Making Visible Feminine Modernities:
The Traditionalist Paintings and Modern Methods of Wu Shujuan

THESIS

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Abstract

A female ink painter prominent in her day but eclipsed in modern histories, Wu Shujuan (吳淑娟 1853-1930) offers a glimpse into the tensions and uncertainties that underlie late nineteenth and early twentieth century China, when concepts such as “art history,” “gender,” “tradition,” and “modernity” were constantly reexamined and redefined. It was through the cultivation of her image as a traditional painter that Wu established a modern platform, visibly engaging in contemporary constructions of traditional art histories and modern Chinese nationhood.

Throughout the 1910s, Wu Shujuan acquired a considerable national and international presence, and two painting catalogues published during this period are central to this thesis: *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fén, the most Distinguished Paintress of Modern China* (中國近世女界大畫家吳杏芬畫), printed in 1915; and the second edition of *The Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes Painted by Madame Wu Hsing-fen, the most Distinguished Paintress of Modern China* (中華名勝圖說: 歙邑杏芬繪圖), published in 1926. With titles that immediately evoke the relationship between gender and modernity, these volumes further reflect contemporary uncertainties as to how such a renowned woman artist should be classified within early twentieth-century Shanghai—an issue that is addressed in chapter one.
Each of the subsequent three chapters examines a different way in which Wu Shujuan distinguished herself within modern forms of artistic production, participating in a wider movement wherein women acquired unprecedented visibility in the public eye. To begin with, the artist was an extensive traveler, and through her many journeys she appropriated a kind of cultural prestige previously reserved for the male literatus. In painting the sights she beheld in various ancient styles, Wu moreover created geographic and art historical travelogues as part of a culturally nationalistic vision of a unified China. The artist’s step into the world of international commerce and use of new printing technologies are further markers of her quest for modernity. Branded in her publications as authentic, masterful, and sensational, Wu effectively targeted both Chinese and foreign audiences. Within a market confused with fakes and forgeries, the genuine artworks of Wu Shujuan also emerged as viable substitutes for paintings that appeared ancient but were of dubious origins. Finally, the artist achieved considerable success on the international stage. Through her participation in exhibitions in the U.S., Italy and Japan, Wu strove to create a dialogue of cross-cultural friendships. Indeed, a study of her relationships with foreigners in Shanghai reveals the role of the American Women’s Club as a feminine networking tool that promoted her art to foreign audiences.

Wu Shujuan’s artistic narrative thus contains a much greater depth and complexity than what her traditional paintings might superficially suggest. Far from being an anachronism in the new republic, Wu was an artist actively aware of her own identity as a new woman and engaged in contemporary negotiations between tradition and modernity.
Dedication

For my mother, the woman who taught me the magic in words
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Introduction

The effervescent art scene of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Shanghai was fueled by tensions between tradition and modernity as artists, facing a China beset by foreign invasion and internal rebellion, sought to re-examine the nation’s past and move forward into self-ascribed “modern” directions. Their efforts resulted not in any singular modernity, but in a plurality of modernities, far-ranging and specific to every artist. For some, modern society required the adoption of Western forms, and painters incorporated elements of European realism, coloring, mediums, and technologies. For others, the trait of the modern artist was to innovate within Chinese tradition, adding new vitality and technical mastery to ink painting.¹ Looking back onto this period, art historians are usually drawn to the painters whose artworks exhibit precisely such innovations resulting from the modern, commercial and western trends that were transforming Shanghai: to the sensual and formalistic brushstroke of Xugu (1823-96), the colorful epigraphic line of Wu Changshi (1844-1927), or the skillful realism in the drawings and oil paintings of Xu Beihong (1895-1953). In focusing on such powerful developments in painting, however, modern scholarship has unfortunately eclipsed the reputation of an acclaimed female

artist who based her career on the continuation of a more conservative, traditional style: Wu Shujuan (吴淑娟 1853-1930).

Animating her paintings with the brushwork and compositions of ancient masters from the Tang to the Qing dynasties, Wu was proficient in a wide range of literati techniques and subject matter, producing high quality artworks that were much sought after by her contemporaries—even though they reflected very few traces of perceivable “modernity.” It was precisely through her mastery of literati painting of the past, in fact, that Wu Shujuan fashioned herself a modern identity as a woman equally engaged in the social activities of her male counterparts and ultimately visible in a way unprecedented for female artists in relation to travel, publishing and commerce, cross-cultural relations, and building feminine histories of past women painters.

By interweaving the terms “tradition” and “literati” into the narrative of Wu Shujuan’s artistic development, I admit to the historical processes that continuously shape their definitions; there exists neither a single uniform Chinese tradition nor a singular meaning for what it meant to an individual to be one of the literati, especially in the twentieth century, and most especially as a woman. In fact, strictly speaking, the term “literati” was only historically applicable to men, to Confucian-educated scholar-officials who were dedicated to the service of the country and possessed a heightened aesthetic sensibility in the “three perfections” of poetry, calligraphy and painting. While Wu Shujuan never held an official position, this paper utilizes “literati” as an analytical term justified by the fact that the painter’s class status, frame of mind, and artistic style all reflect an underlying self-association with literati customs of the past. Indeed, as a young
girl under her father’s tutelage, Wu inherited a set of moral and aesthetic values that derived precisely from her father’s self-identification as a literatus. As she emerged as an artist in her own right, however, Wu’s use of traditional styles and pursuit of social activities associated with her literati upbringing ceased to be a product of simple inheritance; “tradition,” for Wu Shujuan, became an active process, a conscious self-identification with patterns of the past which included more than just literati culture. The term “tradition” contains within it an infinite depth of significances, and we witness in Wu Shujuan’s art and life a continuation of several other legacies, such as the stylistic heritage of academic court painting and the promotion of art through female networking according to the historical culture of the cainü, or “talented woman.” As an analytical lens through which to view Wu Shujuan’s artistic career, “tradition” can ultimately be understood in three ways: as an art historical concept reflective of past styles, as a set of cultural practices embodied by the artist herself as a living exemplar, and as part of a wider societal discourse or movement surrounding the subject of tradition. Indeed, as this paper unfolds, so too will the role of Wu Shujuan in the creation and re-definition of “tradition” and “literati” within early twentieth-century Shanghai.

The modernity discussed in this paper, that is the modernity experienced by Wu Shujuan, is thus not antithetical to tradition, nor is it a requirement of craft delimited simply by the ink traces left by her brushstroke; rather, it is a new approach, a consciousness and a visibility with which the artist acts in society. It is not that women in Chinese history were disengaged from these activities in the least, but rather that their degree of agency and visibility dramatically increased into the twentieth-century.
Wu Shujuan cannot be viewed as an isolated case, but as a prime example of how women of the time were distinguishing themselves within artistic and literary spheres. Chinese womanhood itself took on new importance in national discourse in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, as intellectuals debated the role of the Chinese woman in bringing about a modern nation.²

Liang Qichao (梁启超 1873-1929), a foremost reformist of his day and a staunch advocate for women’s education, rejected what he saw as the apathetic status of women in China’s past. In his article entitled “Proposals for the Education of Women” (Lun nüxue), published in 1897, Liang laments: “When I try to deduce the deepest underlying reason for the weakness of a nation, it always starts from the lack of education for women.”³ It was specifically through the instruction of women in practical skills that Liang hoped to transform the female population into active sustainers of the nation’s economy. While praising the productivity of foreign-educated female doctor Kang Aide, Liang levied his critique against the historical cainü, the “talented woman” who spent her time cultivating her literary skills.⁴ “Proposals for the Education of Women” thus signaled a shift in feminine values, in the very definition of female knowledge and talent. While Liang’s defense brought to the forefront the image of the new woman as an educated and public participant in the nation’s economy, his position was fiercely countered by more conservative intellectuals who reaffirmed women’s role in the home as the preservers of Chinese tradition. Although there was no single consensus on how

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² For a detailed look at the “New Woman,” consult Ying Hu, Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China 1899-1918 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2009), 1-20.
³ As quoted in and translated in Ying Hu’s Tales of Translation. Ibid, 3.
⁴ An analysis of Liang’s comparison between the historical cainü and Kang Aide is provided in Ying Hu’s Tales of Translation. Ibid, 1-20.
she should straddle tradition and modernity, the idea of the new Chinese woman in all her manifestations permeated society from the discourse of leading officials down to popular culture. Wu Shujuan was one of many to accept the challenge of constructing a new role for the modern Chinese woman.

This paper deals primarily with Wu’s career after the Republican Revolution of 1911, when the artist acquired a greater national and international presence. During this period, Wu Shujuan published two volumes of paintings which are central to this paper, and the titles of which immediately evoke the relationship between gender and modernity: *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fên, the most Distinguished Paintress of Modern China* (中國近世女界大畫家吳杏芬畫), printed in 1915; and the second edition of *The Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes Painted by Madame Wu Hsing-fen, the most Distinguished Paintress of Modern China* (中華名勝圖說: 歙邑杏芬繪圖), published in 1926. Gendered and suggesting separation, the bilingual titles of the first publication and the English title of the second reflect how Wu Shujuan cultivated an image specifically as a female painter in a changing China. Only the Chinese heading of the latter volume does not indicate the sex of the artist; instead, Wu’s name is affixed to her place of birth, as one would traditionally introduce a male literatus. This disjunction between book headings is typical of a transitional period, and reflective of contemporary uncertainties as to how this prominent female artist should be classified within early twentieth-century Shanghai.

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5 Judging by the dates of the letters prefacing the volume, the first edition was most likely printed in 1919.
Printed in English as well as in Chinese, both catalogues are books in the Western sense: with hard covers and collotyped images, they are bound along the left side of the page and thus opened and read in the Western—contemporaneously seen as the “modern”—manner. Recommendations from foreign and Chinese collectors were incorporated into the printing of the volumes, prefacing the artwork itself and attesting to its value. *Chinese Paintings* from 1915 is introduced by a letter from Weihaiwei district governor James Lockhart Stewart, 6 Shanghai scholar Yang Yi (楊逸), and Wu’s art dealer Chen Guoquan (陳國權). 7 *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes* from 1926 comprises an even wider range of references, including foreigners such as American Consulate General Edwin S. Cunningham, art historian Helen B. Chapin, Reverend Evan Morgan, the Allied War Relief Association of Shanghai, and contemporary Chinese art connoisseurs such as Wu Hengzhi (吳衡之) who went by the English name of H.C. Wolfe, Marshal Wu Peifu (吳子玉), Xu Mozhai (許默齋) and Huang Bocun (黃樸存).

Preserved on these pages are over sixty paintings which, through the very traditionalism that doomed them to obscurity in modern scholarship, consciously present themselves as guides into Chinese art history for foreign and native readers alike. It is precisely through these volumes that we learn of Wu Shujuan as a modern woman: of her travels to historical Chinese sites, her investment in publishing and commerce, her re-integration of historical female artists into the male literati canon, and her engagement in establishing relations with foreigners. Wu Shujuan was thus not an anachronism in the

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6 Weihaiwei was a British-controlled district in Northern China.
new republic, a relic of the past without relevance to the future, but an artist actively aware of her own identity as a new woman and engaged in this negotiation between tradition and modernity.
Chapter 1: Comparing Biographies: Wu Shujuan and the Historical Woman Painter

Until the modern era, Chinese art criticism held an ambiguous stance toward female artists. That select women painters were praised for producing works “without feminine qualities” or “lacking in feminine softness”\(^8\) indicates the prevailing assumption that an inherent femininity was somehow transferred onto paper, weakening the overall value of the piece. Although some female artists such as Guan Daosheng (管道升 1262-1319) of the Yuan dynasty succeeded in overcoming this perceived flaw, recorded histories of painting consistently separated male and female artists, grouping the latter along with monks and foreigners—other marginalized societal figures.\(^9\) The biographies of male and female artists, however, were often constructed out of the same vocabularies and conventions.\(^10\) Ellen Johnston Laing and elaborates: “they were child prodigies; they excelled at family styles; their works resembled and sometimes surpassed those of great masters; they were reincarnations of a particular old master; their brushwork was strong or forceful; their works were of the ‘marvelous’ or even the ‘untrammeled’ class; and,

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\(^9\) Marsha Weidner and Ellen Johnston Laing, ed., *Views from a Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 17. The earliest known Chinese art catalogue to include women painters is the *Xuanhe huapu*, the imperial catalogue of the Northern Song court (960-1127). Laing identifies three women in this volume sorted according to the subjects they painted: a Miss Tong, a Miss Wang, and a Cao Zhongwan. Ibid. 18, 29 notes 30-33.

\(^10\) Ibid. 26.
occasionally, they opened new paths.” A crucial difference in the composition of a woman’s biographical entry, however, is that her life events were structured around her role as daughter, wife, and mother. The name of her father and husband, for instance, were cited in the same way as the official position of a male literatus would be listed. While this practice of evaluating a woman painter through the lens of a male relative appears unsettling to the contemporary viewer, the historical truth is that few female artists would have become painters if not for the assistance of a male relative who was also skilled with a brush.

The crux of the matter, then, becomes how Wu Shujuan’s biography compares to those of her predecessors. More precisely, how did the ongoing societal tension between tradition and modernity affect Wu’s manner of living and the way in which her contemporaries perceived her? In his preface to *Chinese Paintings*, painter and calligrapher Yang Yi (1864-1929) supplies a fairly extensive survey of Wu Shujuan’s life, much of which does, indeed, fall into the conventional literati framework set forth by earlier compilations of women artists’ biographies.

Wu, whose name was also styled Xingfen nüshi (杏芬女士), meaning Lady Scholar of Almond Fragrance, was born into a successful literati family in Anhui province. Her father, Wu Zijia (吳子嘉), was an advisor to Zeng Guofan (曾國藩 1811-}

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid. 14.
13 Ibid. 13.
14 Yang Yi is also the compiler of a volume of 741 Shanghai artists entitled *The Ink Forest of Shanghai* *Haishang Molin* (海上墨林), published in 1919.
16 Wu Zijia’s official name was Wu Hongxun (吳鴻勛).
and was known for his paintings of bamboo and epidendrums. He is depicted as a loving man who, upon perceiving his daughter’s cleverness, fostered her natural propensity for painting, and openly confessed her superior skill. The young female painter married a scholar, Tang Kunhua (唐昆華 d.1904), who became prefect of the Jiangsu region, and was later promoted to the rank of daotai. When fin-de-siècle politics became too heated, however, he withdrew from office, following the time-cherished tradition of the virtuous literatus who removes himself from political corruption in order to devote himself entirely to his studies. Yang neither records the specific reason for Tang’s retirement, referring to it only cryptically as resulting from “differences with his colleagues,” nor discusses how he continued to earn a living. Instead, Yang focuses on the literati ideal of an idyllic existence: “[Tang] retired into private life and amused himself daily with noted scholars in literature and led the life of a dilettante. He enjoyed himself also in visiting country places and beautiful scenery.”

Wu’s marriage was apparently a happy one; she and her husband are portrayed as sharing a profound intellectual bond, a symbiosis of temperaments captured in Yang’s preface: “besides managing the affairs of her household, [Wu] spent most of her time in literary pursuits together with her husband, sometimes they discussed matters of paintings, while at other times, they consulted each other about books in their library.”

Wu is recorded as travelling to Shanghai with her father on business as early as the age of ten. See Xu Hong, “Early 20th-Century Women Painters in Shanghai,” *Shanghai Modern* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 206.

Tang Kunhua also went by the official name of Tang Guangzhao (唐光照).

*Daoài* were in charge of the civil and military of two adjoining territories known as *fu*.


Ibid. 2.
their marriage, and Wu assisted him in determining its authenticity. Her eye proved so discerning, in fact, that “sellers made a rule not to show any forgeries.”22 This same art historical learning, which enabled Wu to distinguish original from fake, also qualified her to paint convincing imitations of past masters, a superior skill praised in countless biographies of historical painters. Yang elaborates: “whenever she uses her brush, it seems as if she is helped by the spirits of the past.”23 In the typical manner of conventions and clichés, this section of the biography thus reveals as many general details as it conceals personality. Indeed, while commending Wu’s talents, Yang Yi renders a biography in which her artistic development from child prodigy to companionate wife fits squarely into the lives of women artists of the past thousand years.

Yang’s conclusion to the biography, however, intimates the author’s difficulty in classifying Wu Shujuan within the context of early twentieth-century Shanghai; Wu is described as at once belonging to an historical feminine tradition as well as surpassing it:

In writing the foregoing, it makes me more and more convinced that the literary and artistic culture always has its origin; and that our national culture is more valuable than anything else. In the case of Madame Wu, not only is there no lady equal to her to be found among Chinese of the present day; but she must be also one of the special kinds even compared with all lady-artists recorded in our pictorial histories of olden times.24

While Yang’s concluding paragraph reveals multiple issues in contemporary discourse—gender, nation, tradition and the future of Chinese art—it resolves none. Instinctually inclined to rank Wu Shujuan according to her sex in feminine histories, Yang also

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid. 3.
24 Ibid. 4.
implies that she does not completely conform to this category, but is of a “special kind.”

The association of Wu Shujuan with the creation or preservation of a national culture is especially significant, for it entails Wu taking visible strides into the modernities offered by the new Republic specifically as a woman artist. Indeed, Yang highlights three ways in which Wu sought to distinguish herself within more “masculine” forms of artistic production, activities highly unconventional for women by traditional standards: her travels, her early interest in publishing, and her participation in foreign exhibitions. These three subjects constitute the following three chapters.
Chapter 2: The Travels and Visual Travelogues of Wu Shujuan

Wu Shujuan did not simply travel; she enjoyed travelling, and purposefully sought out the splendor of famous sites to nurture her art. Indeed, in their respective introductions to Wu’s painting catalogues, both Yang Yi and H.C. Wolfe emphasize the artist’s mobility. As stated by Yang in *Chinese Paintings*:

> Madame Wu was also very fond of visiting famous mountains and was not afraid of any trouble in visiting places of wonderful scenery. When she came back, she used to turn out pictures of those places which she had actually seen for her own amusement. In this illustrated catalogue, for instance, the views of West Lake and the famous mountain Hwang-shan which she painted seem true to nature.25

Wu must have held a soft spot for the poetic sights of Hangzhou and its West Lake in particular because she maintained her own studio there even while owning a home in the French concessions of Shanghai, at the same address printed in *Chinese Paintings* as the residence of her son: 136 rue des Pères.26 The first painting reproduced in this earlier catalogue is, in fact, of Wu’s studio near West Lake (Figure 1). This intimate scene portraying a modest scholarly house surrounded with trees, garden rocks and water effectively greets the reader into the other views beheld by the artist. The small figure seated at the second-floor desk is undoubtedly a self-portrait of Wu herself, practicing her

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painting while enjoying the natural beauty of her surroundings. Wu often explored the famous sites around Hangzhou, painting them into an equally enchanting ten-leaf album re-printed in *Chinese Paintings* (Figure 2). The peaks of Huangshan in Anhui province were similarly a source of delight for Wu, and she took them as her subject on multiple occasions, depicting them in a variety of styles; *Chinese Paintings* reproduces a twenty-four leaf album of Huangshan (Figure 3), and *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes* prints a single full-page hanging scroll (Figure 4). Perhaps acting as Wu Shujuan’s art dealer, H.C. Wolfe, like Yang Yi, describes the process by which Wu drew upon her many travels as inspiration for her art:

> The lady moreover delights in scenery, and there is no celebrated place in China which she has not visited. On returning home from her journeys she would reproduce her vivid impressions on canvas, and her pictures on every hand enabled her to continue her enjoyment of these beautiful scenes.\(^{27}\)

Unfortunately, Wolfe’s preface, written in 1919, does not specify which sites Wu actually had the occasion to experience firsthand—it seems a little unlikely that she was able to travel to all eighteen landscapes featured in this later volume. The art dealer does not mention, either, whether the artist traveled alone or with her husband. As Wu Shujuan was fifty-one at the time of Tang Kunhua’s death in 1904, most of her travels would certainly have been embarked upon during her husband’s lifetime, and apparently with his full support. Indeed, if Wu did travel with Tang, his own desires did not detract from her actual experience and enjoyment of the famous sites; full of enthusiasm, Wu would return home and transfer the sights onto paper. Although much documentation is missing,

\(^{27}\) H.C. Wolfe, “Preface,” in *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes* (Shanghai, 1926), n.p.
Wolfe’s above comment is crucial in revealing three phenomena: first, that Wu Shujuan travelled enough to acquire a reputation for her journeys; second, that her reason for travelling was entirely dependent on her own will and desire to see China; and lastly, that women’s travel was not only visible but celebrated and encouraged as a selling point. The natural question to follow is how this facet of Wu Shujuan’s life relates to the experiences of her female contemporaries and predecessors.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was far from unheard of for women artists to travel across China; they had been doing so, in fact, for hundreds of years. Various accounts record loyal wives embarking upon journeys to escape turmoil, visit a relative, bury a relation, or simply accompany their husbands. In most cases, however, the woman’s personal desire to behold famous sites was secondary either to necessity or to a more Confucian goal. One of the longest recorded trips undertaken by a female painter was by Chen Shu (陳書 1660-1736), who journeyed from Zhejiang to Beijing twice in order to visit her son. If Chen beheld any famous landscapes during her voyage, it was perceived as incidental, subordinate to her Confucian objective. In theory, the yearning to travel in a woman of the literati class was not a socially-desirable quality; Confucian order and propriety dictated that upper class women remain within interior domestic spaces. As stated in *The Book of Changes (Yijing)*, “a woman's proper place is the inside, a man's proper place the outside. The proper placing of men and women

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28 Flora Li-tsu Fu, *Framing Famous Mountains: Grand Tour and Mingshan Paintings in Sixteenth-century China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2009), 72-3.
fulfills the grand principle of heaven and earth.” In practice, however, the bounds between inner and outer spheres were far more porous. During the seventeenth century in particular, women acquired greater visibility in travelling. Intimate groups of literati class women in seventeenth-century Jiangnan also embarked on small excursions along the river or to the nearby mountains without compromising their reputations. For grander expeditions, however, women often felt compelled to supply more socially acceptable reasons than sightseeing. A late Ming and early Qing novel entitled Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World (Xingshi yinyuan zhuan), for instance, features a party of eighty women who join in a Buddhist pilgrimage to Mount Tai in Shandong partly as an act of devotion, but mostly as an excuse for sightseeing and recreation. Even while traveling under the pretense of Buddhism, however, many women encountered resistance. According to Yiqun Zhou, champions of Confucianism panicked at the sight of women worshipping at public temples; fearing the threat these female devotees posed to proper Confucian family order, they strove to “re-sacralize women’s domestic role” and thereby reassert the home as the spiritual center.

Women who stretched the limits of propriety and treated the public and private realms as one thus found themselves with an ambiguous reputation. For professional

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30 Ying Hu, “Re-Configuring Nei/Wai: Writing the Woman Traveler in the Late Qing,” Late Imperial China 18.1 (1997): 79.
32 Ibid. 224.
33 Flora Li-tsui Fu, Framing Famous Mountains: Grand Tour and Mingshan Paintings in Sixteenth-century China (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2009), 72-3.
painter and poet Huang Yuanjie (黄媛介 ca.1620-ca.1669), the boundaries between inner and outer were entirely fluid. Regarding them as nonexistent, Huang embarked upon unaccompanied trips across the Jiangnan region, travelled the lengthy distance to Beijing, and sold her paintings along the way. A contemporary male scholar describes her lifestyle: “She often travels in a light boat, carrying her brushes, between Wu and Yue. I once saw her living in a rented place by a bridge in Xiling [Hangzhou], selling her poetry and painting by a small pavilion. She would stop once she made enough to live on.”

Although Huang was born into a literati family and in marriage made a proper scholarly match, her itinerant life resembled less that of a respectable wife than of a courtesan.

Her reception in society was twofold. While some male literati praised her for her talent and welcomed her into their homes to teach their own wives and daughters, others labeled her itinerant life as immoral. Indeed, in spite of all these women’s efforts, travel for personal enjoyment was still socially coded as a masculine pursuit.

Born two centuries later, Wu Shujuan experienced a China that was increasingly open to public feminine excursions, a China in which travel was not necessarily incompatible with respectability. According to Hu Ying, late Qing women distinguished themselves from the past not through their mobility, but through their visibility on both the national and international stage.

Within Wu’s generation, wives began accompanying their husbands to Europe along with the first diplomatic missions of 1876

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid. 120-2.
38 Ying Hu, “‘Would That I Were Marco Polo’: the Travel Writing of Shan Shili (1856-1943)” Journeys 5.1 (June 2004): 120.
1878. 1901 marked the beginning of female students travelling to Japan, and by 1903 they did so unaccompanied by their male spouses or relatives. The time was ripe for women artists to acquire training abroad as well. By the 1910s, ink painter He Xiangning (何香凝 1878–1972) had returned to China after completing an art degree at the Tokyo Women’s Art School, and by the mid to late 1920s, women artists such as Cai Weilin (蔡威廉 1904–1940), Pan Yuliang (潘玉良 1902–1977) and Fang Junbi (方君璧 1898–1986) were returning home from their studies in Europe. He, Cai, Pan and Fang were all born roughly a generation after Wu Shujuan, who herself did not have the occasion to travel abroad. In fact, by the time He Xiangning returned to Shanghai in 1916, Wu was already over the age of sixty. Understandably, then, Wu’s travels were of a more limited scope—the visibility of women in public spheres was not wholly uncontested during the early twentieth century, and the earlier one wished to travel, the more difficult it would have been to walk the line between respectability and visibility. According to Joan Judge, “while female talent and virtue were now both understood in relation to the nation, it was the publicness or privateness of this relation that generated the most controversy.” While one extreme argued that women ought to preserve ‘Chineseness’ by privileging domestic virtues, the other extreme contended that women ought to fashion new female subjectivities and display their talents in new public

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41 For a survey of women oil painters who studied abroad, consult David Pong, *Encyclopaedia of Modern China* vol. 3 (Farmington Hills, MI : Charles Scribner's Sons/Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 48-9.
feminine roles. In Yang Yi’s biography of Wu Shujuan, the author bestrides both extremes, simultaneously portraying Wu as the traditional literati wife and mother and also as a public figure, a woman of talent engaged in modern society. Indeed, by the time Yang composed Wu’s biography in 1915, the visibility of women’s travel had already become a signifier of the Modern Chinese Woman.

Wu Shujuan’s journeys within China were fundamentally of a different kind than those of He, Cai, Pan and Fang. While Wu’s youthful foreign-trained contemporaries sought innovative visual forms through which to express China’s modernity, Wu’s travels made visible an expression of modernity in which contemporary women gained access to traditional masculine forms of literati culture. Travel was a form of cultural authority heretofore inaccessible to women—with the exception, perhaps, of rare forerunners such as Huang Yuanjie. In theory, it was not actually necessary for artists in Chinese history to observe the mountainscapes they depicted themselves—imagination and antique styles rather than topographical accuracy was the crux of their creation, and so female artists in China held an advantage over their European counterparts; whereas the Western woman had no access to the training required to paint the epitome of European art, the nude, the Chinese woman could still envision the height of literati painting, the landscape. As of the early sixteenth century, however, the cultural elite began a fashion of acquiring cultural capital that was beyond women’s reach—embarking upon increasingly far-

43 Ibid.
reaching journeys to sacred peaks and sites. Known as zhuangyou (heroic tours) or zongyou (extensive tours), these voyages were similar to the European Tour, functioning as “a demonstration of taste, an effective way of enhancing one’s literary or artistic skills, and a practical means of building and expanding networks and communications.” The preface to an official’s epitaph or collected writings would hence customarily introduce a brief of his official career, then list the mountains he had visited. According to Flora Li-tsui Fu, this order implies that the latter reinforced the prestige of the former, symbolically linking the geographical landmarks observed to the landmarks in his official career. Although the vogue of travel as an acquisition of cultural merit spread to literati of the official and non-official types, merchants, and Buddhist and Daoist pilgrims, it was largely exclusive of women. The golden days of zhuangyou may have been over by the time Wu Shujuan became an artist, but the linking of travel with cultural authority persevered.

The very conception of traveling as a standard credential for the ideal literati painter was introduced as early as the Song dynasty (960-1279). According to Li Chengsou (李澄叟 ca.1150 - after 1221), travel constitutes a prerequisite for artistic development: “those who paint landscapes must travel everywhere and observe widely, only then will they know where to place and move the brush.” The practice of drawing artistic inspiration from nature was further reaffirmed in a well-known dictum put forth

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45 Flora Li-tsui Fu, Framing Famous Mountains: Grant Tour and Mingshan Paintings in Sixteenth-century China (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2009), 55.
46 Ibid. xix.
47 Ibid. 62.
48 Ibid.
by the greatly influential Ming dynasty literati painter Dong Qichang (董其昌 1555-1636). According to Dong, an artist could only master landscape painting by “reading thousands of books and by traveling thousands of li,” a tenet constantly repeated by later artists. By citing her extensive travels across China, Yang Yi and Chen Guoquan thus confer upon Wu the social prestige of a traditionally-trained literatus.

Hu Ying elucidates this point even further: “travel in the traditional literati mode is almost always a peregrination through the past, and travel writing a way of writing oneself into the tradition accumulated at a given site.” The same can be said of literati painting; art historical study is a pilgrimage through earlier times, and painting a way of reviving the spirits of ancient masters. When Wu Shujuan returned from a journey, picked up her brush and set it to paper in imitation of an historical painter, she was doubly encoding her painting as a personal travelogue leading the viewer not only through the geographical landscapes of China, but also through the landmarks of its art history.

A travelogue, in essence, is the re-creation of the artist’s real experience, represented visually for the viewer’s participation. Yang Yi’s 1915 introduction prefaces the paintings of Wu Shujuan in a very similar manner, recounting how her artworks convincingly submerge the reader into China’s scenic sites and painting history so effectively it almost equals firsthand experience. In admiring Wu Shujuan’s albums,

52 This is how Flora Fu describes Ye Cheng’s sixteenth-century Picture of Mount Yandang. Flora Li-tsu Tsui Fu, Framing Famous Mountains: Grand Tour and Mingshan Paintings in Sixteenth-century China (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2009), 99.
Yang writes: “the views of West Lake and the famous Hwang-shan which she painted seem true to nature. Once I compared her pictures of Hwang-shan with the photographs of a Japanese gentleman, but I found her pictures were more alive than the photographs.”

The author’s commentary continues onto the adjoining description of the Huangshan album itself: “This album is so true to life that it is said that persons who look over the pictures often think they are there themselves.”

The instinctive response on the part of viewers to project themselves into the depicted landscape was a longstanding tradition in Chinese painting, and was especially appropriate in approaching a travelogue. It is said that when the Six Dynasties painter Zong Bing (宗炳 375-443) grew too old to roam through the mountains himself, he painted their image on his walls so that he might wander the scenery again with his eyes even while lying in repose.

Foreign viewers of the twentieth-century similarly saw an opportunity to enjoy the experience of famous sites while travelling only with their eyes. In 1919, Reverend Evan Morgan contributed a preface to *Eighteen Famous Landscapes* in which he expresses his own understanding of Wu Shujuan’s paintings: “without going out of the door or undertaking the fatigue of travel by train and boat, it is possible to see some of the famous landscapes of China… these are now accessible to me through the art of Madame Wu.”

The vitality exuded by Wu’s paintings derived not only from her actual experience of cultural sites, but was also enhanced by her mastery of the styles of ancient literati painters. Yang Yi continues on

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54 Yang Yi. “Views of the famous Mountain Huang-shan” No. 35 in in *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen* (Shanghai, 1915).
this point in his introduction: “As Madame Wu has carefully studied old landscape paintings a great deal, she has kept them in her heart, and whenever she uses her brush, it seems as if she is helped by the spirits of the past. Her copies of ancient pictures are difficult to distinguish from the originals.”57 In his own preface in the 1919 version, Chinese scholar H.C. Wolfe even goes so far as to say that Wu’s works provide “an opportunity of viewing the form and style of ancient masters of every school.”58 While these testimonies certainly suggest the interpretation of Wu’s paintings as travelogues through geographical space and art historical time, how can we ascertain that this was the artist’s actual intent?

The line that distinguishes the project of the artist from that of her publisher is a difficult one to draw. True to a legacy of female artists whose art was published by male relatives, Wu Shujuan does not include a textual preface of her own in either of the published catalogues. It is only through the poetic musings of her painting inscriptions and the paintings themselves that Wu Shujuan can really begin to be understood. *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes*, the volume as a whole, is the clearest illustration of how Wu Shujuan consciously constructed these kinds of geographical and art historical travelogues. With the purpose of apprehending the motivation that led to the creation of the artworks themselves, the structure of the book and its textual additions will be momentarily set aside. Wu’s selection of which landscapes to paint was not arbitrary; up until the last years of the Qing dynasty, China proper was composed of

58 Ibid.
eighteen provinces, and Wu painted a famous scene from each.⁵⁹ Within a China struggling for a unified self-definition, Wu was thus proposing a culturally nationalist project based on the natural sceneries which, throughout Chinese history, acquired cultural meaning as sites of religious and aesthetic activity. It becomes irrelevant, at this point, whether or not Wu Shujuan actually had the occasion to visit each site in person. If the premise of a travelogue is the sharing of a “real experience,” Wu is here proffering something equally real: a personal vision of a peaceful and unified nation into which viewers are invited to venture.

Wu Shujuan was also well-versed in the history of Chinese art, and acquired a reputation in her time for learning how to imitate not any single particular master, but many. By virtue of being a woman raised in the scholarly class, Wu would have had firsthand access to ancient paintings through her husband’s art collection and through friendships formed with other literati art collectors. Wu experimented with so many subjects and styles, in fact, that every painting included in Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes was imagined with a different reference in mind. This is not to argue that Wu Shujuan’s conception of art history was entirely accurate, however; in fact, without access to reliable images of ancient masters, her repertoire diverges significantly from contemporary canons and does not always resemble the historical style she is said to be emulating. Nor is this to claim that the artist was merely a copyist without any personal style. Within Chinese literati tradition, the imitation of an ancient master was only

deemed successful if it was re-adapted through the brush of the contemporary artist, and a combination of fineness and sketchiness of line, mixed with an interest in slightly off-centered, sometimes naively unbalanced compositions with deep diagonal recessions dominate Wu’s landscapes in a manner quite unique to her hand. As a metaphorical travelogue of the landmarks of art history, the styles of ancient masters are thus presented to the viewer through the personal lens of Wu’s experience. Contrary to what one might expect, the artist’s inscriptions do not mention the sources of inspiration behind each artwork. It stands to reason, however, that because the paintings’ original audience would have been Chinese art connoisseurs such as H.C. Wolfe, no explicit description was necessary for their stylistic decoding. While other explanations are equally probable without further documentation, the very breadth of styles incorporated into the single volume fundamentally suggests a desire to go beyond the mere representation of geographical sites and provide an art historical experience as well.

A comparison of just three of the eighteen paintings exemplifies the freedom with which Wu Shujuan drew upon ancient masters. Capturing the poetic stillness of the water gently rippling under the paddles of two fishermen, *Lake of Tien* (Figure 5) portrays a moonlit night with a watered down wetness of brush that suggests recent rainfall. Wu’s inscription is equally poetic, itself conjuring the image of the willow, the moon’s reflection in the water, and the old man’s rowing of the boat. This hazy dreamscape-like atmosphere is similarly illustrated in *Return from a 1000 Li Journey* (Figure 6), an album leaf by artist Shen Zhou (沈周 1427-1509) who was known for painting pictures of famous sites in a charming style that combined awkward line and elegant simplicity. In
comparing the boating figures and hatched mooring dock illustrated in both paintings, it is clear that Wu herself preferred a slightly more refined line and higher degree of detail. And yet the awkwardly thick-lined stones in the water, vanishing washes of the horizontal mountains disappearing into the water and into the distance, and overall poeticism of the tableau are reminiscent of Shen Zhou’s own lake scene.

In great contrast to the tranquility of Lake of Tien, Wu’s painting The Chien-kuo (Figure 7) brings to life the danger of the expedition in this treacherous footpath in Sichuan province. The drama of the composition derives from the artist’s use of diagonals: the rickety bridge criss-crosses into the mountain, the trees sprawl across the lower portion of the paper, the hills rise up to precipitous heights, and the waterfall zigzags out of the mountain’s mouth, winding down the composition toward the viewer. Wu’s inscription captures the dangerous force of the surging current confronted by travelers. In comparing The Chien-kuo with a piece in the style of Li Tang (李唐 ca.1050 – 1130) entitled Gazing at a Waterfall (Figure 8), parallels between the two paintings become immediately apparent. The program and manner in which the mountains are constructed is very similar. In the foreground, the rocks are low and geometrical, seemingly growing out of each other and defined by texture strokes. In the mid-ground, the mountains are defined from the bottom up; angular lines of triangular rock project from the base, interspersed with light dots of vegetation, and then rise straight up and cumulate in more rounded, sloping peaks which are topped with trees. In the distance, skinny mountains pop up in light washes.
Although similarly a mountainous scene, the rocks depicted in Wu Shujuan’s *Mount Taiyi* (Figure 9) differ very much in style from those in *The Chien-kuo*, generating a less aggressive though equally grand atmosphere. Whereas *The Chien-kuo* precipices are composed of angular planes with sparing texture strokes near the peaks, the mountains in *Mount Taiyi* consist of overlapping and intertwining units with dense texture strokes and thick vegetation concentrated along the crests of the range. The rounded masses, spattered with energetic dots of ink and surfaced with elongated hemp fiber strokes, rise up at a sharp angle, their winding crests following a slight “S” curve that recalls a hanging scroll by Wang Hui (王翬 1632-1717) entitled *Large Emerging from Small after Wang Meng* from the Shanghai Museum (Figure 10). The differences are equally as apparent. Wang Hui carefully details architecture and human activity along a continuously receding ground plane, animating the surrounding landscape with wild and energetic brushstrokes. Wu Shujuan, in contrast, depicts only the rooftops of a temple peeking out from between the rocks before a mist that disrupts the flow of space, employing a much more subdued line in rendering the natural elements. Both paintings, however, grow out of the stylistic tradition of Dong Yuan (董源 d.962) with their earthy masses, hemp fiber texture strokes, and alum rock peaks topped with splashes of vegetation. As a whole, the steep angle of the mountains displaced to one side of the composition further creates, in both pieces, a tension between horizontal recession and vertical heights, between heavy concentrations of ink and empty spaces.

By this point, two facts should be absolutely clear: first, that Wu Shujuan painted landscapes geographically located all over China; and second, that she painted them in a
plethora of styles reflective of China’s long literati tradition. As a whole, Wu’s landscapes can thus be interpreted as a culturally nationalistic travelogue encompassing China’s historical legacy. The structure of the volume itself, most likely determined by Chinese scholar H.C. Wolfe, clarifies and supports the artist’s goal. Very much serving as a visual and textual travel guide, *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes* is organized as follows: subsequent to each painting is an English account of the location and significance of the landscape, as well as a brief introduction to the style of the ancient master imitated. The third page of each sequence provides a Chinese account with the same basic content, though it also transcribes the artist’s inscription on the painting. While it may be argued that Wolfe selected which paintings would be comprised in the catalogue, to assume that Wu Shujuan coincidentally painted a landscape of every province, each one in a different style, would be to unfairly deprive her of her agency. While Wu Shujuan’s paintings may have continued to be rather conservative in style, her travels and visual travelogues nevertheless capture the experience of a modern woman visibly venturing into cultural territory long considered as belonging to men.
Chapter 3: Publishing and the Commercial Lure of the Woman Artist

If *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes* serves as a visual travelogue, it also functions as a marketing strategy targeting Chinese and foreign collectors. The final page of the volume, after all, suggests that copies of the book can be procured, and originals of the pictures seen, under the supervision of H.C. Wolfe at No.296, 4th Huaxing Alleyway, Zhabei district, Shanghai. In his preface to *Chinese Paintings* in 1915, Wu Shujuan’s art dealer Chen Guoquan expresses an urgency for viewers to invest in his client’s art. He lists the catalogue itself, as well as the paintings contained within it, as unequivocally unique in their day for three reasons: first, in a contemporary art scene confused with fakes and forgeries, the difficulty of ascertaining the authenticity of an artwork is entirely removed when the paintings are done by a living artist; second, while a painter usually concentrates in a single specialty such as landscapes or flowers or figures, Wu Shujuan mastered all these subjects; and lastly, the paintings are drawn from a hand that has fifty years of experience. A final reason, not specifically listed in Chen’s introduction, but implicit in his sensationalization of the female painter, is that the artworks were painted by a “lady-artist.” After providing a brief introduction as to how Wu Shujuan and her early publications fit into the history of Chinese women’s involvement in the industry of

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60 *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen* (Shanghai, 1915), last page.
book publishing, this chapter will proceed to analyze these three marketable aspects of the artist: her authenticity, her expertise in various art historical subjects and styles, and her sensationalism as a woman painter.

Although the publication of women artists had its precedents in China’s past, these cases were historically confined to the printing of poetry, and often enabled through the intervention of a husband or son. It had become acceptable for *guixiu*, “gentlewomen” of the scholarly class, to publish their poetry as early as the sixteenth century, and their collections would circulate among family and friends, discussed and traded by fellow *guixiu*.62 Up until the early twentieth century, Ellen Widmer underscores, the women’s aspirations were rarely monetary; while some anthologies of women’s poetry did become commercial successes, the most frequent scenario was one in which family presses would publish the collection of a female relative in order to enhance the family’s reputation, as well as to retain a more permanent record of her writings. Widmer moreover records a historical disjunction between the female writer and her publisher, noting that “women writers often found it convenient to act as if they were not entirely responsible for their own publications.”63 While some female poets claimed that their works were published by a son without their consent, others maintained that their husband was responsible for the publication.64 This particular literary legacy continues into Wu Shujuan’s own publications, lending a probable explanation for the exclusion of any personal commentary to her volumes; indeed, the prefaces to both *Chinese Paintings* and *Eighteen*

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63 Ibid. 11.
64 Ibid. 12.
Famous Landscapes designate Wu’s son Tang Xiong (唐熊 1892-1935) as the initiator of the printing project.

Were it not for Wu Shujuan’s early interest in publishing before even the turn of the twentieth century, we might be inclined to discredit her direct participation in publishing her own artworks. Before the death of Wu’s husband in 1904, however, the couple had collaboratively published two painting volumes: a catalogue of their personal art collection entitled Ancient and Modern Paintings (Hudie qiuzhai suozang huace 蝴蝶秋齋所藏畫), and a book reprinting of her painting One Hundred Flowers (Baihua tu 百花圖), published in 1898. While literati of the past had printed their own collections, the use of this technology by a female artist to promote her own paintings—as opposed to poetry—was a new phenomenon. In addition, although many women artists of the past are recorded as having supplemented their household incomes by selling paintings, Wu reached further into her commercial potential through printing, making a profit even from artworks never intended to be sold. Indeed, as an image reproduced in Chinese Paintings reveals (Figure 11), the Baihua scroll remained a favorite in the family collection over the next twenty years. As a book, Baihua tu was reproduced lithographically in the Chinese manner; opened with the string binding on the right hand side (the opposite of

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65 I have not, unfortunately, been able to access this book. An existing copy in Japan has been cited in the bibliography of Joshua Fogel’s forthcoming volume, The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art, and is cited as follows: Wu Gan 吳淦. Hudie qiuzhai suocang huace 蝴蝶秋齋所藏畫冊 (Painting album of works held at the Butterfly Autumn Hut), (Japan: Akashi Chūshichi, 1882). It appears to have been one of many Chinese books published in Japan during this time period. Consult Joshua A. Fogel, ed. The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 312 note 41.
66 Yun Bing (18th century), for instance, supported both herself and her husband through the sale of her paintings. Marsha Weidner and Ellen Johnston Laing, ed., Views from a Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912 (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 122.
modern western books) and was meant to be read by flipping the pages from right to left. *Baihua tu* consists of thin sheets of paper, printed on one side and folded in half with the ink facing outward to create a recto and a verso.67 The front and back covers were made of thicker paper, with the title handwritten on the cover, then printed again on the first page (Figure 12). Its foreword, unsurprisingly, notes that the volume was printed at the behest of Wu’s husband, Tang Kunhua. Seventeen paintings of various flowers by Wu Shujuan are reproduced among the numerous lively inscriptions of her contemporaries, both male and female, and printed solely in Chinese. Their commendations heighten the reputation of the artist both as a cultural figure and as a financial investment. According to Yang Yi’s “Introduction,” numerous copies of the book were sold,68 and it even met with some success in foreign circles, making its way into the collection of U.S. diplomat William Woodville Rockhill (1854-1914).69 The governor of British-controlled Weihaiwei district in Northern China, James Holden Stewart Lockhart (1858-1937), moreover responded to these publications as advertising campaigns. In his own preface to *Chinese Paintings*, Lockhart writes that he had often seen representations of Wu Shujuan’s paintings in *Hudie qizhai* and *Baihua tu*, and had thereafter wished to obtain an original by the artist, who happily obliged.70 Wu continued to publish after her husband’s death, printing a pamphlet of six landscapes for Chinese viewership in 1913

69 This copy is currently located in the Freer Sackler Library.
(Figure 13), a series that is explicitly re-reproduced in *Chinese Paintings* to reach a foreign audience.\(^7\)

Casting an increasingly broader net for her clientele, Wu Shujuan’s affinity for publishing cumulated in the 1910s and 1920s with *Chinese Paintings* and *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes*, both volumes reproduced with collotyped images. This shift into the technological aspects of modern book culture was matched in textual content and material form; printed in English as well as in Chinese, the catalogues became “books” in the western sense of the word: hard-covered with thicker paper, and opened with the spine on the left-hand side. Along with the adoption of modern printing technologies which, through their faster and higher-quality reproductions, heightened Wu Shujuan’s visibility in the Shanghai art market, the artist took a significant step further into the world of commercialism. Indeed, just in compiling collotyped images into catalogues, Wu not only profited from the sales of the volumes themselves, but also benefited from their function as advertising campaigns displaying her mastery in a variety of styles.

Of course, Wu Shujuan’s purpose was not purely commercial; as seen in the previous chapter, the artist was also proposing a consolidation and preservation of national culture. These two goals, both commercial and culturally nationalistic, were at least superficially shared by several art historical books of the period. A prime example is *Chinese Pictorial Art* (中華名畫) by E.A. Strehneek, published by the Shanghai Commercial Press after an exhibition held in 1914. The intention of the catalogue,

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\(^7\) Yi Yang, “Introduction,” *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen* (Shanghai, 1915), 3.
Strehlneek writes, is to familiarize more audiences with Chinese painting, an artform especially misunderstood by western viewers and collectors. Printed in English as well as in Chinese to reach a larger readership of art connoisseurs, Strehlneek’s volume is formatted as a western-style book, with two solid covers, thicker paper bound at the seam, and meant to be read in the western manner. The artworks re-printed are from the author’s personal collection, and consist mostly of landscapes, flower paintings and figure paintings believed to date from the Tang to the Qing dynasties. These are organized chronologically and adjoined by descriptive texts that elucidate the artist and subject matter. The overall appearance of Strehlneek’s *Chinese Pictorial Art* is very close to Wu Shujuan’s *Chinese Paintings* in purpose, format, and scope of works illustrated. Two of its contributors, scholar and translator H.C. Wolfe and art connoisseur Huang Bocun, were later to write introductions to Wu Shujuan’s own volume in 1919. Although Wu’s publications were quite entrenched in the art historical book culture of their day, Chen Guoquan did not exaggerate in his introduction to *Chinese Paintings*; Wu Shujuan’s catalogues retained three exceptional characteristics: their authenticity, great variety and mastery, and their female patron.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Shanghai art scene was a confusion of fakes, forgeries and fundamental uncertainty. As Sonia Lightfoot stresses, heated competition among foreign connoisseurs and affluent Chinese over the inherent commercial worth of paintings resulted in one of the most prolific periods of fraudulent

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While many professional foreign agents made their careers in Chinese art during the 1910s, they constantly had to grapple with the question of authenticity. Along with the increasing interest of foreign audiences in Chinese art, Chen Guoquan continues, “a great number of spurious pictures have been foisted on an unsuspecting public.” The ever-haunting question naturally followed: was it better to purchase an ancient masterpiece that could later be revealed as fake, or to invest in works by contemporary painters which were less valuable, but unquestionably genuine? The prefaces to both of Wu Shujuan’s later volumes recollect the cloud of uncertainty pervading contemporary collecting practices. In the words of H.C. Wolfe, “At present, collectors, coveting the possession of masterpieces authenticated by true colophons, search for them in every market. They are not easily obtainable and even [when] got, it is hard to decide which are genuine and which not.” Chen Guoquan further details the ongoing deceit among those involved: “malpractice has been going on everywhere, by making the silk darker in colour and by cutting off the original and genuine signatures or seals of the painters in order to attribute the paintings to some artists of higher fame and much old [sic] period; so to enhance their prices.” According to Hong Zaixin, Strehlneek’s Chinese Pictorial Art, mentioned above, was actually a commercial ploy to trick foreigners into purchasing fake artworks at inflated prices. Indeed, among native

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74 Ibid. 77. Foreign agents included Langdon Warner, Denman Ross, A.W. Bahr and Friedrich Hirth, among others.
connoisseurs, this foreign gentleman was apparently known as a cheat who “sells a carrot for the price of ginseng.” Evidently, procuring Chinese art in early twentieth-century Shanghai was a dangerous game.

The collection of James Stewart Lockhart, who had acquired two paintings by Wu Shujuan, exemplifies the prevalence of forgeries and the conflicting tension between investing in the ancient and purchasing the authentic. With the assistance of art dealer Tse Ts’an Tai (Xie Zuantai 謝纘泰, 1872-1939) portrayed by Lightfoot as a rather shady character, Lockhart obtained five hundred paintings purporting to date anywhere from the Tang to the Qing dynasties. Although the names of great masters were included on the list, most paintings were not genuine, but in fact good quality forgeries. In retrospect, the paintings with the most historic value are actually those Lockhart obtained from contemporary artists at the turn of the twentieth century—artists like Wu Shujuan. While Lockhart’s collection, like that of Strehlneck, professed venerable ancestry, it did not vouch for authenticity, and the genuineness of Wu Shujuan’s hand in dispelling such difficulties held a decided market value.

Building off the instability of the art world, H.C. Wolfe adds a further incentive to western readers, offering them the position of “savior” to Chinese art while the nation undergoes a period of crisis. Admiring the dedication of an American enthusiast who built an entire room in the U.S. for a calligraphic piece he purchased from contemporary female artist Wu Zhiying (吳芝瑛1868-1934), Wolfe bemoans that Wu Shujuan’s

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78 Zaixin Hong, “Guwan jiaoyizhong de yishu lixiang,” *Studies in Shanghai School Painting* (Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2001), 610.
artworks are not similarly preserved: “would that all the precise work of Madame Wu Hsing-fen were likewise safely housed in some foreign country during these troublous times in China!” Wolfe’s concern is quite legitimate, especially considering the number of artworks that were either lost or destroyed throughout the course of the twentieth century. In Strehlneek’s *Chinese Pictorial Art*, famous artist Wu Changshi expressed a similar fear over the fate of ancient artworks: “they [antique treasures] are becoming rarer and unless some philanthropic persons make collections of them and publish reproductions to serve as models, artists will have nothing to copy, and will not be able to use the old in making the new.” This petition among artistic circles to ensure the preservation of authentic Chinese culture through purchase and printing is echoed in Wolfe’s own appeal, a commercial lure geared toward the colonial-mindset of the “savior,” which sells to foreigners the opportunity of protecting something “authentically” Chinese—the artworks of Wu Shujuan.

In light of these circumstances, a painter’s ability to convincingly yet honestly reproduce the styles of ancient masters was invaluable; not only was the resulting artwork completely genuine, but it also enabled viewers to acquire a taste of the past. Wu Shujuan was just such an artist, praised for a fluidity of brushstroke that enabled her to take on the demeanor of any ancient master. Recall, for instance, Yang Yi’s commendation of her extensive art historical studies so that “whenever she uses her brush, it seems as if she is helped by the spirits of the past.” Not loyal to a single master, Wu Shujuan thus

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imbibed the “spirits” of artists from Li Sixun (李思訓 651-716) of the Tang dynasty to Zheng Xie (鄭燮 693–1765) of the Qing dynasty, enjoying a freedom of style and subject matter that women in the past rarely had the luxury of assuming. It was not that certain subjects were deemed too “masculine” for the female hand,82 but rather that women rarely had the time to master such a wide range of styles. Largely they were limited to those practiced by their male relatives.

With the wider diffusion of private collections through photographic reproductions, however, Wu Shujuan was able to achieve a remarkable pluralism in her oeuvre that can only be defined as modern. Having thus managed to escape the stylistic restraints of earlier eras, Wu published Chinese Paintings and Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes as brief educational canons introducing Chinese and especially Western readers to key styles in traditional Chinese art. As seen in the previous chapter, the latter volume reproduces landscapes covering a broad expanse of styles, thereby providing the opportunity, according to H.C. Wolfe, for viewers to have genuine experiences of Chinese art history: “It is now our good fortune to have this large collection of pictures, selected from renowned paintings, reproduced; and those who like to do so, may have thus an opportunity of viewing the form and style of ancient masters of every school.”83

Although greatly simplifying the history of Chinese art—clearly Wu Shujuan could not embody over a millennium of painting history, the volume was advertised on the market as a viable alternative to artworks by ancient masters of dubious origin. The insertion of

biographies of past painters appended to the images—the effect, that is, of weaving stories of the past into Wu’s contemporary paintings—moreover heightened Wu’s commercial appeal to foreigners as the link to “genuine” Chinese culture.

Paintings reproduced in the 1915 edition of *Chinese Paintings* generate an even clearer canon of Chinese art history; organized chronologically according to the style of the particular ancient master imitated, each image is followed by a brief description of the original painter’s significance. Notably, the list of masters is inclusive rather than exclusive, comprising not only literati-amateurs, but also artists of the academic court tradition, as will be seen in the following chapter. Some imitations are more faithful than others, and it is important to recognize again at this juncture the distance between Wu Shujuan’s understanding and representation of the history of Chinese art and our own contemporary canons. Indeed, painters of Wu’s generation had no coherent modern survey of Chinese art to which they could refer.\(^4\) Recall, also, the disorienting art market with its profusion of fakes and forgeries that were devoid of any reliable standards of authentication. A painting Wu Shujuan affected in the style of Zhao Mengfu (Figure 14), for instance, holds no trace of the original artist’s style and suggests that Wu was misled by a forgery. It was only after Wu’s death that the imperial collection was finally opened to the public, and not until the 1960s that good color reproductions became widespread.

Without our contemporary retrospection as a frame of reference, Chen Guoquan does more than recommend Wu as a substitute for lost art of the past, but posits her as a mediator between the “true” essence of traditional Chinese art and the image it would

acquire on an international stage. In the author’s own words, “it is hoped that this collection of absolutely genuine paintings will enable foreign connoisseurs to form correct and true ideas of Chinese pictorial art.” Wu Shujuan, a female artist, was hence charged with the task of re-interpreting the definition of traditional Chinese painting for the market.

Channeled through the hand of this woman painter, the canonical history of Chinese art proposed in the modern context of book culture was not only novel, but also sensational. With national discourse tying together the fate of the nation and the progress of the “Modern Chinese Woman,” all eyes were turned to what she could produce. That the English titles of both volumes include the phrase “Wu Hsing-fen, the most distinguished paintress of modern China” alone reflects the marketability of the authoritative female artist as something exceptional, as an indication of societal advancement. In his introduction to Chinese Paintings, Chen Guoquan observes the fact that “lady-artists have always been scarce and much fewer than men in our history,” and expresses his hopes that Wu Shujuan’s publication might serve as a catalyst welcoming a new wave of women painters into a modern society. Indeed, the sensationalism imbedded in the heightened emphasis on Wu’s gender is matched in the explicit targeting of a female audience:

As there are at present very few Chinese lady-artists to be found in our country, and in order to encourage them, and also induce others to take up this important subject in a serious manner this book has been published in both English and Chinese. A nation’s future depends upon the realization of its ideals, and it is the duty of the true artist to produce the best and

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86 Ibid.
highest ideals in an attractive form so as to inspire the people to action, and lift them out of their present condition to something much better (emphasis mine). 87

The engagement of female readers as important figures in enacting change on matters of national import is revolutionary, and mirrors an increasing trend in popular culture, especially in periodicals, to address a female audience directly. Providing a forum for men and women to discuss the “Woman Question,” The Ladies’ Journal (Funü Zazhi 妇女杂志) featured Wu Shujuan as a role model, for the same paintings she reproduced in Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes graced the covers of the magazine for twelve consecutive months during the year 1918 (see example Figure 15).

Empowered by the outside category of “exceptional,” Wu Shujuan was able to present history as she perceived it, even if equally unorthodox. Rather than preserving the age-old division of male and female painters, Chinese Paintings inserts female muses of the past directly into the canon, wives placed alongside husbands, and daughters alongside father-figures. In Views from a Jade Terrace, Marsha Weidner and Ellen Johnston Laing uncover a history of female support and networking leading up to the modern period and concluding with Wu Shujuan. This feminine tradition linked female tutors, mothers, aunts, daughters and friends together in the production of Chinese painting, and was continued by Wu in her instruction of female student Li Qiujun (李秋君 1899-1973), an artist who was to become a co-founder of the modern manifestation of female artistic networking in the 1930s: the Chinese Women’s Calligraphy and Painting

87 Ibid.
Society. In parallel to Wu Shujuan, there was an effort among female writers of the period to create a female literary tradition, fashioning new trends but also editing anthologies of traditional women’s poetry as a continuation of past feminine editorial practices. Over the centuries, women painters in China had drawn inspiration from their female predecessors, re-copying their styles as a means of preservation and an expression of deep respect. In the first half of the nineteenth century, female scholar Tang Souyu compiled an anthology of women painters in Chinese art history entitled _The Jade Terrace History of Painting_ (Yutai huashi). Rather exceptional as a written account with an exclusive focus on women artists, it was not quite as sensational as Wu Shujuan’s visual integration of women artists directly into masculine canons through new reproduction technologies. In _Chinese Paintings_, Wu’s brushwork conjures the essence of two historical women painters: Guan Daosheng (管道升 1262-1319), and Yun Bing (恽冰 18th century).

Guan Daosheng, here listed next to her husband Zhao Mengfu (赵孟頫 1254-1322), was commonly known as “the first lady painter of China,” a woman with the literary and painterly skills of a man, to whom centuries of artists—both male and female—would look to for inspiration. In _Bamboo Study_ (Figure 16), Wu Shujuan replicates the signature style of Guan Daosheng, epitomized in the latter’s _Bamboo Grove_ (Figure 17). Painting a charming panorama that invites viewers into the sensorial

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89 An example of this is Shan Shili’s _Guixiu Zhengshi Zaixu ji_ (Second Sequel to the Anthology of correct Beginnings by Women of this Dynasty, written between 1911-1918). For more details on this tradition of female editorship, consult Ellen Widmer, “Retrieving the Past: Women Editors and Women’s Poetry,” _The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing_ (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 81-106.
experience of ambling along the babbling brook, rustling bamboo, soft slopes and cool mist, Wu captures the two innovations for which Guan was known: the depiction of groves of bamboo in clumps after rainfall; and the reintegration of bamboo into a panoramic landscape setting.\textsuperscript{90} Guan’s novel bamboo panorama was later adopted by male artists Guo Bi (1280-1335), Song Ke (1327-87), Xia Chang (1388-1470) and Luo Ping (1733-99),\textsuperscript{91} and female painters Luo Qilan (active 1790s), Fang Wanyi (1732-79), and Xiangfan (Ming or Qing). A portrait of Guan Daosheng in the style of Hua Yan (Figure 18) is also incorporated into Wu Shujuan’s volume as “a token of deep respect and esteem.”\textsuperscript{92}

The second woman artist who graces the pages of Wu’s volume was less commonly known than Guan Daosheng, and her appearance in \textit{Chinese Paintings} is thus all the more important. In \textit{A Basket of Charming Flowers} (Figure 19), Wu imitates the hand of Yun Bing, a distant descendent of the early Qing Orthodox master Yun Shouping (恽寿平 1633-90)\textsuperscript{93} whose style drastically differs from that of Guan Daosheng. Wu’s inscription on the painting explicitly states her intent to imitate the temperament, or manner, of the female scholar Yun.\textsuperscript{94} As exemplified in her work \textit{Cut Branches of

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. 69.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen} (Shanghai, 1915), No. 19
\textsuperscript{93} There is a debate as to the familial relationship between Yun Bing and her mentor. Erroneous accounts that she was Yun Shouping’s son have been redressed by Weidner, who concludes that Yun Bing was in fact a distant descendent of Yun Shouping. Marsha Weidner and Ellen Johnston Laing, ed., \textit{Views from a Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists, 1300-1912} (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 122.
\textsuperscript{94} The inscription reads: “仿惲清于女士冰筆意.” Yun Bing’s alternative name was Yun Qingyu (恽清于).
*Summer Flowers and Lychees* (Figure 20), Yun’s style is a refining of the decorativeness and descriptiveness found in Yun Shouping’s art, “a delicate mode that required an exhaustive, firsthand knowledge of flowers and plants and absolute control of the color medium.”  

The juxtaposition of Yun’s meticulous colorful details and Guan’s casual monochromatic brushstroke testifies to the variety of styles practiced within the “annexes” of Chinese women’s art. Through *Chinese Paintings*, Wu Shujuan thus reintegrated feminine histories—including her own—into the male-dominated canon.

Through publishing, Wu Shujuan was able to realize something that professional and literati painters of the opposite sex had had the occasion to exploit early on: the commercial value of painting.  

Branded by her contemporaries as authentic, masterful, and sensational, Wu Shujuan achieved a commercial potential that hinged on her visibility in the art world. Indeed, throughout the 1910s, Wu built her reputation on the foundation of literati and feminine learning, establishing a modern platform from which she could help redefine “traditional art” for the market as inclusive of the histories of historical women artists.

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95 Ibid.
96 While it might be argued that literati painters did not receive monetary payment for their paintings as they deemed commercial exchanges “vulgar,” it was generally understood that a favor was expected in return.
Chapter 4: Wu Shujuan on the International Stage

Through publishing and networking, Wu Shujuan’s reputation among foreign audiences grew significantly through the 1910s, and while the artist never travelled abroad herself, she ensured that her paintings did. After living through half a century of instability and foreign interference—through the Opium Wars, Sino-Japanese War, Boxer Rebellion and Revolution of 1911, Wu’s generation perceived the very concept of “the West” as fraught with the duality of something to emulate but also to resist, and the question of how China should pursue relationships with it as a nation was much debated. Unfortunately, the quality of reproduction in Chinese Paintings renders most of Wu Shujuan’s inscriptions, including the dates, illegible, and in the absence of any further writings by the artist herself, her stance toward Western and Japanese powers is difficult to ascertain. Contemporary interpretations of Wu’s works, however, combined with her active involvement in exhibitions abroad and her interactions with foreigners in Shanghai, suggest that the artist perceived amiable international relations as crucial in the re-modeling of China into a modern nation, and that she conceived her own role within this project as that of a cultural bridge furthering these relations.

In writing the descriptive texts printed alongside paintings in the 1915 edition of Chinese Paintings, Chen Guoquan portrays Wu Shujuan as the embodiment of a reconciliatory spirit between Chinese tradition and modern Western powers. The artist’s
attitude toward China’s past, as recollected by Chen, is revealed in two paintings: *The Forest of Kong* (Figure 21) and *A Hundred Blessings from Heaven* (Figure 22). A quiet scene framed by interwoven trees, *The Forest of Kong* depicts the burial place of Confucius in Shandong. Chen explains the image in personal terms: “Wu spoke often to her son that the weakness of present China was entirely due to the fact that Confucianism was not taught in its true sense. She painted this picture to illustrate this idea, and therefore it should not be viewed as an ordinary painting, but as an artistic ideograph.”

According to Chen’s interpretation, Wu thus advocated a faith in Confucian virtues that did not equate to either a “backward” or anti-foreign attitude, as many Chinese felt at the time, but could provide a flexible moral structure capable of integrating cooperation between modern nations. An account of Wu’s commitment to revitalizing the moral standards of China’s past through artistic involvement in society is similarly appended to a painting of a stag auspiciously entitled *A Hundred Blessings from Heaven*. Chen elaborates:

> In olden times, painting subjects were always selected from classical and historical instances with the object of teaching the people… Later artists devoted themselves to paint views and scenery without any moral object. This scroll was painted with the idea of teaching the people virtue, therefore it retains the original object of Chinese paintings of olden times.\(^98\)

Portrayed as a socially engaged artist negotiating the concept of “virtue” in contemporary times, Wu Shujuan further returns “moral object” to art in *Five Relations Among Mankind* (Figure 23), perhaps the most politically-engaged of her paintings. At first

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\(^97\) *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen* (Shanghai, 1915), No.36.

glance, this hanging scroll appears, in fact, to be a masterful, though principally
decorative, imitation of bird paintings in the style of court painter Shen Quan (沈銓
1682- after 1760). The symbolism of grouping together five types of birds would be
fairly evident to contemporary connoisseurs of Chinese art, who would interpret the
birds’ interactions as representative of the Confucian Five Cardinal Relations, namely
Emperor and Minister, Father and Son, Husband and Wife, Brothers, and Friends. These
relations are respectfully symbolized by the phoixes, cranes, mandarin ducks, small
grey birds, and yellow birds. 99 A note, set off by an asterisk on the following page,
contextualizes the painting, adding a further layer of meaning relevant to contemporary
society: “This scroll was depicted by Madame Wu in the year 1901, just after the Boxer
trouble in North China. The birds mentioned under heading 5 [yellow birds] apparently
refers to foreigners in China and the Chinese, who ought to try to know each other better
and to be more friendly with each other.” 100 This interpretation of the painting articulates
two telling revisions of the traditional Confucian Relations: first, it emphasizes harmony
over hierarchy; and secondly, it lingers on the value of friendship, the relation that had
been most marginalized in late imperial China. Wu Shujuan’s paintings were
consequently understood not as condemnations of more conservative cultural structures
in the quest to modernize China, but as condoning the revision and renewal of
Confucianism as a tool to building relationships with the West. In other words, Wu’s
paintings served as a window through which her contemporaries could view a
reconciliation between Chinese and foreigners that was conceivable and graspable, at

99 Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen (Shanghai, 1915), No. 23
100 Ibid.
least on the grounds of artistic exchange. It should be remembered that Chen Guoquan was acting as Wu Shujuan’s dealer, and thus had a vested interest in portraying his client as encouraging amiable foreign relations. Without further textual evidence, unfortunately, it is difficult to confirm whether or not Chen accurately interpreted the intent embedded in Wu’s artworks—and by association her stance on foreign affairs.

The artist’s avid participation in international exhibitions, however, bespeaks a similar reconciliatory spirit between Chinese and foreigner, reflecting a modern cognizance of the potential for art to cross cultural boundaries. Wu’s first showing abroad was a smashing success; one of a hundred Chinese artists to submit paintings to the 1911 International Art Exhibition in Rome, Wu was the only one to receive a prize.¹⁰¹ Vittorio Pica, author of the exhibition catalogue L’Arte Mondiale a Roma nel 1911, was seemingly unimpressed with the quality of Chinese artworks on display, detailing the Chinese pavilion on a single page and reproducing no images. The Japanese pavilion, in contrast, received the attention of five pages and dozens of its paintings and prints were reproduced.¹⁰² Although neither this catalogue nor Esposizione Internazionale di Arte: Catalogo della Mostra di Belle Arte lists the name of Wu Shujuan as a participant in the 1911 exhibition, Chinese and Japanese accounts record that the Italian Queen Elena was so smitten with her works that she purchased several paintings to decorate her palace.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Records of this event vary depending on the source. According to Walter Davis, Elena purchased only one piece. Walter B. Davis, “Wu Shujuan,” Encyclopedia of Modern China, vol. 4 (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner’s Sons/Gale Cengage Learning, 2009), 101. According to Xu Hong, however, she purchased over a dozen. Xu Hong, “Early 20th-century Women Painters in Shanghai,” Shanghai Modern
The breach between Asian and Italian accounts is intriguing. While this moment signified, in the Asian context, a western recognition of the value of Chinese art, within the Italian context, the acquisition of artwork from a subjugated country was of comparatively little import. Considering the décor at *Il Castello di Racconigi*, which devotes an entire apartment suite to *chinoiseries*, Queen Elena’s procurement of Chinese paintings is unsurprising. That she selected the work of a woman artist, however, may indicate a burgeoning international spirit for female artistic networking. A particular interest in the Italian Queen, in fact, seems to have been sparked among Chinese women of the period. A female artist sent to study the art education scene in Japan in 1907, Shen Shou (沈寿 1884-1921) fused together Western photographic realism and traditional embroidery, creating a portrait of Queen Elena that won first prize in the 1909 Nanjing South Seas Exhibition, and the Excellence Award at the World Fair in Turin 1911.¹⁰⁴

Both a picture of this portrait and an image of the Queen in her car were printed in issues of *The Women’s Eastern Times* (*Fünnü Shibao*) in 1911 and 1912 (Figure 24 and Figure 25).

The “Modern Woman” of the West had become a topic of much interest in early twentieth-century China, as intellectuals and writers who equated the fate of the nation with the education of women sought out foreign exemplars. In 1912, the revolutionary Xu Tianxiao (徐天嘯 1886-1941) published the first general history of Chinese women

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¹⁰⁴ Xu Hong, “Early 20th-century Women Painters in Shanghai,” *Shanghai Modern* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 206. Yang Yi’s description is similarly vague: “among several hundreds of paintings from various Chinese painters, only Madame Wu’s pictures were bought at high prices by the Empress of Italy.” Yang Yi, “Introduction,” in *Chinese Paintings by Madame Wu Hsing-fen* (Shanghai, 1915), 3.
entitled *A New History of Women of the Divine Land* (*Shenzhou nüzi xinshi*), in which he contrasted the sad state of feminine existence in China’s past with the perceived strength of Western heroines such as Queen Victoria and Madame Roland. According to Joan Judge’s interpretation of a new-style textbook, the *New Reader for Girls and Women* (*Nüzi xin duben*) from 1905, “the historical Chinese women would serve as ‘the past leaders of the new Chinese citizen,’ while the ‘modern’ Western heroines were a reflection of their ‘future image.’” Along with the appearance of women’s journals in the early 1900s, Chinese women were apprised of the activities of their western counterparts on a regular basis. Explicitly targeting a female audience, these magazines published articles ranging from science to childhood development, including exposés on women’s education abroad and biographies of famous western women. Just such an article was published on Queen Elena in *Funü Shibao* in 1912, which portrays the Queen as a true Western “Modern Woman,” but with the familiar feminine tropes of “love, nurturing, and service:” poised in appearance, well-traveled, astute in household management, and a virtuous wife who gives abundant attention to her children. In participating in the Italian exhibition and drawing the attention of the Queen herself, Wu

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107 Much of women’s magazine readership was actually male.
109 According to Joan Judge, Chinese biographies of Western heroines were mitigated through traditional feminine tropes in order to lessen the threat presented by the Western heroine. Joan Judge, “Blended Wish Images: Chinese and Western Exemplary Women at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in *Beyond Gender, Genre, and Tradition: Cosmopolitanism and Modernity Late Qing China*, Grace S. Fong et al, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 105.
Shujuan was effectively closing the gap of “modernity” that separated her from the western prototype.

Closer to home, Wu Shujuan was also an advocate of the Sino-Japanese Art Society (Zhong-Ri Meishu Xiehui). With the threat of Japanese expansionism looming nearby, relations between China and its neighbor were tense, and the Sino-Japanese art exhibitions “exemplified the persistent efforts made by Chinese and Japanese authorities alike to enlist the art world in negotiating a balanced diplomacy.”[111] True to her spirit of reconciliation, Wu participated in two of these exhibitions in spite of the anti-Japanese sentiments unfurling in China: the 1922 Sino-Japanese Exhibition, and the 1929 Modern Sino-Japanese Painting Exhibition.[112] Along with Wang Yiting, Wu Changshi, Liu Haisu, Gao Jianfu and others, Wu Shujuan even served as one of the Chinese jurors for the Sino-Japanese Art Society.[113] In order to encourage readers and celebrate the inauguration of the first Sino-Japanese Art Monthly (Zhong-Ri Meishu Yuebao) in March of 1922, Wu sold a limited number of her artworks to journal subscribers for half their market price. The year of the launching also coincided with Wu Shujuan’s seventieth birthday, and the Sino-Japanese Art Monthly of that year devoted a four-page spread to the artist—longer than any of the male painters featured.

The journal is truly a testament to Wu Shujuan’s success among Chinese and Japanese art circles. An extensive biography abundant in praise, printed in Japanese and Chinese, adorns the first page of the article, and follows the same outline proposed by

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112 Ibid.
Yang Yi in *Chinese Paintings*. Wu’s brush is described as anything but ordinary, her skills as forcefully pushing beyond the artistry of her father, and her landscapes as conjuring in the mind of the viewer poetic images of the past. The following page reproduces four hanging scrolls (Figure 26), birthday gifts collaborated upon by Wu Shujuan’s contemporaries, most notably Wang Yiting (王一亭), Wu Changshi (吳昌碩), and Yao Shuping (姚叔平). Fifteen paintings by the artist’s own hand, mostly landscapes and flower-and-rock paintings, conclude the section on Wu Shujuan (Figure 27 and Figure 28). The cooperation between Chinese and Japanese artists in the *Sino-Japanese Art Monthly* to highlight the career of Wu Shujuan fundamentally underlines three aspects of her career: first, it symbolizes the support Wu received from her male counterparts, with their gifts serving as visual acknowledgment of the female artist as an important cultural figure; second, it demonstrates a marketing technique in which the commendations of male artists heightened the perceived value of the paintings for sale; third, it illustrates Wu Shujuan’s commitment, among an entire network of artists, to the larger project of improving Sino-Japanese relations. Indeed, by virtue of her talent and willingness to breach the political and cultural divide, Wu acquired a great respect from her fellow Japanese collectors and painters, and dignitaries of Japan graciously attended her seventieth birthday celebrations in Shanghai.

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114 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
In order to penetrate this international stage, Wu Shujuan first had to establish a reputation among Shanghai circles as a leader of modern Chinese art, and this she accomplished through participation in another type of modern organization: art societies. Indeed, in collaboration with Wu Changshi, one of the artists most involved in Sino-Japanese art relations, Wu Shujuan headed the national essence ink painting (guocui 国粹) department of the Heavenly Horse Society, the most influential art association of the 1920s more commonly known as Tianmahui (天马会). Although primarily recognized for its promotion of European modernism, the group was actually seminal in the cooperation between Western-style painting and traditional ink painting, serving as a key engine in the survival of the latter.\(^{119}\) The society’s membership roster, printed in the press on 28 September 1919, proudly lists Wu Shujuan as a member,\(^{120}\) one among a broad spectrum of painters who, while working in different media and styles, nonetheless shared the mandate to promote both art and art criticism among the people.\(^{121}\) Indeed, the public exhibition of art and the subsequent welcoming of criticism were seen as necessary steps in the advancement of art and society, and the modern sensibility imbedded in this dedication to social engagement reflects yet another way in which Wu Shujuan extended her talents beyond what her conservative style might suggest and grasp the potential of modern artistic exchange.

By the 1920s, Wu Shujuan’s paintings had travelled the distance to North America. A letter by American Consulate-General Edwin S. Cunningham, written in


\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.
Shanghai on 23 April 1926, recognizes her contribution of several landscape paintings for the Sesquicentennial Exposition held in Philadelphia that year. The letter also expresses Cunningham’s hope that such cultural exchanges “help in fostering a spirit of international cooperation and goodwill” by giving “those in a far country some idea not only of the Chinese mountains, valleys and streams but also of the manners and methods of the Chinese artist.” While Cunningham underscores the importance of the artist in cultivating cultural understanding for an improved political climate, one question remains: how is it that this diplomat, a man whose interest in Chinese painting hardly compared to that of James Stewart Lockhart, became sufficiently familiar with Wu Shujuan’s works to recommend them for the Sesquicentennial? This inquiry is tied to another. Between the publication of Chinese Paintings in 1915 and Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes in 1926, four new foreign prefaces, including Cunningham’s, were acquired and printed. These were written by the Allied War Relief Association, Reverend E. Morgan (1860-1941), and Helen Burwell Chapin (1892-1950). What was the link that drew them all to Wu Shujuan?

The answer, interestingly, lies with women—the American Women’s Club of Shanghai, to be exact. In 1919, Wu Shujuan collaborated with the American Woman’s

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122 The exhibition catalogue for the Sesquicentennial makes no note of either Wu Shujuan’s participation or that of any other Chinese artist.
125 The American Women’s Club of Shanghai was founded on 28 November 1898 by a small group of women with the following goal: “To obtain a higher, broader and wiser culture, intellectual, social and moral, and for the purpose of more closely uniting the American community of Shanghai.” Rugh, Gertrude R., American Woman’s Club Shanghai Annual 1919-1920 (Shanghai: American Woman’s Club, 1920), 13.
Club to help raise money for post-WWI war relief, donating a total of ten landscape paintings which were sold at a Tea Dance held at the Carlton Café. According to the letter written by the Allied War Relief Association and printed in *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes*, Wu’s paintings earned the impressive sum of $1300, half of which was given to the American Red Cross, and the other half to the French & Italian War Relief Associations. While the Shanghai Branch of the American Red Cross Society was active through the 1920s and 1940s, supervising a refugee hospital and maintaining a relief kitchen for Russian refugees, the French and Russians Red Cross Fund, and Italian War Relief Fund were both short-lived organizations active during WWI. Members of the American Women’s Club, touched by Wu Shujuan’s generosity, delivered a congratulatory speech upon her seventieth birthday in 1923. The artist’s interaction with the club was not limited to these charitable occasions, however. An entry in the *American Women’s Club of Shanghai Annual 1919-1920* records that members of the organization were invited to visit Wu Shujuan’s collection:

A number of fine old paintings, as well as some paintings done by Madame Wu Hsing-fen herself, and some by her son, were shown to the group from the Literary Department at Madame Wu’s home, 136 Rue du [sic] Peres, December 27, 1919. Madame Wu is noted, as an artist, for her versatility of style. Paintings from the eighteen provinces were especially

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126 The Carlton Café was the location the Women’s Club Literary Department, which met every Thursday at 4:30. Gertrude R. Rugh, *American Woman’s Club Shanghai Annual 1919-1920* (Shanghai: American Woman’s Club, 1920), 37.
128 Djordjevic, Nenad, *Old Shanghai Clubs and Associations* (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books, 2009), 38.
129 Ibid. 21.
Among the private art collections in Shanghai listed as having been visited by members of the American Women’s Club in 1920 is that of Reverend E. Morgan. Unfortunately, no description of either the collection or the social call itself is included in the annual, and no other annuals of the Women’s Club survive. In 1921, the club did publish *The Dawn of Chinese Civilization: Papers of the Literary Department of the American Woman’s Club*, however, to which Reverend Evan Morgan contributed a chapter entitled “Lao Tzu and the Taoist Doctrine.” In comparing the wealth of papers on all facets of Chinese culture submitted by members of the club in the annual with Morgan’s own 1912 publication *A Guide to Wenli Styles and Chinese Ideals*, it would certainly come as no surprise if Morgan had presented papers at meetings of the Women’s Club prior to the 1920s. It seems very possible, in fact, that Morgan was first introduced to the art of Wu Shujuan at the war relief exhibition of 1919, the same year he wrote his preface to *Eighteen Famous Chinese Landscapes*.

A review of the annual shows that Edwin S. Cunningham’s wife, referred to consistently as Mrs. E. Cunningham, was also an active member of the club. Unfortunately, this one surviving annual predates the 1924 arrival of Helen B. Chapin in Shanghai. A tribute to the American woman’s life, published in 1950, reveals that Chapin

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worked alongside Cunningham at the American Consulate.\textsuperscript{133} Having worked at the Oriental Department of the Boston Museum of Fine Art prior to her arrival in Shanghai, Chapin was most likely introduced to the American Woman’s Club and the works of Wu Shujuan either through Cunningham himself or his wife. In traditional China, women artists participated in private webs of feminine support, gathering together at someone’s home to discuss their painting and poetry. Modern China witnessed the appearance of a new concept of public networking as a form of international feminine cooperation. More specifically, the American Women’s Club served as a networking tool for Wu Shujuan, encouraging her art, and making her work visible to foreign audiences.

While Wu Shujuan’s artworks themselves disclose little about the artist’s approach to international relations, her participation in exhibitions abroad in Italy, Japan and the United States, combined with her networking among foreigners in Shanghai, reveal her dedication to maintaining international artistic venues through which she could help close the perceived distance between China and modernity.

Conclusion

The narrative of female painter Wu Shujuan’s life and art thus offers a glimpse into the tensions and uncertainties that underlie late nineteenth and early twentieth century Shanghai, as concepts such as “art history,” “gender,” “tradition,” and “modernity” were reexamined and redefined. Artistically, Wu espoused literati and court styles of the past, cultivating her image as a traditional painter and establishing a modern platform from which she could visibly engage in on-going discourses surrounding the construction of traditional art histories and modern Chinese nationhood. The personal stories of Wu Shujuan also impart a subtle glimpse into the private lives of Chinese women, illustrating how they embraced a multitude of local, national, and international influences, living with societal contradictions in a way that seemed quite normal even as they gradually developed new forms of feminine agency.

While Wu may have continued to paint in the traditional styles of her literati inheritance, the ways in which she conceived, exhibited and published her artwork expose a distinct feminine modernity at once unique to Wu Shujuan and also witnessed in the unprecedented visibility of women’s activities in society at large. The artist traveled widely for her own pleasure, transforming the nation’s sights into geographic and art historical travelogues that portray a harmonious image of a unified modern Chinese nation reconciled with its traditional past. In the publishing industry, Wu exploited the
commercial potential of new printing methods, and was marketed as a cultural figure based on her authenticity as a living artist, her mastery of ancient styles, and her sensationalism as a professional female painter. Thus participating in the re-definition of “traditional Chinese art” for the market, Wu Shujuan interwove feminine histories into the fabric of male literati canons, including her own. She conceived herself as a cultural bridge with the potential to reinforce amiable political relations between China and foreign nations, and participated in Italian, Sino-Japanese and American exhibitions, finding within the latter a network of feminine artistic support.

The essence of Wu Shujuan both as an artist and as a person cannot be understood purely through the interpretation of the ink flowing from her brush, but must be contextualized within her visibility in society and the modern consciousness with which she preserved styles of the past. Far from being an anachronism in the new republic, a relic of the past without relevance to the future, Wu Shujuan was therefore actively aware of her own identity as a woman and visibly engaged in contemporary negotiations between tradition and modernity.
Appendix A: Figures
Figure 1. Wu Shujuan. Madame Wu Hsing-fen’s Studio near the West Lake, Hangzhou. Painted by herself in the style of Wen Zhengming. Dated 1897 (丁酉). Hanging scroll. No.1 in Chinese Paintings, 1915.
Figure 2. Wu Shujuan. *Ten Beautiful Views of the West Lake*. Album of ten leaves. Ink and color on silk. No. 31 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 3. Wu Shujuan. *Views of the Famous Mountain Huangshan*. Six out of twenty-four leaves. Ink and color on paper. No. 35 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 8. After Li Tang. Gazing at a Waterfall. Ink and color on silk. Undated. Current collection unknown
Figure 10. Wang Hui. Traveling in Autumn Mountains after Wang Meng, leaf 2 Large Emerging from Small. 1672. Hanging Scroll. Ink and color on silk. 55.5 x 34.5 cm. Shanghai Museum (source: Artstor).
Figure 12. Wu Shujuan. First page in *Baihua tu*. 1898.
Figure 13. Wu Shujuan. One out of six album leaves reproduced in a 1913 pamphlet. Ink and color on paper. No. 27 in Chinese Paintings, 1915.
Figure 14. Wu Shujuan. *Houses in a Fairy Mountain after Zhao Mengfu*. Hanging scroll. Ink and color on silk. No.7 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 16. Wu Shujuan. *Bamboo Study in the Manner of Guan Daosheng*. Handscroll.

Ink painting on silk. No.2 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.

Figure 17. Guan Daosheng. *A Bamboo Grove in Mist*. 1308. Handscroll. Ink on paper. 15 x 112.4cm. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mrs. William H. Moore for the Hobart and Edward Small Moore Memorial Collection.
Figure 18. Wu Shujuan. *Portrait of Lady Guan in the style of Hua Yan*. Dated 1904 (甲辰).

Hanging scroll. Ink and color on silk. No. 19 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 19. Wu Shujuan. *A Basket of Charming Flowers in the style of Yun Bing*. Undated.

Hanging scroll. Ink and color on silk. No.18b in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 21. Wu Shujuan. *The Forest of Kong*. Dated, but illegible. Possibly 1887 (丁亥).

Hanging Scroll. Ink and color on silk. No.36 in *Chinese Paintings*, 1915.
Figure 22. Wu Shujuan. *A Hundred Blessings from Heaven in the style of Shen Quan.*

Figure 23. Wu Shujuan. *Five Relations Among Mankind in the style of Shen Quan.*

Figure 24. Photograph of Shen Shou’s embroidered portrait of *Queen Elena. The Women’s Eastern Times Funü Shibao* (1911:1). Courtesy of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Library, Heidelberg University.
Figure 25. *Image of the King and Queen of Italy in their car. The Women’s Eastern Times Funü Shibao* (1912: 7). Courtesy of the Institute of Chinese Studies, Library, Heidelberg University.
Figure 27 and Figure 28. Fifteen paintings by Wu Shujuan printed in the *Sino-Japanese Art Monthly*, March 1921, pages 7-8.
Appendix B: List of Chinese Names
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Chinese Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cai Weilian</td>
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<td>陳國權</td>
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<td>方君璧</td>
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<td>管道升</td>
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<td>唐昆華 /唐光照</td>
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<td>Tse Ts’an Tai / Xie Zuantai</td>
<td>謝緋泰</td>
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<td>王肇</td>
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<td>Wang Yiting</td>
<td>王一亭</td>
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<td>Wu Changshi</td>
<td>吳昌碩</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wu Hengzhi</td>
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<td>宗炳</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhao Mengfu</td>
<td>趙孟頫</td>
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</table>
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