

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



Women as a subject have been extensively represented in Chinese painting since ancient times. As is evident from Tang dynasty imperial tombs near Xi'an in Shaanxi province, palace ladies carefully depicted in mural paintings demonstrate that artists from as early as the eighth century began to explore the representation of women in Chinese art. From the portrayal of celestial figures, court beauties, courtesans to lower ranks of women in society, the high recurrence and diverse range of women represented in Chinese paintings over the centuries reveal the popularity and permanence of the subject matter. What is less known is that Chinese women exist in the history of Chinese art not merely as subjects of study but also as creators. Held at Indianapolis Museum of Art in 1988, *Views From Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 – 1912* is an important and timely exhibition that has highlighted the artistic achievement of pre-modern Chinese women artists. The exhibition catalogue revealed that the artistic styles of ancient Chinese women were conventionally attributed to schools or traditions established by male masters and their profiles were commonly associated with those of male artists related to them.

Instead of defining the artistic practices of women in relation to men, what has been overlooked since antiquity and needs to be recognised is the existence and significance of Chinese women's artistic individuality. To this day, there has been a general marginalisation of Chinese women in art history and an accompanying lack of historical research and critical scholarship of their work. While their contribution has been major, there have been only sporadic attempts critically to examine Chinese women's position and influence in the visual arts. This book investigates the role, participation and significance of women in modern Chinese art through the narratives and work of three artists – Pan Yuliang, Nie Ou and Yin Xiuzhen – who lived and were professionally active at different socio-political stages of twentieth-century China. The twentieth century is deemed appropriate for the study because it was a critical period during which China underwent drastic socio-cultural and political transformations. With changing conditions of artistic practices in China, the book investigates the ways in which three women artists participated in the representation of women and their experiences in the visual arts.

China in the tumultuous twentieth century was inextricably interwoven with a series of rebellions and revolts that moulded and transformed it, during which the nation encountered and addressed issues of modernity. The process was phenomenal considering that China underwent several transitional phases of political systems within decades, shifting abruptly from the

late Qing of Imperial China to the Chinese Republic, itself hastily dissolved to become the People's Republic of China (PRC). Besides experiencing social upheavals, China was subject to foreign aggression, facing persistent threats from Japanese and European imperialist powers. It was also during this revolutionary era that prevailing attitudes of gender and equality were recurrently challenged and dealt with. Critical events that followed each other throughout the century, including the 1911 Revolution, 1919 May Fourth Movement, the implementation of various policies by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as China's re-entrance into the global world community in the post-Mao period, were factors that contributed to various changes in Chinese women's lives. To this end, it is inevitable that the investigation of women's participation and role in modern Chinese art needs to be made in relation to socio-cultural and political changes that occurred in the twentieth century.

To encapsulate the research in a framework, the women's search for artistic individuality in China will be analysed in the light of the country's development in moving through the three stages as outlined in Table 1. Using an interdisciplinary framework, drawing upon concepts from theories of modernism, feminism and postcolonialism, the research seeks to understand a culturally specific field in art history and the interrelationship between various factors that contributed to it. Through empirical micro (artist) and macro (art discourse) histories, the study investigates how the artists negotiated their identities in circumstances that made their positions distinct, that is, being Chinese women artists at various points in time. The research, by providing relevant narratives and historical experiences, also seeks to understand how the conventional perception of gender in Chinese society can be shown to be working in the field of the visual arts.

The approach of the research stems from the understanding that women's art in modern China should be studied not in terms of generalised Chinese culture, but in parallel with careful analysis of the distinct socio-political events of each historical phase. Sustained analysis of the artists carried out in relation to the realities of their times and experiences will not only reveal complex and diverse developments of women's artistic production in modern China but also elucidate the progressive development of Chinese women's participation in art. This will demonstrate that Chinese women artists, conscious of their particular position and cultural context, as well as proficient in constructing their own subjectivities and understanding of the world, are active agents of representation.

The narratives of the artists in question will outline a social history of being a woman artist at different stages in twentieth-century China, thereby offering meaningful insights into wider socio-cultural issues of each phase. For

TABLE 1: A CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

ARTIST	CAREER PARALLEL TO POLITICAL PHASES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY	POLITICAL CONTEXT OF CHINA	CULTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY
Pan Yuliang 潘玉良 (1895-1977)	1a) 1918-1937 (China) 1b) 1938-1977 (France)	Semi-Colonialism Republican	Modernism Pre-Nationalism Pre-Feminism
Nie Ou 聂欧 (1948-)	2a) 1969-1977 2b) 1978-1990s	Socialism Post-Socialism	Anti-Modernism Nationalism Feminism
Yin Xiuzhen 尹秀珍 (1963-)	3a) 1980s 3b) 1990s	Post-Socialism Capitalism	Modernism/Postmodernism Feminism/Globalisation

example, situating the analysis of Pan Yuliang's work in the semi-colonised context of early twentieth-century China will facilitate an understanding of the extent to which the Western painting movement in China was linked to the struggles of modern Chinese artists of the period. In the process of attaining modernity, many Chinese artists struggled between emphasising their cultural identity and turning to the West for inspiration. In addition, the study of Pan's work in relation to the nation's specific political and social-cultural context will illuminate the originality and complexity of her Westernised works, and emphasise the difficult situation of being a professional female artist of her period.

The life experiences of the artists, shaped by various conditions of their time, offer significant insights into their artistic oeuvre. Being sent to the remote countryside for almost a decade during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has had a profound influence on Nie Ou's choice of subject matter.

Consistently employing subjects that reflect her rural experience, Nie has revealed, “what I saw and experienced never fade from my mind...my memories of those days and peasants remain strong and vivid” (interview with Nie in Mandarin, 6 May 2008). Political and social conditions of different periods in twentieth-century China have implications for insightful understanding of the individuals in question, and the suggestion that their careers may be taken as exemplary of women’s artistic accomplishment in their times.

The juxtaposition of artists of different generations is a deliberate attempt to create new opportunities for comparative studies of female artists in China and to produce a dynamic reading of modern Chinese art from a different perspective. The study examines the women’s responses to various influences and circumstances through careful analysis of their artistic production and development, bearing in mind the shifting gender relations of each historical phase. Do Chinese women’s artworks have particular characteristics that reveal their distinct circumstances at various periods? In what ways are the works of Chinese women different from those of their male counterparts? Are there certain constraints in each period that have shaped women’s artistic development and the general artistic discourse of the nation? These are some of the issues the research seeks to understand.

Critical analysis of Chinese art needs to be tied to specific backgrounds and motivations of individual artists. The fundamental question of individualism in art and its place in art history would be difficult to examine except in details of the works and lives of individual artists. Besides situated in their specific historical contexts, the qualities and achievements of individual artists can only be uncovered through more personalised and systematic methods of study. In view of this, this research utilises a structured mode of analysis through synthesising the findings of specific case studies of three individuals in a clearly defined theoretical framework as outlined in Table 1. This chapter (Chapter 1) discusses the rationale of the research and provides an overview of what to expect in this book as well as what is to come in the following chapters. The rest of the book will be divided into four chapters; three chapters will be devoted to the detailed study of the three artists in question, in which the artists’ roles and works are positioned in relation to various historical events. The last chapter will be an epilogue which consolidates the earlier chapters and extrapolates a conclusion.

While being comparatively successful in relation to their male counterparts in artistic accomplishment, many Chinese women artists were often not given equal recognition and opportunities. Pan was one of the first female artists to study abroad in the early years of the Chinese Republic. A regular participant at French salons from the 1940s to the 1970s, the diligent artist produced an impressive oeuvre of high quality works in various media including oils, Chi-

nese ink and colour, watercolour, pastels, charcoal and prints. Pan's artistic achievements were comparable to those of famous Chinese male masters such as Xu Beihong, her classmate at the École des Beaux-Arts, and Zao Wou-ki, a Chinese artist highly regarded by the French community. However, Pan's work was never given comparable value or attention relative to that of her male contemporaries during her lifetime. Her name could be found neither in major Chinese art-historical records nor most French art archives; Pan's artistic achievement was clearly overlooked in both Chinese and Western art histories. It was only after the popularisation of Chinese novelist Shi Nan's quasi-realist book, *Huahun Pan Yuliang*, in the mid-1980s that the Chinese public rediscovered the forgotten artist. With regard to the new-found popularity of a forgotten artist, one might argue, after China's reopening to the world in the eighties, a new Chinese generation raised in a transformed climate would generally welcome a symbolic Chinese figure with some of Pan's qualities, one who had acquired a certain international experience, led an eventful life and possessed a distinct personality, since this would lend cosmopolitan stature to China's national image.

As decades passed, women's status in Chinese society was thought to have improved with transformed socio-cultural conditions. Nevertheless, women continued to face various challenges and disadvantages in relation to their gender. When it took office in 1949, the CCP advocated policies to promote gender equality. Although women were given certain rights to jobs and property, Janet Weitzner Salaff and Judith Merkle have pointed out, "the oppression of women remained culturally, politically and economically institutionalized: the traditional image of women, the subordination of women in the family, and the economic and politically inequality of women were not eliminated by the revolution" (Salaff and Merkle 1973: 146). In the process of the CCP-led women's emancipation movement, women could not be truly liberated as they continued to be greatly burdened in various aspects that Salaff and Merkle highlighted.

While women have stepped forward to join men in the workforce, persisting traditional Chinese attitudes dictate that childcare and household chores remain the primary responsibility of women. To this day, domestic commitments continue to curtail the careers of many Chinese women. During the Cultural Revolution, after she was forced to discontinue her studies, Nie Ou worked in the fields alongside peasants in the countryside. When the revolution was over, Nie had to cope with her delayed studies, marriage, childcare commitment and career all within the same period. An accomplished ink painter, she has been described by Joan Lebold Cohen as "exceptionally gifted" (Cohen 1987: 111). While she comes across to many as confident and composed, Nie herself has found it challenging to be a mother, wife and profes-

sional painter all at once (interview with Nie in Mandarin, 6 May 2008).

In recent years, Chinese women artists have started to question and emphasise their position in the visual arts. However, the strong domination by male artists of the local art scene and a relatively weak presence of Chinese women in international art circles continue to undermine the efforts and contribution of Chinese women artists. Although contemporary Chinese art has received significant attention through numerous international exhibitions since the 1990s, the work of women artists has notably been omitted from many high-profile shows. During the peak of Chinese art fever in the 1990s, women accounted for a miserable percentage of Chinese artists represented in major art exhibitions. Among the eighteen Chinese participants in the exhibition *Another Long March* held in Japan in 1997, there were only three women artists. In the large-scale exhibition *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* that included mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and several overseas-based Chinese artists in 1999, only five women were represented out of sixty-seven individual and group participants. In the major travelling exhibition, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, curated by Wu Hung in 1998, only three women participated out of twenty-two Chinese artists represented.

Yin Xiuzhen, a leading female figure in Chinese contemporary art, has been active in the international art scene since the 1990s. Her often tight schedules mean that she is frequently absent from home when she travels overseas to participate in art exhibitions. Yin confesses that it is a challenge to juggle her career with familial responsibilities, particularly in caring for her daughter, Song ErRui (interview with Yin in Mandarin, 27 Dec 2008). Britta Erickson, a scholar of Chinese art, reiterates:

Those [Chinese women] able to complete their training at an academy may have their energies diverted to supporting a husband in his career, or to childcare. Even in couples where both are artists, the woman still shoulders responsibility for housekeeping and raising children, frequently sacrificing her career for her husband's (Erickson 2001: 65).

Although puzzling, it would be inaccurate to attribute the lack of prominence of women artists to a scarcity in China. In fact, a large number of women make up the student body in art colleges in China and, like Yin, many women move on to professional practice after graduation. As Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has noted, "I know there is no lack of women artists, but maybe the social economic conditions [in China] still do not allow everybody to have equal opportunities..." (Grosenick 2007: 20). The statement reveals that although they go on to develop their artistic talents, women continue to be excluded from many op-

portunities open to their male colleagues. The fact that even today many Chinese women artists have missed out on opportunities that were given to men hints at a phallogentric tendency and a discernible bias in the historiographical system of Chinese art, in which discrimination in relation to one's gender is inevitably present. From ancient times, male domination and chauvinism have been rooted strongly in Chinese social systems and institutions. As Chinese art historian Liao Wen has pointed out, the strong patriarchal system established since feudal China has generated unfavourable social expectations against women pursuing independence of thought, action and livelihood (Liao Wen 2000: 19-31). Within this milieu, women artists have been evaluated in terms of their relationships to canonical male artists who are often related to them by kinship or are their colleagues.

Discussing pertinent issues in the context of modern Chinese history will illuminate some ways in which Chinese women artists have been marginalised, not only in their native country but also as "provincial" artists in the international art arena.¹ As artists of a peripheral culture in relation to Euro-American canonical construction, various origins of the artistic production of Chinese women may have been overlooked. The research on Chinese women artists aims in part to assess the influence of Western modernism on the development of modern Chinese art. The book argues for a distinct version of modernism considered from Chinese women's perspective. It examines the specificities of local feminism while simultaneously interrogating the complex influence of the West on the development of Chinese art. The study demonstrates Chinese women's participation in the discourse of modernism, elucidating the ways in which each of the artists in question has offered a distinctive and idiosyncratic response to the European phenomenon of modernism.

The achievement of cultural modernity in non-Western nations has frequently taken place through a conflicting and disadvantaged relationship with the political thought of their Euro-American counterparts. Forms of modernism that have evolved outside the Euro-American context are often marginalised because of their association with the indigenous, ethnicity and primitive traditions. This research demonstrates that the process of a modern art discourse of a peripheral context can be seen as an appropriate adaptation rather than an unoriginal appropriation of the Western model, with distinctive characteristics accredited to its specific cultural context. The interpretation of modern Chinese art or, in the wider scope, Asian art through the perspective of the Euro-American paradigm, although indispensable, is inadequate for a thorough analysis of modernism in the discourse of representation. To facilitate the understanding of this point, the following discussion is divided into three areas, namely 1) The Problematics of Colonial

Modernity and Modernism; 2) Feminism and the Women's Question in Chinese Art; and 3) The Situation of Asia Today, so as to highlight the relevance of this research to the general discussion of modern art.

THE PROBLEMATICS OF COLONIAL MODERNITY AND MODERNISM

Measured against Eurocentric standards, the modernity that non-white, non-Western or Third World countries have achieved often appears incomplete and lacking. Europe is typically referred to as the centre and model for the development of modernity and modernism elsewhere. From this perspective, the modernised arts and cultures of previously colonised or Third World countries can achieve only the status of peripheral or "provincial" forms. In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty questioned whether modernity indeed has a single origin (in Europe) and whether Third World countries could have generated their own modernities instead, that they should not be judged against a supposedly European "original". Chakrabarty argues that Europe itself needs to be understood in its very provinciality or local specificity, and that every case of transition to capitalism (or modernisation) needs to be treated as a case of translation. From this approach, the evolution of modernity in non-European countries should not be judged against a mythical European "original" model (see "The Politics of Historicism" in *Provincializing Europe*, 6-11).

Modernisation was a process that originated in the West, but its influence has been extended to the non-Western world. In *The Dynamics of Modernization, A Study in Comparative History* (1966), C.E. Black examined the entry of developing countries into the modern era in various fields including political science, economics, and social revolutions. In attempting to define "modernization", Black writes that it may be seen as "the process by which historically evolved institutions are adapted to the rapidly changing functions that reflect the unprecedented increase in man's knowledge, permitting control over his environment, that accompanied the scientific revolution" (Black 1966: 7). According to C.E. Black, the term "modern" was first used in Latin after the sixth century and later in English and other languages. By the seventeenth century, "modernity", 'modernism' and 'modernization' were employed in a variety of more or less limited and technical contexts" (Black 1966: 5).

The definition of modernism is, however, itself problematic. Modernism is often used to describe cultural tendencies, artistic or literary movements that arise due to changes generated during the process of modernisation. But an increasingly indiscriminate use of the term to denote various artistic movements in different contexts has complicated the understanding of modernism, causing its original meaning and usage to become somewhat ambiguous.

ous. In recent history, “modernity” as a stage of societal transformation has been widely employed to describe particular characteristics common to those countries more advanced in political, socio-cultural, economical and technological aspects, while the term “modernisation” refers to the process by which these nations acquire these qualities. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the modernist movement in Europe emerged as a reaction to dominant Western attitudes and traditions in literature and the arts. From a movement that first started to challenge dominant European sensibilities, it has travelled to other parts of the world to influence perspectives and practices of other societies in the arts throughout the twentieth century.

As argued by scholars such as Chakrabarty and Black, non-Western countries have participated in and contributed to the development of this world system by merging their own practices and traditions into it. Nevertheless, since being “modern” was closely associated with the allegedly advanced West from the beginning, modernism is often implicitly known and understood from the “Western modernist” perspective and history. Although their responses have been varied and diverse, the participation of non-white, non-Western peoples has been denied a place in the pantheon of modernism. From this viewpoint, the West has acquired a kind of cultural hegemony in the discourse of modernism while modernisms of the non-West are often perceived as derivative of Euro-American modernism. An existing body of literature on the subject of modernity has displaced the significance and contribution of non-Western societies in the allegedly international movement. *Modernism 1890-1930* (1978), the classic book of modern literary criticism, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, failed to consider the participation of non-Western peoples, nor did it regard the influence of non-Western cultures on the discourse of modernism. In his highly acclaimed work on cultural modernity, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1983), American scholar Marshall Berman also overlooked the ways in which formerly colonised nations might have contributed to the Western experience of modernity.

In the biased perception of the colonial discourse, the natives are often situated in the Other position, and their cultural expression is considered inferior. Under this unfavourable positioning, forms of modernism developed by formally colonised countries can only be viewed as derivative, unoriginal and thereby marginalised. Such negative stereotypes conceal the actual disposition and character of various non-Western peoples and promote the thinking that Europe still maintains a cultural authority in post-colonial societies. Eurocentric assumptions about race, nationality and representation thus prevent the world from understanding truthfully the cultural production of post-colonial countries. The consequence of Euro-American culture on Third World nations is therefore viewed as a better culture influencing an inferior

one. As Chakrabarty writes, “our constructions of world systems, is (theoretically) rooted in the ideas of ethics in eighteenth-century Europe – a third-world historian is condemned to knowing ‘Europe’ as the original home of the ‘modern’, whereas the ‘European’ historian does not share a comparable predicament with regard to the pasts of the majority of humankind” (Chakrabarty 2000: 42). This statement illuminates the complex sentiments and struggles of non-white, non-Western artists of Third World countries in their quest for modernism, particularly when they adopt a foreign artistic medium and technique.

Such a position has privileged the cultural production of Euro-Americans and marginalised the natives. As art historian John Clark points out, “the zone of autonomous cultural energy which drove their [the colonized’s] adaptations was ignored; their own developments and re-positionings of ‘other’ forms were forcibly concealed beneath the iron mask of Euramerican ignorance” (Clark 1993: 2). Clark clearly points to the prejudiced view of the Euro-centric that does not take into account the intricate relationship between an artist and his/her sources, and does not consider reactions and possibilities that may evolve during the complex process of cultural juxtaposition. Yet, the Euro-American model of modernism could not be applied simplistically in a provincial context without impeding the recognition of any originality and new developments in the modernism of peripheral cultures.

As every form of modernism that has evolved in different countries is distinctive in its own way, it is inappropriate to measure it against conventional codes of Western modernism. Asia – the world’s largest and most populous continent – is bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the south by the Indian Ocean, and on the north by the Arctic Ocean. The geographical term Asia can give a false impression of this region as a singular, integrated entity. The truth is, as art critic Binghui Huangfu has pointed out, “there is often very little contact between its constituent parts. In fact many Asian cultures spent little energy in trying to relate to each other” (Huangfu 2000: 1). The modernisation of Asia has been uneven, as the countries in this region underwent modernisation at different times, with varying pace and intensity. Thus, it would be misleading to treat the modern art of Asia as a generalised field, because in reality there are great disparities among different cultures within Asia. The attainment and evolution of modernity in various parts of Asia differ, not to mention the ways in which codes of modernism, subjected to differences of their particular socio-cultural specificities, may be interpreted and translated. Hence, the arts of various Asian countries have to be carefully analysed within the specific contexts of their respective cultures and historicities.

An important point that distinguishes China from many other formally col-

onised Third World nations is that China was not subjected to the full control of a single central colonial government and was never systematically and completely colonised. With various imperialist presences limited only to a number of coastal cities, China by the early twentieth century had not become formally colonised and consequently the term “semi-colony” has been used by scholars to apply to the country. Shih Shu-Mei writes that “semicolony” as a term has been “used since the 1920s and 1930s by Marxist critics, including Mao Zedong, as a way to describe the coexistence of colonial and native feudal structures” in early twentieth-century China (Shih 2001: 31). In addition, Paul Cohen has pointed out that “China was never forced to supplant its native language with a colonial one” and that its official language has remained Chinese to this day is proof of “the incompleteness of colonialism in the country”. With various factions of Western powers vying for control and profit in China from the mid-nineteenth century, which led to the formation of unique colonial relationships, Cohen has also described the Chinese colonial experience as “partial, multiple, and layered” (Cohen 1984: 144-145).

China by the twentieth century had become intertwined, practically and conceptually, with the world around it, and this led to the subsequent modernisation of the nation. It is therefore essential for the understanding of a new China to be examined across national and cultural boundaries, through which China became connected to a modern world of global space. According to Rebecca Karl, the early twentieth century “was the time at which China’s participation in global systems of signification and power relations...came to be consciously recognized by Chinese intellectuals as at least incipient totalities” (Karl 2002a: 97). Bearing in mind the developments in other modernising Asian societies, a thorough study of modern Chinese history will bring to light its culturally specific character.

Irrefutably, an important characteristic of twentieth-century Chinese art was the arrival of modernism. While modern Chinese art has garnered significant international attention in recent decades, an important facet that has yet to receive sufficient consideration is the participation of female Chinese artists in the discourse of modernism. In the master narrative view of modernism, the figure closely associated with the modernist ideology has been historically coded as white, male and Anglo-European. Modernism’s alleged claim to universalist, transcendental aesthetics obscures its role in the discourse of cultural hegemony that marginalises the non-white, non-Western female. From the perspective in which modernist myths of creativity and originality have been shaped within the Western, patriarchal system of differences, Chinese women artists would probably have been excluded from the modernist canon. Building on the basis of a general exclusion of Chinese women in art history, this book argues for their art as a specific, distinct way of re-

sponding to modernity in China. By exploring specificities of the less discussed gender in China, the book seeks to unmask some interesting and unexplored aspects of encounters in the field of modern art and the discourse of representation.

Although this research studies the development of modern art in a specific Chinese context, its problematics are, in many ways, relevant to the study of modernism in Asia at large. After centuries of colonisation, many traditional civilisations in Asia were transformed under the influence of the hegemonic culture of their colonial masters. The impact of imperialism on numerous ancient civilisations caused their cultural histories to be rewritten in the politics of colonial scholarship, which makes colonialism a dominant paradigm of historical analysis in the twentieth century. Although transformations owed to the process of imperialism are obvious, the discriminatory effects of cultural colonialism have caused the modern art history of Asia to be written inaccurately.

Some scholars, such as Partha Mitter, have argued that the discourse of colonial studies tends to have a “monocular vision of the destiny of nations and overlooks the specific cultural expressions of Westernization” (Mitter 1994: 6). That is to say, although colonised nations may generally share similarities in the process of colonisation, there are as many differences in specific experiences related to each of their individual histories. In the field of art, it would be misleading to generalise diverse responses of artists from various colonised nations during their different processes towards achieving modernism. Cross-cultural explorations in modernism between the countries of Asia could help to reveal intricacies and complexities in the works of modern Asian artists. The relationship between modernism and a peripheral culture is by nature complex and problematic, and it can be made even more so by involving women as producers of modernism. Visibly influenced by French modernism, the oil paintings of Pan Yuliang might be taken as unoriginal replications of prominent European masters’ work, such as that of Matisse and Cézanne.

In addition, as a female Asian artist based in early twentieth-century France, Pan’s representation of the non-Western nude complicates her involvement in this genre. The visual economy of her non-white nudes echoes certain aspects of European Orientalist paintings, demonstrating that she was adopting facets of Orientalist aesthetics. In the catalogue of *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting 1800-1880* (1982), Donald Rosenthal aptly suggested that “the flowering of Orientalist painting...was closely associated with the apogee of European colonialist expansionism in the nineteenth century.” France colonised Algeria and its neighbouring territories from 1830 to 1962. In Edward

Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), Orientalism is a mode of thought in Western literature for defining and expressing the presumed inferiority of the Oriental culture (to be specific, the Islamic Orient), and hence a control mechanism of colonialism designed to justify and perpetuate European dominance. The term has since been used in academic discourse to denote a patronising attitude of the West towards Middle Eastern, Asian and North African societies. Infused by the vision of Romantic escapism, Orientalist paintings were ostensibly produced for a white, male audience that implicitly indicated a privilege which entitled the European male voyeur to fantasise about exotic, Eastern cultures. From this understanding, as a woman artist from the Far East in the epoch of Imperialism, Pan could not be perceived as the most suitable candidate for the genre of Orientalist painting.

Beyond the fact that representations of the non-Western nude were a point of departure for Pan, this book seeks to understand Pan's specific experience of becoming a modernist artist of originality in her era. Have we taken into consideration her long apprenticeship to European art and the particular motivations behind her work? Rather than viewing her art pieces as unoriginal copies of European artists, it may be more meaningful to uncover nuanced anomalies of her paintings, and consider her work from her stance and in relation to her personal experiences. For this reason, this book considers modernism from the perspective of female Chinese artists, and hopes to demonstrate that Chinese women artists are capable of giving individualised responses to the original Euro-American phenomenon.

If we compare wide-ranging and diverse forms of modern art across Asia, we are able to detect forms of modernism that distinctly evolved outside the West. If one allows the art of non-white, non-Western countries to be understood in its respective cultural and historical specificity, forms of modernism generated would be seen as innovative and relevant to their societies. Furthermore, there are complex issues related to the time-space lag in the consideration of European-derived modernism in provincial or peripheral cultures. What may be regarded as modernist in Asia may not necessarily be applicable to or relevant in Europe, although it is generally agreed that modernism arrived in Third World nations much later than in the West. With influential factors (distance, space and time) involved in the processes of adaptation, assimilation and translation of Western modernism, the artists' perceptions and understanding of the term "modernism" in non-Western countries would probably have changed and thus differed from those of original sources. When Western techniques or styles were transferred to the Chinese context, they were articulated into a different dialogue, which involved complex, individualised negotiation processes by the artists, such that differentiated and new meanings were likely to have been generated. Although the work of mod-

ern Chinese artists in the early twentieth century followed closely the forms and styles of the West, those that evinced a Chinese sensibility gradually but surely evolved.

FEMINISM AND THE WOMEN'S QUESTION IN CHINESE ART

In order to have a broader and more complete view of modern Chinese art, it is timely and necessary to include the previously neglected gender in discussion. The work of modern Chinese women artists needs to be examined not only alongside twentieth-century artistic and cultural issues but also in relation to the articulation of rising feminist consciousness in twentieth-century China. The May Fourth Movement, which stirred nationalist consciousness amongst Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century, helped to ignite the Chinese women's movement. Without the changes brought about by the May Fourth women's emancipation movement, underprivileged Chinese women such as Pan Yuliang could not have received art education and training, and achieved thus far. Pan painted at a significant historical period in which feminism arose as a force of socio-cultural transformation in China. It was a time during which a significant proportion of women began to receive formal education, when the concept of the New Woman emerged. Reforms of the period led to a reassessment of women's status, which was pivotal to the recognition and professional development of women artists. Liberation brought about by the women's emancipation movement created new possibilities that led to the negotiation of modern identities for Chinese women. It was then that Chinese women began to be seen and treated as autonomous subjects seeking knowledge and capable of self-authorship and reason.

Studies in disciplines such as psychology and sociology have shown that there are differences in the ways men and women perceive reality and themselves. Consequently, they have different expectations and responses to life experiences. As acclaimed psychologist Carol Gilligan pointed out, "Given the differences in women's conceptions of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities (Gilligan 1982: 22)." In the latter decades of the twentieth century, feminist art historians in Euro-America began to discover formerly overlooked women artists and tried to locate their works in established art-historical canons. Major literature in feminist art-historical criticism includes "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1988) by Linda Nochlin; "Feminist Critique of Art History" (1987) by Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Matthews; *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) by Rosika Park and Griselda Pollock; and *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999) by Pollock. These important works have helped to

build a feminist critique of art history, one in which women's distinct perspectives and ways of art-making are revealed and documented.

To date, there has been a lack of critical scholarly texts in the history of art concerning the stance of Chinese women artists, or centring on the work, subjectivity and experiences of Chinese women artists. From the 1990s to the turn of the twenty-first century, there were some attempts by writers and scholars of Chinese art to document and research women artists and women's art in China, which led to the emergence of "women's art" and the notion of artistic expression framed around gender identity. These publications include Liao Wen's *Nüxin zhu yi zuo wei fang shi* (*Feminism as an Art Form*, 2000); Xu Hong's *Nüxin: meishu zhi si* (*Women's Reflections on Art*, 2003); and Tao Yongbai's "Nü er guo de sheng ge" ("The Sacred Song from the World of Women", 2005). In the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of Chinese women artists no longer conformed to conventional forms of expression and began to emphasise their female experiences in their art. Taking inspiration from their domestic and social roles as the basis for their art, they developed their own individual styles. The category of "women's art" was emphasised through women-focused art exhibitions in the 1990s, such as the 1995 *Chinese Women Artists' Exhibition* held in China's National Art Museum, which was organised in conjunction with the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The 1998 exhibition *A Century Female Art Exhibition* (*Shijin nü xing*) was built upon the public attention that female artists had garnered through the *Chinese Women Artists' Exhibition*. Various developments on the focus of women's art from the mid-1980s hinted at the emergence of nascent forms of Chinese feminist art. While it was an encouraging sign, the visual strides made by the new generation of female artists did not reflect strong, distinctive women's voices or perspectives, with many of them being reluctant to be labelled as feminists. In fact, the idea of Chinese feminist art appeared to revolve around prevailing male forms of discourse, with a tendency to rely on dominant patriarchal art heritage. This predicament seemed to parallel the Chinese women's emancipation movement, which had been constructed and implemented by men for purposes which disregarded women as individuals.

While the Chinese scholars' writings on Chinese women artists and their art are important works which have contributed considerably to the understanding of Chinese women artists, most of the analysis in these publications was not undertaken in a critical methodological manner. In-depth studies of individual artists are mostly lacking and the investigation of key works was usually brief. To an extent, these studies appear like brief surveys of Chinese women's art and fall short of situating the artists in question properly in art-historical scholarship. Many specific accounts of personal experiences, struggles and success of women artists remain to be discovered. The scarcity

of a systematic documentation of Chinese women's art gives an impression that Chinese women have been passive in the history of art.

Compared with the history of Western (white, middle-class) feminisms, which have been explored extensively over the last decades, in-depth studies of Third World women's engagement with feminism are relatively scarce. In the 1980s, feminists who focused on the struggles of non-Western women argued for the need to recognise that not all women were white/Western and middle-class, and that the experiences of "other" women needed to be taken into account as well. Chandra Mohanty questioned the notion of an encompassing sisterhood and argued for the rewriting of women's history based on "specific locations and histories of struggles of people of colour and postcolonial peoples, and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such peoples" (Mohanty 2002: 195). Discussing the notion of difference, Michèle Barrett proposed that the analysis of different disciplines of women's studies required "a more deconstructive model that emphasizes differences within the category woman itself as well as within the specific social existence of woman" (Barrett 1987: 29).

Other than as pictorial subjects, there has been a lack of recognition given to Chinese women in Western literature on premodern and early modern Chinese art. Western scholars have been hesitant about valorising women artists in their own tradition, and this situation was exacerbated by prevalent negative images of Asian women in circulation since the late nineteenth century in the West. Studies of Asian women have revealed the existence of a common belief in the inferiority of women in society, which justifies a secondary status imbued in their cultures from ancient times. This general belief that women are inherently inferior, however, has different origins within the region of Asia, which can be traced to specific backgrounds and have been influenced by a variety of factors such as religion, tradition and indigenous philosophy. While the understanding of Chinese womanhood might have been revised throughout the twentieth century, the achievements of intellectual and artistic women were certainly eclipsed by more sensational accounts of oppressed wives, daughters and daughters-in-law. One-sided accounts from missionaries also testified that Chinese women were regular victims of domestic abuse, infanticide and foot binding, and built up an impression of them as submissive and largely kept in ignorance.

As mentioned, given their diverse and distinct historical backgrounds, Chinese women do not experience their gender identities in the same way as those in the West. Given China's distinct historical background, the start of its women's movement was very different from those of other Asian nations as well as the West. It is thus difficult to derive a Chinese feminist movement in either a white/Western sense or on a general Asian pattern. Instead, the Chinese wom-

en's movement has developed in a way specific to China's historical changes and conditions. The particular history of China makes it difficult for Chinese women's liberation to parallel the framework that propelled Western feminism. Rather than attributing gender issues to sexual difference, Chinese scholars have pointed out that gender issues in China have been more closely associated with nationalism. An erstwhile strong interrelationship between gender and nation in China has caused dialectics of identity and difference to become blurred and ambivalent as the gender-nation nexus shifts with socio-political transformations. As Li Xiaojiang, an eminent feminist scholar in China, has observed,

Unlike Western feminism, Chinese women's liberation has never been a self-motivated movement but part of national revolutions. In the discourse of nationalism, the state apparatus acts as an agency mobilising women, and partly policies function as criteria in creating female images (Li Xiaojiang, Zhu Hong and Dong Xiuyu 1994: 6).

In the multifaceted Asian region itself, feminists of various nations have been attracted to different issues, as the nations that make up Asia have had very diverse concerns at different times. For example, while the early women's movement in India struggled with problems in the domestic sphere such as dowry, death and birth control, the women's movement in the early Chinese Communist regime was more concerned about issues in the public realm, such as land ownership and political participation. The political mobilisation of women in modern China has been discussed extensively by several scholars of Chinese history. These include Roxane Witke in "Woman as Politician in China of the 1920s" and Suzette Leith in "Chinese Women in the Early Communist Movement", both compiled in the 1973 Michigan papers in Chinese Studies, *Women in China*, edited by Marilyn B. Young. Phyllis Andors covered some socio-political aspects of the Chinese women's movement in her informative book *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women 1949-1980* (1983). The experiences of women, influenced by their specific socio-cultural positions and factors such as class, ethnicity and location, therefore need to be taken into account in the discussion of the "woman's question".

Subjugated by patriarchal domination, women in many societies have been relegated to the disadvantaged position of the "other", not unlike colonised subjects. Besides having to face gender issues at home, Asian women, as the inferior gender in formerly colonised societies, are marginalised in the politics of race and ethnicity across cultures. In this sense, they are "doubly colonised", that is, by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies. Based in Australia, cultural studies scholar Ien Ang, who is of Chinese descent, has highlighted

her personal experience as being subjected to differentiation on the basis of her race. As women of colour in a predominantly white society, Ang has pointed out that Asians are subjected to being objectified and fetishised in a dominant white society, and has argued for the allowance of “ambivalence and ambiguity” in the politics of multiculturalism (Ang 2001: 178). Referring to her “other” status, both as a female and an Asian migrant in Australia, Ien Ang also writes, “I am now positioned as a desired other, and . . . my femininity actually enhances that desirability...” (Ang 2001: 148).

In the field of art, the diverse and complex ways in which women of Asian origins participate in art-making need to be analysed carefully within relevant cultural and theoretical contexts. An increasing number of female art practitioners have shown concern about their identity issues. With the intensifying of women’s consciousness in the twentieth century, Asian women artists have begun to call for feminist intervention in art through their distinct narratives and artworks. The art exhibition entitled *Text and Subtext: Contemporary Asian Women Artists* showcased the works of 22 women artists from various Asian countries including China, Singapore, Thailand, India, Korea, Japan and the Philippines. Opened at Singapore’s Earl Lu Gallery in June 2000, the exhibition explored varying notions of difference in relation to common issues women artists faced, including nationality, race, culture and sexuality. Art exhibitions as such seek to facilitate interactions between women artists in their practices and map out areas of convergence and divergence. According to Flaudette Datuin, by telling their side of story, Asian women artists are presenting “revelatory testimonies of their struggle, thus presenting an/Other history – one that is not anchored on a catalogue of styles or forms, nor on a linear narrative of masterpieces and masters” (Datuin 2000: 16). Articulating their distinct, individual perceptions through alternative, even subversive, strategies, an increasing number of contemporary Asian women artists are seeking ways to recover a voice in the politics of representation.

Concurrently with growing feminist consciousness among women artists in Asia, there has been a gradual trend towards pan-Asian feminist art in the international arena. Significant art exhibitions that focused on the concept of Asian women artists include *SRI: Multiple Feminisms Counter Multiple Patriarchies* (2013) held at the American Centre in New Delhi, India; *Half the Sky* (1998), held at the Women’s Museum in Bonn, Germany; and *Against the Tide* (1997), held at the Bronx Museum of the Arts in New York, the United States. In addition, there have been activities that encouraged cross-cultural exchanges amongst women artists in Asia and other nations. Beginning in 1995 and lasting for a decade, the series of the *Womanifesto* festival was a biannual event based in Thailand that focused on women’s artwork through activities such as exhibitions, workshops and seminars. South Korea has been initiating artis-

tic events that centre on the work of Asian women artists, including *Patjis on Parade: Women's Art Festival '99* and *Women's Art Festival: East Asian Women and Her Stories*, held in 2002.

Since the late twentieth century, Third World feminists have rejected the dominant white, middle-class feminist viewpoint of advocating a homogenising idea of sisterhood. Feminists of non-Western origins have proposed a new and revised agenda, one that favours diversity over sameness. In *The Challenge of Local Feminisms* (1995), Amrita Basu seeks to rectify the neglect of Third World women as representatives and agents of feminist experiences by focusing on women's movements in postcolonial nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The fragmentation of the centrality of the white female experience has important intellectual and political consequences which have made the discourse of feminism more complex. Differences relating to various ethnic, racial, class and religious groups have become increasingly important in the new international feminist agenda. Consideration of recent non-Western experiences posed a challenge to the unilinear Euro-American paradigm which envisaged alternatives.

In an increasingly shifting world order, postfeminism seeks to challenge existing boundaries and establish new political and cultural agendas. Feminism, with various specificities of Third World societies, has come to be intertwined with issues of postmodernism. Ann Brooks writes, "postfeminism facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminism, and addresses the demands of marginalized, diasporic and colonized cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and post-colonial feminisms" (Brooks 1997: 4). Ella Shohat urged feminists to go beyond the impasses of 1980s Western feminism and advance an appropriate feminist model. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argued,

For us, 'postmodern' is not an honorific, nor are Third World postmodernisms necessarily identical to those of the First World. A more adequate formulation would see time as scrambled and palimpsestic in all the Worlds, with the pre-modern, the modern, the postmodern and the paramodern coexisting globally, although the dominant may vary from region to region (Shohat and Stam 1996: 293).

From this perspective, postmodernism on a global scale has inevitably become hybridised. It is a palimpsest of non-synchronous, emergent and residual formations: a mixture of various space-time possibilities, and an overlap of different modes of production. In the construction of a new feminist discourse, transnational exchanges and cultural flows of the new era require an alternative kind of interpretation that involves comparative studies of differ-

ent experiences. Acknowledging that the “centre-periphery” model of structuring the world is no longer relevant in the transnational age, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan advocate a feminist construction that allows “more nuanced and complex theories of social relations” (Grewal and Kaplan 2002: 19). Grewal uses the term “scattered hegemonies” to refer to the effects of the mobility of capital as well as multiple subjectivities that replace the European unitary subject (Grewal and Kaplan 2002: 7).

Embracing the idea of transnational feminism, a few blockbuster women’s art exhibitions have been organised in the West to reflect the new global imperative. *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* (2007), presented by the Brooklyn Museum, New York, aimed not only to showcase a large sample of contemporary feminist artworks from a global perspective, but also to move beyond the specifically Western brand of feminism, which has been perceived as the dominant voice of feminist art practice. Featuring eighty women artists from all over the world, the curators advocated a “relational feminist curatorial approach” which offered an expanded definition of feminist artistic production that acknowledged cross- and inter-cultural differences among women globally. As curator Maura Reilly pointed out, “rather than treating women in other areas of the world as foreign or exotic, a transnational perspective would allow us to make connections between the cultures and lives of women in diverse places without reducing all women’s experiences to a ‘common culture’” (Reilly 2007: 31). Three Chinese artists, Lin Tianmiao, He Chengyao and Yin Xiuzhen, were included in this international feminist exhibition.

With advancement in women’s rights and status, modern day Asian women enjoy more freedom and opportunities than before. Contemporary female Asian artists such as Yin Xiuzhen, though based in their homeland, have become increasingly involved in the international art scene. In her art, Yin has tackled some critical issues of the globalised, postmodern period. Yin examines her socio-cultural environment that relates to the urbanisation and transformation of her native city Beijing and her country. She explores issues of modernity and postmodernity and reflects on traditions and her feminine identity. Her gender and involvement with modernist styles are inseparable elements in her artistic development.

Another major feminist art exhibition, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curated by Connie Butler for The Museum of Contemporary Art (Moca) in Los Angeles in 2007, included works by a hundred and twenty artists from North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. The accompanying catalogue features groundbreaking essays by leading art critics, historians and scholars, offering fresh insights into feminist art practice from a cross-cultural perspective. A critical objective highlighted in the cata-

logue is to map a transnational feminism, so as to provide an expanded and relevant context for all participating women artists. Recent international shows on women artists stress a globalised spatial model, one that does not treat artworks from non-Western women as simply replicating a colonialist production, but acknowledges artworks through mutually respectful collaboration. Nonetheless and surprisingly, no Chinese woman artist was represented in the supposedly all-encompassing *WACK!* exhibition. While *WACK!* invited a few women artists from Japan and Korea, unfortunately, it overlooked the contributions of Chinese women artists.

THE SITUATION OF ASIA TODAY

Following the end of World War II, the world experienced the momentous era of decolonisation. As previously colonised societies in Asia gained their independence in the twentieth century, many embarked on the route to modernisation and underwent major developments in the areas of economics, culture and politics. The global meaning of “Asia” underwent major shifts in the post-colonial period. Generally consistent economic success in the past decades has transformed Asia and captured the attention of the world in what has become known as the “East Asian Miracle” (Berger 2004: 3). In addition to the highly modernised nation of Japan, newly industrialised economies, namely Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, commonly referred to as the “Four Asian Tigers”, propelled the growth of the region in the 1980s. This necessitated a change in how contemporary Asia should be perceived towards the end of the twentieth century. What was previously associated with Third World backwardness in uncritical Western perception of Asian societies (when the region was still wrestling with problems of decolonisation) has now demanded a new understanding.

The growing prominence of Asia in the twentieth century not only reduced the Euro-American influence in this region, but increasingly and unequivocally posed a challenge to the universalism of Euro-American culture. Scholarly research in the field of East Asian studies pioneered by prominent scholars such as John King Fairbank and Edwin O. Reischauer helped to frame the modern development of the region in terms of Confucianism and Asian values, which in turn helped to sanction belief in traditional East Asian values. Hitoshi Tanaka, a former politician and senior fellow at the Japan Centre for International Exchange, has written that the economic growth in East Asia, especially with the rise of China and India, is “not a short-term phenomenon” but a formidable force in a shifting global power in the twenty-first century (Tanaka 2008: 2). In Tanaka’s words, East Asia is “a region that is rapidly becoming a central player in world affairs and is currently in the midst of a re-

markable – and potentially destabilizing – transformation” (Tanaka 2008: 1).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars of East Asian studies further expanded and refined the scope of the field by contextualising the transformation of this region in modern theories and world developments. In *The Peripheral Centre: Essays on Japanese History and Civilization* (2002), Johann P. Arnason not only situates Japanese civilisation in the East Asian regional context, he also compares the Japanese experience to that of the West in order to present Japan as a convincing case for interpreting modernity. Other books on the contemporary developments of Asia include *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* (2004) by Mark T. Berger; *East Asia and Globalization* (2000) edited by Samuel S. Kim; *Modern China: A Companion to a Rising Power* (2000) by Graham Hutchings; and *The Rise of Asia: Economics, Society and Politics in the Contemporary Asia* (1998) by Frank B. Tipton.

Influenced by recent theories such as postcolonial studies, curators, artists and historians of non-Western origins have begun to emphasise their voice and forms of representation that seek to validate their own modernism in art. Postcolonial writing is characterised by its opposition to the colonial that usually indicts white and/or colonial societies. Gyan Prakash writes, “One of the distinct efforts of the recent emergence of postcolonial criticism has been to force a radical re-thinking and re-formation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination” (Prakash 1992: 8). Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that postcolonial theory has provided a methodology for a wide range of academic disciplines “because it has acknowledged the very specific forms of colonial and neo-colonial power operating in the world today” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2006: 5). By addressing issues such as difference, resistance and reconstruction, postcolonial theories are useful in the ways we question and interpret cultural origins of art-historical practices, theories and language.

As mentioned, the rapid economic development of Asia has produced a corresponding rise in international interest in Asian culture and values. Thomas McEvilley pointed out, “as previously colonized societies come to experience themselves as their own centres, their arts will serve the function of both integrating them around expressions of their own selfhood and evincing new attitudes toward the West” (McEvilley 1996: 59). As they started to review their “other” position, non-Western artists have attempted to transcend their peripheral situation by redefining and pushing boundaries in contemporary art. Many are rethinking the histories and identities written by their former Western colonialists, and are increasingly emphasising their cultural integrity. By re-historicising the position of Asian artists, the previous order of their subservience is being reviewed and a more complex understanding of artistic production than the dichotomy of periphery versus the centre is being facilitated.

The acceleration of globalisation in the 1980s started to challenge the legitimate role of the state as key authority in the development of a nation. The historical shift towards decolonisation and transformation of the nation-state system during the Cold War demanded a new global outlook. International social relations have changed with the rise of new realities in which individuals and communities live and have experiences that transcend the boundaries of the state. The effects of diaspora, transnational communities and cultural dislocation have further shifted the nature of cultural identity and complicated the understanding of culture and its political implications. As theories and practices that originate in Europe become increasingly universalised and domesticated in different contexts around the world, the binary concept of centre/periphery as well as evolving postcolonial subjectivities is in urgent need of reconfiguration.

In his important book *The Location of Culture* (2004), Homi Bhabha addresses hybridity as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. He argues that colonial hybridity as a cultural form produces ambivalence in colonial rulers and thereby alters the balance of power (See Bhabha's colonial hybridity in the 2004 edition, 161-174). The blurring of a clear nation-state situation and the phenomenon of cultural hybridities in the increasingly transnational world force us to rethink original perspectives of forms of identity, states of being and modes of analysis. Referring to recent developments in Asian art, Vishakha N. Desai writes that "cultural hybridity – the mixing and juxtaposition of outside elements with indigenous forms and techniques – has been a key part of modern Asian art" (Desai 1996: 13). Indeed, Desai points out that "it is the clash between traditional Asian culture and modern Western influences that makes up an integral part of Asian life in this century" (Desai 1996: 13). As the discourse of art enters a new dimension with the dissolution of the universal significance of the Euro-American art canon and its historiography, the discussion of art history needs to stay relevant by opening itself up to including communication with non-Western cultures in the new era.

With more complex issues surfacing in a globalised age, scholars have attempted to situate contemporary Chinese art in critical cultural theories, such as postcolonialism and postmodernism. For example, in *Chinese Art at the Crossroads: Between Past and Future, Between East and West*, editor Wu Hung put together a long list of writings from prominent curators such as Hou Hanrou, Li Xianting and Britta Erickson on the current globalised Chinese artistic experience. The wide range of issues tackled includes transnational cultural identity and the changing position of contemporary Chinese art. These publications are examples of the apparent rise of compilations of writings on recent developments in contemporary Chinese art by various scholars. As each collection includes many writers and scholars in the field, from

both Chinese and Western backgrounds, we can expect more varied and interesting perceptions of contemporary Chinese art.

Relevant books, newspapers, journal articles, art catalogues and other materials, using both Chinese and Western primary and secondary sources, have been obtained in the course of this research to generate a more balanced view on issues discussed. Materials were procured from libraries, universities and art institutions (museums and art galleries) in Beijing, Shanghai, Hefei (Anhui province), Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore, France, the United States and Australia. In order clearly to understand more nuanced considerations and motivations of the artists, interviews were carried out with the artists Nie Ou (conducted in Chinese on 6 May 2008) and Yin Xiuzhen (conducted in Chinese on 27 December 2008). More intimate contact through personalised interviews with the artists allowed me to moderate questions during the interviews, the better to understand their personal and specific experiences.

Information on the deceased Pan Yuliang is lacking and was particularly difficult to obtain. Pan's art catalogues and some information on her were made available to me by the Musée Cernuschi de Paris, Anhui Museum, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, National Museum of History, and Jeff Hus's Art Gallery in Taiwan. From France I managed to procure art catalogues and photocopied materials with the assistance of the Musée Cernuschi. The Anhui Museum, which keeps most of Pan's surviving works, assisted in providing information on Pan through essay articles, newspaper cuttings and art catalogues. My interview with its senior curator and researcher Wang Lihua (conducted in Chinese on 26 February 2008) benefitted my understanding of Pan's background.

Drawing on the work and biographical information of the artists, this research seeks to understand their personal experiences so as to produce an insightful reading of their work in the larger context of art history and gender relations in China. To achieve a more objective conclusion in this research as well as to incorporate connoisseur insight into the subject, an interview was conducted with historian of Chinese art, Dr. Francesca Dal Lago (22 March 2009). Dal Lago's personal involvement in contemporary Chinese art and her bicultural experience of having lived in both Eastern and Western societies have elicited thoughtful and interesting perspectives on the development of contemporary Chinese art.