of Li Keran stemmed from his proper integration and solution of the problems of art itself and the problems created by the times. On solving the problems of art alone, how did his creative work exist in the context of the development of art itself? What concrete and close links were there between his unique style and tradition? This chapter attempts to proceed from traditional aesthetic categories such as "elegance and vulgarity", "likeness and unlikeness", "brushwork" as well as "depth", "fullness", "blackness", "lightness" and "wholeness", to probe his art in relation to tradition. Such a relationship will prove that his original style came chiefly from tradition and that most of the problems solved by him existed long ago in traditional art itself.

5.1 ELEGANCE AND VULGARITY

Elegance and vulgarity are an important pair of categories that influenced the development of Chinese painting over a long period. They are the standard of aesthetic judgement that determines the relative superiority or inferiority of taste and quality. However, its connotation is not unalterable. The sense of elegance and vulgarity of Chinese painting in the 20th century has a brand new connotation, and is linked to trends in modern culture. But in the sphere of modern *traditional* Chinese painting, the new concept of elegance and vulgarity comes primarily from the evolution of tradition.

Li Keran's landscape style marked the accomplishment of the traditional landscape's transition from a classical pattern to a modern one, the basic characteristics of which could be found in the change of aesthetic concept, that is, a change from the "unearthly refinement" of the ancient literati into the bright, cheerful and energetic "vulgarity" of the masses. The birth of this new aesthetic interest of course had a social, political and

ideological foundation, as well as stemming from the painter's individual nature. However, if viewed from the angle of artistic tradition, there exists a more direct inner source.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Li Keran wrote many articles introducing and studying Qi Baishi which distinctly brought up the aesthetic question of "artistic work that suits both refined and popular tastes" (*ya su gong shang*). It could be said that this idea grasped the key to Qi Baishi's artistic spirit.

Li Keran had perceived from Qi's art:

> "In Chinese painting, painting with ink and brush is appropriate in drawing from life, and glamorous colour can be applied too, so it is possible to exhibit cheerful emotion; moreover, such paintings possess considerable high-level power of expression."(1)

Qi Baishi not only shook off the orthodoxy of the imitative style of the four Wangs but also rectified the inclination towards a sketchy neglect of semblance and the cold, insipid, desolate atmosphere of the unorthodox literati painting.

> "His works not only possess the healthy simple emotions of the modern people but at the same time contain a unique individual style and depth of tradition."(2) "He tried his utmost to knead together the simple healthy sentiments of the masses with classical artistic craftsmanship. On the one hand, he endeavoured to meet the demands of the masses; on the other hand, he promoted their demands to a higher level".(3) "He unified the contradictory elements of the elegance of classical paintings and the vulgarity of the folk arts, the concrete form and the spirit or mental state, and ideological content and artistic quality. Most important of all was his effort to shorten the distance that had long existed between the ancient artistic tradition and the life of the people, together with their ideology and sentiments."(4)

The successful experience of Qi Baishi showed Li Keran and greatly encouraged him in realizing that the high technology of classical art is capable of expressing the ideological sentiments of the modern people. The demand for semblance can be unified with spiritual factors that are to be found in traditional classical paintings. The interest of playing with brush and ink can be unified with the demand for realism. Profound tradition can be unified with the individual style of creativeness (pls.375-378). Li stated that the art of Qi

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[1] *Li Keran On Art*, p.62, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990

[2] ibid.

[3] ibid., p.70

[4] ibid.

Baishi had

> "a broadening and smoothing action" on the path of establishing a new form of Chinese painting.(5)

As regards his personal chosen subject, "how to convert the traditional essence into a feeling of reality"(6), he had discerned the way out from the examples set by Qi Baishi. It can be said that the new aesthetic inclination expressed in Li Keran's landscapes came directly from the influence of Qi Baishi's art.

Tracing back from Qi Baishi, one can also see the background of deeper traditional evolution which influenced the art of both Qi Baishi and Li Keran.

During the Qing Dynasty in the 18th century, the development of textual research and the continued excavation and rediscovery of many pre-Tang steles promoted the interest of the people in the study of ancient steles. The study of ancient steles *(beixue)* required a specialized knowledge of the origin, times and content of the steles as well as an ability to distinguish the authenticity or forgery of stone rubbings and trace the evolution of the Chinese written language. Due to the richness of calligraphic styles, including those prior to the Tang Dynasty, such as the various kinds of seal characters *(zhuan)* before the Qin Dynasty, the official scripts (*li*) of the Qin and Han as well as the cursive hand styles of *zhuan* and *li*, such a rediscovery of ancient original steles had posed a challenge to the dominant position of the *tie* style in the calligraphers' circle. The *tie* school chiefly means the calligraphic tradition of regular script *(kaishu)* and semi-cursive script (*xingshu*) since the two Wangs of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (Wang Xizhi, 303-361, Wang Xianzhi, 344-386) and the Tang Dynasty, which were looked upon as models by calligraphers in times before the 18th century. Up to the 18th century the calligraphers' circle was dominated by the styles of Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) and Dong Qichang (1555-1636) because of the partiality of Emperor Kang Xi (1662-1722) and Emperor Qian Long (1738-1795) for their calligraphic style. The "orthodox" *tie* style and the calligraphic styles of Zhao and Dong were characterized by their dignity, elegance and dexterity (pls.379,380). The calligraphic

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[5] ibid., p.62

[6] Li Keran, 'Recalling', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.4, p.16

style of the steles *(bei)*, however, due to the dissimilarities of characters which were chiselled from those formed by a writing brush, had led to a new fashion of roughness, clumsiness and vigour which was in striking contrast to that of the *tie* School. The calligrapher of the *Bei* School, Deng Shiru (1743-1805) modelled himself after the steles of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, using the *li* method to write *zhuan* characters. He had the spirit of initiating reforms in the calligraphic styles of *zhuan*, *li*, *kai* and *cao* (pls.381,382). The well-known scholar Ruan Yuan (1764-1849) was the first person who brought up the difference between *bei* and *tie*, he himself being an admirer of the *bei* style. After him, Bao Shenbo (1775-1855), a student of Deng Shiru, wrote *The Double Oars of the Boat of Art* (*Yi Zhou Shuangji*), further advocating the study of the calligraphic styles of steles of the Northern and Southern Dynasties. Kang Youwei completed his *The Double Oars of the Boat of Arts* (*Guang Yi Zhou Shuangji*) in 1889, putting forward a more drastic calligraphic theory which honoured *bei* and belittled *tie*, setting up the forcefulness, vigour, density and eccentricity of the steles of the Northern and Southern Dynasties as a new standard of aesthetic judgement (pl.383).[7]

The upsurge in the study of steles not only accelerated the reform of calligraphic style, it was also a shock to the orthodox aesthetic conceptions in painting. The fashions of the orthodox Qing Dynasty's flower -bird painting, elegant like that of Yun Nantian's (1633-1690) school; dexterous and gaudy like that of Zou Yigui's (1686-1772) school; clever like that of Hua Xinluo's (1682-1756) school, all basically belonged to the style of grace and beauty. However, 18th century "unorthodox" Yangzhou painters, like Jin Nong (1687-1763) and Zheng Banqiao (1693-1765) had begun to merge the calligraphic style of the *Bei* School into painting, which exhibited the taste of the grotesque, childish and clumsy, turning from the "refined" to the new aesthetic characteristic of the "vulgar", and thus formed a new vanguard in contemporary flower-bird painting. In the 19th century, Zhao Zhiqian (1829-1884) centred his mind on Northern Dynasty steles, using the calligraphic brushwork of the *Bei* School in painting, in pursuit of a strong painting style,

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[7] See Wan Qingli, 'Li Keran's Thoughts On Art and Painting Style', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.43, p.26

thus moving from elegance into magnificence (pls.384,385). Meanwhile, because he himself was at the same time a scholar, poet, calligrapher and master of seal cutting, he enabled the literati painting tradition characterized by the Three Perfections -- poetry, calligraphy and painting -- which dated from the Song Dynasty, to develop into a new combination of Four Perfections -- poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal-cutting. Consequently he succeeded in setting up the Calligraphic School. After Zhao, Wu Changshuo (1844-1927) proved better in all respects in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal-cutting and subsequently became the master of the Calligraphic School (pls.386, 387). His style in flower-bird painting appeared heavy and forceful, grand and magnificent, banishing the gentle and gaudy style of art circles at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and enabled the concepts of "elegance" and "vulgarity" to change and develop further. Qi Baishi then further developed the achievements of Wu Changshuo and blended the essence of folk arts into literati accomplishments, becoming not only a traditional master but the foremost "people's artist" of the 20th century. Under the influence of the Calligraphic School, a number of flower and bird painters, like Chen Shizheng (1876-1923), Pan Tianshou (1897-1971), Qian Shoutie (1897-1967), Wang Geyi(1897-1988), Lai Chusheng (1902-1975), Zhu Yuesan (1902-1983) and Li Kuchan (1899-1983) all became the successors of the Calligraphic School.

As an erudite scholar in art history, Huang Binhong held in high esteem the tradition of the Calligraphic School. He criticized the "dry and hard" style of painting in the Ming Dynasty as well as the "soft and extravagant" style of the Qing Dynasty, holding the belief that "painting has been invigorated since the reign-periods of Dao and Xian." (8) He said:

> "Since the reigns of Dao and Xian (Daoguang: 1821-1850; Xianfeng: 1851-1861) the discovery of the lore of bronze and scripts has widened our vision. Much interest and enjoyment in brushwork has been aroused. Calligraphy and painting as a speciality is a very well rooted field of study ... "(9)

Such an appreciation by Huang Binhong of the Calligraphic School as an innovation in the modern history of painting was regarded by art historians as a "very abnormal

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[8] See Wang Bomin, *Huang Binhong*, Shanghai, Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1979, p.41

[9] ibid.

viewpoint" until the end of the 1970s.(10)

In a postscript on Li Keran's picture *Resting the Ox While Harrowing Grass*, Qi Baishi also expressed his personal view on modern art history and the Calligraphic School. He commented,

> "In Chinese painting, the rising generation that could surpass its predecessors was in the Qian-Jia period (Qianlong -- Jiaqing: 1736-1820), thereafter little was known of such master painters; in the Tong-Guang period (Tongzhi -- Guangxu: 1862-1908) there was only one master painter, who was Zhao Huishu (Zhao Zhiqian). Later on, there was only Wu Foulu (Wu Changshuo)."(11)

In the postscript, Qi Baishi first eulogized the achievements of the unorthodox Yangzhou Painting School during the period of Qianlong and Jiaqing, saying that it surpassed the ancients; second, he held the belief that Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshuo's art had reached another high point in modern art history. This postscript at the same time indicated his own heritage and origin in art. Finally, Qi went to write,

> "After Wu passed away over twenty years ago, painters were as numerous as fish scales, but only Keran was able to succeed Wu Foulu. As I have viewed many paintings by Li Keran, I am now saying what I think (about him). 87-year-old Qi Baishi."(12)

The few lines towards the end indicated that Qi had not only praised Li Keran's ability, he also clearly affirmed that Li Keran was the successor of the Calligraphic School.

It was directly under the influence of Qi Baishi that Li Keran continued the traditions of the *Bei* School and the Calligraphic School. His artistic style proved that he successfully introduced the new aesthetic tastes -- clumsiness and forcefulness, which earlier appeared in flower-bird painting, into landscape for the first time.(13)

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[10] ibid.

[11] 'The Chronicle of Li Keran', *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.223

[12] ibid.

[13] See Wan Qingli, 'Li Keran's Thoughts On Art and Painting Style', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No.43, p.38

5.2 LIKENESS AND UNLIKENESS

The question of "likeness and unlikeness" is closely linked with the question of "elegance and vulgarity". Even from its very beginning, Chinese painting had been imaginary, symbolic and rational, had never once reached the visual "likeness" that was appearing in Western painting, and had never attained the "unlikeness" of absolute abstraction. But along the lengthening path in the transformation of style, there continued to persist a discussion on "likeness and unlikeness", which is in reality a relationship between form and spirit, subject and object, natural and artistic beauty. Professional painters during the Tang and Song dynasties, and before, paid attention to semblance, emphasizing "representative beauty" in the unification of the subject and object; whereas the literati painters during the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties paid more attention to personal character, cultivation and knowledge, and were interested in the brushwork, the "implication of antiquity" and formalism. As a result of the cultivation of personality the notion of "elegance" had gradually shifted from the "unification of form and spirit" in vision to the "intrinsic beauty" in refined brushwork. A passage written by Dong Qichang says:

> "Considering the marvellousness and fantasy of nature, painting is inferior to the real landscape; but considering wonderful brushwork, painting far excels the landscape".(14)

This was the first time that brushwork had been seen separately as a main aesthetic standard. Fang Shishu (1692-1751) had once said,

> "Hills and rivers, grass and trees are all the creation of nature, they are all existing landscapes. To create a landscape through mere imagination and then manipulation by the hand is to produce a virtual one. Thus the landscapes becoming real depends entirely on the wielding of the brush, --- therefore the ancients, with their brushwork, could create a miraculous landscape apart from earth and heaven."(15)

It could be said that Fang had truly voiced the essence of Chinese landscape painting. Wang Yuanqi had pointed out that to settle a landscape

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[14] See *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol II. Beijing, Zhonghua Book Store, 1980, p. 148

[15] See Guo Yin, *Manuscript of the Aesthetic History of Chinese Painting*, Beijing, The People's Fine Art Press, 1981, p.354

"we should first decide atmosphere (*qishi*), then composition (*jianjia*), next decide on sparseness and denseness (*shumi*), and finally thickness and thinness (*nongdan*)."[16]

This was no less than to place on landscape painting the demand for the abstract beauty required by calligraphy.

In reforming Chinese painting, Li Keran insisted on concepts of Chinese traditional landscape different from those of the West, and on the exquisiteness of brushwork demanded by traditional painting. Hence, he firmly grasped the essence of Chinese landscape painting, and therefore his reforms did not go beyond its macrosystem.

However, in the context of the upheavals which have shaken China over the past century, Chinese landscape paintings really appear "too old", "too quiet" and "too cold". When viewing the traditional landscape with the object of building a stronger country and pursuing material progress, and taking the object-sketching (realism) of Western painting as a reference, people naturally considered literati painting, which sought only for a release in spirit but not for likeness in form, as an important problem in the reformation of Chinese painting. Must Chinese painting have a "likeness" ? Was it or was it not able to reflect practical life? Fu Baoshi, who had made an attempt at reformation in the 1940s, had expressed his deep worries over the issue. He doubted very much the practicability of reforming Chinese painting through "sketching from nature", and worried that over-likeness would become an onerous burden on Chinese "lines" and "ink", and would be detrimental to Chinese painting. In the face of the "dilemma of Chinese painting", Li Keran was greatly inspired and enlightened by Qi Baishi's art. He perceived that Qi Baishi's art attained the unification of "likeness" with brushwork and with highly spiritual elements. For example, the prawns drawn by Qi Baishi were as transparent as if they were in water, their volume, texture, motion and spirit were not in any way lacking, reaching the sphere of "likeness" in vision. Meanwhile, every stroke, every line was rich in the abstract beauty of calligraphy, satisfying the demand of enjoyment by both the refined and the common people. Hence, Li drew the conclusion that "Ink and wash painting can be lifelike". He acutely discovered Qi Baishi's inscription which says, "the wonder is between likeness and unlikeness", and was

[16] See Yu Anlan, *The Collection of Painting Theories*, Beijing, The People's Fine Arts Press,1960, p.206

the first to propagate it, thus enabling it to become Qi Baishi's most influential painting theory. Later, he proposed the principle of "uniformity of form with brushwork" for his own landscape creating. He said,

> "The interest of brushwork should be sought after upon the base of accuracy and solidity of representing objects."(17) "The trace of the brushwork should be closely linked with the form of nature, the trace of the brushwork should transform into the scene of nature".(18)

Li Keran had successfully applied the brushwork of "*wulouhen*", "*zhechaigu*" and the ink accumulation method in portraying illusions of lofty hills and woods bathed in the setting sun, in waterfalls rushing down, in reflections in lakes, etc.

Sketching from nature is the basic method of approaching "likeness". In the early 1950s, Li Keran published articles intentionally recommending the sketching experience and the spirit of seeking truth of the old man Qi Baishi. Evidently he wanted to blaze a path to realize the aim of reforming Chinese painting by sketching. Prior to the introduction of the Western sketching method into China, some Chinese landscape painters also attached importance to sketching. For example, in his *Book on Brushwork*, Jing Hao of the Five Dynasties had written that deep in the recesses of the Taihang mountains, there were innumerable ancient pines with an excellent landscape which greatly surprised him. So he took up brush and paper to make sketches. In the Ming Dynasty, after touring through the Mount Hua, Wang Lu had finished his renowned *Pictures of Mount Hua* and declared,

> "Meaning lies in form. Without a form how can you display your meaning?"(19)

There was also a famous saying by Shi Tao of the Qing Dynasty, "To draft after visiting every miraculous hill"(20). However, generally speaking, the traditional sketching method could only draw a general outline, without wrinkling and rubbing, without doing painting on the spot. Huang Binhong's explanation of Shi Tao's saying is:" What we look for in lofty peaks is the comprehension of truth". The landscape sketches by Qi Baishi were

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[17] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.135

[18] ibid.,p.44

[19] *Chinese Encyclopedia*, the vol. of Fine Arts, Beijing, The Chinese Encyclopedia Press, 1991, p. 835

[20] Shi Tao, *Monk Kugua On Art*, see Yu Anlan ed., *Serial Pamphlets On Painting*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.151

not sketching from nature, but a study into and a grasp of objects (pls.388, 389). One can find notes written across the sketches of both Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong (pls.390, 391), which are to assist the painters to recapture the feelings and sensations of the time when they want to recreate pictures. Li Keran's method of sketching differed from his seniors in that he finished his sketches or paintings outdoors, including those which were studies of an object's features and those created in front of scenery. Although his method of sketching entirely differed from tradition, it was definitely not a Western style. He considered that the methods of observation and expression in sketching should agree with the Chinese attitude to nature. It should observe from multiple angles and positions, should not be confined to a single point nor to a bird's eye view. A painter should choose the best angle so as to fully view the entire landscape, and so that there is the possibility of linking up either up and down, or left and right, or the front and the rear, thus providing an all-round survey of the object to be sketched. This makes us think of the earliest observation style in Chinese landscape painting which was "meandering about in the scenery, keeping a moving sight of it"[21] ("*shen suo panhuan, mu suo choumou*", quotation from Zong Bing of the Southern Dynasties) -- i.e. vision is variable and twisting; "a landscape of hundreds of *li* can be kept within a square foot of drawing paper"[22] ("*zhichi zhi tu, xie bai qian li zhi jing*", quotation from Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty) -- i.e. the field of vision can be stretched as far as the entire landscape; "free either to lift up or to bend down, with one's spirit soaring up to heaven" [23] ("*fu yang zi de, you xin tai xuan*", Ji Kang of the Jin Dynasty) -- i.e. a survey of a limitless expanse within a limited space, but coming back from the limitless to the limited. In sketching, Li Keran seized the most lively, rich and fresh impression of nature, but his landscape conception is obviously not limited within the sphere of his vision, his spatial consciousness was traditionally Chinese.

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[21] [Southern Dynasties] Zong Bing, see *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981, vol.I, p.177

[22] [Tang Dynasty] Wang Wei, ibid., p.269

[23] [Jin Dynasty] Ji Kang, see Zong Baihua, *A Stroll in Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai people's Publishing House, 1981, p.82

Li Keran considered that "artistic conception is the soul of landscape painting", and "artistic conception is the union of passion and scenery". Such an idea is obviously a return to the tradition of the Tang and Song Dynasties when the emphasis was on painting natural features and on similarity to the object, stressing the unity of subject and object. The only difference was that Li wanted "a conception showing spirit of the new times"[24].

Although sketching from nature had a particular and significant meaning to Li Keran, enabling him to make a successful breakthrough in reforms, his view on the meaning of sketching agreed with that of Qi Baishi. He considered the highest realm of creation in Chinese painting is the perfect freedom of the mind, when heaven and man merge into one (*tian ren he yi*), and "the universe is within one's grasp"[25] -- the transcendent realm (*huajing*). In the opinion of Li Keran this did not in any way mean that Chinese painters could paint something from nothing, or subjectively paint anything from mere imagination, but meant rather that, in conformity with the comprehension of the Chinese painter, only

> "through incessant observation and practice for a long time, to come to know the object in an all-round way, can one reach a stage where one can truly proceed to carry on creative work."[26] Li also wrote that "An elite traditional painter would consider studying life and getting acquainted with life to be a very important part of self-cultivation; as he proceeds formally to work as an artist, he has already passed the phase of getting acquainted with life."[27]

Li Keran regarded sketching from nature as a basis for one's artistic activities, and of getting acquainted with life in one's artistic career. Only after this can a painter enter the path of creative work. Taking Qi Baishi as an example, Li Keran said,

> "Only at the age of over fifty, did master Qi Baishi come to settle down in Beiping. He had been in the country for almost half a century ... Between the ages of forty and fifty he went on tour five times, travelling over nearly half of China, thus widening his eyes and broadening his mind. In this way, he laid a strong real-life foundation for his future career in art".[28]

Following the experience of Qi Baishi, Li Keran arranged his long-distance

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[24] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.98

[25] Dong Qichang, *Hua Zhi, Serial Pamphlets On Painting*, ed. by Yu Anlan, Beijing, The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.79

[26] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.88

[27] ibid.,pp. 67-68

[28] ibid., p.68

sketching trips through the country for ten long years . After such outdoor sketching activities Li would enter his studio and reform his artistic style incessantly. Only in his later years did he relax himself and enter into the stage of freedom. Although the sketching system set up by Li Keran made a big historic step forward in representing real life and visual resemblances to nature, his basic understanding of sketching is still traditional.

5.3 BRUSHWORK

One of the imperishable values of traditional Chinese painting is the interest aroused by calligraphic brushwork. People have been demanding brushwork. It may be said that this demand for brushwork has been in existence ever since the birth of landscape painting. As early as in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Xie He advocated the way of wielding the brush correctly, i.e. the so-called "bone-means" (*gu fa yong bi*) as the second article of his Six Principles *(liu fa)* [29]. Zhang Yanyuan of the Tang Dynasty stated that "Calligraphy and painting differed in name but not in essence" (*shu hua yi ming er tong ti*); "The spirit and form of pictures are based upon the painter's purpose and are fully expressed through brushwork" (*guqi xingsi jie benyu liyi er guihu yongbi*).[30] Zhao Mengfu of the Yuan Dynasty wrote: "The method of painting rocks is like the *feibai* method in calligraphy, while painting woods is like writing seal characters; in sketching bamboo one should first acquire perfectly the eight rules of calligraphy" (*shi ru feibai mu ru zhou, xie zhu hai ying bafa tong*).[31] Dong Qichang of the Ming Dynasty proposed his viewpoint of "Considering the wonderful brushwork, the painting far excels the landscape" (*yi bimo zhi jingmiao lun ze shanshui bu ru hua*), which greatly reinforced the aesthetic value of

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[29] see *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981, vol.I, p.190

[30] ibid., p.307, p.308

[31] Zhao Mengfu, an inscription on the *Picture of Inky Bamboo* by Ke Jiusi, see Guo Yin, *The Xing-Shen Theory in the Classical Aesthetics of China,* Hefei: Anhui People's Publishing House, 1982, p.174

brushwork. In the Qing Dynasty, the Calligraphic Painting School ushered the concepts of the *Bei* School into their paintings; later Kang Youwei honoured *bei* and belittled *tie* drastically, which resulted in the change in styles of modern landscape painting and flower-bird painting. It may be said that the value of brushwork rests not merely in its abstract form, but also in the merging of its form and connotation.

Li Keran resurrected the tradition of the Song Dynasty when professional painters put stress on representing the beauties of nature, but at the same time he did not give up the tradition of literati painting by scholars of the Ming and Qing Dynasties who stressed the stylish beauty produced by brushwork. It might be said that Li had bridged the gap between the two traditions of representing forms and expressing personalities. Li's style of brushwork differed entirely from that of his masters Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, but had been directly influenced by their theories and practices.

The wielding of the brush in painting should be slow and ponderous, this was the greatest gain of Li Keran in watching closely the manipulation of the brush while Qi Baishi was painting. He recalled that when he was some thirty years old, he wielded his brush hastily and rapidly in painting. Once Qi spoke to him on this point, and said,

> "Your painting is the running hand of painting which I delight in very much, I would like to paint in a running hand too. But now I am nearly ninety and I am continuing to write in a regular hand."(32)

Li Keran then realized that Regular Hand should be the basic technique or foundation of a painter. Qi Baishi wielded his brush steadily and slowly, and Li realized that

> "the strength carried with the brush can strengthen the power of expression". "Where do we derive force from? Contradiction yields force".(33)

Hence, a slow wielding of the brush will manifest a ponderous sensation of how the brush overcomes the resistance of the paper in its progress.

> "We Chinese had fully realized that the line should be thick, rough ... thick to exhibit force."(34)

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[32] Refer to Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.40

[33] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.134

[34] ibid.

At forty, Li Keran's speed in wielding the brush slowed down so as to yield a tremendous change in his entire painting style. However, the "clumsy heaviness" of Qi Baishi's brushwork derived from his nature, so the wielding of his brush was really very natural without any artifice, whereas Li Keran's "clumsy heaviness" of brushwork was formed through long cultivation and promotion of knowledge performed with self-consciousness. Hence his brushwork evinced traces of pretentiousness, and was naturally inferior to that of Qi Baishi.

In pursuance of the "clumsy heaviness" of line, he also pursued the plumpness of it. This came closer to his inborn disposition. He considered that "it is easier to draw a sharp line, but it is rather hard to impart plumpness to the line", (35) and that it would be ideal to display strength and force in the plumpness and richness of the line. He had a predilection for the script of Yan Zhenqing of the Tang Dynasty, whose writing was natural and magnanimous in style (pl.392). "The bone and muscle are uniformly distributed, there is no grandiloquence and pomposity", as Kang Youwei remarked. Further, he was greatly influenced by the *wulouhen* theory of calligraphy advocated by Yan Zhenqing so that his lines tended to be the continuation of dots, the so-called "accumulating dots to become lines" which were plump and restrained (pl.393).

As to the serrated brushwork done by Li Keran, it came directly from Huang Binhong's sideways brushwork (pl.394). Huang once said,

> "The peculiarity of wielding the brush on its side is that it yields lines which are smooth on one side and serrated on the other. In painting the landscape of Mount Yandang or Wuyi, I am used to wielding the brush in this way."(36)

When Huang Binhong was lecturing to Li on the wielding of the brush, he left a page of demonstration brushwork, from which we can clearly perceive these serrated lines (pl.395, 396). Li Keran was applying such a method of wielding the brush in coordination with his ink accumulation method to create his "painting technique in the portrayal of a dense forest enveloped in mist" which successfully exhibited the hills and trees in one

[35] Ibid., p.152

[36] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotation from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.37

uniform body (pl. 344-351). Every short serrated line had become a tree with its back to the sun on a distant mountain. Employing this method of wielding the bush, Li Keran successfully represented waterfalls -- the relationship between water and rocky stones, as well as reflections in the water, etc.

The core of Li Keran's brushwork is the ink accumulation method, which he acquired directly from Huang Binhong and then developed in his own way. In Huang's ink accumulation, "Despite the accumulation of layer after layer, it continues to retain the magnificence of the lines."[37] (pl.397) However, in Li's ink accumulation lines almost disappear. They are merely visible on a few spots where they are usually the contours of houses, boats, twigs and branches of trees, or hilltops in the sunshine. In the process of ink accumulation over voluminous space, representation by lines has been replaced by ink plane; the expressive power of line is hidden among the rich layers of ink. This is the greatest difference between the ink accumulation of Li Keran and that of Huang Binhong. From the point of view of the significance of the line, Li's ink accumulation is indeed a little inferior to that of Huang Binhong. But, if viewed from the changing trend of modern brushwork, even the accumulated layers formed upon short lines by Huang Binhong reflected the inclination of modern Chinese painting towards a weakening of the pattern of line. In this tidal current, as an art historian said, there was Qi Baishi's *mogu* technique (without drawing a general contour with line) (pl.398) which took a considerable proportion of the devices used in his paintings, so that Huang Binhong remarked, "In Baishi's paintings, the way he employs ink far excels his wielding of the brush"; [38] and there were also the methods of 'dispersed brush tip' (*sanfeng bifa*) which Fu Baoshi used in his tempestuous manner (pls.224,225); the attempts of weakening the function of the line by Gao Jianfu (pl.399), Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren of the Lingnan Painting School; and the splashing ink and colour techniques of Chang Daqian and Liu Haisu (pls.400, 401), which in their later years replaced the strict linear pattern with their glamorous ink planes to

[37] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.185

[38] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotation from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.25

varying degrees.[39] This tendency towards transformation of brushwork expressed the great interest which modern Chinese painting took in realistic style and in directly passionate expression. The painter Lǘ Fengzi (1886-1959) made a speech in defence of *mogu* painting, which fully explained a new comprehension of the principle of 'bone-means' and the relationship between brush and ink. He summarized:

> "Chinese painting considers that *Gu* ('bone') is the essence of itself, and this is its basic feature"; "If a picture is not formed by lines, it must be formed by ink dots or colour dots, or by ink planes or colour planes". "It should be known that a line is a continuation of dots, whereas a plane is an expansion of dots. It should also be known that a dot has its volume, a dot is the concentration of force which when it becomes a line will impart a sensation of 'righteous life and honourable death' *(sheng si gang zheng)*, which is termed *gu*. Can it be said that the dots and planes, which impart the same sensation of 'righteous life and honourable death' to people, should not be called *gu*?" [40]

Li Keran's brushwork style is based upon the construction of ink planes, it was also obviously the result of development from such a transformation of brushwork.

In his later years, Li Keran advocated attaining 'spiritual rhyme' (*shen yun*) from the 'ink rhyme' *(mo yun*). He held ink methods in high esteem, which was not only an exhibition of the above-mentioned tendency, but also originated directly from Huang Binhong, who had been very particular about ink. Huang had gathered up the complete set of theories on ink methods advocated by the ancients, and further proposed that

> "A painting should be forceful and glistening, the forcefulness is the power of the brush, the glistening is the colour of the ink. When the brushwork is profound, the whole painting can attain spirit-consonance which is life motion (*qiyun shengdong*)."[41]

He summarized methods of brushwork into five items, "steady (*ping*), round (*yuan*), retaining (*liu*), heavy (*zhong*) and changing (*bian*)" and ink methods into seven items: "thick ink (*nongmo*), breaking ink (*pomo*), accumulating ink (*jimo*), thin ink (*danmo*), splashing ink (*pomo*), scorching ink *(jiaomo*) and overnight ink (*xiumo*)". [42] Li Keran practised and

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[39] Lin Mu, 'A Pioneer in Modernization of the Traditional Chinese Painting', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies,* No.8, 1994

[40] See Zong Baihua, *Stroll in Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1981, p.47

[41] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotation of Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, pp. 34-35

[42] ibid., p.29, p.32

developed Huang Binhong's theories of brushwork and ink method. Many examples can be found in his theoretical works and paintings, showing that he was directly influenced by Huang - for instance, his apprehension of Huang's 'forceful and glistening brushwork'; his realization of Huang's idea, 'thick ink without coagulating and sluggishness, thin ink without superficiality and weakness" [43]; his admiration of the pure and clean ink colour of Dong Qichang which was mentioned several times by Huang. Li Keran's most unique method in applying ink was his control and manipulation of the rich intermediate colours. Such an achievement was the result of his painstaking repeated study of the techniques of applying water and ink and of wielding the brush. With the assistance of the subtle delicate richness of the intermediate colours, he displayed the depth of space, the depth and the weight of objects, as well as imparting an especially glossy and moist effect to his pictures. Li's new achievement of guiding art to meet the demands of the times and his individual expression was a development of Huang Binhong's brushwork theory and style.

5.4 DEPTH

Apart from the basic foci of attention -- momentum, composition, sparseness and density, thickness and thinness manifested in traditional landscape painting, Li Keran also put forward the problem of "layers" (*cengci*). For the comprehension and solution of this problem, he apparently drew support from the intervention of elements of Western painting, such as space gradation in composition. But to Li Keran, the basic meaning of the problem and a solution for it came, as before, from tradition itself -- primarily from the influence of Huang Binhong, next from the tradition of the landscape painting of the Song Dynasty.

Concerning the concept of "depth" (*shenhou*), Huang Binhong primarily meant the quality and interest of a painting as well as the character and knowledge of the painter. He required that a painting should be able to transmit profound and subtle emotional

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[43] ibid., p.45

experiences, with an elegant and gentle style but not one which was frail. He said:

> "Concentrate your energy on making your painting profound and luxuriant; once you start to be in vogue, tending towards the flippant and frivolous, you'll be looked down upon as of little importance."[44]

Li Keran was greatly shaken by Huang's thoughts, and then pursued "depth" of his artistic expression after the beginning of the 1950s. Li Keran's early style of landscape appeared quite natural and unrestrained, somewhat resembling the style of Shi Tao. But Huang Binhong criticized Shi Tao for being too pretty and undisciplined, inferior to Shi Xi whose style appeared profound and vigorous. Li therefore began to renew his understanding of Shi Tao and Shi Xi, following the example of Shi Tao's freshness in artistic conception and savouring the perfectly round, vigorous and heavy brushwork of Shi Xi. In order to avoid the defects of taking "slick and frivolous" as "natural and unrestrained"; "soft and lovely" as "graceful and elegant", he would rather take a risk of being "crude" and "clumsy". Right up to his later years, he repeatedly sighed with emotion over his own masterpieces, saying: "I am pleased in my awareness of the profound and vigorous, without the habitual practice of frivolity", which can really be looked upon as his deep yearning for the earnest teaching of his teacher Huang Binhong.

Concerning the further connotation of Huang Binhong on "depth", he meant thick, heavy and forceful brushwork. His landscape painting started from the Xin'an School of his hometown. He was deeply affected by the works of Hong Ren (1610-1664), Zha Shibiao (1615-1698) Cheng Sui (1605-1691), Dai Benxiao (1621-1693), Shi Tao (1630-1707) and Shi Xi (b. 1612). His early works placed emphasis on the fresh and refined, and he was known as "Bai (white) Binhong" (pl.402). After he was fifty years old, he assimilated the painting style of the Song and Yuan dynasties, using dried wrinkling and wet dyeing, or else the method of ink accumulation, and thus his style became dense and heavy, bold and vigorous, and this was called "Hei (black) Binhong" (pl.403). After the age of seventy, a unique style appeared in his landscapes, alternately using splashing ink, accumulating ink, old ink and breaking ink so that his mountains and rivers looked deep and thick (pl.404). The characteristics of his brushwork were exactly like those that he commended in Dong

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[44] See Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.48

Yuan (active 934-960):

> "If you look at it closely, there are only strokes, uneven and jumbled, you do not know what he was painting; but looking from a distance, you find unity and coherence, light and shade, voidness and solidness, everywhere appropriate."(45)

He pointed out that the main idea of the ink accumulation was:

> "To find layers in the colour of the ink to exhibit the integral air of mountains and rivers." (46)

Huang Binhong was an expert on the ink accumulation method, but he did not consider that the beauty of thick and heavy brushwork was equivalent to thick ink or profuse strokes, realising that light ink and simplified strokes could also accomplish the same effect of "thick and heavy", the crux of the question lying in the latent force of the brushwork, which should be neither careless nor weak and dissipated. Li Keran learned the method of ink accumulation directly from Huang Binhong. Since 1956 he had been trying and developing the method in his sketches and paintings. In 1979, he wrote:

> "In painting a landscape, it is necessary to make the layers deep and thick, and that requires the method of ink accumulation, which is very important but also difficult. Everyone knows when he applies the paint once on *xuan* paper, he often feels that ink colour is lively and fresh. But the ink accumulation method requires the addition of layer upon layer of ink. If one does not have a command of this method, any addition will result in stiffness, disorderliness, dirtiness and rigidity. The modern landscape painter Huang Binhong was expert in this method, and could add more than ten layers of ink. The more he added, the more vigorous, luxuriant and bright it became." (47)

Proceeding from Huang Binhong's ink accumulation method, Li Keran started his own creation, such as blending the use of the ink accumulation method with the light and shade method to exhibit the backlighting effect of mountains, and using intermediate tones of ink colour to convey distant space and the volume of an object, etc.

The ultimate connotation of Huang Binhong's "depth" was, as he had said, "to show the integrated atmosphere of landscapes", or their "inner beauty" --"rivers and mountains are originally like a picture, one sees inner beauty in the quiet". (48) "Inner beauty" means

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[45] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations of Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.19

[46] ibid., p.35

[47] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.44

[48] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations of Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.3

nature's inner vitality as well as the personality charm attached to nature when one is viewing and representing it. Among the seemingly disorderly dots and strokes of Huang Binhong, details of nature and visual resemblances had actually not been represented. When he followed the " depth" of Song and Yuan landscapes, he only made reference to the depth of ink colour; to the luxuriance and vitality in the arrangement of scenery; but did not get close to the realistic features of Song-Yuan art. It could be said that Huang had pushed traditional landscape painting to the limit of abstract beauty. Whereas Li Keran learned directly from Huang Binhong he changed direction in his pursuit of a new target and a new appreciation. He said:

> "In order to exhibit the profundity and vigour of our landscapes in his later years, Huang Binhong tirelessly made great efforts in his method of using ink. He repeatedly tested the breaking and accumulating ink methods, being able to paint a picture seven, eight or even more than ten times, with the result that the picture looked luxuriantly green. He created a new and dynamic atmosphere, exceedingly rich and thick but not losing quiet and emptiness. His pictures swept away the thin and withering atmosphere in Ming and Qing literati painting, raising the expressive power of landscape, and have left us a most valuable legacy."(49)

Li Keran explained the "depth" of Huang Binhong, who emphasized its effect on the quality of art; he explained brushwork and nature's "inner beauty" as an expression of the vastness and richness of nature, going a step further to link the aesthetic concept of "depth" with the feeling of space in landscape painting, and generalized it as a technical question of "layers". He said,

> "To paint a landscape well, one should successfully surmount two difficulties: 'line' and 'layer', the latter is most difficult. It is because a landscape painting usually has to express a space of dozens of *li*, and thus the question of 'layer' appears especially prominent. It is a problem which many old Chinese painters never solved. Only when the 'layer' problem is solved would one be able to achieve the 'depth'. There has been no great artist who would not seek for 'depth'.(50)

Li Keran made a big stride in a realistic visual sense.

To express a sense of space, Li Keran also returned to the tradition of the Song and the Yuan. The landscape paintings of the Song and the Yuan are nearer to nature than those of the Ming and the Qing. The former pay much attention to the arrangement of layers in

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[49] ***Li Keran On Art***, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.12

[50] ibid.,p.144 [NB This now refers to the book by Li]

good order in a picture. Guo Xi of the Song Dynasty wrote:

> "There are three methods for painting mountains, looking up at the summit from the foot, called *gaoyuan*; peeping at the rear of the mountain from the front, called *shenyuan*, and looking at a faraway mountain from a nearby one, called *pingyuan*."(51)

Guo Xi's methods enabled Chinese painters, when viewing mountain scenery, to "look up at the summit"; "peep at the back of mountain" and "look towards a distant mountain". His visual line in observation was moving and turning. It fully expressed the unique spatial consciousness of Chinese landscape painting (pl.405). It is precisely Li Keran's landscapes that demonstrate such Chinese spatial consciousness and rules of composition. The difference is that he laid more emphasis on the front and back relationship of images. He believed that

> "The main point is to paint out a feeling of depth. A piece of paper is flat, one must express the depth by every possible means, only thus can you fill people with enchantment." (52)

With the help of methods from Western painting, he reached a new compromise between the "comprehensive image" by "moving sight" of the Chinese style and the "visual image" by "a quick glance" of the Western style. He therefore pushed forward Chinese landscape tradition to another limit much closer to the visual beauty of nature.

5.5 BLACKNESS

"Blackness" is one of the most remarkable peculiarities of Li Keran's landscape style. Since the later part of the 1950s he was repeatedly reprimanded for such a peculiarity, which during the so-called Cultural Revolution even became a crime, known as "Black Painting". However, all of that did not make him give up his original intention, and he continued to take up "blackness" as his artistic subject. Because of this, his landscape style possessed, on the one hand, the typical characteristics of the times, but on the other, it had increased its distance from the popular prevailing fashion and popular taste.

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[51] See *Pamphlets On Painting*, ed. by Yu Anlan, Beijing: People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.23

[52] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.172

Appreciation of the colour black comes from a unified viewpoint of philosophy and aesthetics peculiar to the Chinese. Lao Zi said, "The five colours makes man's eyes blind; the five notes make his ears deaf" (*"wu ce ling ren mu mang, wu yin ling ren er long", Lao Zi*, Chapter 12)[53] ; "Mystery upon mystery - The gateway of the manifold secrets" ("*xuan zhi you xuan, zhong miao zhi men*", *Lao Zi* Chapter 1) [54] . The Chinese word *"xuan"* (Mystery) means profundity and also means 'black'. A line from a famous ancient poem goes: "Dark clouds press upon the city, the city will be destroyed by them" (*"heiyun ya cheng cheng yu cui"*, by Li He)[55], another line says, "When blackness penetrates the Moon, the storm comes pelting down" (*"hei ru taiyin leiyu chui"*, by Du Fu)[56] : here, the "blackness" or "dark" strongly implies the spiritual elements. Li Keran employed the ink to the utmost, seeking "spiritual rhyme" in "ink rhyme". This is just his way of obtaining sublimation in the spiritual realm through the visual impact and contagious power of the colour black.

From the angle of Chinese painting technique, even before the Tang Dynasty, there had been the saying "even dense inky black is still green", which reveals that an inky colour had been acceptable to express the lively exuberant colour green. Another saying prevailing in the Tang Dynasty was, "There are five distinct colours in ink", thus the realm of ink had become a world alive with the multi-coloured. Poet Liu Kezhuang of the Song Dynasty, after viewing the painting *Ink and Wash Picture of Ferrying Across in Ling Village* by Xiao Zhao, wrote: "Emerald green and gorgeous red sparkle over our eyes" (*bilu yanhong zhao yan lai*), which tells us that he actually visualized "emerald green" and "gorgeous red" from the colour of the ink. The inscription by Shi Tao:" Inside clusters of blackness are clusters of ink, amidst such inky blackness earth and heaven expand" (*heituantuan li motuantuan,*

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[53] *Lao Tzu*, translated by D. C. Lau, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books

[54] ibid.

[55] [Tang] Li He, 'Yanmen Taishou Xing', *The Selection of Tang Poetry*, vol.II, Beijing: The People's Literature Publishing House, 1978, p.12

[56] [Tang] Du Fu, 'For the Picture of Two Pines', *The Complete Works of Du Fu*, Vol.4, Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Book Publishing House, 1996, p.47

mohei cong zhong tiandi kuan), further tells of the miraculous mystery of applying ink in Chinese painting and the limitless potency of ink in artistic expression.

The predilection of Li Keran for blackness might be traced back to the story of "Li Lan's ink block" which impressed him much in his childhood, and to the story of his divergence of opinion with his supervisor, Andre Claudot, in employing the colour black while he was studying in the Hangzhou Academy of Art. But he actually began to stick to blackness as his artistic subject for life when he learned the ink accumulation method under the tutorship of Huang Binhong.

Huang Binhong accomplished his ink accumulation method when he was over eighty years old, thereby establishing his unique personal style (pl.406). However, there were conflicting opinions in the art world about Huang's style. His layer upon layer of rich blackness is the hardest point to appreciate and accept. Someone criticized his painting as "inky darkness". In reply to such criticism he once humbly explained,

> "It is not because people cannot apprehend, but because my attainment has not reached the stage of maturity. To paint with the ink accumulation method is a difficulty in painting. The more we discuss, the clearer it will become." (57)

He remarked,

> "Some people make their pictures light and simple, others heavy and rich. They have their own accomplishments and strong points. In painting, we do not fear accumulating a thousand layers of ink, but we do fear that the accumulation of ink has not been done properly and may become mere blackness. If it is done properly, even a hundred or a thousand layers, that blackness would be vivid. The ancients used to speak of economizing with ink as if it was gold, implying we should paint with ink carefully and diligently, but not to mean we should restrict the application of ink. The excellent liquors of the world are for people to drink. The Chinese ink is for painters and calligraphers to apply to paper, to write and to paint. A good swimmer can swim in the river and in the boundless sea as well; a good painter can paint two or three strokes to paint a wonderful picture, but he can also splash a great deal of ink to make an excellent painting." (58)

Master painters who were adept at the ink accumulation method were very few in history. The father and son of the Mi family in the Song Dynasty, (Mi Fu: 1051-1107, and Mi Youren: 1086-1165) were adept at using ink accumulation and breaking ink to display

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[57] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p. 35

[58] ibid., p.17

the landscapes of the South in rainy weather (pl.407). Gao Kegong (1248-1310) of the Yuan Dynasty was also a master painter in ink accumulation, his painting style being rich and strong (pl.408). Gong Xian (1618-1689) of the Qing Dynasty did nearly all his drawing with the ink accumulation method alone, employing ink-dots to accumulate layer after layer, so that his image merged into a whole (pl.409). Huang Binhong had acknowledged:

> "Gao Kegong can be recognized as my teacher ... while Gong Xian appeared less ponderous in his brushwork, and the way he employed ink far excelled that of the painters of the Ming Dynasty. I had followed his ink method." (59)

Huang Binhong studied all the strong points of the ancients in ink methods, but his ink accumulation was far different from that of the ancients. His brushwork was formed by dots and short lines showing the feature of "one wave with three folds". His dense strokes appeared deep and fluffy and the colour of the ink looked transparent. He summarized the main points of using the brush:

> "Wrinkling strokes should be separated from one another, not overlapping or touching. In discussing calligraphy, the ancients had the parable of porters jostling for a path. When some tens of porters, bearing burden on their shoulders, meet on a path, some have to keep to the right, some to the left, so as not to jostle against each other. This is the key to using one's brush."(60)

Li Keran benefited directly from Huang's theory and practice. Later he quoted the effect of dislocation in the process of plate printing as an example of the ink accumulation brush method:

> "The second time should not be a repetition of the first", "Each stroke of the brush should be staggered with the previous one, so as to gradually constitute the volume, space, light and shade as well as atmosphere"(61).

This can be considered to be a further development and an exposition of the theory of "porters jostling for a path". However, the effect of Li's ink accumulation was inferior to that of Huang Binhong, because Li mostly used lateral brushwork and pursued a complete mergence of it with form, so that it was almost inevitable that the colour of the ink and the brushwork looked rather stiff. It was not until his later years, when he had fully matured in ink methods and been adept at controlling rich intermediate tone that his ink colour became

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[59] ibid., p.50

[60] ibid., p.44

[61] ibid.

vivid.

As to why painting should be richly and heavily coloured, Huang Binhong discussed the rationality of this from both objective phenomena and artistic tradition. He said,

> "When I view mountains, I like to view them early in the morning or in the evening, or to see them shrouded in misty clouds. Because in such a situation, more miraculous changes would appear in the landscape."(62)

In other words, in deepening shades of dusk, mountains appear to be heavier, and this was the reason that he liked to paint mountains with thick, rich colour. He criticized the landscape paintings by the four Wangs of the Qing Dynasty:

> "Mountains possess thick rich colour, I can fully appreciate it when I view them. But the four Wangs of the early Qing Dynasty dared not apply heavy and rich ink colour, so the mountains they painted were almost hoary white. This was because they simply imitated, and did not study or investigate the actual mountains." (63)

He also quoted historical styles to support his viewpoint:

> "As I viewed the paintings by the ancients of the Northern Song, it was as if I were walking in the mountains at night. In the sombre darkness, I could only descry layers upon layers of dense blackness."(64)

He remarked that

> "In painting the mountains at noon, the ancients of the Northern Song would paint the peaks dark black, although they had never been reached by either Ma Yuan or Xia Gui."(65)

He went on to say,

> "The paintings of the Tang Dynasty were sharply distinct and clear, but those of the Song Dynasty were rather sombre and dark, like monuments". (66)

The works of Fan Kuan (pl.83) and Li Tang (pl.410) of Song Dynasty were indeed painted black, which feature may possibly have derived from their discovery of phenomena of nature, but mainly from their deep interest in magnificent painting style.

Li Keran was a painter who took pains to go into nature to make observations, to discover and to sketch directly from nature. In his later years, he summarized some rules

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[62] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, pp.50-51

[63] ibid., p.6

[64] ibid., p.18

[65] ibid., p.26

[66] See Wang Bomin, *Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1979, p.33

that he had found in nature, which were different from what the ancients usually expressed in their paintings. For example, he had noticed that the near landscape is bright and the remote landscape dark; the space in a dense forest does not appear white but black; a creek in the shadows of woods gleams with deep black. Therefore, he invented black mountains, black rivers and the method of expressing emptiness with black. He once said,

> "In broad day, the rocks of Mount Huang look like a jumble of rugged stones, but if viewed against light, or viewed in the evening, they appear remarkably beautiful." (67)

As a result, his landscape paintings mostly concentrated on scenes in the morning or evening, at dusk, in misty or rainy weather and against lights. This was directly connected with his choice of the subject of ink accumulation. We can easily surmise that Li Keran's choice of subjects, of traditions, and the observation of nature had all been directly influenced by Huang Binhong.

But in any case, the ink accumulation method employed by Li Keran was not only entirely different from that of Huang Binhong, his consumption of ink in painting surpassed that of any landscape painter in history. Huang Binhong, in applying ink accumulation, had left vacant spaces in some places on his painting, empty spots in some places among the crowded strokes. Thereby, he successfully transformed substance into emptiness, and even where there are layers of ink, each stroke appears clear and distinct. However, in Li Keran's paintings, "blackness" is no longer "revealing", no longer "lucid", no longer "concrete"; the meaning of "blackness" becomes "concealing", "blurred" and "abstract". Li's ink accumulation method went beyond the ultimate limit employed by Huang Binhong, perhaps only a small step, but it turned the relationship between black and white upside down. Therefore, the style of "blackness" did not start with Li Keran, but it is reasonable to consider it as an original creative feature of Li's landscapes.

5.6 LIGHTNESS

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[67] See Lang Shaojun, 'On Landscape of Li Keran', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, Beijing, 1986/3, p.60

Throughout the landscape painting of Li Keran the characteristic which runs parallel to 'blackness' is 'light'. He introduced the sensation of light into Chinese landscape so that the traditional landscape possessed the illusion of light. Such an invention attracted a great deal of attention.

When did Li Keran start to pay attention to the problem of introducing light into Chinese landscape painting? From where did he derive his means of utilizing light? Wang Luxiang once put forward these questions in his paper.

He said, according to Zhang Ding's recollection, on their way to go sketching south of Yangtze river in 1954, Li several times talked to him about the achievements of the Dutch painter Rembrandt in the utilization of light, and more than once he mentioned well-known works of Rembrandt, such as the *Night Watch* and the *Raising of the Cross*. Rembrandt was adept in the utilization of sidelighting, domelighting and backlighting. Zhang Ding thus considered that Li had been enlightened by Rembrandt, transferring Rembrandt's method of applying light in his figure oils into Chinese landscapes.(68)

From Li Keran's sketches in 1956 and 1957, we can clearly discern that he was exploring the techniques of light effect. His paintings of landscapes at dusk seem to show the rich layers that had been inside the heavy and dense colours of Rembrandt. The effect of his mountains against the light was something like that of the main image in dark or brown colours in Rembrandt's oils. The glow of the sunset on the hilltops in his pictures was something like the mysterious sacred light in the paintings of Rembrandt. (pl.433-435) We can say the light painted by Li Keran was full of realistic effect, it never came near to the light painted by the Impressionists, but rather came closer to that painted by Rembrandt. Li Keran had said,

> "The expression of light and dark is not merely decided by the objects we paint, but rests rather upon the needs of the picture."(69)

He pursued the effect similar to a supernatural light or the light over the stage, as appeared in Rembrandt's paintings, which evidently showed the arrangement of light and

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[68] Wang Luxiang, 'My Opinion about Teacher's Influence and Li Keran's Landscape Paintings', Beijing: *Chinese Painting studies*, No.6, 1993, p.9

[69] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.144

dark by design.

In any case, from the light employed by Rembrandt in his figure oils to the light effect in the traditional landscape painting by Li Keran, there existed a considerable distance between the two. For Li Keran, even with a sudden inspiration, there must have existed a series of intermediate links before he solved the problem. Inspiration is prepared beforehand for the purposeful mind. Only for those who had paid attention to the problem of light for a long time could such 'transferring' or 'borrowing' be possible.

What, then ,are the intermediate links in Li's case? First, we naturally think of those figure oils against the light heavily painted by Li Keran when he was studying Western art at the Hangzhou Art Academy (pl.3). His propaganda pictures in the War Against Japanese Aggression repeatedly employed this reversed light effect in heavy tones (pls. 14-18). Though the oil paintings and propaganda paintings then did not display the rich intermediate tones of his later landscapes, the major tone of blackness contrasting with minimal light was unquestionably an experimental preparation for his later landscape painting style, as well as for his approach to Rembrandt. It can be said that his supervisor Claudot's painting style, together with the sketching style of the Hang School, had an influence on him throughout his life.

Next, Lin Fengmian's endeavour in using light effects to express feelings and convey a favourable atmosphere exerted an influence on Li Keran which should not be overlooked. In the 1940s, Lin Fengmian's landscape painting had abundantly used ink with rich gorgeous colours and in full composition. At this stage, Lin had begun exploring the painting of trees against light, as in *Village Cottage* (pl.411) and *Spring* (pl.412). In the 1950s, he went a step further and developed the images of black hills and bright trees, as in *The Lake* (pl.413); *Village Cottage* (pl.414) and *Autumn Forests* (pl.415). In those paintings, the dark and purple autumnal hills setting off the flaming autumnal forest and leaves were entirely the images in backlighting. Those works certainly imparted a clear and direct revelation to Li Keran. From the figure paintings in reversed light (pl.416) to the landscapes under backlighting, Lin Fengmian was unquestionably a pathbreaker for Li Keran. Of course, the achievements of Lin Fengmian did not in any way belong to the field

of traditional landscape painting.

We may well ask, is there anyone who gave Li Keran the idea of transferring the experimentation with light to Chinese traditional landscape painting? Who was the one who lit the sparks of inspiration within the field of traditional landscape for him? The answer is not only a definite 'yes', but also that this man was most probably Huang Binhong again.

Some material that has attracted little notice up to the present shows that Huang Binhong had in the early 1950s shown some interest in the effect of landscape against light. People had witnessed Huang amusing himself with many landscape photographs, studying the appearance of light penetrating through from behind the forest and from the back of the peaks. (70) Among the works of Huang Binhong in his later years, light ink set off the peaks and light penetrating the forest was visible to the eyes. (pls.417, 418) Although all these works done by Huang Binhong were based upon a very traditional viewpoint and brushwork, such a solution of the light problem coordinating with the traditional ink accumulation must have been a challenge and a shock to Li Keran.

Obviously Li Keran was studying the question of the effect of light upon a more realistic style. Therefore, his landscapes have a strong visual sense and illusion of light. But this is only one aspect of the problem.

Since the problem of light illusion had been introduced into the system of traditional landscape painting, it had to be solved together with the problems originating in tradition itself, such as brushwork, black and white, void and substance, and spirit-consonance, while the result must coincide with the traditional manner of appreciation. This is to say that the problem of light in Li's landscape painting was not a mere problem of light and shade, or reverse light or side light as it is represented in Western painting. In this respect, the theory and practice of Huang Binhong had exerted the most direct and most significant influence on Li Keran.

For example, in response to the criticism "such great blackness as this in all our landscape" (*jiangshan ruci duo hei*), Li Keran said in perplexity,

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[70] Zhang Zongxiang, 'On Huang Binhong's Painting', *Chinese Painting*, 1983/4, p.15, Beijing: Beijing Publishing House

"Without black, how can there be light!" "Blackness is for the sake of lightness". (71)

What he said was from the viewpoint of the traditional demands on ink colour in Chinese painting.

Huang Binhong had actually suggested the concept of 'bright ink' (*liang mo*). He said,

> "As ink is black in colour, we call it black ink, but when it is properly employed, changing the black into the bright, we can call it 'bright ink'". (72)

How should we comprehend the term 'bright ink'? A passage by Su Dongpo of the Song Dynasty would serve as the best explanation. He said,

> "When people discuss ink they usually prize its blackness, but have neglected its brightness. If it is bright but not black, it is sure to be discarded; but if it is black but not bright it would hold no charm to anyone. We should make it bright and clear just like the eyes of a child." (73)

That is to say, the colour of the ink should be bright and black, just like the eyes of a child. Huang Binhong used the brightness of lacquer as an analogy, and proposed,

> "If the black colour is like lacquer, it can preserve its vigour". (74)

They both stated that ink should so black as to attain brightness, in order to be of the first grade. But what is the significance of 'bright ink' in a painting? The answer is:

> "The whole picture could be full of life from it." (75)

In other words, the colour of the ink should be blazing and shining, so that the painting can be full of spirit. But to reach such a stage, from the point of view of technique, Huang Binhong had pointed out,

> "Add one accumulated layer of ink to the blackest spot of the picture, or add one stroke of the most concentrated overnight ink. When dried, it would be the blackest in the whole painting. In contrast with the white, it will be more black, and can therefore be called 'bright ink'". (76)

Apart from the technique, Huang Binhong also suggested that the choice of medium

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[71] ibid. p.53

[72] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.47

[73] ibid., p.32

[74] ibid.

[75] ibid., p.47

[76] ibid.

should be very strict. It is better "to have the best ancient ink put in store, to be ready for using at any time"; or to grind the new ink slab with first grade gum, as a means of painting with the thickest ink. Otherwise, if the quality of the ink slab were inferior, the ink would be diffuse when it comes into contact with water and completely disappear after only a few years. (77)

Li Keran had exerted his utmost, throughout his whole life, to meeting the demands of 'bright ink'. He considered that 'bright ink' appears to be more important to ink accumulation, and even harder to attain. He therefore very much admired Huang Binhong's technique in ink accumulation, because

> "Huang could add ink more than ten times to a picture, the more ink is added, the more bright and gorgeous it becomes"(78).

It may be said that Li Keran's apprehension of 'light' firstly rested on his demands of ink colour, in his own words,

> "The thicker the ink, the brighter the painting, a picture requires no colour as the ink is multicoloured in itself. The interest of brushwork coupled with the charm of ink would be so shining as to be splendid."(79)

'Light' and 'blackness' as related problems are inter-related with the problem of substance and void in traditional painting. 'Blackness' and 'substance' usually refer to the space where brush is applied; 'light' and 'void' refer to the empty space, without any touch of brush or ink. In ancient painting theories, there was the saying "easy in substance, hard in emptiness" *(shichu yi, xuchu nan)* (80) ; "the most miraculous spot is where no brush has ever touched" (81). We can thus clearly visualize the high esteem in which empty space was held by Chinese painting. Huang Binhong remarked emphatically,

> "In viewing a painting, not merely the substance of a painting should be appreciated, we should also view its emptiness." (82) "When the ancients

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[77] ibid., p.32

[78] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.44

[79] ibid.

[80] See *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.4

[81] [Qing] Dan Chongguang, *Hua Quan*, see *A Collection of Historic Essays on Paintings*, ed. by Shen Zicheng, Beijing: Cultural Relic Publishing House, 1982, p.310

[82] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.5

painted, they paid attention to empty space, which is not easy for us to follow. Knowing the empty space, yet keeping to the ink, such a wonder is not easily described in words."(83)

Painting with the ink accumulation method, it is really not easy to keep 'emptiness' among the dense layers of ink. Huang Binhong made a comparison with playing chess (*weiqi*) and said,

"Painting a picture is just like playing chess. Success depends on the ability to create 'living eyes' (*huoyan*), the more the better. What to chess playing are 'living eyes', are breathing spaces to painting."(84)

In Huang's later years, the thicker he accumulated his ink, the more apparent was the element of brightness. He left some empty spaces on his painting, but the empty spaces showed neither cloudy vapour nor light spots, nor the crevice between two substantial forms. But when viewed with a sweeping glance, the whole painting seemed to be alive, to be penetrating, and therefore, the equilibrium of substance and void was maintained. Huang Binhong's principle of spreading emptiness was quite abstract (pls.419,420). Li Keran often quoted Huang's remark that "there are dragons and snakes moving in the painting", and understood that

"it was not to fill up the passage of the bright spots", "paths on hills, water and cloud should be inter-woven like the sliding and squirming of the dragon and snake, thus gaining vitality."(85)

Therefore, Li Keran creatively left the 'emptiness' and 'light' to the most conspicuous spots and the most substantial spots where there are usually a section of a path, a tiny bridge, some cottages, a sheet of waterfall, a glistening stream or a contour line of a hilltop illuminated by the sunset. Meanwhile wielding his brush repeatedly over thousands upon thousands of strokes he unfolded a grand and profound view of thick forests and hills; thus converting the blackness of the whole picture into limitless space; into void and abstractness. Li Keran's principle of arranging the light was to follow a realistic style.

In this manner, the black and white disposition in Li Keran's landscapes has the significant meaning of that in Rembrandt's art. In 1957, Li Keran had closely viewed and appreciated the original paintings of Rembrandt in Berlin. Li found that Rembrandt had

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[83] ibid., p.4

[84] ibid., p.5

[85] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.162

painted the background of his oil paintings stroke by stroke and never brushed over the picture evenly, thus enabling people to sense a depth, an atmosphere, a floating light sensation trembling in the background of darkness. From the viewpoint of Li Keran the essence of Rembrandt's technique was similar and compatible with that of Huang Binhong's ink accumulation. Li Keran therefore benefited from Huang Binhong and from Rembrandt as well. Between master-painters of East and West, he was able to be intimate with both. His achievement in employing light was an exemplary model of merging the traditions of the East and the West.

5.7 FULLNESS

Another prominent feature of Li Keran's landscape style is "fullness".

In the tradition of Chinese painting, representation of details had been the most remarkable feature of the professional painters' art for generations. Literati painting advocated "wielding the brush freely", without demanding exactitude in forms (*"yi bi caocao", bu qiu xing si*). In technique, they stressed "writing" over "painting" so as to attain a "literary atmosphere"; in composition, they stressed "void" over "substance", for pursuing an "aloof spirit"; in style, they paid attention to individuality, opposing craftsmanship and finding satisfaction in "amusing oneself by frolicking with brushwork". The positive meaning of this manner is to be striving to gain freedom in painting expression without any restrictions from professional techniques. Prior to the end of the Ming Dynasty, Dong Qichang borrowed the theoretical framework of *chan* Buddhism, and classified the renowned painters in history into two schools: "the Northern" and "the Southern". He strongly advocated the literati painting of "the Southern School" as against the professional painting of "the Northern School", deprecating the latter's painting craftsmanship and exactitude in form as "the habitual practice of painters". As a result, Dong's theory had promoted Chinese painting to become a highly cultural mode, laying great stress on intrinsic spiritual values. But on the other hand, it had led to the emptiness of painting style in recent

centuries.

From this standpoint, Li Keran had obviously inherited the professional painting tradition. He stressed basic training in painting, paying attention to painting techniques, rules and resemblance in form. He advocated that at the first stage of painting, the beginner should

> "paint in detail. It does not matter if there is too much detail in draft, for in the end it can be integrated."(86)

He considered that

> "It would not be proper to emphasize succinctness in style alone. Our literary works *The Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber* are highly artistic, but they are all very rich in life detail."(87)

In landscape, he gave up the traditional process which left too much empty space, in order to represent enthusiastically the diversified features of nature.

Apart from the richness in his landscape, Li Keran's painting style of "fullness" is mainly displayed in his "all-over" composition. He boldly and resolutely cut off the space left at the top and bottom of a picture, usually taking directly the medium shot in landscape, sometimes even arranging the rivers and mountains high and low on the paper so as to raise the horizon of the spectators' eyesight beyond the highest level of his picture.

Obviously this is different from the conventions of traditional landscape composition, which put emphasis on drawing the foot and the top of mountains. By contrast, the middle sections of mountains look rather vacant. Painters were accustomed to start their brushes from the very top of a mountain and move down along its meandering stages. They would pay particular attention to painting the summit, doing more brushwork. As their brushes traced down to the middle of the mountain and below, they would paint some clouds, so as to make this section of the mountain appear sparse and sketchy. When they reached the base, they would add ponderous brushwork to the paper again, always terminating the mountain at the mouth of a river, or by a willowy bank, or with a bridge leading into a village. With the water winding by the village, there would appear thatched cottages with open windows, where reclined scholarly personages studying or playing

[86] ibid., p.164

[87] ibid.

chess. The base of the hills expands far and wide, usually bordering the water, so there are always vacant spaces along the bottom of the picture. Moreover, on the top margin of a picture there would be inscriptions and signatures, for which much empty space would be reserved (pls.421, 422). Just as Huang Qiuyuan had said,

> "Viewing from the general outline, perfect compositional rules demand a solid foundation for mountains, a source for water, roots for trees, orientation for the wind, and a path for a road. In this way, we may appreciate the landscape picture, living with and enjoying it."(88)

Huang Binhong's landscape composition is generally very traditional. He also advocated

> "In a landscape painting, there should be ridges for mountains, sources for rivers, traffic for roads, as well as clouds and smoke, woods and trees. All of them are arranged in good order in a picture, thus the picture appears perfect." (89)

The kind of full view of his landscape painting stuck basically to such a rule (pls.423,424). But what interested Li Keran most was a batch of small landscape pictures done by Huang Binhong in his later years. At this stage, Huang's ink accumulation method had matured. His paintings were mostly full, leaving only tiny spaces of the top and bottom. Both directions of the picture were rather fully occupied and crowded. With layer upon layer of accumulated ink, blank space was left at various places among the mountains. Looking at it from nearby, one can only perceive the abstract lines and dots, but looking from a distance, one can descry deep mountains and the rich foliage of trees, an excellent picture indeed (pls.425,426). Li Keran must have acutely comprehended the expressive power in this kind of composition, where the darkness embraces light, the ink accumulation and light effect showing the greatest charm thereby. In a traditional composition, leaving numerous blank spaces, the expressive power of the ink accumulation method and the light sensation would be damaged greatly. Consequently, Li Keran repeatedly emphasized,

> "One inch of empty space in the picture is worth an inch of gold, we must particularly prize such empty space".(90) "The marginal line of the

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[88] See Wang Luxiang, 'My Opinion about Teacher's Influence and Creativeness of Li Keran's Landscape Paintings', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies*, No.6, p.17

[89] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations from Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People Fine Arts Press, 1961, p.7

[90] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.162

picture is really very precious, for it has a tendency to expand".(91)

In the history of traditional landscape painting, there had been attempts at the "cutting off method" in composition. As an art historian pointed out in his paper(92), in the Yuan Dynasty, Wang Meng (?-1385) in his *Log Cabins in the Forest of Ju District* (pl.427) had adopted such a method to cut off the crown of the hill and cover the entire scroll completely with landscape. It was thus labelled a "miraculous invention of landscape composition". In the Qing Dynasty, Shi Tao had also adopted such a method to select the best sections of landscapes for painting (pl.428). In the Ming Dynasty, Shen Hao had advocated,

> "With the supreme summit as the main object, those down-below tops can be neglected and the foothills and roots of the trees need not be shown. People can imagine them outside the sphere of the brushwork."(93)

Dan Chongguang of the Qing Dynasty had consciously realized that viewers "do not observe a picture as a whole at the last moment", he therefore advocated "cutting off the top of hills and the bottom of roots, to conceal trees and rocks by the left and right sides of the frame."(94) However, the application of such a "cutting off method" in composition appeared only in the horizontal scroll painting or in the fan-painting, and was seldom seen in the vertical scroll or large-size pictures.

In breaking away from traditional composition, Fu Baoshi was a pioneer among modern painters. Many of his landscape paintings in the 1940s did not stick to the traditional composition of a long strip but were closer to a square. He did not place most emphasis on the top or bottom of a picture, but rather on the middle portion. The top of mountains in the background and rocky crags in the foreground are usually cut out of the picture. Consequently his landscape paintings look full and expansive (pl.260). Most probably, his composition style must have exerted some influence on Li Keran.

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[91] Ibid.

[92] See Wang Luxiang, 'My Opinion about Teacher's Influence and Creativeness of Li Keran's Landscape Paintings', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies*, No.6, p.19

[93] Shen Hao, *Hua Chen, Pamphlets On Painting*, ed., by Yu Anlan, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.136

[94] Dan Chongguang, *Hua Quan, Pamphlets On Painting*, ed., by Yu Anlan, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.171, p.168

However, Li Keran had his own experience of study of Western painting. His oil paintings at the period when he was studying at the Hangzhou Art Academy and his propaganda paintings in the period of the War Against Japanese Aggression had shown that his compositional consciousness was influenced by the graphic concepts of modern Western painting. In those works he very often used the "cutting off method" in composition. When he was later working to reform Chinese landscape painting, he proved to be adept at obliterating the surplus vacant space and unnecessary details of a picture. It is reasonable to believe that he was naturally inspired by his past experience.

The "fullness" of Li Keran's composition has evidently exerted an influence on modern painting style. Huang Qiuyuan had once complained that

> "Modern artists have many defects, such as hills without foundation, rivers without source, trees without roots, roads without paths. Hence, it is not easy to say that viewers could have the sensation of satisfaction, or pleasure to the eyes or minds. Most of these paintings have hills standing aloft, always with prominent summits. Though they look very gorgeous, they show only one aspect of nature, displaying none of the alluring quietude and serenity of nature". (95)

Even if Huang Qiuyuan's criticism is applicable to most artistic works of the time, in the case of Li Keran, it has to be considered otherwise. This was because Li Keran adopted the all-over composition, the effect of his ink accumulation method had a forceful impact on people's visual sense, and the proportionately very small areas of light sparkled like gems on a black velvet.

5.8 WHOLENESS

"Wholeness" is an important characteristic of Li Keran's landscape style. In this case "wholeness" means the integrated and simplified image of artistic conception.

Throughout the history of the conceptual development of landscape painting in China, the landscape image of the Song Dynasty is mostly conspicuous for its wholeness.

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[95] Wang Luxiang, 'My Opinion about Teacher's Influence and Creativeness of Li Keran's Landscape Paintings', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies*, No.6, p.17

An example is *Travel in Mountains* (pl.83) by Fan Kuan, in which the majestic mountains look very imposing. After the Yuan Dynasty, landscape images gradually shifted to brushwork, the image as an entirety gradually faded away. For example *Autumn Colours on Que and Hua Mountains* (pl.429) by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) is perfect as far as his brushwork is concerned, but is absolutely deficient in the forceful style of the Song Dynasty. It was more so with literati painting in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, when the literati painters were mostly paying no attention to the creative image as an entirety and more interested in the charm of the brushwork. Thus landscape paintings with distinctive and integral images were seldom seen, except for a few by such artistic talents as Gong Xian and Shi Tao.(96)

Li Keran obviously admired the monumental painting style. He had been attempting to search for a style that could symbolize a positive national spirit. The master-painters in history that he especially venerated were Fan Kuan (pl.83), Li Tang (pl.410), Wang Meng (pl.430), Shi Tao (pl.431), Shi Xi (pl.432) and Gong Xian (pl.409). One can clearly perceive an apparent common feature among those masters' landscapes, i.e., the monumental style with a very conspicuous effect of wholeness. Li Keran once said,

> "Art must firmly grasp the nature of objects and express it strongly, emphatically and deeply."(97)

He considered that exaggeration in artistic expression "should afford the greatest emotional satisfaction to people".(98) The six Chinese characters of *"zhong zhong"* (strongly), *"hen hen"* (emphatically) and *"shen shen"* (deeply) defined his fundamental conception of how to integrate and simplify the image of landscape. He finally merged beauty and majesty into his landscape and formed a unique pattern unknown in the history of landscape painting. However, the grand and magnificent features of his painting were mainly developed from the traditions of the Song Dynasty.

As early as when he was learning the skill of oil painting in Hangzhou, he had come

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[96] Lang Shaojun, 'Li Keran's Landscape Painting', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, 1991/5, p.91

[97] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.80

[98] ibid., p.79

into contact with the concept of "wholeness". There were two prominent aspects of the sketching system of the Hangzhou Academy: one was the silhouette of image, the other was the primary tones of light and shade, with strong emphasis on the concept of viewing a picture as a whole. Thus, from his studies there Li Keran not only apprehended the importance of the concept of "wholeness" in artistic expression, but also acquired the knowledge of how to introduce the three tones of black, white and grey in a picture. In his later practice, he showed very clearly the consciousness and skills to gain the effect of "wholeness" in the oil paintings of his early years and in his propaganda drawings during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. In his teaching career later, he repeatedly stressed this point to his students:

> "The sense of wholeness of a picture is a problem that a painter must spend his whole life trying to solve."(99)

Li Keran acknowledged that, for himself, the "consciousness of wholeness" came from Western painting, but he was more willing to emphasize that it came from observation of nature. He once said,

> "I absorbed something from the West, but more importantly, I discovered it from objects, such as the backlight, the sense of wholeness."(100)

He discovered that a landscape with back-lighting would give a much stronger sense of wholeness; and that objects viewed in the misty haze at dawn or dusk were also rich in a sense of wholeness, they therefore looked particularly beautiful, so he took pains to display such beauty. It may be said that he went into nature to observe landscape with the sense of "entirety", and then in return, what he found in nature stimulated him to develop his artistic expression.

In pursuit of the sense of wholeness and profundity of the landscape image, he replaced the flowing lines in his landscapes of the 1940s with the form of mass by ink accumulation brushwork. While he did not go back to the Hangzhou Academy's treatment of giving up half tones in sketching, he attempted to attain a subtle and profound effect while pursuing a strong entity. That is to say, he wished to attain simplicity after using a

[99] ibid., p.144

[100] See Lang Shaojun, 'On Landscape of Li Keran', Beijing: *Literature and Art Studies*, 1984/3., p.60

profusion of strokes when painting a picture. In this respect, he admired the high level skills of Rembrandt's oils in a unity of profusion and simplicity. Even up to the late 1970s, people noticed that he had a print of one of Rembrandt's oil paintings hanging on the wall of his studio, [101] for the purpose of studying the entire effect with the richness of detail as well as the skill of unifying the black, white and grey tones in his work. At the mature stage of his art, Li Keran's landscapes have rich and exquisite half tones, showing the characteristics of transparency, multiple layers and natural transition between shades of colour in oil painting, and it should be said that his ink accumulation effect was also influenced and enlightened by Rembrandt's oil painting.

Observing the works of Chinese master-painters from the same viewpoint, Li was acutely conscious that,

> "In drawing shrimps or prawns, Qi Baishi controlled the colour of the ink, basically keeping in the same shade. With the manipulation of his brush, slowly or rapidly, lightly or ponderously, so as to yield the illusion that the shrimps were contracting or expanding with the sensation in transparency and elasticity of their body. The same with Ba Da's art, it also had a strong effect of wholeness, the minutest variation incorporated in one body, displaying unity and harmony. In the application of ink, they seldom changed colour shades with great disparity in one painting."[102]

Thus he concluded,

> "The change in the application of the colour of the ink should be very slight, it should not be too obvious to the eyes within a detail. If we demand a change with every stroke, the picture would be 'blurred' and 'confusing' to the eyes, destroying the sensation of a wholeness, losing the major effect of the picture."[103]

Li Keran had grasped the essence of reaching a harmonious unity in the Chinese master-painter's art too.

Huang Binhong, who had the most direct influence on the reform of Li's landscape painting and in the problem of "wholeness", was also the one that had benefited Li Keran the most. He once said,

> "The works of teacher Huang have a very strong sense of wholeness with profound multiple layers of ink, and fully display the complicated and

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[101] See Wan Qingli, 'Li Keran's Painting Devices and Techniques', Hong Kong: *Brush and Ink*, No. 25, p.59

[102] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Art Press, 1990, p.44

[103] ibid.

delicate relationships among the diverse objects in nature." (104)

He had watched Huang Binhong painting and seen how he applied his ink over the entire paper, here a few strokes, there a few strokes. Viewed closely, not even one stone could be found, but when viewed from a distance, the verdant green of mountains, stones and rocks, space, even colours all shone out. Later, in summing up his ink accumulation method, Li Keran said,

> "The most important thing is a strong consciousness of wholeness. A painter should have a whole idea about the complete picture before painting. For example, the painter should have a preconecived idea before painting of where he should paint"(105). "In order to grasp the picture as a whole, one should avoid just completing one part then another. One should draw integrally, to add the ink of every stroke as an integral part of the whole."(106)

Huang Binhong was a typical scholar with a profound knowledge of the arts, and he painted in the manner of a scholar, and did not follow any rigid rules of painting. His way of painting, therefore, could only be comprehended mentally, and was also not to be followed directly. Li Keran had his roots deep in studying painting as a subject, he was adept at transforming abstract painting theory into concrete procedure. In order to attain the unification of a wholeness with rich and subtle variation in detail, Li Keran invented the method of "from nothing to something, then from something to nothing", i.e., the painting process was divided into two stages. At the first stage, the painter should pursue richness, should paint more, even to excess. At the second stage, the painter should perfect his painting by the process of ruffling, wrinkling, dotting, dyeing and accumulating ink, then repeating the process, so as to reduce or remove any confused and trifling parts. In the process of arranging tones, the layers should get richer and deeper, and the bright spots should be minimized until only the minutest area of light is left, so that "there is no confusion in colour shades; the layers are very distinct; and there is a strong sense of wholeness".(107) In his paintings, Li Keran pursued richness, richness and richness,

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[104] ibid., p.139

[105] ibid., p.44

[106] ibid., p.144

[107] ibid., p.37

avoiding simplicity in the first half of his painting process; then he pursued simplicity, simplicity and simplicity during the second stage. He considered that otherwise he would not achieve a strong effect of wholeness. It was by this special procedure that his landscape painting accomplished the unification of "richness" with "simplicity" and "wholeness" with "subtle variation of details".

The concept of "wholeness" is indeed not an original concept of traditional Chinese aesthetics. However, the integrated and simplified effect realized by Li Keran tacitly agrees with the Chinese aesthetic concepts of "void" and "quietude". The images in Li Keran's landscape paintings are formed through thousands of brush-strokes with ink accumulation, but finally rest on a unification, manifesting the theories of Chinese painting, that *"yihua* (every stroke) is the very origin of everything and the very root of diverse objects" *(yihua zhe, zhong you zhi ben, wan xiang zhi gen*); [108] and "From one stroke of the brush, accumulate tens upon thousands of strokes, and finally remain in one stroke still" *(you yibi qi, ji qianwan bi, reng shi yibi)*[109]. The thought of "*yihua*" is actually the embodiment of Chinese Daoist philosophy which says, "one gives birth to two, two to three, three to thousands upon thousands ... which finally return to one" (*yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wan ... wan gui yi*). Thousands upon thousands returning to one amounts to a return to the state of "void" and "quietude" (*xujing tiandan*) which is the "origin of the myriad things" (*wanwu zhi ben*)[110]. Daoism emphasizes the void, and considers that without the void, nothing can grow, and consequently there would not be any activity of life. Therefore, it considers "void" and "quietude" to be the supreme limits of the beautiful, whereas Confucianism lays stress on the "substantial" (*chongshi*). It considers "Substantialness is beauty" (*chongshi zhi wei mei*)[111]. But at the same time it does not stop at the

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[108] Shi Tao, *Monk Kugua On Art*, see *Pamphlets On Painting*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1960, p.146

[109] Wang Bomin, ed., *Quotations of Huang Binhong*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1961, p. 30

[110] Zhuang Zi, 'Tiandao', *Selection of Historic Materials of Chinese Aesthetics*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Store, 1980, vol. I, p.36

[111] Meng Zi, 'Jinxin Zhang Ju Xia', *Selection of Historic materials of Chinese Aesthetics*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Store, 1980, vol. I, p.23

"substantial", it goes on from substantiality to the void, then develops to the realm of the marvellous; i.e., "rich with glory is greatness, transformation of greatness is holiness, unfathomable holiness is known as the *shen* (spirit)." (*chongshi er you guanghui zhi wei da, da er huazhi zhi wei sheng, sheng er buke zhizhi zhi wei shen*)[112] That is to say that Confucianism considers the uppermost or the supreme limit is in the realm where you can only appreciate and apprehend but are unable to explain. In this way, at the highest level the Daoists and the Confucians do agree. "Quietude" and "void" provide people with the time and space for comprehension and imagination, and only can then objective representation be converted into the subjective mind. Li Keran's landscape painting, starting from substantial richness, finally returned to simplified unification, just as the poet Fan Xiwen wrote, "regard substance as empty, converting landscape into sentiment" *(yi shi wei xu, hua jingwu wei qingsi)*.[113] Thus his art attained the artistic realm with infinite meaning.

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[112] ibid.

[113] (Song) Fan Xiwen, 'A Nocturnal Discourse before Bed', see Zong Baihua, *A Stroll in Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981, p.34

CHAPTER 6: LI KERAN'S ART IN THE CONTEXT OF REFORM MOVEMENTS IN CHINESE PAINTING

As a participant in the reform movements in Chinese painting this century, and as the representative of its final achievement -- the new orthodoxy of traditional landscape painting, the line which Li Keran followed to reform Chinese painting as well as to combine Chinese and western art was very different from other artists. But were we to observe the overall picture of the Chinese reform movement this century, we would find that there existed many close links between Li Keran's thoughts and practice and those of different schools and masters in the reformation of Chinese painting. Li Keran had set his mind on the reformation of traditional Chinese painting from the beginning of the 1940s. But his contact with such a concept had been much earlier. Liu Haisu was the principal of an art school where Li had his initial education in art. The first time he heard of the idea of "blending the Chinese and the western", it was from Kang Youwei. He acquired his knowledge of art from elder painters such as Lin Fengmian, Xu Beihong, Qi Baishi and Huang Binghong, all of whom were very important in the movement to reform Chinese painting in the early half of the 20th century. This chapter attempts to make a brief survey and investigation on "the century reform movements" together with the relationship between Li Keran and the diverse reform lines and schools, from which we will find that the creative work of Li Keran not only existed in the context of development of art tradition, but also in the "century efforts" in the reform of Chinese painting. His artistic style was not only individual, but at the same time embodied the common dream of painters of several generations of this century. In other words, we might say that the success of Li Keran's art represented not only a solution to one of the problems of art itself, but was also an answer to the particular problems presented to art by China in the 20th century.

6.1 AN ART MOVEMENT THAT RUNS THROUGH THE CENTURY[1]

6.1.1 THE ORIGIN

The reform movement in Chinese painting in the past hundred years was definitely not merely in search of a change of style in art, but originated from the historical problems of society. It started at the beginning of the century and was promptly channelled into the May Fourth New Culture Movement which aimed at the transformation of society. The Opium War of the 19th Century symbolized great changes in China's social and cultural pattern. The might of western fleets and cannons had blown open the gate to China, a fact that testified to the backwardness of China. Since then, the problem of striving to make the nation stronger has become China's most important task in the 20th century. The quest for reform of traditional Chinese painting to a very great degree lies in the wish of the nation to strengthen itself.

But before the Opium War, besides the public recognition of the "Four Wangs" as the orthodox school of painting, there already existed in painting circles the Eight Strange Masters of Yangzhou whose strong individuality appeared attractive to the culture of the townspeople. Their art was quite active in the Yangzhou region in the 18th century when commodity exchange and the art market were brisk and prosperous. As unorthodox literati painting, it already presaged a change in the cultural connotations and visual style of traditional literati painting. After the Opium War, the expansion of the sphere of the western powers in China as well as the rapid spread of western civilization in the country stimulated the development of national industry and commerce as well as that of the commercial economy in cities along the coast. There emerged as a result the Shanghai School of painters, like Ren Bonian (1840-1895) etc who evolved from elegance to vulgarity so as to suit the tastes of the general public, and the Painting School of Bronze and Stone

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[1] See Shui Tianzhong, 'Debates about the Reformation of Chinese Painting in Retrospect', Beijing: *Histroy and Thoery of Fine Arts*, 1983/2, p.176; Xue Yongnian, 'Retrospect to the Development of Chinese Ink Painiting in the 20th Century', Part I, Beijing: *Art Research*, 1996/2, p.4; Part II, 1996/3, p.36

so as to suit the tastes of the general public, and the Painting School of Bronze and Stone Scripts which took as its model the vigorous styles of the steles of the Qin and Han Dynasties. In the art of these schools, a new chance for tradition to move towards the modern was already in store, but they complied only with the needs of new aesthetic judgments brought about by social changes, and had no conscious intention of transforming traditional culture and society. But the series of political events that occurred during the period between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century[2] instead changed the direction in which Chinese painting had been evolving, causing it to become very much a part of the social and cultural reform movement.

6.1.2 MAKING A START

The leader of the Reform Movement of 1898, Kang Youwei, was the first man to draw back the curtain for the reform movements of Chinese painting. After the failure of the Reform Movement in 1898, he fled to Europe. When he visited the painting collections in several well-known museums in Italy, he sighed

> "the paintings of our own country are too crude and superficial, they are far behind those of the West, there must also be a reform in this field." (3)

In 1917, he made another resounding call in his *Catalogue of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections*:

> "Chinese paintings in recent years have been at an extremely low ebb", "a clarion call is necessary to save the situation." (4)

Cai Yuanpei, first as Minister of Education in the Republic of China in its early years, then as the Chancellor of Beijing University, also advocated reform, and commented:

> "Calligraphy and painting are the quintessence of our culture, but both

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[2] The Sino-Japanese War in 1894 (*Jiawu Zhangzheng*) resulted in the total defeat of the Chinese navy by Japan. It made clear the total failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement(*Yangwu Yundong*). The Wuxu Reform (*Wuxu Bianfa*) in 1898 led by Kang Youwei, which lasted for only one hundred days, also failed.

[3] Kang Youwei, *Travels in Italy*, See Shui Tianzhong, 'Debates about the Reformation of Chinese Painting in Retrospect', Beijing: *History and Theory of Fine Arts*, 1983/2, p.178

[4] Kang Youwei, 'The Catalogue of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections', Jiang Guilin, ed. *Additional Collected Papers from Wanmu Caotang*, Taibei: Dacheng Publishing House, 1978, p.191, p.203

of them modelled themselves after the ancients".(5)

He therefore advocated using art education to influence the spirit of the Chinese people.

Chen Duxiu (1880-1942), the chief commander of the May Fourth New Culture Movement had in the January 1918 issue of *New Youth* collaborated with Lǘ Cheng in the form of a correspondence which started the attack, using the slogans "Art Revolution" and "Rise in revolt against the Three Wangs".(6) The shock produced by the above could be compared to the slogan "Down with Confucianism". Their spearhead was chiefly directed at the development of traditional painting during recent centuries, which ignored drawing ability in realistic style, and placed emphasis only on what they had inherited and on imitation of ancient methods. Hence, the four Wangs of the Qing Dynasty, long considered as the idols of the orthodox school, had become the chief target of the revolution.

In fact, the bitter attack on traditional painting in modern times was not caused by its loss of aesthetic judgement but by its non-conformity with the needs of the times. Kang Youwei, as a political reformer representing the interests of industry and commerce, had pointed out that from the angle of realistic utility:

> "Everything in industry and commerce today depends on painting, so without an improvement in painting, industry and commerce will have nothing to talk about."(7)

He had discerned that in modern industrial and commercial society, the development of architecture, machinery, technology, medical science, commercial advertising and other fields without exception needed the precise and accurate technique of Western drawing. However, the literati painting in recent centuries only "steathily copied the rough sketch of the ancients, erroneously drew withered and sordid landscapes and nondescript figures and flowers and birds".(8) He warned

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[5] Cai Yuanpei, 'Replace Religion with Art Education', *New Youth*, No.6, Vol,3, 1917

[6] Lu Cheng, 'Art Revolution', Chen Duxiu, 'Art Revolution -- A Reply to Lu Cheng', *New Youth*, January, 1918, Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed. *Collected Essays On Fine Arts*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, P.10

[7] Kang Youwei, 'The Catalogue of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections', Jiang Guilin, ed. *Additional Collected Papers from Wanmu Caotang*, Taibei: Dacheng Publishing House, 1978, p.192

[8] ibid. p.203

"Using those to compete with western paintings is like using a rifle against a cannon."(9)

His warning had a smell of gunpowder, but it brought the situation into the open, pointing out that Western civilization was challenging China. Therefore, the tradition in literati painting of "paying close attention to freehand brushwork and disregarding portraiture" (10) was of course denounced as "evil painting" for cutting itself off from the masses and non-conformity to the scientific spirit in the May Fourth Movement when the public were calling loudly for "science and democracy". Just as Western learning had become the wish of the people and the general trend of events, those important figures who advocated the reform of Chinese painting had also fixed their eyes on the west, and on the realism in Western painting in particular. Kang Youwei was the earliest advocater of

"blending the Chinese and the western to usher in a new era of painting." (11)

Chen Duxiu proclaimed that:

"The reform of Chinese painting cannot succeed without adopting the realistic spirit of western painting."(12)

Cai Yuanpei pointed out:

"People of the West attached importance to natural science, that was why in art they started from the portrayal of material objects." "The world today is in a period when eastern and western cultures are merging with one another, and our country should of course adopt the strong points of the West." (13)

When they launched a fresh attempt to comment on tradition through the use of Western realism as their main reference, they of course tended to praise the academy paintings before the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties which were despised by the literati painters. For example, Kang Youwei was of the opinion that the peak of Chinese painting occurred in the Song Dynasty and that academy paintings in the Song Dynasty were

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[9] ibid.

[10] Chen Duxiu, 'Art Revolution -- A Reply to Lu Cheng', *New Youth*, January, 1918, Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed. *Collected Essays On Fine Arts*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.10

[11] Kang Youwei, 'The Cataloque of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections', Jiang Guilin, ed. *Additional Collected Papers from Wanmu Caotang*, Taibei: Dacheng Publishing House, 1978, p.214

[12] Chen Duxiu, 'Art Revolution -- A Reply to Lu Cheng', *New Youth*, January, 1918, ibid., p.10

[13] Cai Yuanpei, 'A Speech Delivered at the Beijing University Research Society of Painting Method', *Beijing University Daily*, 25th October, 1919

"mature art, lacking nothing, with accomplished beauty", and that therefore,

> "Only by taking academy painting as the correct path can the incorrect painting theories of the past five hundred years be rectified, and Chinese painting be remedied and make progress.(14)

The stand of Cai Yuanpei, Kang Youwei and Chen Duxiu had triggered off the reform movement of Chinese painting in this century, leading also to a dominant direction in the transformation of Chinese painting. However, none of their theories had broached the topic of the essence of the concept of literati painting and the merit in its spiritual expression. In fact, in the conflict between Chinese and Western cultures, the self-examination and criticism of tradition mentioned above was one-sided. Therefore, their stand had not only met with the opposition of the conservatives who firmly believed that "There's only good and bad, but no old and new in art", but also elicited a comprehensive exposition by Chen Shizheng (1876-1923) on the value of literati painting.(15)

Chen Shizeng's family had a long tradition of learning, he himself had studied abroad in Japan. He was expert in ink and wash painting and in freehand brushwork, also well-versed in the history of art. He was a figure with unusual influence upon Chinese art in the 20th century. In his article, not only had he stated his views of the values of literati painting in a positive way, he used as an example the development of Western art after the Post-Impressionism to prove the significance of such values: "The strong point of art obliges it to make other searches,"(16) which meant that the object of art was not aimed at likeness in appearance, its aim was the spiritual symbol. One of his proofs was:

> "It can be said that western painting has reached its height in likeness in appearance. Since the advent of the 19th century, it used scientific theories to study light and colour, to learn through real life and visible phenomena in a subtle way. Whereas Impressionism, which followed it, did exactly the opposite, paying no attention to objects, relying solely on subjective imagining, as Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism appeared in close succession. From these changes in ideas, one could see the insufficiency of likeness in appearance."(17)

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[14] Kang Youwei, 'The Cataloque of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections', Jiang Guilin, ed. *Additional Collected Papers from Wanmu Caotang*, Taibei: Dacheng Publishing House, 1978, p.194, p.191

[15] Chen Shizheng, 'The Value of Literati Painting', ibid., p.12

[16] ibid., p.16

[17] ibid.

In his article, Chen Shizeng strongly defended the values of literati painting. He not only supported the efforts to continue the practice within tradition, but also provided another trend of ideas and direction for blending with and selecting Western art.

The above-mentioned views, published during the start of the reform movement in Chinese painting in this century, have basically guided the reform practice of the various schools of Chinese painting for nearly a hundred years since then. Though these views differed, the central idea of all of them was to transform tradition so that the nation could become stronger.

6.1.3 ART SCHOOLS -- THE ARENA FOR REFORM MOVEMENTS

The May Fourth New Cultural Movement sounded a bugle call for innovation in Chinese painting. An important measure which impelled this new movement to continue its development and eventually to set up the neo-orthodoxy of Chinese painting was the adoption of the teaching of Chinese painting in the sphere of modern education at the beginning of the century, when new schools were being established.

Since the abolition of the imperial examination system by the late Qing Government in 1905, art education had become a branch (or department) of new schools. By 1928, the art schools and the art departments affiliated to universities which had great influence upon modern Chinese art were springing up one after another. This had changed the ancient way of masters passing on their knowledge and skill to their apprentices. The most influential art education institutions included: the private Shanghai Pictorial Art Institute *(Shanghai Tuhua Meishu Yuan)* founded in 1912 by Liu Haishu (later the Shanghai Art School, *(Shanghai Meishu Zhuanke Xuexiao)*; it merged with the Nanjing Art Academy *(Nanjing Yishu Xueyuan)* in 1952; the Research Society of Painting Methods of Beijing University *(Beijing Daxue Huafa Yanjiuhui)* run by Cai Yuanpei in 1917 (tutors included Xu Beihong and Chen Shizheng); the National Beijing Art School *(Guoli Beijing Meishu Zhuanke Xuexiao)* set up in 1918 (Lin Fengmian had been the principal; it later amalgamated with the Art College of Beijing University *(Beijing Daxue Yishu Xueyuan)* with Xu Beihong as principal; after the

War of Resistance against Japan it was reorganized as the Beiping National Art Academy (*Guoli Beiping Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao*) still with Xu Beihong as principal; it is now the Central Academy of Fine Arts (*Zhongyang Meishu Xueyuan*)); the private Wuchang Art School *(Wuchang Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao*) founded in 1920 by Tang Yijing (now the Hubei Art Academy (*Hubei Meishu Xueyuan*); the private Suzhou Art School (*Suzhou Meishu Xuexiao*) founded in 1922 by Yan Wenliang (merged with the Nanjing Art Academy in 1952); the Chun Shui Painting Institute (*Chun Shui Huayuan*) founded in Guangzhou in 1925 by Gao Jianfu; the National Art Academy (*Guoli Yishu Yuan*) founded in 1928, (with Lin Fengmian as principal, later on its name changed to National Hangzhou Art School *(Guoli Hangzhou Yishu Zhuanke Xuexiao*), and in 1954 changed again to Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (*Zhejiang Meishu Xueyuan*); it is now the China Art Academy (*Zhongguo Meishu Xueyuan*)); the Art Department of the National Central University (*Guoli Zhongyang Daxue Meishuxi*) under the charge of Xu Beihong in 1928, etc. All these art education institutions spared no effort in advocating new art and in the reform of Chinese painting.

Among the directors of the above-mentioned art education institutions, the three most important figures were Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian and Liu Haisu. During the May Fourth period, they were all young men of about twenty years of age, who had received a traditional cultural education and studied or had contact with traditional Chinese painting, while also having received the baptism of the New Culture, cherishing the ideal of revitalizing Chinese art. All three had at some point studied in Japan or Europe, having embraced both Chinese and Western art, with emphasis both on creative practice and theoretical reflections. After their return to China, they threw themselves whole-heartedly into careers in modern art education. Thanks to the appreciation and support of Cai Yuanpei, they soon became the first group of Chinese modern art educators. On the principles concerning running a school, they were all deeply affected by Cai Yuanpei's "all-embrace" and Kang Youwei's "blending the Chinese and the western to usher in a new era of painting." While energetically promoting the teaching of western painting, they never overlooked the cultivation of Chinese painting talents. In fact the three young men put their

most energy and efforts into creativity and reform in Chinese painting.

> The prospectus of Shanghai Art School under the charge of Liu Haisu proclaimed: "We want to develop the innate art of the Orient, study the subtlety of Western art ..... plan for the rejuvenation of Chinese art."(18)

Though at that time there was a tendency to worship western art without reservation, the Shanghai Art School had, at one time or other, had a group of teachers which included outstanding Chinese painters like Pan Tianshou, Huang Binhong, Lu Fengzi and Zhu Wenyun. After the decisions to use life-models and to enrol boys and girls in the same school, which stunned society, Shanghai Art School became one of the earliest bases that pushed forward the new art of China.

As early as the time when he assumed charge of the Beijing University Research Society of Painting Methods, Xu Beihong had expressed his attitude towards the reform of Chinese painting in the following remarks:

> "We want to keep what was good in the old method; to continue those things that were about to disappear; to change those things that were not good; to supplement those that were insufficient; to mix those elements of Western art that were useful for us."(19)

At that time he had just come back from Japan after an inspection tour of six months. He was greatly inspired by the Japanese painters'spirit in exploring things new through mixing with the western method. A strong sense of social responsibility impelled him to take the rejuvenation of the nation's art as his responsibility. He deeply "deplored" "the decadence of Chinese painting" and "the downfall of the nation".(20) His goal was to "inherit what was left by our forefathers, adjust their good models and establish a modern art." During the opening ceremony of the Research Society in the autumn, he delivered a speech, saying:

> "Hereafter our Beijing University Research society of Painting Methods should guide Chinese art into its proper track so that in the future we can produce more talents to check unhealthy tendencies in art circles."(21)

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[18] *The Chinese Encyclopedia, Fine Arts Volume*, No I, Beijing: The Chinese Encyclopedia Press, 1991, p.460

[19] Xu Beihong, 'On Improving Chinese Painting', Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng, ed. *Collected Essays On Fine Arts*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.63

[20] ibid.

[21] See Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Modern Chinese Painitng*, Najing: Jiangsu Fine Arts

Following his return to China after seven years of studying abroad in France, he was appointed as a professor at Nanjing Central University, acting concurrently as the head of the Art Department of the Shanghai Nanguo Art Institute, where he found that he and Tian Han cherished the same ideals and both advocated realistic art. When he became the principal of the Art College of Beijing University, he recognized at once the outstanding achievement of Qi Baishi who was being largely neglected at that time. He overrode all objections to engage Qi as a professor. Although it was after 1946, when he was appointed the principal of the Beiping National Art Academy, that he systematically carried out his reforms in the teaching of Chinese painting, the scientific spirit and the realistic approach dictated by his goal of reforming Chinese painting had from the very beginning been clear and unflinching.

When Lin Fengmian was in charge of the National Art Academy, his slogan was: "Introduce western art, make adjustments in Chinese art, blend Chinese and Western art, and produce art of the times." He was the first to put the Western Painting Department together with a Chinese Painting Department and require students to study the arts of both. Despite the fact that the situation at that time was just as he had described when he said, "No matter in which school, Chinese painting and western painting are always in antagonistic and conflicting positions", (22) he still insisted on "assimilating the culture of other nations, with our culture as a basis, to form a new epoch."

Since the Revolution of 1911, mass organizations of painters all over the country had been exceedingly active. Although many among these were very small and shortlived, this fully testified to the vigorousness of the modern art movement. (23) In the 1920s and 1930s, there appeared several rather famous organizations whose sole aim was the development of traditional Chinese painting. In Beijing, there was the Research Society of

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Press, 1986, p.64

[22] Lin Fengmian, 'Reassessing the Value of Chinese Painting', *Apollo*, National Art Academy Monthly, No.7, February, 1929

[23] See Xu Zhihao, *Catalogue of Chinese Fine Art Societies*, Shanghai: Shanghai Publishing House of Calligraphy and Painting, 1994

Chinese Painting (*Zhongguohuaxue Yanjiuhui*) headed by Jin Shaocheng and Zhou Yang'an; in Shanghai there was the Yiguan Society (*Yiguan Xuehui*) headed by Huang Binhong and Jiang Xuyun; in Lingnan, there was the Research Society of Chinese Painting (*Guohua Yanjiuhui*) represented by Pan He, Lu Zhenhuan, Zhao Haogong and others. Although disagreeing that the way to reform Chinese painting was through blending it with western art, these organizations were very active in holding exhibitions, publishing journals and utilizing public and private collections of hand-written and printed copies for research, and had considerable influence. The art schools in various localities invited some of these painters to teach in their schools with the attitude that there should be "freedom in learning, all-embracing", and as a result the art schools became places where different ideas confronted, interchanged with and supplemented each other. In this way, the art academies and schools became the centre of the reform movement of Chinese painting during this century.

6.1.4 THE WAR OF RESISTANCE AGAINST JAPAN AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DOMINANT DIRECTION IN THE REFORM OF CHINESE PAINTING

In the 1930s, the main themes of resistance against Japanese aggression and national salvation gradually prevailed over that of enlightenment in the May Fourth New Culture Movement. The spirit of self-criticism born in the enlightenment period had sunk to an awkward situation in the crisis of "national and racial extinction". The intellectuals who inherited the May Fourth spirit began to understand and reassess Chinese traditional culture more rationally. At this period, the enthusiasm of art circles for the ancient artistic achievements in the grottoes at Dunhuang showed that the public in general had a new awareness of national tradition. The widespread and rapid growth of woodcuts had pointed the direction of the development of Chinese modern art, it also laid the foundation stone for new Chinese orthodox art in the 20th century.

The collection of writings unexpectedly found in a stone room of the Mogaoku grottoes at Dunhuang at the beginning of the century had interested the world's academic circles and had drawn Sir Aurel Stein from England, Paul Pelliot from France, a Japanese expedition team and Langdon Warner from America, all of whom took many of the precious scriptures, murals and statues to their own countries. The investigation of these materials in the West became a special field of study. In the period 1920-1924, Pelliot published his six volumes of Dunhuang murals. In 1936, the Chinese version of Stein's *Archaeological Finds in Western Regions* was published. But for various reasons, these had not attracted the attention of domestic academic circles in China. It was not until the War of Resistance against Japan, when the Gansu Corridor became the National Defence Front and Chongqing became the temporary capital that Mogaoku all of a sudden came into the limelight. Scholars and artists from all over the country swarmed to Dunhuang, where they began to carry out surveys and investigations, to make records and copies and to do some conservation work. Zhang Daqian was one of the earliest to arrive in Dunhuang and from 1940 he spent two years and seven months copying a total of more than 270 Dunhuang murals. *Dafeng Tang Copies of Dunhuang Murals* was published in 1943. The magnificence of Dunhuang art aroused great excitement in these artists, and made them see the great "age of magnificence in tradition". Precisely as one artist wrote:

> "God bless China! He has kept for us in the caves of westernmost Dunhuang the magnificent art relics of a thousand years. We can rewrite art history! As if awakening from a dream, we've discovered the greatness, the vitality, the power and the imagination of our forefathers."(24)

While reaching a new awareness of Chinese art history in medieval times, the art circles had also turned their interest to a number of painters who lived between the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing. This was because these men embodied the "moral integrity" (*qijie*) of Chinese traditional culture as well as the "consciousness of responsibility" from Confucius and Mencius down to Sima Qian. Huang Binhong was stranded in Japanese-occupied Beiping working on the historical data on painters who had been Ming Dynasty loyalists. Fu Baoshi published *The Biographies of Artists of Han*

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[24] Zong Baihua, *An Aesthetic Stroll*, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981, p.129

Nationality at the end of Ming Dynasty (Preface by Guo Moruo) in 1939. On the paintings of these Ming Dynasty loyalists (artists), Fu's analysis followed:

> "After the Ming Dynasty was conquered, every hill and every stretch of water, every plant and every tree, under the brushes of the painters was woven with the spirit of resistance to an alien race into a picture of peerless heroism. Up to the 18th century, we are still able to get in touch with the lustre of such a spirit." (25)

As to the development of painting in the post-Tang dynasties of Song, Yuan and Ming, and the reason why brushwork was becoming more freehand and why the spiritual value of Chinese painting was rising, Fu believed that it was caused by the bullies of an alien race in addition to social unrest. He believed that the works of Ming Dynasty loyal painters "were imbued with the spirit of the nation", "their profound meaning was beyond their brushwork."(26) The high esteem in which Fu Baoshi and Zhang Daqian held Shi Tao and Zhu Da, and the denunciation of the four Wangs after the May Fourth Movement echoed each other, led to a tendency to worship the tradition of Ming loyalists and early Qing monks Shi Tao and Zhu Da in Chongqing's Chinese painting circles during the time of the War of Resistance against Japan.

The War of Resistance against Japan of the whole nation had made the art circles' criticism of the May Fourth Movement concentrate on the problems of national artistic form, popularization and the reflecting of reality. Due to a shortage of supplies caused by the war, the development of art suffered serious limitations. An exception was the new woodcut movement initiated by Lu Xun. The outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan, instead of hindering woodcut creation, pushed it forward to a new stage. The first reason was that the cost of producing woodcuts was very low; the second was that most of the woodcut artists, though they formerly lived in the cities, with the progress of the War, were dispersed into inland regions including liberated areas and army stations. The third reason was the necessity of spreading propaganda among the masses during the War. In addition, the new woodcut had from the day of its birth been the most revolutionary

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[25] Fu Baoshi, 'The Progress of Chinese Painting Thought', *Fu Baoshi Art Collected Works*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986, p.251

[26] ibid., p.252

component part of the May Fourth New Culture Movement. With greatest enthusiasm, young woodcut artists joined the War of Resistance with their creative works, causing the production of woodcuts to expand rapidly, because they had become a kind of new art that was closest to the masses, closest to reality and with plenty of vigour. As to the artistic language of the woodcut, Lu Xun had said:

> "My idea is that it is not necessary to ask whether it is western style or Chinese style, let's see if the spectators can understand, then use whatever is suitable." (27)

He also advocated the realistic style, believing:

> "To draw the proletariat artists should paint realistically, one should paint workers according to the workers' original features, there's no need to paint the fist larger than the head." (28)

For this reason, he stressed the basic skills in training in woodcut-making, and believed that a woodcut is after all a drawing, therefore one should first master the skill of sketching.(29) During the War, new woodcuts not only overcame traces of imitating the western pattern in the initial stages, but also showed their distinctive Chinese style after the extensive discussions throughout cultural circles on the problem of national form. The woodcut movement in Yanan, however, was more explicit in its creative principles, "revolutionization", "nationalization", and "popularization", and it was entirely brought into the orbit of the revolutionary force led by the Chinese Communist Party. Thus, the woodcut movement during the War set an example and prepared cadres for future new Chinese art, and also pointed out the basic principles for the innovation and development of Chinese painting. These were: popularization and realism.

After experiencing the tremendous impact of war and the storm of revolution, the various kinds of innovative experiment in Chinese painting begun early in the century were faced with a new situation. The conservative schools of sticking to old ways, and the new schools of imitating modern western styles seemed to have lost their momentum of development. It appeared that Xu Beihong's school of "realism" had exceptional insight,

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[27] Lu Xun, 'To Li Wucheng', 1934, *Lu Xun On Art*, ed. by Zhang Wang, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1956, p.168

[28] *Lu Xun On Art*, ed. by Zhang Wang, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1956, p.37

[29] ibid., p.151, p.179

and had made great progress during the period of the War. For example, Fu Baoshi, Guan Shanyue and Zhao Wangyun began to try using comparatively realistic methods to work on their landscape paintings. Jiang Zhaohe's figure painting with its outstanding achievements of realism had proved that innovations in traditional figure painting had successfully brought about a change from the classical to the modern pattern. It should be said that this was as a result of the times and the environment. Because of this, Xu Beihong felt elated:

> "Realism has raised its position in our country because of the War of Resistance." [30] "It is really gratifying to see that the War was also able to drive away the demons in art." [31]

After he became the principal of the Beiping National Art Academy, he reaffirmed anew his thoughts on the reform of Chinese painting. Comparing it with the reformism propounded by himself at the beginning of the century he went a step further in stressing that art must reflect real life. He said:

> "To establish a new Chinese painting is neither reform nor a combination of the Chinese and the Western, it means obtaining our art directly from reality and nature alone"; [32] "In soliciting opinions as to the needs of the country and the wishes of the students, they all want art to reflect people's lives."[33]

His line of reform of Chinese painting by using western sketching as the basic training, a line which he carried out forcefully, laid a teaching foundation for realism, a new orthodox Chinese painting.

In summary, the reform movements in Chinese painting which commenced at the beginning of the century grew into a tendency to criticise the abuses of old Chinese painting and a tide of many-directioned and multi-faceted innovative experiments around the time of the May Fourth Movement. By the end of the War of Resistance against Japan, the reform movement in Chinese painting was basically dominated by realism.

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[30] Xu Beihong, 'The effect of western art on Chinese art', See Shui Tianzhong, 'Debates about the Reformation of Chinese Painting in Retrospect', Beijing: *History and Theory of Fine Arts*, 1983/2, p.201

[31] See Shui Tianzhong, 'Debates about the Reformation of Chinese Painting in Retrospect', Beijing: *History and Theory of Fine Arts*, 1983/2, p.201

[32] Xu Beihong, 'Steps In the Development of a New Chinese Painting', 1947, *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Vol.II, p.531, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

[33] ibid.

6.1.5 NEW REGIME AND NEW ORTHODOXY

The new regime, as set up by the Communist Party in 1949, ushered the entire nation including cultural and art circles into a highly political and organizational environment. Innovative movements in Chinese painting had also proceeded under the guidance of Party policy and Mao Zedong's thoughts on literature and art with unprecedentedly powerful form. The innovative movements of the 1950s had directly inherited the spirit of criticism of the May Fourth Movement, centring around the problems of "whom to draw for" and "to draw what" as well as the collisions between the new and old, the eastern and the western, and launched a fierce critical assault on formalism and the restoration of the old in the Ming and Qing dynasties' orthodox literati painting. Meanwhile, they also made criticisms of the innovative achievements of the first half of the century and firmly established the principles of revolutionization, popularization and nationalization. With the beginning of the economic and cultural construction of the New China, the innovative movement in Chinese painting was unfolding again, with the art academies as its centre.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a series of political movements constantly reinforced the political education function of art. The closed cultural environment obstructed the entrance of modern western culture and arts. Under such special conditions, Chinese painting entered into a period when realism was highly developed and became the mainstream. Based upon the achievement of Xu Beihong and Jiang Zhaohe's realism, and following the tradition of realism in the Soviet Union, figure painting developed Liu Wenxi's (b.1933) model which mixed freehand brushwork together with New Year painting methods; Fang Zengxian's (b.1931) model, which incorporated techniques of flower-bird painting; Cheng Shifa's (b.1921) model, which benefited from cartoon-drawing; and Ye Qianyu (1907-95) and Huang Zhou's (1925-97) model, which was based upon their figure sketches from life. Heralded by the peripatetic sketching from nature undertaken by Li Keran, landscape painting gradually grew up into a new orthodoxy characterized by a realistic style, represented by Li Keran in Beijing; Fu Baoshi and Qian Songyan in Nanjing;

Shi Lu and Zhao Wangyun in Xi'an; Guan Shanyue (b.1912) and Li Xiongcai (b.1910) in Lingnan. In flower-bird painting, Pan Tianshou brought in landscapes, greatly expanding the boundary of flower-bird painting. Upon the basis of sketching from nature, artists doing fine brushwork painting in the North and South of China also formed schools, as represented by Yu Feian (1888-1859) and Chen Zhifu (1896-1962).

Without doubt, the achievement of reform in Chinese painting of the 1950s - 1960s was unprecedented, and rested mainly in the realization of the objectives of "innovation in Chinese painting", "resurrecting Chinese painting" and "blending the Chinese and the western to usher in a new era of painting" which were envisaged in the May Fourth period. Mao Zedong's thoughts, such as "Literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers, and should also serve the needs of proletarian politics"; "the old should serve the purpose of the new, the alien culture the Chinese"; "unite revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism", set a limited creative space for artists of the time, but within such a space, the artists did their utmost to solve problems of art itself linked up with the demands of the times, enabling traditional Chinese painting to transform itself within the narrow confines specified by politics. And finally they accomplished the transformation of traditional Chinese painting from the classical to the modern pattern under the guidance of the May Fourth spirit and ideals such as "popularization"; "reflecting social reality" and "the realistic and monumental style". The new orthodoxy of traditional Chinese painting was established upon such a background.

But during this period, the excessive interference of politics in art, and the excessive pursuit of fame and political benefits by art resulted in the production a large number of shallow, common, hypocritical works full of political slogans, which were a record of messages of the times, but were of little or no aesthetic value. The development of such a trend reached its climax during the period of the Cultural Revolution. Consequently, after the Cultural Revolution it caused a profound argument and reflection on the new orthodoxy as well as the May Fourth tradition.

6.1.6 FORMATION OF A MULTIPOLAR PATTERN IN ART CIRCLES

Discussion of the defects of the May Fourth Movement was a sensitive subject in cultural circles in the 1980s. An influential view was that the theme of national salvation obscured that of enlightenment, leading to the crushing of the ideological trend of individual emancipation from feudalism which belonged with the May Fourth spirit. (34) Another point of view considered that due to the over excessive value placed by Chinese intellectuals on the individual's obligations to society, the ideological trend of individual emancipation during the May Fourth Movement was intrinsically a promotion of reforming society and not a question of sticking firmly to the belief in "individual liberty". (35) All these reflections on the May Fourth tradition came directly from reflections upon the Chinese political environment from the 1950s to the 1970s, including reflection on the origin of such undesirable practices as: "politicisation of the role of art"; "the uniform pattern in artistic creative works"; and "prohibition of individual exploration beyond the pale of collective conception".

Just as in the May Fourth period and in the early years of New China, the change of historical conditions of the new era compelled traditional Chinese painting to face a serious challenge once again. The torrential influx of modern Western civilization and arts in a reforming and opening environment provided a opportunity for people to reflect on the reform movements of Chinese painting during the century. The transformation of aesthetic perception and the ways of thinking and the ways of living in a commodity economy in the new era, all made new demands on the development of traditional Chinese painting. The great debate on it began again. Those who believed that "Chinese painting is in crisis" considered that traditional Chinese painting had come to a dead end; the efforts made by Xu Beihong, Lin Fengmian and even Li Keran were merely petty remedies, unable to save it from its fate of decline and fall. The only real way out for modern Chinese painting

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[34] Li Zehou, 'The Dual Variation: The Enlightenment and National Salvation', No.1, Chengdu: *Towards The Future*, 1986

[35] Gan Yang, 'The Faith of Liberty: Defects in the May Fourth tradition', Beijing: *Dushu*, No.5, 1989

therefore was to agree with the direction of Western art.(36) Their opponents considered that traditional Chinese painting was not merely representative of oriental culture, but would be the trend of world arts in the future. Because its main core was "a return to nature", just like the green plants that help maintain the equilibrium of the life cycle, it emphasized the harmony between mankind and nature, man and society, man and oneself, thus maintaining the mental equilibrium of mankind. Only conservative features led the art of the Ming and Qing to deviate from the main core, while innovatory features led art after the May Fourth Movement also to deviate from the main core, hence producing a foggy mist around modern Chinese painting.(37) Such viewpoints with entirely different cultural directions, nevertheless have much in common when reflecting upon the May Fourth tradition, i.e., both parties disputed the problem of the conflict between the Chinese and the Western; both dissented from the new orthodox art -- the active result of the combination of the Chinese and the western since the May Fourth Movement. Both were attempting to surpass the guiding principle in the reforms in Chinese painting since May Fourth, and both wanted to establish their theory, basing it upon cultural systems and the related artistic spirit, no longer keeping an eye on selecting techniques or styles from the West.

At the same period that the new orthodoxy based upon Xu Beihong's realism was questioned, the art of Lin Fengmian and Huang Binhong, which had not been considered as mainstream, was rediscovered. Huang Qiuyan, and Chen Zizhuang (1912-1976), as representatives of the traditional masters were unearthed; Wu Guanzhong (b.1919), as the successor of Lin Fengmian, attracted much attention. In the new tidal wave of art, popularization was replaced by individuality and elitism; realism by abstraction and transformation; the social function of reflecting reality by supra-politics understanding of life. However, successors to the new orthodox art were not lacking. For example, Zhou Sicong (1939-1996) succeeded to the tradition of Jiang Zhaohe (1904-86), paying attention to social reality; while Jia Youfu followed the example of Li Keran and pursued a

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[36] Li Xiaoshan, 'Chinese Painting as a Kind of Preserved Tradition', Nanjing: *Jiangsu Pictorial*, 1986/1

[37] Pan Gongkai, 'A Brief Discussion of the "Green Painting"', Beijing: *Art*, 1985/11

magnificent and monumental style in landscape painting. In addition, there were also attempts that did not descend directly either from the ancient or modern tradition -- for example, the so-called "New Literati painting", adopting the literati painting language, displaying the attitude of cynicism; and the "New Ink and Wash Painting", which was something like Pop Art made with ink and paper. All of these finally constitute a new multipolar pattern in Chinese art circles today, and it could be said to be a result of the reform movements in Chinese painting throughout the century.

From this brief review of the reform movements in Chinese painting this century, it can be seen that Li Keran's personal artistic career was closely linked with the mainstream of new Chinese art after the May Fourth Movement. As the representative of the established new orthodox art still alive at the end of the 1980s, he stated his position in the debate of the time. He believed that the direction of the May Fourth path was correct, but complained that inadequate attention had been paid to tradition since the May Fourth Movement. As can be seen from his artistic reforms in his later years, he tried his utmost to make his art more intrinsically valuable, more abstract, more vigorous in imagination, and attempted to surpass the tradition of May Fourth.

6.2 LI KERAN AND THE MAIN SCHOOLS OF REFORM IN CHINESE PAINTING IN THE EARLY PART OF THE CENTURY

The tide of reform in Chinese painting in the first half of the century took two different routes, one tending towards merging with Western art and the other towards transformation within tradition. Within these two main trends, there existed diverse schools, of which the most influential were the traditional innovative school, represented by Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong; Xu Beihong's realist school and Lin Fengmian's expressionist school. Despite their different concepts of reform in Chinese painting and their varying degrees of success and failure, they jointly constituted the modern tradition of Chinese painting, consequently playing a significant role in the development of Chinese painting

later on. Li Keran not merely kept a close link with tradition through his apprenticeship with the traditional masters Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong, but also kept in close touch with the entirely different approach of merging with Western art. He was very talented at distinguishing and selecting the most valuable artistic subjects from those entirely diverse theories and practices, giving them his individual solution by bringing them together through the intermediate link of sketching from nature. Therefore, Li Keran's personal achievement, which effectively blended Chinese and western art within the framework of tradition, had benefited to a considerable degree from the various experiments in the reform movements of Chinese painting.

6.2.1 LI KERAN AND THE EXPRESSIONISM OF LIN FENGMIAN

"The Expressionism of Lin Fengmian" is not a precise term. It bears no direct relation to the Expressionism of the West. The term here merely indicates a kind of ink and colour painting that Lin Fengmian used the medium of Chinese painting to create. Lin emphasized that the nature of art was emotional and expressive, and his style and artistic language can be traced back to modern Western painting, especially the Expressionism at the very beginning of the century, hence, this thesis borrows the term "expressionism" to refer to Lin's artistic style. In order to reveal the relationship between the art of Li Keran and that of Lin Fengmian, it is necessary to make a general survey of the origin of Lin's artistic experience and thoughts.

Lin Fengmian went to study in France in 1919. The next year he entered the Municipal Art School in Dijon, and studied under the principal who had much respect for oriental art. Six months later, the principal recommended him to study sketching and oil painting at the National Art Academy in Paris. Later, he suggested that Lin should not involve himself in academic study for too long but instead should study his own oriental artistic tradition. Thus Lin left the studio in the Academy to wander among the various museums to do research on oriental art. It may appear rather surprising that Lin went to the West just to study oriental art. But getting re-acquainted with his native tradition in a

foreign country had a decisive influence on the formation of his unique concepts of innovation in Chinese painting in his later days. At that time, he was more inclined to the Post-Impressionism that had been raging through Europe then, and the modern painting schools of the early 20th century. During that time, he became acquainted with the French painter Andre Claudot (1892-1982) who had just returned to France after World War I. In 1920, Claudot held an exhibition of his battlefield sketches in Dijon. When he went to Paris, he demonstrated his concerns for the livelihood of the common people at the lowest levels of society. He had never been satisfied with the academic school of the day but was influenced by the forceful painting style of Henri Matisse (1869-1954). [38] All of this was the reason that Lin Fengmian invited Claudot to teach at the Hangzhou Art School later on. While in France, Lin Fengmian became acquainted with Cai Yuanpei, who was then visiting there. Lin responded earnestly to Cai's proposal to "replace religion with aesthetic education", then organized the "Overseas Art Movement Association". When he returned to China, he set up the "Society of Art Movement" throughout the whole country, championing the reform of the old Chinese painting circles and the creation of "the new era art", both of which displayed his attitude of "art for life's sake". Meanwhile, he tried to introduce Parisian artists and their work in Hangzhou Art School where he was in charge, hoping that the new Chinese art could keep abreast of developments in the modern art of the world. Consequently, in the first ten years after the establishment of Hangzhou Art School, it became a centre where modern art was introduced and experimented with.

The idea behind "blending the Chinese and the western" as proposed by Lin Fengmian, was to adapt modern Western painting to help make innovations in Chinese painting. Influenced by Cai Yuanpei's ideas on aesthetics, Lin considered that

> "Art is basically the product of emotion"; "all social problems are the problems of sentiments".[39]

He believed the function of art is to provide solace, to communicate and to temper

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[38] See Wan Qingli and David Clarke, 'The French Painter Andre Claudot and His Trips in China', Taibei: *Xiongshi Art*, No.242, April, 1991, p.181

[39] Lin Fengmian, 'An open letter to the artists of the country', *Treatises on Art*, Nanjing: Zhengzhong Publishing House, 1936

the sentiments of human beings with beautiful creations. Based upon such a viewpoint, he considered that there were strong and weak points in both Chinese and western painting. For example, the landscape under a Chinese artist's paint-brush tended to express his emotion, "all paintings are a kind of impression". Hence,

> "There has never been a Chinese landscape painter who sketches in front of the actual landscape".(40)

He considered that Chinese painting in recent centuries, because its form was underdeveloped, with imitation prevalent everywhere, failed to meet the demand that it should freely express the sentiment of the painter, finally losing the social position it should deserve, whereas the modern classical painting school and the naturalism of the West, because they lacked sentiment, had made art into something purely mechanical. Therefore, Lin advocated "blending oriental and occidental art" with the object of displaying sentiments. He expected that those who defend Chinese painting should realize the fundamental purpose of Chinese painting is to express sentiment, and should take advantage of the strong points of Western art to "adjust the requirements of our internal sentiment so as to bring about the renaissance of Chinese art"; (41) whereas those who favour Western painting, should realize that Chinese painting has its own important elements for its establishment. "Some of these elements can surely supplement what is lacking in Western painting". (42) These viewpoints that guided his pursuit of a generalized and exaggerated artistic style in his creative works, although in teaching he stressed the fundamental training of sketching from objects, consequently also guided his choice of Western schools of painting. He discarded classical realism, but directed his gaze naturally at the modern school that came after the end of the last century, acquiring their gorgeous colouring and their geometric shapes in form. As to the study of Chinese tradition, Lin mainly adopted its quality of expressing sentiments, at the same time trying to avoid being enslaved within the demands of formalism and calligraphic brushwork, and instead to learn the free lines

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[40] Lin Fengmian, 'Future Prospects of Oriental and Occidental Art', ibid. [NB This now refers to *Treatises on Art*]

[41] ibid.

[42] Lin Fengmian, 'Preface', *Treatises on Arts*, ibid.

portrayed by ancient folk artists. Eventually, the route of blending the Chinese and the West adopted by Lin Fengmian, in a certain sense, fitted in with the notion of Chen Shizeng who stressed subjective expression, and the artistic style created by Lin Fengmian was a new kind of Chinese painting entirely different from any traditional one.

But with the breaking out of the War of Resistance against Japan in China, Lin Fengmian's artistic experiment in stressing individuality lost its development opportunities. His path was no longer the direction hankered after by young artists. When New China was set up, experimenting with the modern western style was completely forbidden. Lin Fengmian isolated himself in his own home, but he could not escape criticism after Liberation, and was even imprisoned for four years during the Cultural Revolution. Even then, Lin Fengmian never switched his mind from artistic problems and his original choice of ways to resolve them. As late as the 1980s, when his artistic achievements became politically acceptable, the strongly individualistic style, close to modern Western art, which he represented again became the trend of the time.

Li Keran was studying in the Hangzhou Art School when the School was at its peak under Lin Fengmian. There, Li Keran became involved in the mainstream of the New Culture Movement of China. Under the influence of Lin Fengmian, he attempted to experiment with the tendencies of the Post-Impressionist School and the early modern art schools. At a later stage of the War of Resistance against Japan, when he was starting his practice of innovation in Chinese painting, he switched his direction and accepted Xu Beihong's realism, and became the student of the traditional masters Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong. Finally, Li Keran went on with his reforms of Chinese painting within the traditional framework and persisted in following the demands of calligraphic brushwork. It appears that Li went in a completely contradictory direction from Lin Fengmian's, and was also far remote from Lin Fengmian's style. However, in stressing that the function of art was to convey passion and express sentiment, Li firmly kept in line with Lin Fengmian. On such significant matters, they were both the defenders of traditional aesthetics; both were expressionists. Departing from the principle of expressing one's sentiments, it was not hard for them to comprehend the forms of the modern western schools, as well as the

intercommunication between modern Western art and Chinese folk art, Chinese opera and even literati painting. They both showed interest in the formative rules of modern painting and more or less benefited from these rules in forming their own styles, such as the peculiarities of Li Keran's personal style, "blackness", "lightness", "fullness" and "wholeness", which all bore a direct relation to the rules of form of modern art. Even when he went on sketching trips, what Li stressed most was strong sentiment obtained from objects and meticulous means of expression. His artistic thoughts such as, "express the object you are depicting strongly, emphatically"; the style should be "wonderful" (*qi*), "forceful" (*hen*) and "never pedestrian" as well as "cutting out", "exaggeration" and "organization", all these were based upon the starting point of rules of form. Li Keran believed: "The greatest responsibility of an artist is to touch people's hearts". (43) In other words, he considered the essence of art to be emotional and expressive. Although the fact that Li's way of conveying emotion was more implicit than that of Lin Fengmian, what he agreed on with the latter, even if it looked rather incompatible at the time, might be the important reason why he was able to surpass pure realism and traditionalism as well as going far ahead of his contemporaries.

6.2.2 LI KERAN AND THE REALISM OF XU BEIHONG

"The realism of Xu Beihong" is the term used in this thesis to refer to a particular route adopted by Xu Beihong to reform Chinese painting, as well as to the practice of the artists who came very near to this route. It is worth mentioning that Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng, the two leading figures of the Lingnan School, were pioneers in the reform of Chinese painting who held similar artistic views to Xu Beihong, however, their achievement and influence were far less than Xu's. The basic characteristics of this reform route were: merging the techniques of the Western academic realism of early this century with those of traditional Chinese painting; emphasizing sketching from life, pursuing the visual

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[43] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1990, p.128

resemblance of artistic language; and advocating art for life's sake. Xu Beihong's realism occupied a particularly important position in the reform movements of Chinese painting in the 20th century, again, it was the direct origin and direct tradition of the new orthodox art in the later part of this century. Hence, it is necessary to make a brief survey of the content and particulars of Xu's artistic thoughts here.

In 1919, when Xu Beihong went to study in Paris, Europe was experiencing a revolution in art. The diverse currents of artistic thought were having an impact on artistic circles, while the strict classical style existed almost only in academies or some private studios. Xu Beihong, as a loyal disciple of Kang Youwei, firmly believed that only the Realism of the West was capable of reforming Chinese painting. With great enthusiasm, he studied the skills of Realism in Paris, while what he could accept had never exceeded the limits of Impressionism. His strong sense of social responsibility, a fervent faith in Realism and his "bigoted prejudice" and "determined character", as well as the support of Cai Yuanpei made him a noted artist and artistic activist in Chinese art circles when he returned to China in 1927. The demand of the times enabled him to realize his ideals and to bring his temperament into full play.

The reason that Xu Beihong occupied an irreplaceable position in modern Chinese art is that he was the first to lay down a basis of strict realistic sketching for modern artistic education in China. He took a strict scientific attitude to the apprehension of realist sketching, stating:

> "Artists should have the same zeal in pursuing Truth as scientists. The study of science has a foundation of mathematics; the study of art is to be based upon sketching. As there are no boundaries in science, art is the common language of the world. Those who have received education in China must have studied mathematics, but nobody has heard of studying 'Western mathematics', it is the same with studying sketching."(44)

He believed that

> "Sketching is a universal method". (45)

Comparing the sketching training system of the various arts academies in the first

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[44] Xu Beihong, 'The Art Situation of China Today', *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Vol.II, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987, p.533

[45] From Feng Fasi, 'Xu Beihong and Chinese Art Education', *Art*, 1995/8, p.60

half of the century, Xu Beihong had once spoken confidently,

> "There is a definite Yes or No in mathematics, a 'positive' and a 'negative'. But the definite 'positive' and 'negative' since sketching came to China originated from me. It may have a history of only twenty years but is actually universal." (46)

Comparatively speaking, the sketching system of the Lin School at the Hangzhou Art School had been influenced by Post-Impressionism, and coincided with Lin Fengmian's artistic idea of "Inclusionism", a flexible system of art indeed, whereas Xu Beihong regarded it with the attitude of pursuing truth. He took "form" in sketching as an image of objective truth.

> "Without the existence of form, where would handicraft come from?"(47)

He demanded that in practising sketching one should grasp the entity, at the same time penetrating into every minutest detail, so as to attain "total expansiveness without neglect of the slightest detail"(48) and thus achieving the enchanting effect of something which is "soul-stirring when gazing from afar, immeasurably glamorous when beholding from within inches."(49)

In contrast with Lin Fengmian's predilection for the various schools of Western painting, Xu Beihong showed his deep abhorrence of all forms of style in modern western art and for the modern painting schools of the West. As early as 1929, he had developed an argument with Xu Zhimo (1896-1931) over the "formalism" prevalent among the works displayed at the First National Exhibition of Fine Art. He strongly deprecated the "Commonness of Renoir, the flippancy of Cezanne and the vulgarism of Matisse"(50), which had completely removed the dignity of Art. He highly extolled the masterpieces of the romantic and classical masters of the West. Even as early as 1918, he put forth his

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[46] Xu Beihong, 'The Art Situation of China Today', *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Vol. II, p.533, The Artist Press, Taibei, 1987

[47] Xu Beihong, 'An Unsolved Mystery', ibid., p.135 [NB This now refers to the book by Xu]

[48] From Ai Zhongxin, *A Study of Xu Beihong*, p.83-85, Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Press, 1981

[49] From Feng Fasi, 'Xu Beihong and the Chinese Fine Art Education', Beijing: *Art*, 1995/8, p.61

[50] Xu Beihong, 'Mystery' *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume I, p.132, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

notion that

> "The purpose of painting is: dramatic likeness in every respect. *Miao* (Excellence) pertains to beauty, whereas *xiao* (semblance) pertains to artistic crafts. Hence, in painting, one has to be faithful to every detail in order to attain a perfect likeness. Only when the hand links closely with the heart or mind, may one dispense with sketching an object alone, and allow one's pen or brush to run at will so as to create an entirely new scene of beauty, almost perfect in every detail". (51)

This means progressing from the mere sketching of an object to the achievement of a perfect likeness, and thence to enter the sublime. This is the interfusion of the awakening of the painter with the natural object, when sentiment and landscape merge imperceptibly, thus reaching the very summit of creative work. Later, he further suggested,

> "Respect morality, love literature, strive to be all-inclusive, make the most of every detail, surpass all in brilliancy, but pursue a path of moderation".(52)

All these are to be the criteria of Art. "Respect morality" is directed point-blank at the character of the painter.

> "The responsibility of a painter is to fathom the mystery of the universe, to find an answer for human life". (53) "Even Art is only a minor skill, but she can realize the utmost beauty, create the utmost wonder, to appeal to mankind".(54)

"Love literature" means a painter should have a high cultural level: his works should be strongly imbued with literature. This means that the tradition of "there should be a poetic tint in the picture, and the picture should exhale an atmosphere of poetry," should be observed faithfully.

"Strive to be all-inclusive, make the most of every detail" is not only a demand on the sketching ability of the painter, but is also a demand on the artistic spirit and scope of the picture. The poet Du Fu (712-770) said,

> "The silk fabric has been soaked by the painter's ink-brushwork with his vitality; Almighty Heaven would surely weep at the supplication of a

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[51] Xu Beihong, 'The Methods of Improving Chinese Painting', *Beijing University Monthly*, 23-25 May, 1918, collected in *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Vol.I, p.41, the Artist Press, Taibei, 1987; see again 'On The Improvement of Chinese Painting' *Painting Lore Magazine*, No.1, June, 1920, *A Discussion On Chinese Painting*, p.110, Beiping: Li Da Publishing House, 1932

[52] Xu Beihong, 'An Unsolved Mystery', *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume I, p.138, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

[53] Xu Beihong, 'Looking Back and Looking Forward at the New Art Movement', *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume II, p.427, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

[54] From Xu Xingping, 'My Understanding of My Father's 'Realism'', Beijing: *Art*, 1995/8, p.63,

sincere human being." (55)

That grandiose style is what Xu expected in his "Strive to be all-inclusive", and this grandiose vision is a preamble to "Make the most of every detail".

> "Appreciate nature with minute care, observe with particular attention."(56)

In this way, the picture drawn by the painter would be full of meaning without the neglect of any detail.

"Surpass all in brilliancy, but pursue a path of moderation" means that art should not go to extremes even at the very summit of skill, but should find the ideal point of coordination for a settlement of the contradiction between the real and the imaginary, the complex and the simple, line and phrase, form and spirit, the painting of the concrete and of the imaginary object. Thus may the highest ideal be reached, the most beautiful harmonious state of "Moderation" (*zhongyong*).

With his ideal of realism coloured strongly with romanticism, Xu Beihong managed to guide all his own education and artistic works. In 1947, he went a step further and advocated that to establish new Chinese painting was merely following the guidance of Nature. Later, he actually admitted,

> "Though I have espoused realism for over some twenty years, I have never got in touch with the broad masses".(57)

However, his idea of realism still has the most extensive influence. Among the genres of traditional Chinese painting, figure painting was the earliest to obtain good results and make progress upon the foundation of his sketching training system together with his notion of getting closer to real life.

A long list of names of those painters who came under the influence of Xu Beihong's realism could be given, among them Jiang Zhaohe (1904-1986), Zhao Wangyun (1906-1977), Ye Qianyu (1907-1996) and Huang Zou (1925-1997) were all the elite of this

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[55] Du Fu, 'The Song of New Landscape at Liu Mansion House in Fengxian', *Selections from Du Fu*, p.58, Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Book Press, 1983

[56] Xu Beihong, 'An Unsolved Mystery', *The Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, Volume I, p.138, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987

[57] See Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Modern Chinese Painting*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.72

school (Gao Jianfu (1879-1951) and Gao Qifeng's (1889-1933) Lingnan School basically belonged to this list).

From 1946 when he undertook to teach in the National Beiping Art School, up to 1953 when Xu Beihong passed away, Li Keran had worked by Xu's side for eight years. In the second year after Xu's death Li went on his long-distance sketching trip, and thus began his most important stage of innovation in Chinese painting. In his work of this period, vestiges of the influence of Xu Beihong were visible in many aspects of his work. These included his aim in innovation, which was to "switch the essence of Chinese tradition into the aspect of expressing reality", his pursuit of the visual sense of landscape painting without estrangement from real life and his study of the accuracy of shape by the method of sketching, while linking shape with brushwork to set up a new "language system" for landscape painting. All these were evidently the continuation of the innovative direction championed by Xu Beihong. The experiment of taking sketching as a fundamental lesson into the system of teaching Chinese painting had many times resulted in academic arguments, including those carried on in the period of the Beiping National Art School, in the early period of New China and in 1980s, all of which revolved around the problem of the innovations in Chinese painting. All these disputes centred around the problems of whether sketching could be a fundamental lesson in the teaching of Chinese painting and whether the beginner in Chinese painting should start with sketching from life or with copying traditional masterpieces. In the various controversies, Li Keran had been a supporter of Xu Beihong's sketching system. Li Keran had stated that,

> "Sketching is a science in studying shape or form, it envelops all the basic rules and regulations of the painting language. The unique object of sketching is to reflect the objective image correctly. Accuracy in painting images, volume, light and shade would be of benefit to the development of Chinese painting, without doing any harm to it."(58)

All such viewpoints were in reality an elucidation of Xu Beihong's idea. But Li considered the application of science to art should occur when it appears necessary, otherwise no application of science would be required. In other words, he did not consider the object of art was to seek Truth or that the method of sketching was equal to the method

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[58] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.27

of creating. He believed that training in sketching was only the most basic training in drawing shape or form. In this way, Li Keran had distinguished the problem of the accuracy of form from that of the exaggeration of artistic expression; consequently in his artistic practice he had been able to unify Xu Beihong's realism with Lin Fengmian's expressionism.

The sketching system set up by Li Keran for the teaching of Chinese landscape painting was no doubt based upon the sketching system of Xu Beihong. It included both the study of form or shape and the creation of art, which to a considerable degree realized Xu's ideal of a realism which was also pervaded with the romantic spirit. And in one sense, it was also an approval and development of Xu Beihong's school.

6.2.3 LI KERAN AND THE SCHOOL OF TRANSFORMING WITHIN TRADITION

The term, "the school of transforming within tradition", refers to the groups of artists who persisted in seeking reform within tradition, uninfluenced by the impact of Western art and culture, since the beginning of this century. Among the artists of this school, the most conspicuous representatives were certainly Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong. One enjoyed renown in flower-and-bird painting, the other was famous for landscape painting. Their art did not merely represent the continuation of tradition, it also represented the new vigorous life of tradition in artistic transformation in 20th century China. They were all ashamed to imitate the ancients, but would not follow Western art either. They differed in their routes to reform within tradition, but all testified to the vitality of tradition in modern times as well as the response in traditional art to the historic changes in society. The influence of Qi and Huang upon Li Keran was especially great and direct. Here, it is necessary that we make a brief investigation of the artistic background and thoughts of both Qi and Huang.

Qi Baishi came from the peasantry, he was apprenticed to a carpenter in his youth , and later on, he became a folk painter. As he came of age, he acquired scholarly culture,

and gradually became well-versed in traditional poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal cutting. After middle age, he developed into an artist, with the culture of a scholar. In his sixties, he followed the advice of Chen Shizeng, changing his own artistic style, abandoning his cold and cheerless style and blending colourful and sentimental elements of folk arts into his art, creating a simple and powerful modern style. As a painter who relied solely upon the sale of his paintings for a living, he devoted his whole life to singing the praises of the peasantry and their labouring life. Throughout life, he painted his paintings with the memories of his native place and his childhood as the subject matter and also as the theme of his poems. He let flow his sentiments of happiness, indignation, sorrow and joy, never took his feelings to abstruse profundity or concealment in his art. He was fond of the labouring life so full of fraternity, self-sufficiency and stability. Such an aesthetic emotion, where the value of virtue and the meaning of life are affirmed through such an affection, was naturally different from the pastoral eulogy of the literati painters. He regarded feudal bureaucracy as an ugly monster, and he bitterly criticized the inequalities of the world. The wisdom he displayed in his poems and paintings all came from his experiences of life, which were entirely at variance with the discussions and chatting over the situation or philosophy of the literati. Though he did not comprehend democracy nor the tidal flow of new ideas of May Fourth, in reality, he was standing upon the ground of democracy. The popularization that had been inherent in his aesthetic ideas and the particulars of his art, which was admired and enjoyed by both the upper classes and the common people, undoubtedly belonged to the aesthetic of the 20th century in China.

Huang Binhong came from the family of a merchant. He studied poetry and classical books and history, and learned calligraphy, painting and seal cutting from his childhood. In his youth, he took an active part in social reform. He agreed with constitutional reform and had twice been accused of being a revolutionary and had been hunted by the Qing regime. Later, he supported the Revolution of 1911, and actively contributed articles and paintings to the *True Situation Pictorial* (*Zhenxiang Huabao*, established by Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng in 1911, in Shanghai) which propagated the revolutionary theory of Sun Zhongshan. Huang Binhong possessed a very strong national consciousness. He constantly devoted his

energy to studying, writing, publishing, teaching and painting in traditional culture and art, and he visited the famous mountains, scenic spots and historic remains all over the country.

In 1934, his feelings were so deep that he remarked:

> "Since the World War, mankind has suffered tremendously. After thinking about this, I realize that material civilization is man-made, unlike spiritual things which arise from our innate nature".

He also remarked,

> "The painting of the West started from Impressionism and moved to abstraction, from the accumulation of points to drawing lines, so the technique is reaching perfection, and it will gradually coincide with that of the East". (59)

His views were a response and support to the argument on the value of literati painting put forward by Chen Shizeng. In its early stages, his landscape painting followed the cold and aloof style of the loyalists of the late Ming Dynasty which naturally bore some relation to his revolutionary anti-Qing ideas while he was still a youth. Later, he switched to pursue the vigorous and strong style of the master painters of the Northern Song Dynasty. In his later years, on the solid foundation of his picture drafts which he had accumulated through his years of journeying around the country, he began his painting reforms, striving to express the majestic mountains and torrential rivers by his profuse and vigorous brushwork, which he considered to be the symbol of the Chinese national character. Finally, with his profound knowledge and acute perception of tradition, he summarized the "seven rules of ink", creating a semi-abstract style in landscape painting, with his accumulated ink in points and short lines, which came nearer to the mentality of modern art.

The other painters who basically belonged to the school of transforming within tradition were Zhang Daqian, Chen Shizeng, Yu Feian (1888-1959), Chen Zhifuo (1896-1962), Wu Hufan (1894-1968), Li Kuchan (1899-1983), and Lu Yanshao (b.1909). But their achievements were not as distinguished as those of Qi and Huang.

The greatest fruit that Li Keran gathered from his masters Qi and Huang through their profound knowledge and audacious original spirit was the perception of the profundity of tradition and the path and direction of innovation. Li therefore located his work of

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[59] Huang Binhong, 'On The Future Prospects of Chinese Art', *Art Journal*, No.1, 1934, Shanghai: Liangyou Printing House

innovation within the huge framework of tradition, following the attitude of the oriental style towards nature, coupled with the basic demand of calligraphic brushwork. The creative experience of Qi and Huang helped Li Keran directly and greatly in solving a series of problems that had been included in "switching the essence of Chinese tradition into the aspect of expressing reality".

We should not, however, overlook the influence of Fu Baoshi and Pan Tianshou, and their insistence on "the national arts as the trunk", upon Li Keran's idea that "tradition is a blood relation to our art, while those coming from abroad should be the nutrition[60] .

Li Keran had started his study of Chinese painting at the beginning of the 1940s. Since the 1950s, he had abandoned oil painting completely and devoted his whole heart to traditional landscape painting, which appeared to be incomprehensible and a little pitiful to his old schoolmate from the Hangzhou Art School, Wang Zhanfei, who parted with Li Keran in Wuhan in 1938 and left for Yan'an. Only after a separation of seventeen years did they meet again in Beijing. Wang recalled his sentiment then,

> "What surprised me most was that Li Keran had now resolutely given up the oil painting that he once treasured and in which he had made important achievements, in landscape and portraiture as well as some large creations with very strong themes. He had now abandoned what he had sought for years, and turned to a search for Chinese painting. How strong his determination must have been in order to make this decision. What cause and strength impelled him to make such a decision?"[61]

It was no wonder that Li Keran's turning towards traditional landscape painting at the beginning of the 1950s, when oil painting, figure painting and large creations of strong themes were in favour and traditional landscape was despised by the public, made Wang Zhanfei feel perplexed. However, Wang had at that time already felt that

> "Li Keran had exceptional insight when he talked about matters connected with national culture."[62] "Li Keran displayed a great ambition in concentrating his attention on studying the profundity of Chinese painting and putting it into his own works."[63]

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[60] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.186

[61] Wang Zhanfei, 'Friendship by the side of West Lake', collected in Sun Meilan, *A Study of Li Keran*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1991, p.291

[62] ibid., p.290

[63] ibid.

Considered in this way, the switching of Li Keran in his studies bore a direct relation to his studying under Qi and Huang, and was inseparable from his association with Fu Baoshi and Pan Tianshou when he was in Chongqing in the 1940s.

Fu Baoshi was a historian, a critic and a painter of profound learning, convinced of the unique characteristics and broad spirit of traditional Chinese painting. He had long wanted artists to discover and to get acquainted with the "genuine value" of Chinese painting, and to invigorate Chinese painting with the "valuing ourselves" concept of national culture. Such a viewpoint was some distance from the leading trend of what Li Keran had been in touch with while studying at the Hangzhou Art School, but coincided with the adoration and affection for the traditional arts in which Li Keran was brought up. This meant great support for his insistence that "tradition is a blood relation to our art". Fu Baoshi had a very high opinion of landscape painting, considering it as

> "the maximal explanation of the Chinese national mentality, and at the same time the most intimate form of Chinese philosophical thought."(64)

Its profound significance lies in a state when "Human beings and Nature transcend the primeval atmosphere of nature",(65) seeking the maximal liberation of human life, looking for the homogeneity of the universe with man. Later, he remarked,

> "If the Chinese people forever refuse to give up landscape painting, they will forever be broad-minded".(66)

Such high praise from Fu Baoshi regarding the philosophical significance and aesthetic value of Chinese landscape painting might have had a positive effect on Li Keran in his decision as to where to launch his attack when trying to realize his ideal of invigorating Chinese painting. In addition, Fu Baoshi was at that time attempting to break through the confinement of the formula of the ancients with sketching from nature, even warning that, "line" and "ink" belong to the nation, they are "the noumenon and life of Chinese painting, which can not be harmed". This could not fail to leave a deep impression on Li Keran.

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[64] Fu Baoshi, 'The Progress of Chinese Painting Thought', *Fu Baoshi's Collected Art Works*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986, p.228

[65] Fu Baoshi, 'Yun Nantian', ibid., p.200

[66] Fu Baoshi, 'The Spirit of Chinese Painting', ibid., p.508

Pan Tianshou, who had twice been the teacher of Li Keran, was the president of the National Art Academy in Chongqing when Li Keran was teaching there. As early as 1928 Pan had put forward his view in *An Outline History of Chinese Painting*:

> "For the national spirit is the flesh and blood of national art, and the thoughts coming from abroad are mere nutrients. If one merely relies on nutrients without taking exercise, he can never succeed. Therefore if there is an intention to open up a new situation in Chinese art, it has to wait for a renaissance movement in national art."(67)

In the 1930s, national contradictions were becoming more accentuated, and Pan Tianshou stressed once again that

> "The art of a nation means the crystallization of a national spirit. so there exists a close relationship between the vitalization of national art and the vitalization of national spirit."(68)

This view was very close to that of Fu Baoshi, who wanted to rejuvenate Chinese painting through "knowing ourselves and valuing ourselves". Pan Tianshou firmly advocated that Chinese painting must reform itself. He insisted on following the road to developing Chinese painting independently. In teaching, he urged the students to study tradition seriously and earnestly during the basic stages, suggesting that they should "dig in first and jump out afterwards", guiding them to make a comprehensive and deep study of tradition. In the later period, when Li Keran likened the traditions of the Chinese and of the West to "a blood relation" and "nutrition", and in his motto in the 1940s, "break in with the greatest skill, and break out with the greatest courage", the shadow of Pan Tianshou's thought was perceptible.

6.3 LI'S STYLE AND THE DREAM OF A CENTURY

In defining standards in the appraisal of landscape painting, Li Keran in his later years regarded "greatness" as the highest mental criterion for the perception of landscape painting. Such a concept had never before entered the field of traditional Chinese painting

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[67] Quoted in Pan Gongkai, 'My Father Pan Tianshou and the Teaching of Chinese Painting', Zheng Chao, ed., *The Cradle of Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy Press, 1988, p.138

[68] ibid.

theory. He explained,

> "'Greatness' means 'magnificent and broad-minded', whereas the art of some painters gives people a feeling of 'trivial and affected'. This is determined by elements in the cultivation and character of the painter himself." (69)

He cited the painting of Fang Kuan of the Song Dynasty in support of his own viewpoint:

> "Such works by Fan Kuan are rare in history, and are examples of greatness, a good tradition in our Chinese painting." (70)

Considering the entire artistic theory and practice of Li Keran, his "Greatness" refers to profundity of artistic connotation, especially an artistic style that symbolizes the general characteristics of the national culture.

Roughly speaking, in the history of painting in China, the artistic style that tended to represent an entire spiritual feature of the nation was mainly represented by the academic art of the Han, Tang and Northern Song dynasties, whereas the artistic tendency towards strong individuality was most prominent in the literati painting of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. After the May Fourth Movement, a majority of intellectuals admired the traditional art of the Tang and Song dynasties but bitterly criticized the tradition of the Ming and Qing dynasties. This bore some relationship to the problem of demanding a resurrection and invigoration of nation and China. The cursory works of aloof and proud intellectuals appeared, especially in the period of the May Fourth Movement, to be lacking in the spirit of "science" and "democracy" which should accompany realistic style and popular appeal, and were lacking in the higher features of an integral national mentality as well. Taking these things into consideration, they were far removed from the dignified and magnificent art of the Han and Tang dynasties that had successfully assimilated alien civilizations. Even some of the intellectuals who highly praised the tradition of literati painting emphatically stressed that the genuine value of literati paintings rested in the aspect of national mentality that would not submit to alien rule, but they failed to alter the fact that literati painting was being ignored and slighted. For example, Fu Baoshi had considered that since the Yuan

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[69] *Li Keran On Art,* Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.183

[70] ibid.

dynasty the idea of Chinese painting had been transformed from an awakening of "truth" and "rationality" to an expression of "passion" and "meaning". The main causes were outside encroachment and social instability, which impelled the intelligentsia to "vent righteous indignation through the wielding of the brush" (71) . Such an expression of "passion" and "meaning" was in reality the exhibition of the national mentality. Hence, orchid, bamboo and landscape had "become symbols of the Chinese nation at the time" (72) . He considered that Chinese painting had "attained the most meaningful era of accomplishment" in the Yuan Dynasty, the basic reason being that the subjection of the nation to alien rule had sorely touched the sensitive national pride of literati painters, and had brought the essential peculiarity of the free hand ink and wash painting into full play. Moreover, it enabled the spiritual value of painting to ascend along the route of "painting rests upon the personality of the painter", so the brushwork could step higher to elegance and simplicity, and express more of the sentiments and personality of the painter (73) . Although Fu's viewpoints were spattered full of brilliant academic ideas, they failed to affect the mainstream of thought in the reform movement of Chinese painting. Before the impact of Western culture, this persisted in looking upon the artistic tradition of Tang and Song as the source from which to re-discover the national spirit and to invigorate the mentality of the nation.

While criticizing the painting of the Ming and Qing dynasties as "being at an extremely low ebb", Kang Youwei also highly praised the paintings of the Tang dynasty as "the exploration of the profundity of art", and the paintings of the Song Dynasty as "mature art, lacking nothing, with accomplished beauty", being at the very summit of art before the fifteenth century. (74) He also considered that the art of calligraphy was at its summit in the

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[71] Fu Baoshi, 'The Progress of Chinese Painting Thought', *Fu Baoshi's Collected Art Works*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House, 1986, p.237

[72] ibid., 238

[73] ibid., p.248, 249, also refer to Wang Luxiang, 'The Painting Spirit of Fu Baoshi', Beijing: *Chinese Painting Studies*, vol.8, pp.96-115

[74] Kang Youwei, 'The Catalogue of the Wanmu Caotang Painting Collections', 1917, Shen Peng and Chen Lusheng ed., *Collected Essays On Fine Arts*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.2

Northern and Southern Dynasties, because the tablet styles were magnificent, solemn and forceful.

As the leading figure of the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun highly extolled the carved stone art of the Han Dynasty as "profound and powerful in spirit and vision"[75]. Lu Xun considered the fact that the art of the Han and Tang dynasties could freely assimilate alien cultures exhibited a "confidence of not being enslaved by an alien race"[76].

With regard to the comparison of the literati painting of "the Southern School" (*nanzong wenrenhua*) with the academic painting of "the Northern School" *(beizong yuantihua*), Xu Beihong voiced his opinion,

> "As to Chinese painting, the Northern School far excelled the Southern School. The works of the South are merely beautifully elegant, whereas the works of the Northern School paid particular attention to fine brushwork and details. Their strong points rest in their brilliant luxuriance, which the Southern School can never hope to overtake. The paintings of the Southern School can be compared to tasteful articles, which are very pleasing to the eye, but not attractive enough for people to linger over long in thought."[77]

He thought that what art should try its utmost to represent was the things symbolizing great undertakings of the world, like the paintings by Michelangelo or the music of Beethoven. With the sentiment of social responsibility, Xu Beihong declared that the mission of art was to "make an appeal on behalf of mankind", and the style of art should be grand, majestic and monumental. Represented by Xu Beihong, the attitude of "enjoying brushwork" adopted by the literati to amuse themselves with art was again replaced in the reform movement of Chinese painting by the Confucian tradition of "becoming morally instructive, offering aid to human relations". [78]

Although Huang Binhong revered the literati painting of the Southern School, he did not in any way debase the academic painting of the Northern School. He even highly

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[75] Lu Xun, Letter to Li Hua, September, 1935, in Li Hua, 'Lu Xun On the National Heritage of Wood Carving Art', *Acquire the Artistic Thoughts of Lu Xun*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, 1979, p.129

[76] *The Complete Works of Lu Xun*, vol.1, Beijing: The People's Literature Publishing House, 1981, p.198

[77] Xu Beihong, 'Recent Events in French Art', *Collected Works of Xu Beihong On Art*, vol.1, Taibei: The Artist Press, 1987, p. 73

[78] [Tang] Zhang Yanyuan, "*cheng jiao hua, zhu ren lun.*" *Selection of Historic Materials on Chinese Aesthetics*, vol.1, Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House, 1981, p.306

praised the academic art of the Tang and Song as being at the "summit of brilliance". He included the elegant and profound brushwork and the luxuriant style of Chinese landscape painting that he had pursued for years as symbols of the national character. This was to say, he had attempted to amalgamate the highly-cultured literati painting with the majestic grandeur of academic painting.

Liu Min Tu (Refugees) painted by Jiang Zhaohe in 1943 was the first work to demonstrate the achievement of the reform movement in Chinese painting. Jiang's artistic view was the model of a unification of the Confucian attitude, which stuck to "not to be elated over things, not to be sad for oneself" (*bu yi wu xi, bu yi ji bei*) and "to feel anxious before other human beings, to be happy after everyone is happy" (*xian tianxia zhi you er you, hou tianxia zhi le er le*), [79] with the spirit of the May Fourth New Culture which advocated "art for life's sake". Like Xu Beihong, he was willing to appeal for the people with his paint-brush. In his own words, "Use my heart to make a cup of bitter tea and offer it respectfully to the public." [80] He had acquired the Western realistic techniques and attitude to creation, while not giving up the traditional brushwork which was considered the core of the artistic language of Chinese painting. In his *Liu Min Tu* and a series of figure paintings, he imparted a monumental quality to his portraits of modern Chinese common people.[81]

Very obviously, to realize the social function of art, and to pursue a powerful style that symbolized the national spirit have been the dream of generations of Chinese intellectuals and painters since the beginning of this century.

After the founding of New China, even though there were drastic changes in social ideology, the literary and artistic notion of "the foreign should be used for China" (*yang wei zhong yong*) put forward by Mao Zedong was in reality a continuation of the opinion

[79] [Song] Fan Zhongyan, 'Yueyang Lou Ji', Wu Chucai and Wu Diaohou eds., *Guwen Guan Zhi*, vol.9, Beijing, Zhonghua Publishing House, 1959, p.419

[80] Jiang Zhaohe, the preface to *The Collection of Jiang Zhaohe's Painting*, vol.1, 1941, also refer to *Jiang Zhaohe On Art*, Beijing: the People's Fine Arts Press, 1994, p.2

[81] See Weihe Chen and Keith Pratt, 'Chinese Figure Painter Jiang Zhaohe', Hong Kong: *Arts of Asia*, July-August 1993, pp.77-89

formed in the period of Li Hongzhang's (1823-1901) Westernization Movement, "the study of Chinese knowledge is fundamental while the study of Western knowledge is incidental; Chinese learning is the essence while Western learning is only a supplement" (*zhongxue qi ti ye, xixue qi mo ye, zhu yi zhongxue, fu yi xixue*), [82] and the proposal of Kang Youwei who advocated "blending the Chinese and the Western" *(ronghe zhong xi)* [83]. They all insisted on absorbing what was beneficial in Western culture. Although their standards of absorption were different, their notion of sticking firmly to their own Chinese culture as the main body were the same. The demand of Mao Zedong on art was to create "the fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love"[84]. This was evidently a step further forward from the spirit of the May Fourth Movement. On account of his stress on a class view-point, the policy for art in New China had been shifting, but it still stuck firmly to national tradition as its basic policy. After the break-down of the relationship between the Soviet Union and China in 1957, national tradition and national style were more thoroughly confirmed. As had been stated in a document at the founding of the Beijing Chinese Painting Studio the same year:

> "The historic path of art is the path of the national tradition. The national spirit, the national manner, the unique form and style, together with the technique which has been formed through long years of accumulation in history, are all valuable precious foundation stones to pave the path of tradition. Thus, our socialist art is built upon such foundation stones infused with national characteristics."[85]

In the debate over where to go and whom to follow in the early stages of New China, Li Keran had clearly expressed his view that new art should take the traditional Chinese heritage as the main body to absorb alien culture. His slogan "to create monuments to the mountains and rivers of our motherland" fully demonstrated his ideal of making his

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[82] Sun Jianai, 'Memoria to Throne on Re-setting up the Capital Grand School', Jian Bozan, ed., *The Wuxu Reform*, vol.3, p.21, see Tang Yijie, ed., *The Chancellors of Beijing University and Chinese Culture*, Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1998, p.22

[83] See Liu Haisu, *Talks On Art at Qi and Lu*, Jinan: Shandong Fine Arts Press, 1985, p.65

[84] Mao Zedong, 'The role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War', *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol.2, Beijing: The People's Publishing House, 1952, p.523

[85] Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan, *The History of Modern Chinese Painting*, Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts Press, 1986, p.263

landscape painting a spiritual monument to the nation and the times. Li Keran's artistic style shows the general characteristics of the times which are visual resemblance, popularity and an august national style. Such a general characteristic not only required the artist to base his creative work upon individual sentiment and experience, but to concentrate his attention on the spiritual ideal of the nation as well. Up to 1960, not only did the new figure painting reflect in an all-round way real life and important social or historic subjects, but flower-bird painting too, which used to amuse the eyes and gratify the mind, had developed into the style of a "large painting" represented by Pan Tianshou, who considered,

> "An article of art should be capable of representing a nation, an era, a region, and the painter who produces it, only then is it genuine."(86)

Pan used his powerful composition and his assertive brushwork in order to pursue "the greatest, the most vigorous, the most righteous and the most honest"(87), a kind of sublime beauty, and finally he developed flower-bird painting from Qi Baishi's style into a monumental mode that suited both refined and popular tastes.

It could be said that although the new orthodox art that had been formed in 1960-1970 was born in an enclosed environment under highly political pressure and under conditions where artists lacked artistic freedom of creation, the general characteristics they displayed in their art had a profoundly historic background. The landscape pattern of Li Keran also gained success because it was not merely individualized but showed a strong quest for pursuit of national progress and self-invigoration in the 20th century. In the same way he had praised the art of Qi Baishi and said,

> "Qi's art fully embodied the spirit of the nation, unyielding courage in hot pursuit of prosperity"(88).

Li's style of landscape painting is a realization of such an attitude, pursuing a resurrection of Chinese painting that had been a dream for a hundred years.

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[86] *Pan Tianshou On Art*, Hangzhou: Zhejiang Fine Arts Press, 1997, p.62

[87] ibid., p.55

[88] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.73

6.4 CONCLUSION

The landscape style of Li Keran successfully traversed the path to link up the essence of traditional art with the demands over a new era. Through strenuous efforts of nearly half a century from the very beginning of the 1940s to the end of the 1980s, Li's art provided his unique personal solutions to the major problems that the reform movement of Chinese painting faced in the 20th century.

First, the dilemma of resolving the problems of art itself along with the demands of social politics has been most prominent in modern Chinese art history of the 20th century. The origin of this dilemma was that the tradition of Chinese painting, continuing for over two thousands of years, could hardly sustain the severe challenge of the tremendous historic changes within the past century. In this century, the success and full development of any artistic style has been the result of the artist's choice and the coincidence of social condition. Some artists were over ardent to meet the demands of society while neglecting the search for a solution of problems of art itself, hence their art was of little or no aesthetic value, and as time went by, their works naturally faded away. Some artists stuck to the rules of ancient tradition, and failed to keep up with the changes of the times, so their art lost vitality in the modern society. However, the great artists, in the face of challenges coming from social upheavals, perceived the mental demands of the times, linked them with their personal experiences, then shifted them into the study of the problems of art itself. In the context of the tradition of art, they created their own unique style of solving the problems of art itself. Although the art of even such great artists was left out in the cold for a time, it would eventually shine with the brilliance of its aesthetic value, as happened with the art of Huang Binhong and Lin Fengmian. Throughout his life, Li Keran was living in the vortex of the times. He deeply felt the spirit of the nation's demand for self-invigoration after the May Fourth Movement, and at the same time, he submerged himself in the depths of traditional art. He carefully discerned values of the painting tradition of East and West, and strove to absorb the experiences of the ancients and his contemporaries in solving artistic problems without any personal prejudice. Most important of all was that he had creatively found the

link between social spiritual requirements and the problems of art itself, thus offering an artistic solution to the spiritual needs of society. It was due to this that his art became representative of the new orthodoxy of landscape painting.

Secondly, the interfusion and confrontation of Chinese and Western cultures has been a problem in all 20th century Chinese art. Not only is the problem still under discussion, but also with the current extensive exchanges between world cultures and the trend towards pluralisation in world culture, the discussion may well continue forever. Li Keran's art is no doubt a successful model of blending the Chinese and the Western. On this problem, his opinion was: "tradition is a blood relation to our art, while things which come from abroad should be the nutrition"[89]. The way he carried this out was to grasp firmly the problem of artistic mentality at the highest level and the problem of brushwork at the lowest, and to ensure they both had the purity of tradition. As to the problems at the middle levels, the artistic language and the artistic techniques and devices were blends of the Chinese and the Western. Therefore, his artistic style achieved the general impression of a very pure tradition amidst a new artistic language system "without any traditional formula". Such an effect of harmony in containing the elements of Western painting within the framework of Chinese traditional art had been attempted but had never been successfully achieved by his predecessors. The ideal of "blending the Chinese and the Western" first proposed by Kang Youwei at the very beginning of the century had at last been realized in the art of the generation represented by Li Keran.

Thirdly, the problem of the continuation and reformation of tradition has been another issue which has perplexed the artists of the 20th century to date. In this century, traditional Chinese painting has always had to face the challenge of the views that it is in "crisis" or "its end has come". When China reached important periods of transformation of social ideology such as the May Fourth period, the early period of New China, and the "new period" which emerged at the end of the 1970s, a debate about traditional Chinese painting invariably ensued; however, the result of the debate was always to push the reform

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[89] ibid., p.186

movement of Chinese painting to a further development.

When the debate broke out at the founding of New China, Li Keran had already been studying the tradition for ten years and had the experience of being the student of Qi and Huang. At the time when the reputation of traditional Chinese painting was on the decline, he was the first to step out along the road of sketching from nature to create a new model of landscape painting. He freed himself from the bonds of traditional formulae by using the sketching method of Western painting. At the same time, he incessantly endeavoured to link up his fresh visual experience with the essential concepts of traditional landscape painting. He created a working method of painting landscapes by facing nature in the Western style, while adopting a traditional attitude to nature and traditional spatial perceptions. His artistic methods of "cutting off", "exaggeration" and "organization" all came from traditional artistic concepts. After the stage of sketching from nature, he went back to tradition, beginning to establish his personal stylized language system for landscape painting, and in pursuit of perfect expression through brushwork. After studying calligraphy for nearly ten years in later life, he gradually approached the condition of "sublimation" of Chinese painting, and achieved the mature style of his landscapes. His attitude to the study of tradition was "to lay stress on generalized principle, not on the minor issues of technique and device"[90], and this was no doubt most enlightening. The prominent features of his landscape style were the result of his individualized solution to the problems of art, whereas his selection and solution of artistic problems came directly from the inspiration of experiences handed down from his predecessors. Through his discovery and solution of artistic problems, he kept a concrete and close link with tradition, realizing his project of "breaking into" and "breaking out" of tradition, and setting up a model of inheriting and reforming tradition. Li Keran's landscape painting not merely set an exemplary model of the transition from the classical to the modern pattern, but also proved the powerful effect of renewal of tradition and the significance of the traditional artistic spirit to the life of society today.

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[90] ibid., p.8

Fourthly, Li Keran had the experience of being a member of the leftist Yiba Art Society and of serving in the Third Bureau in his early years; when he started going on sketching trips for the purpose of reforming Chinese painting he had the support and esteem of society. In the 1950s, his position as an official artist was established, and he was treated very well by the state in his later years. However, he never joined the Party and had not wasted his energy on any administrative duties in his life-time. It is said that "Art was born in tribulation, but died in liberty". Li was a pure artist, but had a favourable wind in his artistic career. He stuck strictly to the duties of a traditional artist, and worked diligently. His belief in the spirit of the masters was "first, the way must be correct, second, it requires painstaking work" (Sun Zuochen); "dreaming of fastening the sun with a long line" (Qi Baishi, *"chi si changsheng ji ri"*, i.e., hoping to stop the passing of time) and "there is no smooth path to the lofty summit". He called himself the "painstaking school", and continued to practise sketching from nature until late in life. He had faith in "the quality of a painting originates from the personality of the painter", the very traditional principle of acquiring art. He never once halted in the study of the Way, in order to raise his culture and knowledge to a higher level. He incessantly carried out reforms in his artistic practice, in order to rectify his own weak points that he had been born with, thus raising the quality of his painting.

Li Keran's early education at the art academy was a training in Western painting. He was influenced by the modern art movements of the 1930s in China, and had ten years of artistic experiences in oil painting, water colours, wood-carving and propaganda painting. Throughout his life, he admired Western painting, including classical, Impressionist and modern art and did not hesitate to learn from it. But he acknowledged that his painstaking studies of Western painting was for the sake of developing Chinese art. In his artistic career, he mainly devoted himself to the work of Chinese painting. At the time when traditional landscape painting was under heavy attack, he began the long course of specializing in landscape painting, and finally became the master of the modern traditional landscape.

Li Keran was enthusiastic and earnest in reforming Chinese painting. As early as

the 1940s, when he began his study of Chinese painting, he had made up his mind to reform it. From the 1950s, he began the long journey to put his project into practice. He chose as his motto: "develop traditional techniques to reflect the new era"; "to create monuments to the mountains and rivers of our motherland"; and "what we prize is guts, what we want is soul". His sketching tours covered tens of thousands of miles, during which he developed his own style and a new model of landscape painting. His influence upon contemporary Chinese painting was in line with Wu Guanzhong's comments, "The origin of the flourishing new pattern of landscape painting, over thirty years after the founding of New China, was the exhibition held in Beihai Park in 1954" (91). Even in his later years, he was constantly wondering, "I wonder whether, in thirty years, I can become a fish that breaks out of the net". In the last year of his life, he asked someone to engrave a seal with the four Chinese characters "*Dong Fang Ji Bai*", meaning "The Dawn of the East", which fully expressed his delight in realizing his dream of the reform of Chinese painting. However, Li Keran never adopted an attitude of rejecting or overlooking tradition. On the contrary, he adopted an extremely careful and respectful attitude towards tradition. He believed that the art of the masters was great because "it had a very solid foundation" (92) . Why solid? Because solidity "includes the cultural tradition of thousands of years" (93). He suggested "one should not stand on the ground of the West to view Chinese painting" (94) , which was a very important principle. The history of Chinese painting differed from the process of evolution in Western art. It was a course of unceasing accumulation and gradual transition, showing a high degree of continuation. Such a characteristic originated in the unified domain of a country with an uninterrupted history of several thousand years, as well as, based on such a foundation, the high culture with a great ability to renew and assimilate. Li Keran's landscape painting had its roots in reform, but did not reject tradition; its roots were in the national culture, but it did not exclude alien

[91] Wu Guanzhong, 'The Style of Li Keran's Paintings', Hong Kong: *The Artist*, No.34, 1983, p.4

[92] *Li Keran On Art*, Beijing: The People's Fine Arts Press, p.72

[93] ibid., p.73

[94] ibid., p.190

culture; its roots lay in the problems of art itself, but it did not ignore the guidance of the spirit of the times. His art reflected the traditional attitude of "the golden mean", the rational and not going to extremes. It could be said that this was the most acceptable choice in the social reality of China, and ensured the success of his art. If at the end of the century, we make a retrospective review of the reform movement of Chinese painting over the past hundred years, we will see that the most accomplished masters of the century were mostly among the ranks of the traditional reform school. This may suggest to us that even in modern China, where tremendous and historic changes have taken place, and in a multipolar situation with various art schools, the strength of the traditional national culture is still very powerful and deeply rooted.

Li Keran's artistic style realized the transformation and harmony between the traditional and the modern pattern; between visual resemblance and spiritual symbolism; between sentiment and rationality; between the individuality and generality; and between popularization and professionalization. An important reason for the success of his moderation in art was that his natural endowments were fortunately coincident with the requirements of the dominant spirits in the reform movement of Chinese painting this century. Hence, he was able to accomplish his historic mission as a representative of the mainstream of modern art. Such luck was not to be given to many other first-grade artists who were outside the mainstream.

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[v] Videotape:

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GLOSSARY OF CHINESE TERMS

Ba Jiu Wen Yue 《把酒问月》
ba *feng chui bu dong tianbian yue* 八风吹不动天边月
baifa xue tong 白发学童
Baishishan Fang Ci 《拜石山房词》
Bayan Lian 《八言联》
bei xue 碑学
Beijing daxue huafa yanjiu hui 北京大学画法研究会
Beijing daxue yishu xueyuan 北京大学艺术学院
beizong yuan ti hua 北宗院体画
bian 变
bilu yanhong zhao yan lai 碧绿嫣红照眼来
Bo Ruan Tu 《拨阮图》
Boyi, Shuqi 伯夷，叔齐
bu yi wu xi, bu yi ji bei 不以物喜，不以己悲

cai yi lian shi 采一炼十
cao 草
Cao Quan Bei 《曹全碑》
chan 禅
changhuai 畅怀
cheng hui guan dao 澄怀观道
cheng jiao hua, zhu ren lun 成教化，助人伦
chengshi 程式
chi 尺
chi si changsheng ji ri 痴思长绳系日
chongshi er you guanghui zhi wei da, da er hua zhi zhi wei sheng, sheng er bu ke zhi zhi zhi wei shen 充实而有光辉之谓大，大而化之之谓圣，圣而不可知之之谓神
chongshi zhi wei mei 充实之谓美
Chun shui hua yuan 春睡画院
ci 词
cong wu dao you, cong you dao wu 从无到有，从有到无
Cuanlongyan Bei 爨龙颜碑
cufu luantou cun 粗服乱头皴
cun 寸
cun fa 皴法

da 大
dafupi cun 大斧劈皴
Dan Ba Bei 胆巴碑
dan mo 淡墨
danbo ming zhi, ningjing zhi yuan 淡泊明志，宁静致远
danran wu ji er zhong mei cong zhi 淡然无极而众美从之
dao 道
Daoguang 道光
ding tou shu wei 钉头鼠尾
dingwei 丁未
dongfang ji bai 东方即白
dui jing chuangzuo 对景创作
dui jing xiesheng 对景写生

fang 放
fengjing 风景

fu yang wang huan, tiandi ji ye 俯仰往还，天地际也
fu yang zide, you xin taixuan 俯仰自得，游心太玄
fudiao shi 浮雕式
fupi cun 斧劈皴

gang 刚
gao mo you lu 高墨犹绿
gao yuan 高远
gu 骨
Gu Wen Guan Zhi 《古文观止》
Guang Yi Zhou Shuangji 《广艺舟双辑》
guangda xiang 广大巷
Guangxu 光绪
Guohua Yanjiuhui 国画研究会
Guoli Beiping yishu zhuanke xuexiao 国立北平艺术专科学校
Guoli Hangzhou yishu zhuanke xuexiao 国立杭州艺术专科学校
Guoli Beijing meishu zhuanke xuexiao 国立北京美术专科学校
Guoli yishu yuan 国立艺术院
Guoli zhongyang daxue meishu xi 国立中央大学美术系

hai rong baichuan, you rong nai da 海容百川，有容乃大
hei ru taiyin leiyu chui 黑入太阴雷雨垂
heituantuan li motuantuan, mohei cong zhong tiandi kuan
黑团团里墨团团，墨黑丛中天地宽
heiyun ya cheng cheng yu cui 黑云压城城欲摧
hen 狠
henhen 狠狠
heye cun 荷叶皴
hua yan 画眼
Hua Chen 画尘
Hua Quan 画筌
Hua Zhi 画旨
Huaisu Shu Jiao 怀素书蕉
huajie 化解
huajing 化境
huanghe zhi shui tian shang lai, benliu dao hai bu fu hui
黄河之水天上来，奔流到海不复回
Hubei meishu xueyuan 湖北美术学院
huo yan 活眼
huqin 胡琴

ji dian cheng xian 积点成线
ji mo 积墨
ji yi 集益
jian jing sheng qing 见景生情
jiancai 剪裁
jiang dang ti 酱当体
Jiang Jin Jiu 将进酒
jiangshan ruci duo hei 江山如此多黑
jianjia 间架
jiao mo 焦墨
Jiaqing 嘉庆
Jiatai 嘉泰
Jieziyuan Huapu 《芥子园画谱》
jimo wuke naihe zhi jing, zui yi ren xiang 寂寞无可奈何之境，最宜人想
jin ren bu jian gu shi yue, jin yue cengjing zhao guren 今人不见古时月，
今月曾经照古人

Jin Xin Zhang Ju Xia 《尽心章句下》
jing 静
jingxu 静虚
jinshi 金石
Jinshi Huapai 金石画派

kai shu 楷书
kai yan bian xiao, xiao shishang kexiao zhi ren 开颜便笑，笑世上可笑之人
kaihe 开合
kan feng gua fan 看风挂帆
kang Mei yuan Chao 抗美援朝
ke gui zhe dan, suo yao zhe hun 可贵者胆，所要者魂
Ke Yi 刻意
kong 空
ku xue pai 苦学派
kuai zai ting 快哉亭
kuangcao 狂草
kuazhang 夸张
kun er zhi zhi 困而知之

Lan Ting Xu 《兰亭序》
laosheng 老生
li 里
liang ju san nian de, yi yin shuang lei liu 两句三年得，一吟双泪流
liang mo 亮墨
Lin Quan Gao Zhi 《林泉高致》
liu 留
liuhua 流滑
longjing 龙井
Long Xi Xing-Gui Sui Shou 《陇西行。龟虽寿》

Mi dian fa 米点法
mi lin yan shu huafa 密林烟树画法
miao 描 (modelling methods with lines in Chinese painting)
miao 妙 (excellence)
Midian cun 米点皴
mo fen wu se 墨分五色
mo gu 没骨
mo gu fa 没骨法
moyun 墨韵

Nanjing yishu xueyuan 南京艺术学院
nanzong wenren hua 南宗文人画
nifan xinli 逆反心理
nong mo 浓墨
nong dan 浓淡

pima cun 披麻皴
ping 平
ping yuan 平远
po mo 泼墨 (splashing ink)
po mo 破墨 (breaking ink)

qi 奇
qi shisu zhi gonghao, qiong li qu zhi du yu 弃世俗之共好，穷理趣之独欤
qi yan 气眼
Qian Chibi Fu 《前赤壁赋》

Qianlong 乾隆
qiao 巧
qijie 气节
qishi 气势
qishi shi zhi ji wuzhi 七十始知已无知
qiu feng chui xia hong yu lai 秋风吹下红雨来
qiyun 气韵
qiyun shengdong 气韵生动

renwu 壬午
rong he zhong xi 融合中西
rou 柔

san fan wu fan 三反五反
sanfeng bi fa 散锋笔法
Shanghai meishu zhuanke xuexiao 上海美术专科学校
Shanghai tuhua meishu yuan 上海图画美术院
shanshui 山水
shen hou 深厚
shen suo panhuan, mu suo choumou 身所盘桓，目所绸缪
shen yuan 深远
sheng si gang zheng 生死刚正
shenshen 深深
shenyun 神韵
shi 实
shi chu yi, xu chu nan 实处易，虚处难
shi fen san mian 石分三面
Shi Gu Wen 《石鼓文》
Shi Jing 《诗经》
shi niu tang 师牛堂
shi shi zhai 十师斋
shidian shang xia yiwei 视点上下移位
shou 寿 (longevity)
shuai xing zhi wei dao 率性之谓道
shuang ye hong yu er yue hua 霜叶红于二月花
shu mi 疏密
shujuan qi 书卷气
Si Sangong Bei 《祀三公碑》
sixiang ziyou, jian rong bing bao 思想自由，兼容并包
Suzhou meishu xuexiao 苏州美术学校

taiji 太极
Ta Tian Yi Mo 蹋天一磨
Tian Dao 天道
tian ren he yi 天人合一
Tianzhu Tu 《天竹图》
tie 帖
Tongzhi 同治
tudi gaige 土地改革

wan hua gui yi 万化归一
Wan He Song Feng Tuzhou 《万壑松风图轴》
wan wu zhi ben 万物之本
wang 王 (a surname)
wang 亡 (desperate)
weiqi 围棋
wen 文

wu hua chu jie cheng miao jing 无画处皆成妙境
wu se ling wu mu mang, wu yin ling wu er long 五色令吾目盲，五音令吾耳聋
Wuchang meishu xuexiao 武昌美术学校
Wuchang yishu zhuanke xuexiao 武昌艺术专科学校
wulouhen 屋漏痕
Wuyan Lian 《五言联》

xi mo ru jin 惜墨如金
xia bi bian you aotu zhi xing 下笔便有凹凸之形
xian tianxia zhi you er you, hou tianxia zhi le er le 先天下之忧而忧，后天下之乐而乐
Xianfeng 咸丰
xiao 肖
xiaotiao danbo, ci nan hua zhi yi 萧条淡泊，此难画之意
xing 行
xing shu 行书
xinyuan 心源
xiong huai yuan zhi, bu wei jin nan 胸怀远志，不畏近难
xiu dao zhi wei jiao 修道之谓教
xiu mo 宿墨
xu 虚
xuan 宣
xuanlan zhi ji, guiyu pingdan 绚烂至极归于平淡
xuanran fa 渲染法
xue er zhi zhi 学而知之
xujing tiandan 虚静恬淡

ya su gong shang 雅俗共赏
yang wei zhong yong 洋为中用
Yanmen Taishou Xing 《雁门太守行》
ye hu chan 野狐禅
Yi-Ba 一八
yi bi caocao, bu qiu xingsi 逸笔草草，不求形似
yi bo san zhe 一波三折
yi da guan xiao 以大观小
yi fu wang ming, qian fu nan dang 一夫亡命，千夫难当
Yiguan Xuehui 艺观学会
yi jing 意境
yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wan ... wan hua yi 一生二，而生三，三生万...万化一
yi shi wei xu, hua jingwu wei qingsi 以实为虚，化景物为情思
yi wei toushi 移位透视
yi yi wei zhi 以意为之
Yi Zhou Shuangji 《艺舟双辑》
yihua 一画
yihua zhe, zhong you zhi ben, wan xiang zhi gen 一画者，众有之本，万象之根
yingdai 映带
you jun tang 有君堂
you yi bi qi, ji qian wan bi, reng shi yi bi 由一笔起，积千万笔，仍是一笔
yuan 圆
Yu tang chun 玉堂春
Yueyanglou Ji 《岳阳楼记》

zai jing wei 在精微
zaohua 造化
zhechaigu 折钗股
zheda 折搭
Zhejian meishu xueyuan 浙江美术学院

Zhen Xiang Huabao 《真相画报》
zhenchuan 真传
zheng dao 正道
Zheng Zuowei Gao 《争座位稿》
zhenya fangeming 镇压反革命
zhi 之
zhichi zhi tu, xie bai qian li zhi jing 咫尺之图，写千百里之景
zhifen qi 脂粉气
zhong 重
Zhong Kui 钟馗
Zhongguo meishu xueyuan 中国美术学院
Zhongguohuaxue Yanjiuhui 中国画学研究会
zhongxue qi ti ye, xixue qi mo ye 中学其体也，西学其末也
Zhongyang meishu xueyuan 中央美术学院
zhongyong 中庸
zhongzhong 重重
zhou bang sui jiu, qi ming wei xin 周邦虽旧，其命惟新
Zhu Hanshan: Zuoyoubian 《朱韩山．座右编》
zhuan 篆
Zhuang Zi Jie 《庄子解》
zhuo 拙
zhusha 朱砂
zuzhi 组织

INDEX OF NAMES

Ai Qing	b.1910	艾青	
Ai Zhongxin	b.1915	艾中信	
Bai Dengyun	(date of birth unknown)		白登云
Bao Jia	b.1933	鲍加	
Bao Shenbo	1775-1855	包慎伯	
Cai Ruohong	b.1910	蔡若虹	
Cai Weilian	1904-1939	蔡威廉	
Cai Yi	1906-1992	蔡仪	
Cai Yuanpei	1868-1940	蔡元培	
Cao Cao	155-220	曹操	
Chen Dongting	b.1929	陈洞庭	
Chen Duxiu	1880-1942	陈独秀	
Chen Shizeng	1876-1923	陈师曾	
Chen Shuren	1884-1948	陈树人	
Chen Xiangping	(date of birth unknown)		陈向平
Chen Yuan	(date of birth unknown)		陈爰
Chen Zhifo	1896-1962	陈之佛	
Chen Zhuokun	b. 1908	陈卓坤	
Chen Zizhuang	1912-1976	陈子庄	
Cheng Shifa	b.1921	程十发	
Cheng Sui	1605-1691	程邃	
Cheng Yanqiu	1904-1985	程砚秋	
Dai Benxiao	1621-1693	戴本孝	
Dai Ze	b.1922	戴泽	
Da Chongguang	(the Qing Dynasty)		笪重光
Deng Shiru	1743-1805	邓石如	
Ding Yanyong	1902-1978	丁衍庸	
Ding Zhengxian	b.1914	丁正献	
Dong Qichang	1555-1636	董其昌	
Dong Shouping	1904-1997	董寿平	
Du Fu	712-770	杜甫	
Fan Kuan	(Northern Song Dynasty)		范宽
Fang Ganmin	1906-1984	方干民	
Fang Jizhong	b.1923	方济众	
Fang Shishu	1692-1751	方士庶	
Fang Zengxian	b.1931	方增先	
Feng Chaoran	1882-1954	冯超然	
Feng Fasi	b.1914	冯法祀	
Feng Zikai	1898-1975	丰子凯	
Fu Baoshi	1904-1965	傅抱石	
Gai Jiaotian	1888-1970	盖叫天	
Gao Qifeng	1889-1933	高奇峰	
Gao Jianfu	1879-1951	高剑父	
Gao Kegong	1248-1310	高克恭	
Gong Xian	1618-1689	恭贤	
Gu Wenda	b.1955	谷文达	
Guan Liang	1900-1986	关良	
Guan Shanyue	b.1921	关山月	
Guo Moruo	1892-1978	郭沫若	
Guo Xi	The Northen Song Dynasty		郭熙
He Haixia	b.1908	何海霞	

He Tianjian	1890-1977	贺天健		
Hong Bo	1924-1985	洪波		
Hong Ren	1610-1664	弘仁		
Hong Yiran	1913-1989		洪毅然	
Hou Wailu	b.1903	侯外卢		
Hou Yimin	b.1930	侯逸民		
Hu Peiheng	1891-1962	胡佩衡		
Hu Tiefen	(date of birth unknown)			胡铁芬
Hu Yichuan	b.1910	胡一川		
Hua Junwu	b.1915	华君武		
Hua Xinluo	1682-1756	华新罗		
Huai Su	725-785	怀素		
Huang Binhong	1865-1955	黄宾虹		
Huang Gongwang (Dachi)	1269-1354		黄公望（大痴）	
Huang Jingwan	(date of birth unknown)			黄警顽
Huang Junbi	b.1898	黄君璧		
Huang Mengtian	b.1918	黄蒙田		
Huang Miaozi	b.1913	黄苗子		
Huang Qiuyuan	1913-1979	黄秋园		
Huang Runhua	b.1932	黄润华		
Huang Yanpei	1878-1965	黄炎培		
Huang Yongyu	b.1924	黄永玉		
Huang Zhou	1925-1997	黄胄		
Hui Xiaotong	1902－1979	惠孝同		
Ji Chundan (another name: Li Yang)			1908-1964	季春丹（力扬）
Ji Kang	(the Jin Dynasty)		稽康	
Jia Dao	(the Tang Dynasty)		贾岛	
Jia Youfu	b.1942	贾又福		
Jian Bozan	1898-1968	翦伯赞		
Jian jiang	1610-1664	渐江		
Jiang Feng	1910-1982	江丰		
Jiang Xuyun	(date of birth unknown)		江旭云	
Jiang Zhaohe	1904-1986	蒋兆和		
Jin Nong	1687-1763	金农		
Jin Shangyi	b.1934	靳尚谊		
Jin Shaocheng	1878-1926	金绍城		
Jing Hao	(the Five Dynasties)		荆浩	
Kang Youwei	1858-1927	康有为		
Ke Jiusi	(the Yuan Dynasty)		柯九思	
Kong Zi	551B.C.-479B.C.		孔子	
Lai Chusheng	1902-1975	来楚声		
Lai Shaoqi	b.1915	赖少其		
Lan Tianshu	b. 1585	蓝田书		
Lao She	1899-1966	老舍		
Lao Zi	(Spring and Autumn Period)			老子
Li Baolin	b.1936	李宝林		
Liu Boshu	b.1935	刘勃舒		
Liu Mengtian	b.1918	刘蒙天		
Li Dazhao	1889-1927	李大钊		
Li Geng	b.1948	李庚		
Li Hongzhang	1823-1901	李鸿章		
Li Hu	1919-1975	李斛		
Li Hua	b.1907	李桦		
Li Huichun	d. 1935	李会春		
Li Jianchen	b.1900	李剑晨		
Li Keran (original name: Li Yongshun)			1907-1989	李可染（李永顺）
Li Kuchan	1899-1983	李苦禅		

Li Lan	(the dates of birth and death unknown)	李兰
Li Qun	b.1912	力群
Li Ruinian	1910-1985	李瑞年
Li Tang	(Southern Song Dynasty)	李唐
Li Wan	b.1920	李畹
Li Xiaoke	b.1944	李小可
Li Xiaoshan	b.1957	李小山
Li Xingjian	b.1937	李行简
Li Xiongcai	b.1910	黎雄才
Li Xiubin	b.1936	李秀宾
Li Yongping	1902-1986	李永平
Li Yuqin	b.1932	李玉琴
Li Yushuang	b.1933	李玉霜
Li Zhu	b.1946	李珠
Liang Kai	(the Southern Song Dynasty)	梁楷
Liang Qichao	1873-1929	梁启超
Liang Shunian	b.1911	梁树年
Liao Jingwen	b.1923	廖静文
Lin Fengmian	1900-1991	林风眠
Lin Gang	b.1925	林岗
Lin Wenzheng	1903-1990	林文铮
Liu Haisu	b.1896	刘海粟
Liu Jipiao	(date of birth unknown)	刘既漂
Liu Kaiqu	1904-1993	刘开渠
Liu Lingcang	1907-1989	刘凌沧
Liu Qing	b.1929	柳青
Liu Shi'an	(dates of birth and death unknown)	刘世庵
Liu Wenxi	b.1933	刘文西
Lǚ Cheng	(date of birth unknown)	吕澄
Lǚ Fengzi	1885-1959	吕凤子
Lu Hongji	1910-1985	卢鸿基
Lu Xun	1881-1936	鲁迅
Lu Yanshao	1909-1993	陆俨少
Lu Zhenhuan	1886-1979	卢振寰
Luo Gongliu	b.1916	罗工柳
Luo Ming	b.1912	罗铭
Meng Lanting	(the date of birth unknown)	孟兰亭
Meng Zi	372B.C.-289B.C.	孟子
Mi Fu	1051-1107	米芾
Mi Youren	1086-1165	米友人
Miao Juwu	(the date of birth unknown)	苗聚五
Ni Yide	1901-1970	倪贻德
Pan He	1873-1929	潘　和
Pan Jiezi	b.1915	潘洁兹
Pan Tianshou	1897-1971	潘天寿
Pu Xinshe	1896-1963	浦心舍
Qi Baishi	1863-1957	齐白石
Qian Jinfu	1862-1937	钱金福
Qian Shizhi	1880-1922	钱食之
Qian Shoutie	1896-1967	钱瘦铁
Qian Songyan	1899-1986	钱松岩
Qin Jianming	b.1942	秦剑铭
Qin Zhongwen	1895-1974	秦仲文
Qiu Shiming	1897-1970	邱石冥
Quan Shanshi	b.1930	全山石
Ren Bonian	1840-1895	任伯年
Ruan Yuan	1764-1849	阮元

Shen Fuwen	b.1906	沈福文	
Shen Enfu	(date of birth unknown)	沈恩孚	
Shen Hao	(the Ming Dunasty)	沈灏	
Shi Lu	1919-1982	石鲁	
Shi Tao	1630-1707	石涛	
Shi Xi	b.1612	石溪	
Sima Qian	b.about 145B.C.	司马迁	
Song Qingling	1893-1981	宋庆龄	
Song Wenzhi	b.1919	宋文治	
Su E (another name: Su Muhan)	1911-1938		苏娥
Su Shaoqing	1890-1963	苏少卿	
Su Yuhu	b.1938	苏玉虎	
Sun Fuxi	1898-1962	孙福熙	
Sun Zuochen	(the date of birth unknown)		孙佐臣
Tang Yun	1910-1992	唐云	
Tao Yuanming	(the Jin Dynasty)	陶渊明	
Tian Han	1898-1968	田汉	
Wang Changlin	1856-1931	王长林	
Wang Geyi	1897-1988	王个移	
Wang Jiaben	b.1905	王家本	
Wang Jian	1598-1677	王鉴	
Wang Lu	(the Ming Dynasty)	王履	
Wang Meng	d.1385	王蒙	
Wang Qi	b.1918	王琦	
Wang Qinfang	(the date of birth unknown)		王琴舫
Wang Shigu	1632-1717	王石谷	
Wang Shikuo	1911 - 1973	王式廓	
Wang Shimin	1592-1680	王时敏	
Wang Wei	(the Tang Dynasty)	王维	
Wang Xianzhi	344-386	王献之	
Wang Xizhi	303-361	王羲之	
Wang Xueya	b.1927	王雪崖	
Wang Xun	1915-1969	王逊	
Wang Xuzhu	b.1930	王恤珠	
Wang Youchen	1885-1943	王又辰	
Wang Yuanqi	1642-1715	王原祁	
Wang Zhanfei	b.1911	汪占非	
Wang Zhaomin	b.1907	王肇民	
Wang Zhaorong	b.1941	王兆荣	
Wang Zhaowen	b.1909	王朝闻	
Wang Zhen	1867-1938	王震	
Wei Zixi	b.1915		魏紫熙
Wen Lipeng	b.1931	闻立鹏	
Wu Biduan	b.1926	伍必端	
Wu Changshuo	1844 -1927	吴昌硕	
Wu Dayu	1903-1988	吴大羽	
Wu Guanzhong	b.1919	吴冠中	
Wu Hufan	1894 -1968	吴湖帆	
Wu Jingting	1904 -1971	吴镜汀	
Wu Qi	b.1932	吴齐	
Wu Shiguang	(date of birth unknown)		乌始光
Wu Zuoren	1908-1997	吴作人	
Xia Yan	1900-1995	夏衍	
Xiao Shufang	b.1911	肖淑芳	
Xiu Jun	b.1925	修军	
Xu Beihong	1895-1953	徐悲鸿	
Xu Linlu	b.1916	许麟庐	

Xu Shiyong	(date of birth unknown)		许士镛
Xu Wei (another name: Qing Teng)	1551-1593		徐渭（青藤）
Xu Yansun	1899-1961	徐燕荪	
Xu Zhimo	1896-1931	徐志摩	
Xun Huisheng	1900-1968	荀慧生	
Ya Ming	b.1924		亚明
Yan Lichuan	b.1910	闫丽川	
Yan Zhenqing	(the Tang Dynasty)		颜真卿
Yang Xiaolou	1878-1938	杨小楼	
Yang Zhiguang	b.1930	杨之光	
Ye Qianyu	1907-1995	叶浅予	
Yin Ruchun	(date of birth unknown)		尹如春
Yu Feian	1888-1959	于非暗	
Yu Feng	b.1916	郁风	
Yu Lu	(date of birth unknown)		俞律
Yu Shuyan	1890-1943	余叔岩	
Yun Nantian	1633-1690	恽南田	
Zha Shibiao	1615-1698	查士标	
Zhan Jianjun	b.1931	詹建俊	
Zhang Anzhi	1911-1990	张安治	
Zhang Boying	(date of birth unknown)		张伯英
Zhang Daqian	1899-1983	张大千	
Zhang Ding	b.1919	张仃	
Zhang Fagen	b.1930	张法根	
Zhang Longji	b.1929	张隆基	
Zhang Ping	b.1934	张凭	
Zhang Tiao	1900-1934	张眺	
Zhang Xun	1854-1923	张勋	
Zhang Yuguang	1885-1968	张聿光	
Zhao Haogong	1881-1949	赵浩公	
Zhao Haosheng	(date of birth unknown)		赵浩生
Zhao Mengfu	1254 -1322	赵孟	
Zhao Wangyun	1906-1977	赵望云	
Zhao Wuji (Zhao Wouki)	b.1920	赵无极	
Zhao Zhiqian	1829-1884	赵之谦	
Zheng Banqiao	1693-1765	郑板桥	
Zheng Yuhe	b.1934	郑于鹤	
Zhong Han	b.1929	钟涵	
Zhou Enlai	1898-1976	周恩来	
Zhou Huaimin	b.1907	周怀民	
Zhou Lingzhao	b.1919	周令钊	
Zhou Sicong	1939-1996	周思聪	
Zhou Yang'an	(date of birth unknown)		周养庵
Zhou Yuanliang	b.1904	周元亮	
Zhu Da (another name: Ba Da Shan Ren)	1626-1705		朱耷（八大山人）
Zhu Dequn	b.1913	朱德群	
Zhu Wenyun	1894-1938	诸文韵	
Zhu Xinjian	b.1953	朱新建	
Zhu Yuesan	1902-1983	诸乐三	
Zhuang Zi	369B.C.-286B.C.	庄子	
Zong Baihua	1898-	宗白华	
Zong Bing	(the Southern Dynasties)		宗炳
Zong Qixiang	b.1917	宗其香	
Zou Peizhu	b.1920	邹佩珠	
Zou Yigui	1686-1772	邹一桂	