A NEW TRADITIONALIST: C. C. WANG THE ARTIST

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Arts in
the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Mei Lan Yeung, B.A.

*
*
*
*
*

The Ohio State University
2006

Master’s Examination Committee:
Professor Julia F. Andrews, Advisor
Professor John C. Huntington

Approved by

Advisor
Graduate Program in History of Art
ABSTRACT

Painter, calligrapher, collector, and connoisseur, C. C. Wang's (1907-2003) contribution to Chinese art in the past century was broad and deep. Of his long and versatile career, his developments and achievements as artist are the focus of this study.

Born in Suzhou to a family of rich cultural background, Wang received training in traditional painting and calligraphy at an early age. Under the tutelage of Gu Linshi and Wu Hufan, both exemplars of the centuries-old orthodox painting tradition, C. C. Wang was committed to reworking the landscape conventions of past masters, particularly the four masters of the Yuan dynasty, Dong Qichang of the Ming period, and the Four Wangs of the early Qing.

After he emigrated to the U.S. in 1949, Wang was nourished by the Western artistic climate and embarked on a search for a personal style with greater currency in contemporary times. Inspired by Abstract Expressionism and fellow expatriate Chinese artists' attempts to blend Chinese and Western painting approaches, he developed a distinguished landscape style by combining brushwork and non-brush textural effects achieved through "controlled accidents."

In the last phase of his career, while he underwent rather dramatic changes in subject and style, C. C. Wang returned to a reliance on the brush and rarely used impressed textures. In his late works that include landscapes, still lifes, rock paintings,
calligraphic images, and abstractions, he aspired to capture the essence of Chinese painting aesthetics in the truest sense.

Based on a division of C. C. Wang's development into four phases, this study investigates his entire artistic career, discussing his innovative landscapes as a synthetic product of his traditional painting background, encyclopedic knowledge in the history of Chinese art, and extensive exposure to concurrent artistic trends in the East and the West. Emphasis is put on his late works, particularly calligraphic images and abstractions, as the final culmination of his decades of artistic transformation and a (re)turn to the basics of Chinese painting aesthetics after a process of distillation and abstraction.
To my parents
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first became aware of C. C. Wang in 1998, when I did research for my work for a seal carving course at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and came across the standard reference book, *Seals of Chinese Painters and Collectors of the Ming and Ch`ing Periods*, which he co-authored with Victoria Contag. Later, when I worked at Plum Blossoms Gallery in Hong Kong, I was granted the opportunity to inspect a considerable number of his paintings closely and was fortunate to have met C. C. Wang in person once. I would like to thank Mr. Stephen McGuinness of Plum Blossoms Gallery for bringing me into closer contact with the versatile artist-connoisseur-collector and his art.

My warmest appreciation also goes to Professor Mayching Kao and Professor Harold Mok Kar-leung, who were my teachers at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, as well as Ms. Michelle Vosper and the staff of the Asian Cultural Council in Hong Kong and New York, without whom my education at The Ohio State University would not have been possible.

I am also most grateful to Mrs. Yien-koo Wang King and Mr. Arnold Chang for offering me insights into C. C. Wang’s life and art, for showing me original works by the artist, and for their generous hospitality and incredible kindness during the interviews we had for my research.
To Prof. John Huntington, who served as the second member of my thesis committee and gave me very helpful comments and suggestions regarding this study, I extend my deepest gratitude.

No one deserves my thanks more than Prof. Julia Andrews, who as my advisor, has shown me unfaltering guidance and patience throughout my research. For her support and encouragement, I shall always be grateful.
VITA

August 26, 1976............................ Born in Hong Kong

1998.............................. B.A. Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

2004-2005.............................. Graduate Research Associate,
Department of History of Art,
The Ohio State University

2005-2006.............................. Graduate Teaching Associate,
Department of History of Art,
The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field: History of Art
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Biographical Sketch of C. C. Wang</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Phase I (early 1930s – mid-1950s): Traditional and Art-Historical Assimilation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Phase II (mid-1950s – early 1970s): Transition and Experimentation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscapes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers and Still Lifes.</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocks</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calligraphy and Calligraphic Images</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstractions</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase IV in Relation to Earlier Periods</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conclusion</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure                                                                 Page


5. Wang Meng (1308-1385), *Quiet Life in a Wooded Glen*, 1361. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 177.8 x 64.2 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago. After Little 1996, 52. ........................................................................ 111

6. Wang Meng (1308-1385), *Thatched Hut in the Western Suburbs*. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 97.5 x 27.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. After Sírén 1956-1958, plate 110a. ................................................................. 112


8. Xu Wei (1521-1593), *Crab and Lotus*. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 114.5 x 29.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. After *Paintings of the Ming* (1988), 156. .................................................. 114


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Attributed to Dong Yuan (d. 962)</td>
<td><em>Riverbank</em>. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 221 x 109 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. After Hearn and Fong 1999, 2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>C. C. Wang</td>
<td><em>Landscape No. 880126</em>, 1988. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 94.5 x 64.5 cm. Private Collection. After <em>Exhibition of C. C. Wang</em> (1994), 53.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Fan Kuan (ca. 960-ca. 1030)</td>
<td><em>Travelers amid Streams and Mountains</em>. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei. After Fong and Watt 1996, 126.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35. Fang Congyi (active ca. 1340-1380), *Cloudy Landscape*. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 42 x 25.5 cm. Collection unknown. After Sotheby’s 2006, 195. ...... 141

36. Mi Youren (1074-1151), *Cloudy Mountains*. Handscroll, ink on paper, 27.3 x 57 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. After Barnhart 1983, 45. ............... 142


40. Shitao (1642-1707), *A Man in a House beneath a Cliff*. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 27.9 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection. After Michael Sullivan 1999, 258. ................................................................. 146


45. Wu Changshi (1844-1927), *Wisteria*, 1921. Hanging scroll in a set of four, ink and color on paper, 118.4 x 47.4 cm. Shanghai Museum. After Shanghai bowuguan 1991, fig. 67-2. ......................................................... 151


49. Taihu rock in the collection of Kemin Hu. After Hu et al. 1998, 71. ............ 154


54. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 93041633 (EW)*, undated. Ink on paper, 68.5 x 55.5 cm. Private Collection. After *Exhibition of C. C. Wang* (1994), 81. ............ 159

55. Rubbing of stone tablet commemorating the erection of the statue of Mr. Shiping (detail), Northern Wei Dynasty (386-588). After Liu Shou’an 2003, 95. ................................................................. 159


xiii


CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Triggered by the urgency to modernize China in the face of foreign imperialism, Chinese art in the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by artists calling for the modernization of Chinese painting, which was regarded as representing a decadent tradition with little relevance in modern times. Early attempts at exploring a new art and revitalizing Chinese painting were made by artists such as European-trained Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900-1991) and Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895-1953), as well as Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896-1994), who was strongly influenced by Western painting.

Seeking a synthesis of traditional Chinese and Western painting, they, as both artists and educators, introduced Western artistic styles, subject matter and techniques, which resulted in varying degrees of success during a period of intense intellectual and political struggle. At the same time, artists such as Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863-1957) and Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 (1864-1955) largely remained in the familiar and time-honored Chinese painting tradition. After the Communist takeover of the mainland in 1949, for decades the development of Chinese art was to a large extent under state direction; it was in places outside of China that “expatriate” Chinese artists could continue pursuing different artistic paths that had been opened by “reformers” or maintained by traditionalists of previous generations, or embark on a new path of their own.
Artists who left China in the late 1940s, whether settling in the then-British colony of Hong Kong, the formerly Japanese-occupied Taiwan, or on foreign soil in the West, inevitably found themselves faced with a changed cultural reality. Amidst a sense of marginality and diasporic alienation, these artists made different decisions in defining their Chinese identity in their works. Among these artists, C. C. Wang 王己千 (1907-2003; name also romanized as Wang Jiqian, Wang Chi-ch’ien, and Wang Chi-chuan), who spent the first half of his life in China and the second half in the U.S., can be seen as one who clung to the Chinese painting tradition without being bound by it. Writing about the significant role of C. C. Wang in the history of Chinese painting in the twentieth century, Richard Barnhart said: “In this confluence of activities as painter, collector, and connoisseur, he will inevitably remind students of Chinese art history of his most distinguished predecessors: Mi Fu 米芾 (1052-1107), Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), and Zhang Daqian [Chang Dai-Chien] 張大千 (1899-1983).”1 It is no exaggeration that C. C. Wang had entered the pantheon of the most revered figures in the history of Chinese painting, and was probably the last successor of this remarkable lineage of painter-collector-connoisseur extending through the past thousand years. By practicing, collecting, and authenticating, he assimilated encyclopedic knowledge of Chinese painting and was able to apply it to create his own personal artistic style. In a century when the challenge of negotiating between tradition and modernity was in the mind of most Chinese artists, he spent decades studying painting in the traditional mode, building a most solid foundation in which his later innovations were firmly rooted.

Maturing as an artist with an individualist style only after migrating to the U.S. in 1949, C. C. Wang was known better as a collector and connoisseur in China. It was only in the past two decades that C. C. Wang the painter attracted attention in his homeland. However, Wang as a successful and versatile figure in the field of Chinese painting was recognized in the Western world since the early 1970s, with his popularity evidenced by numerous publications devoted to his collections and his own works in the U.S., Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Most of the books on C. C. Wang are exhibition or painting catalogues with introductory essays varying in content from the general to the more scholarly. Major publications on him in the forms of books or journal articles had appeared by the late 1980s as he by then had established a personal style of landscape painting, and his works had been widely exhibited and highly acclaimed. Although publications in the 1990s and 2000s cover his late endeavor into non-landscape subjects, calligraphic images, and abstract works, in-depth scholarship on his art from this period is not available.

One of the first art historians to discuss C. C. Wang and his art is Joan Stanley-Baker in *Mountains of the Mind: The Landscape Painting of Wang Chi-ch’ien*.\(^2\) Her essay in this book provides a short overview of the artist’s biography and painting career up to 1970. Seven years later, Lois Katz provided the first detailed study of the artist in a similar title, *Mountains of the Mind: The Landscapes of C. C. Wang*,\(^3\) which covered his landscape works from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. Apart from Katz’s

---


discussion of Wang’s art, which is based considerably on an interview with the artist and ties his art closely to the philosophical origins and stylistic development of the Chinese landscape tradition, the book consists of a short essay by Wang recounting his own life and art, as well as his comments on each individual painting included. James Cahill, in the introduction to C. C. Wang: Landscape Paintings, looks at the artist in the context of twentieth-century Chinese painting, affirming that “he represents … the achievement of ‘traditional’ Chinese painting today, and also the problems it must face and resolve in its relationship to its past and to the contemporary world.”

The above studies provide C. C. Wang’s biography and discuss his career up to the dates of their publication. However, it was not until the publication of Jerome Silbergeld’s Mind Landscapes: The Paintings of C. C. Wang in 1987 that knowledge of the artist was greatly expanded. Offering the most profound scholarship on developments in Wang’s life and art up to that year, the book includes a great many comments in Wang’s own words while analyzing his paintings in a very systematic way. The first part of the book focuses primarily on Wang’s biography, providing the most detailed available account of his life, family, ancestry, and friendships. In the second part, Silbergeld investigates the artistic values of Wang as a painter-collector-connoisseur, expounding on the latter’s views of the formal and technical aspects, as well as the historical basis of his paintings. The book’s most significant contribution is a precise division of C. C. Wang’s painting development into four phases: “Chinese traditionalism”

---


from 1932 to 1964, “beyond traditionalism” from 1964 to 1972, “maturity” from 1972 to 1980, and “beyond maturity” from 1980 to 1987. Silbergeld’s study is based on intricate analyses of the stylistic and technical elements of a large number of Wang’s works in great individual detail. One could hardly provide a more comprehensive account of the artist’s career by that point. Had C. C. Wang not subsequently changed his artistic direction, Silbergeld’s study might very well be the conclusive one.

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, James Cahill, Arnold Chang, Jerome Silbergeld, and Joan Stanley-Baker wrote essays that briefly cover Wang’s works of calligraphy, abstractions, and still lifes. However, with the close of the final chapter of the artist’s life, a more detailed look at his late period in relation to his entire career, which, from his first exhibition in China in 1928, spanned seven and a half decades, may provide a more complete image of C. C. Wang as an artist. This is the main purpose of the present study.

C. C. Wang had always painted landscapes, which indubitably formed the most important part of his oeuvre. However, he also practiced calligraphy as a daily routine. While his landscapes made by combining literati brushwork and textures applied with unconventional tools are seen as his most significant innovation, the development of his calligraphy and abstract paintings towards the end of his life marks an even bigger stretch beyond the traditional boundary. In roughly the last decade of his career (1993-2003), Wang produced a large number of works that play with elements of calligraphy but show no identifiable characters. From traditional calligraphy to the later development of calligraphically-based images and abstractions was quite a dramatic path for an artist who was so deeply rooted in his native artistic tradition. Even more intriguing is that the
dramatic turn took place when the artist was already in his eighties; and it was also at the same time that he began painting rocks and had a renewed interest in still lifes, which he had abandoned many years earlier.

As C. C. Wang’s life and art by the mid-1980s have been quite thoroughly studied by Silbergeld and others, this thesis will look into his entire artistic career, paying particular attention to the periods of his development that have received relatively little discussion, including his transitional stage in which he experimented with various new techniques in a number of abstract works not covered by Silbergeld, and his late period in which he was still productive. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate his career with delicate stylistic analyses of a large number of paintings individually as Silbergeld did. Instead, this study will discuss representative pieces of the artist’s development in order to consider the rather dramatic changes Wang made in his art in his late years, after the publication of Silbergeld’s book. In structure, therefore, this study will propose a division of his career into four different phases, modifying that provided by Silbergeld: the first phase lasting from the artist’s youth to the mid-1950s, in which he painted in the orthodox, brushwork-supreme tradition; the second, from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, representing a transitional and experimental period; the third, from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, in which he transformed his art into an individualist synthesis; and the fourth, from the late 1980s to 2003, in which he distilled his artistic summation from the past decades and ventured into new styles and a wide range of subjects. In order to trace C. C. Wang’s artistic development, it is necessary to first provide a biographical sketch of his life.
CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF C. C. WANG

C. C. Wang was born on February 14, 1907, in Suzhou, a city of high cultural and artistic status since the Yuan (1279-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. He was originally named Jiquan 季銑, also styled Xuanqing 選青. Having adopted the literary name (hao 號) Shuangwu 霜烏 for a brief time, he changed his name in the early 1930s to Jiqian 季遷, which was changed twice after he moved to the U.S. into homophonic names in simpler character forms: Jiqian 紀千 followed by Jiqian 己千. In the 1990s, he started using Liaoran 了然 and Yugong 愚公 as his literary names. However, C. C. was by far his most commonly known name in the West.

---

6 Chronologies of C. C. Wang’s biography and exhibitions can be found in numerous exhibition catalogues. Jerome Silbergeld’s Mind Landscapes presents the most detailed biographical account of the artist up to the mid-1980s. A brief chronology encompassing Wang’s entire life is provided by C. C. Wang’s Painting and Calligraphy Works (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2003), published shortly after his death. The following biographical sketch is based primarily on the effort of Silbergeld and supplemented by information from recent publications.

7 C. C. Wang’s original name Jiquan and courtesy name Xuanqing entail meanings of “selected official” and “selected youth” respectively, reflecting his father’s expectation of him. Having lost all other male members of the family and been left with only his mother, he adopted the literary name Shuangwu (or “crow in the frost”) around 1932. The crow is a traditional Chinese symbol of filial piety, and a wintry crow symbolizes orphanage. However, all the versions of Jiqian had no particular meaning. See Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 13-14. His late literary names Liaoran and Yugong are common Chinese expressions referring to “thorough understanding in the mind” and “the foolish old man” respectively. His use of “names” simpler in form and more basic in meaning as time progressed not only indicated his general self-view as a humble man, but interestingly, also seemed to correspond roughly to the development of his artistic style.
Wang’s family was one of prominence, with his father being a mayor of a small northern city, and his grandfather, a high-ranking official in the Qing court. Further back in his ancestral history, a distant ancestor, Wang Ao 王鏊 (1450-1524), was a successful official and a distinguished literatus, well-acquainted with eminent figures of the Suzhou literati circle. Bred amidst a rich cultural heritage, C. C. Wang had already been oriented towards traditional scholarship at an early age, but it was not until he was fourteen that he began formal studies of painting. His teacher then was Fan Haolin 樊浩霖 (1885-1962), who though equipped with Western art techniques, was known for his traditional landscape and bird-and-flower paintings. Wang was initiated by Fan to practice from the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting and to set eyes on paintings in his own family collection.

At age seventeen, C. C. Wang became a student of Gu Linshi 顧麟士 (1865-1930), who inherited an exceptional family collection of ancient paintings, called the Hall of Passing Clouds (Guoyunlou 過雲樓). He was thus granted the invaluable opportunity to see a large number of masterpieces, especially those from the Ming and

---

8 The peak of Wang Ao’s political career was marked by his appointments as Senior Assistant Minister (Zuoshilang 左侍郎), Grand Secretary (Daxueshi 大學士), and Grand Tutor to the Heir Apparent (Taifu 太傅) during the reign of Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 1505-1521). Also an accomplished scholar, essayist, poet, calligrapher, and art collector, Wang Ao was a friend of literati and artist luminaries such as Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509), Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559), Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1524), Wu Kuan 吳寬 (1435/6-1504), and Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460/1-1526). See Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 13; C. C. Wang’s Painting, 202; L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds., Dictionary of Ming Biography 1368-1644 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976) 2: 1343-1346; and Guofang yanjiu yuan Mingshi bianzuan weiyuanhui (in cooperation with Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo), ed., Mingshi (Ming history) (Yangningshan: Guofang yanjiuya, 1962) 3: 2128-2129.

Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. It was from then that Wang engaged in his training in both connoisseurial skills and painting.

By 1924, he had lost his grandfather, father, two elder half-brothers, and a younger nephew. As the only remaining male member of the family, he was awakened to the need of making a stable income. As a result, after completing middle school, he enrolled in a pre-law program at Soochow University, but in a year’s time, illness prevented him from attending school. In the following two years, as he was convalescing at home, he continued to study painting and was able to earn some local recognition. Later, when his health recovered, he returned to school, graduated, and married Zheng Yuansu 鄭元素 (1910-2003), who also painted when she was young.11

In 1932, C. C. Wang left Suzhou for Shanghai and became a student and friend of Wu Hufan 吳湖帆 (1894-1968), a leading figure in the circles of painters and connoisseurs of Chinese painting and a fellow Suzhou native.12 Studying painting under Wu by day, he simultaneously earned a degree in law at Soochow Law School, which

---

10 Among the hundreds of paintings in Gu Linshi’s collection, which encompass the Yuan, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, those Wang had viewed were mostly from the Ming and Qing periods, since Gu, according to Wang, was reserved in showing his collection for fear that exposure of the works may lead to public attention and confiscation. See Silbergeld, *Mind Landscapes*, 14. However, the Ming and Qing works in the collection covered almost all the recognized masters of the periods, so the works Wang saw were impressive in quality. For more information on Gu Linshi and the Hall of Passing Clouds Collection, see Shanghai bowuguan, *Gu Gongxiong jiashu juanzeng Shanghai bowuguan Guoyunlou shuhua jicui* (Selection of calligraphy and paintings from the Hall of Passing Clouds Collection donated by Gu Gongxiong’s family to the Shanghai Museum) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2002); and Zheng Zhong, *Haishang shoucang shijia* (Notable families of collectors in Shanghai) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2003), 17-27.

11 Zheng Yuansu was known to have painted mainly flower paintings in the traditional manner. I am indebted to Mr. Arnold Chang for showing me a fan-painting of flowers by Zheng, whose surviving works are rare.

12 For more information on Wu Hufan, see Gu Yinhai and She Yanyan, *Wu Hufan de yishu shijie* (Wu Hufan’s world of art) (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2004).
offered evening classes. Like Gu Linshi, Wu Hufan was a known collector of Chinese painting, and his collection, called the Library in the Shade of Plum Blossoms (*Meiyingshuwu* 梅影書屋), was said to be comparable to museums of considerable scale in terms of quantity and surpassing many in quality. As Gu Linshi had been a strong influence on Wu Hufan, Wang’s training as a painter and a connoisseur under the two can be considered as following a consistent lineage, which valued the study of ancient works and had a particular interest in landscapes. Wang learned painting mostly in the traditional mode by observing his teachers paint and by copying ancient masterpieces. With the relative unavailability of pre-Ming works as models for copying, Wang, for a long time, copied mostly Ming and Qing paintings. Later, as photographic reproductions of early masterpieces appeared, Wang was able to copy those works and had connoisseurial discussion of them with Wu Hufan. At the same time, he was also encouraged by Wu to begin collecting paintings and calligraphy as a means to enrich his training.

Through Wu Hufan, Wang became acquainted with Pang Yuanji 龐元濟 (1864-1949) and was able to see on a regular basis Pang’s Studio of Vacuity (Xuzhai 虛

---

13 Sometimes also written as 梅影書屋.


15 Gu Linshi, along with Wu Hufan’s father, Wu Dacheng 吳大澂 (1835-1902), and their other acquaintances of lettered men, had organized the Yi Garden Painting Society (*Yiyuan huashe* 怡園畫社), which held monthly “elegant gatherings” at Gu’s Yi Garden. Although two generations junior to Gu Linshi, Wu Hufan was a regular guest at those “elegant gatherings,” and a frequent visitor to Yi Garden and the Hall of Passing Clouds, where he was able to meet many painting masters and see Gu’s collection. He was thus strongly influenced by Gu, particularly during the early phase of his artistic career. See Zheng, *Haishang shoucang shi'jia*, 156-157; and Gu and She, *Wu Hufan*, 56-67.
Collection, another well-known private collection of Chinese painting. As Wang had lived in Wu Hufan’s house for a period, he had the opportunity to see early Chinese paintings at China’s largest antique shop, the Hall of Gathered Treasures (Jibaozhai 集寶齋), which was located conveniently opposite Wu’s house.

In 1935, the same year he graduated from Soochow Law School, Wang was selected to serve as an advisor to the London Exhibition Committee, which needed to select pieces from the Palace Museum to be included in a major exhibition of Chinese art at the Burlington House. The task offered him a more-than-rare opportunity to view the entire body of paintings in the former Imperial Collection and seeded in him an interest in seeing more art in private collections. That interest was fulfilled in the late 1930s when he collaborated with the German scholar Victoria Contag and spent three years compiling The Seals of Chinese Painters and Collectors of the Ming and Ch’ing Dynasties. As necessitated by research for the book, he was able to see and photograph paintings in many of the finest public and private collections of paintings around the country. Thus, at a time when public museums were very rare, Wang found himself with access to ancient works in prominent private collections, antique shops, and mounters’ shops. By his

16 For more information on Pang Yuanji and his collection, see Zheng, Haishang shoucang shijia, 65-81.

17 The Hall of Gathered Treasures was owned by Sun Boyuan 孫伯潤 (1898-1984), another important art collector and a close friend of Wu Hufan. For more information on Sun Boyuan, see Zheng, Haishang shoucang shijia, 182-196.

18 The seals were photographed with a fingerprint camera. (I thank Professor Julia Andrews for this information.) The book was first published in 1940 in Shanghai with texts in Chinese and German. In 1952, a supplement was added to include seals on paintings from European and American collections. In 1966, an English edition with the supplement was published. Ever since its first publication, the book has been a standard reference work for students and scholars of Chinese painting. See Wang Chi-ch’ien and Victoria Contag, Seals of Chinese Painters and Collectors of the Ming and Ch’ing Periods (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1966).
thirties, C. C. Wang had already studied more important Chinese paintings than anyone alive.

As a result of his extensive viewing of ancient paintings and imitative training, C. C. Wang’s works produced in the 1930s and 1940s can be called art-historical studies, which would be considered conservative in the art world of Shanghai during the time. The Shanghai art scene in the early twentieth century was characterized by an unprecedented variety of artistic directions, traditional and new, Eastern and Western. Though well aware of almost all the artistic trends around him, perhaps with the exception of the left-wing woodblock print movement, Wang was only interested in traditional paintings and grew steeped in what was generally considered the best heritage of Yuan paintings — the full blossoming of literati aesthetics and brushwork — and became a follower of the Yuan masters, particularly Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374) and Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1354). It was also in those years that Wang grasped profound understanding of the relationship between bimo 筆墨 (literally brush and ink; in a general sense, brushwork) and painting, an aspect that would become remarkably important for his career.

Having worked for a lawyer for two years after he obtained his LL.B., C. C. Wang decided to pursue his art full time in 1937. By that time, he had already begun to sell his

---

19 With the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, C. C. Wang moved to the French concession, which accommodated numerous artists of different artistic styles. He knew all of his artist-neighbors, such as the traditionally trained Huang Binhong and Xie Zhiliu 謝稚柳 (1910-1997), and the foremost artist and art educator of Western-style painting, Liu Haisu. In fact Liu Haisu had introduced works of Cézanne, Gauguin, Matisse, van Gogh, and Picasso to C. C. Wang. Wang had also studied sketching with a French watercolor painter for one year between 1944 and 1945. It is not clear whether Wang happened to have missed the woodblock print movement or he had consciously chosen to neglect it as he noted that he was not inspired by either the Nationalists or the Communists. See Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 18, 20 and 22.
works and use the resulting profits to buy paintings for study purposes and for his own collection. In the 1940s, he taught Chinese painting at the Shanghai Art Academy and Suzhou Art Academy.

Wang made his first trip to the U.S. in 1947, stopping off in Japan to see not only Japanese art but also early Chinese art, particularly those appealing to a distinctively Japanese taste, such as the figure works in the Chan 禪 (Zen) Buddhist painting tradition attributed to Shi Ke 石恪 (fl. tenth century) and Liang Kai 梁楷 (early thirteenth century), and paintings by the “individualist” painters Shitao 石濤 (1642-1707), Zhu Da 朱耷 (or Bada Sharen 八大山人) (1626-1705), and Hongren 弘仁 (1610-1664). His visit to the U.S. lasted about one year, during which he stayed mostly in New York, where he served as a consultant to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on a group of recently purchased Chinese paintings. He returned to Shanghai the next year with vastly changed concepts about painting and was able to appreciate the ideas and works of non-orthodox painters such as the Chan Buddhist painters and the individualists. Shortly after he returned home, he grew pessimistic about the political situation of China and decided to leave the country. Wang then emigrated to America in 1949, a turning point in both his life and career.

After 1949, Wang lived mostly in New York. Not long after he arrived, he joined the Art Students League, where, over many years, he took courses in Western art, including life drawing, watercolor, and oil painting, etc. In the early years after his arrival, he made his income by teaching Chinese painting privately and selling real estate. At the same time, with the need to secure a better living for his family, he had to curtail his painting of landscapes, which had a very limited audience in the West. Instead, he painted
flowers and small genre subjects, which appealed more to the Western market, as well as Chinese-style wall paper and bamboo designs on ceramic lamps until 1956, when increasing artists from the East were willing to work for lower wages.

After Wang received his American citizenship in 1956, he was able to spend time in Asia again. Through the early 1960s, he lived in both New York and Hong Kong, where he taught painting at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and between 1962 and 1964, served as chairman of the Fine Arts Department. In 1965, he traveled with Zhang Daqian to Switzerland and other European countries.

Throughout the 1950s and the early 1960s, although Wang’s landscape works were exhibited in art galleries such as Mi Chou,20 the first gallery of Chinese art in America, they were not well received by the market. In the mid- to late 1960s, Wang’s style underwent a radical change as he began to apply textures not achieved with the brush to his works. His continued exploration of this technique, which Joan Stanley-Baker called “textualization,” contributed greatly to his work over the next two decades. His landscapes that combined brushwork and abstract textures into a seamless whole represented the most distinctive chapter of his painting career. With a changed style, C. C. Wang’s works began to attract attention. His first major exhibition was held at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco in 1968. With the success of this exhibition, solo exhibitions of his works were held in numerous museums in the U.S. and elsewhere after 1970.

---

20 C. C. Wang had a close relationship with the Mi Chou Gallery. In fact, it was Wang who offered part of the ground floor of his own home for the gallery to open in 1954 and operate there until 1956 when it had to move to a better location in order to survive. America’s first gallery to specialize in Chinese art, Mi Chou had presented exhibitions for artists including Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian, and Chen Qikuan 陳其寬 (b. 1921). For more information, see Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 28, and Frank Fulai Cho, “Reminiscences of Mi Chou, The First Chinese Gallery in America,” Chinese American Forum 1, no. 3 (May 1985): 4-8.
While Wang was blossoming as a painter, he also made one of his most important transactions as a collector. In 1973, the Metropolitan Museum of Art made a $2.5 million purchase of twenty-five Song (960-1279) and Yuan paintings from his collection. With this transaction, he became financially secure; his artistic pursuit was no longer constrained by economic considerations. In 1982, Wang had two successive surgeries around his abdominal aorta. For months during his recovery, he painted a dozen works with a heightened sense of abstraction, which he and his daughter saw as a result of his physical (and mental) condition.  

Though spending most of his time in New York, C. C. Wang traveled frequently to Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and after 1980, to mainland China, to see exhibitions and collections of paintings, to build his own collection, and to further expand his knowledge of Chinese painting. By the mid 1980s, he already had a more than profound assimilation of the Chinese painting tradition; and while his “texturalized” landscape style had matured, he was extending and renewing his art in several directions. However, by the late 1980s, his eyes suffered from cataracts, which slowed down his painting for a time before he underwent eye-surgery.

From the late 1980s onwards, while he still painted landscapes, his use of the “texturalization” technique abated. At the same time, he took up a renewed interest in small genre subjects. Yet his most prominent development in the period was his exploration of the abstract quality of brushwork and other formal elements, which was manifested in his calligraphic images and abstract works. Not only was he still evolving as an artist in his nineties, he was also still active in commercial transactions of art. In

---

1997, he sold twelve paintings from his collection to Oscar Tang, a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum, who donated the group of works to the museum. In the same year, the Chinese painting galleries at the museum were expanded to include the C. C. Wang Family Gallery for Chinese Painting and Calligraphy. Still painting towards the last months of his life, C. C. Wang died on July 3, 2003, in New York at the age of ninety-six.
CHAPTER 3

PHASE I (EARLY 1930s – MID-1950s):
TRADITIONAL AND ART-HISTORICAL ASSIMILATION

As a student of Gu Linshi, a conservative landscapist, and later of Wu Hufan, one of the last great orthodox painters in China, C. C. Wang, like all traditionalists, learned painting in the age-old pattern of copying ancient works. In the copying process, artists are engaged in a spiritual communion with ancient masters. Like Wu Hufan (fig. 1), whose influence on him was particularly strong, Wang became a follower of the centuries-long orthodox painting tradition. The lineage of orthodox painting, which valued brushwork as the ideal of painting, was believed to begin with the fourteenth-century Yuan masters, continue through Dong Qichang of the Ming and the Four Wangs of the early Qing, and subsequently yielded landscape paintings based on conventionalized brushwork. 22 In the 1930s and 1940s, in the footsteps of Dong, the

22 The four masters of the Yuan dynasty refer to Huang Gongwang, Wu Zhen 吴镇 (1280-1354), Ni Zan, and Wang Meng 王蒙 (ca. 1308-1385), whereas the Four Wangs of the early Qing include Wang Shimin 王时敏 (1592-1680), Wang Jian 王鉴 (1598-1677), Wang Hui 王翚 (1632-1717), and Wang Yuanqi 王原祁 (1642-1715). The artistic lineage represented by these painters can be traced back to the Northern Song (960-1127) period when scholar-officials such as Su Shi 蘇轼 (1036-7-1101) and Wen Tong 文同 (1018-1079) seeded the aesthetics of literati painting. As opposed to professional painters, the aims of these scholar-artists included the expression of ideas and feelings rather than the creation of exact depictions. Undertaken by scholar-artists, literati paintings were seen as expressions of their lofty and cultivated character. In the Ming dynasty, Dong Qichang promulgated a theory that cultivated artists, the so-called literati, should follow a “correct” stylistic lineage by imitating the old masters. His orthodoxy then became codified and institutionalized in the next generations, particularly in the works of the early Qing landscape painters, including the Four Wangs, who closely followed the stylistic vocabulary of scholar-amateur landscapists from the Yuan dynasty. The term “Orthodox School,” in a strict sense, refers to these early Qing landscapists, although Dong Qichang is generally considered the founder of the school in a true sense.
Four Wangs, particularly Wang Yuanqi, as well as his teachers, C. C. Wang adopted an art-historical approach to painting in which he perfected his brushwork by modeling his style after the works of earlier masters.23 His earliest surviving works, dated to the early 1930s, are study pieces painted in the styles of past masters (figs. 2 and 3).

*Landscape after Wang Meng*24 (fig. 4) further illustrates C. C. Wang’s art-historical approach during this early period. As he acknowledged in the inscription, the work was made by merging two compositions by the Yuan master Wang Meng. The lower portion of the painting was copied after that of Wang Meng’s *Quiet Life in a Wooden Glen* (fig. 5), and the upper portion came from his *Thatched Hut in the Western Suburbs* (fig. 6). According to the inscription, the work combines the “brush methods” of the two earlier masterpieces. The painting captures, to a large extent, Wang Meng’s distinct style of “hemp-fiber strokes” (*pima cun* 披麻皴) although C. C. Wang’s brushwork in depicting the rocks at the bottom is not as rugged, and their texture is not as woolly as those in the original. Arnold Chang, the owner of this painting and a long-time, close student of C. C. Wang, notes that the work overall looks a little stiff compared to the original, but the brushwork is of high caliber in its own right.25 Wang’s brushwork was already outstanding by the time and was regarded by Pang Yuanji as “above any

---

23 The use of “art-historical approach” here is based on the increasingly common use of the term “art-historical art” by scholars such as James Cahill in discussions of post-Song paintings. The term is known to have been derived from Max Loehr’s work. For example, Loehr explained: “Ming painting is … strongly or essentially historically oriented art, entirely preoccupied with rational (rather than sensible) matter. Chinese painting thus contemplated itself, became itself art-history.” See Max Loehr, “Some Fundamental Issues in the History of Chinese Painting,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (February 1964): 192-193. See also Cahill, *Hills beyond a River: Chinese Painting of the Yuan Dynasty, 1279-1368* (New York: Weatherhill, 1976), 46; and Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368-1580* (New York: Weatherhill, 1978), 59.

24 I am grateful to Mr. Arnold Chang for showing me the original painting.

crowd. However, in composition, the multi-layered spatial complexity of both of Wang Meng's works is not found in C. C. Wang's re-creation. The dramatic movement in the composition of *Quiet Life*, and the stable and harmonious distant mountains in *Thatched Hut* were not very well integrated by C. C. Wang. As a result, the dynamic sense of energy traveling up from the bottom rocks through the twisting trees is suddenly stopped by the horizontality of the distant mountains. However, the relative weakness in composition is not surprising for a study piece made with the purpose of imitating certain brush methods. In fact, Wang, looking back at his career at the age of ninety, seemed to find his early period overly and exclusively concerned with brushwork. In those years, even in works not painted after particular masters' styles, his compositions were often common variations of a stereotype. Also, like many pre-modern literati, he often inscribed these paintings with poems or prose.

Like Gu Linshi and Wu Hufan, Wang in this period was making a kind of quotation on the past. He was not necessarily imitating particular paintings, but he was trying to assimilate and transmit the styles of earlier masters whom he emulated. As he and his teachers were known for their collecting and connoisseurship, perhaps more than for their paintings, they primarily looked at paintings in terms of art history. Thus, his works from the time are not entirely individual creative expressions as they were made to

---


27 He recalled, “When I was young, my view of Chinese painting was extremely narrow. Everything was brushwork (*himo*)! I was intoxicated by brushwork, so much so that I didn't see anything else. At the beginning I was only concerned about the proper use of brush and ink when I painted, so I didn't pay too much attention to composition.” See Arnold Chang, “C. C. Wang at Ninety – A Kaikodo Celebration,” *Kaikodo Journal* III (Spring 1997): 10.
show fluency by reinterpretation rather than to show originality.\textsuperscript{28} Wang continued this approach to painting through the early years after he left China. His œuvre by roughly the mid-1950s falls into this category of art-historical, orthodox works. Although these works were positively received, he later destroyed most of those he considered too conservative since they represented the boundary of a system out of which he strived to break.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} However, these works may be seen by some as original based on a narrower definition as James Cahill commented on C. C. Wang’s works shown in his exhibition at the Mi Chou Gallery in the late 1950s: “One detects in it [i.e., Wang’s taste] echoes of the great Yuan, Ming and Ching masters, but he has, as the Chinese critics say, ‘completely transformed them,’ and the result meets the \textit{Chinese ideal of originality} [my Italics] without perverse heterodoxy.” Quoted without citation in Cho, “Reminiscences,” 7.

CHAPTER 4


By the time C. C. Wang settled in the U.S. in 1949, he had for decades followed traditional aesthetics in their narrow interpretation. However, there was no market for conservative landscapes in the U.S.\(^{30}\) Wang had to switch his direction due to economic realities. Thus, for the next decade and a half, although he still painted landscapes in the traditional mode, they were limited in number. At the advice of a New York art dealer, he began to pursue other subject matter, in particular, flowers, bamboo, and small genre subjects, working with more expressive and dramatic brushwork in a spontaneous manner — a style reminiscent of Qi Baishi’s, which was more accessible to the American audience.\(^{31}\) *Lotus* (fig. 7) is an example painted in this style. In the work, the fluidity of the medium of ink wash is fully manifested by the powerful and spontaneous brush of the artist. In a few swift broad strokes, which may easily be mistaken for a mere random play of ink wash but are in fact masterfully controlled in both tonal and brush effects, leafy forms emerge through the touch of several lines suggesting veins and stems. For this

---


expressive painting style, Wang, with his profound knowledge in Chinese painting throughout history, was indebted not only to his immediate predecessor Qi Baishi, but also to the Ming master Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593) (fig. 8), and the Qing individualists Shitao and Zhu Da. Another example along this line is Vase and Brushes (fig. 9). With objects outlined and forms filled with a minimal number of free, simple, and sweeping brushstrokes in varying ink tones, this work displays not the kind of drama seen in the previous example but brush-strength with a sense of substantiality as if achieved effortlessly. Forms done in this abbreviated manner, coupled with a great deal of unpainted reserve space and hence a sense of void, may be associated, through Zhu Da of the seventeenth century, Shen Zhou of the fifteenth century, to the Chan Buddhist painters of the Southern Song (1127-1279) such as Muqi 牧溪 (ca. 1200–after 1279) (fig. 10).

Apart from his native artistic tradition, the artistic climate in New York also informed C. C. Wang’s exploration in this spontaneous, expressive style. New York, as an increasingly exciting center of contemporary art in the 1950s, was dominated by the Abstract Expressionists, some of whom, particularly the Action Painters, were themselves influenced by Eastern calligraphy. Although Wang later remarked that he did not really

---

32 It is generally agreed that some of the Abstract Expressionists were influenced by Eastern painting and calligraphy. At the writing of this study, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is in preparation for a major exhibition acknowledging the impact of Asian ideas on modern American art, with the influence of Eastern painting and calligraphy on certain Abstract Expressionists included. (I am indebted to Professor Julia Andrews for bringing me this piece of information, which she learned, in a conference session she moderated, from the presentation “Asian Ideas in Modern American Art” delivered by Alexandra Munroe, Senior Curator of Asian Art at the Guggenheim Museum, at the “Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century” conference at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, MA, on April 29, 2006.) However, there have also been other opinions, for example, Clement Greenberg wrote: “Actually, not one of the original ‘abstract expressionists’… has felt more than a cursory interest in Oriental art. The sources of their art lie entirely in the West; what resemblances to Oriental modes may be found in it are an effect of convergence at the most, and of accident at the least.” See Clement Greenberg, “‘American-Type’ Painting,” in Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 220.
understand Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s,\textsuperscript{33} what he painted, such as \textit{Lotus} and \textit{Vase and Brushes}, were close in spirit to Abstract Expressionist works that value spontaneity, and “chances and accidents” during the creation process.

Taking classes at the Art Students League, he was not only well aware of Western artistic trends but, for a brief period, actually experimented with Western-style painting (fig. 11). At his friends’ persuasion, he was convinced not to pursue this path seriously.\textsuperscript{34} However, such experiments had alerted him to the possibilities of embracing Western stylistic elements, especially new ideas of composition and color, in his exploration of new directions.

With expanded visual horizons, he felt the growing need to break free of his mental shackles, his very preoccupation with the past and the brushwork-supreme ideology of the literati painting tradition. Theoretically, many ideas of contemporary art were consistent with traditional Chinese painting.\textsuperscript{35} For instance, the former’s emphasis on self-expression and abstraction over representation can be linked to the aesthetics in ancient Chinese painting that treasure “spiritual likeness” (shensi 神似) instead of “form-likeness” (xingsi 形似). Thus, he realized, in order to achieve naturalness,

\textsuperscript{33} Wang said: “I knew of Pollock, Kline, Motherwell, and Tobey. I saw what they are doing, but I didn’t really understand it at the time.” Arnold Chang, “Ninety,” 11. Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Robert Motherwell were all foremost Abstract Expressionists. Mark Tobey, an American artist with greater renown in Europe, however, was not a member of the group. Although he was regarded by some as one of the precursors of the Abstract Expressionists, he was not generally classified into a particular school of art and he himself resisted any categorization as such. See Arthur L. Dahl, “Mark Tobey, 1890-1976,” in \textit{Mark Tobey: Art and Belief}, Arthur L. Dahl et al., (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984), 11.

\textsuperscript{34} James Cahill speculated that C. C. Wang was apparently hoping to transform himself into “a Chinese successor to Cézanne” and referred to it as an inspiration that Wang had wisely given up. See Cahill, “Wang Chi-Ch’ien,” 11.

\textsuperscript{35} Wang mentioned: “Once I cam to America, I realized that Chinese painting had a modern sense in it.” See D’Arcy, “Profile,” 26.
spontaneity, and naïveté, the qualities that have always been admired in Chinese painting, he might employ the vocabulary of contemporary art. With this in mind, he began experimenting with abstraction and a de-emphasis on brushwork.

_Fruit and Basket_ (fig. 12) and _The Sound of the Waves_ (fig. 13) are colorful abstractions that clearly display the impact of the vigorous style of the Abstract Expressionists. Here, the controlled “accidental” effects and the overall spontaneity that resulted from the gestural play of ink and color on paper may suggest the influence of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) or Willem de Kooning (1904-1997). In _Fruit and Basket_, suffusing pools of ink and color were softened by a wash of water on the surface and allowed to dissolve into each other on the left side, while sturdy strokes were made with a deeply inked brush moving swiftly over dry paper. Although the diffusion of ink and color is semi-accidental and the dots of white pigment may remind one of Pollock’s dribbles, the painting, for the most part, was still done with the brush. This work can be seen as a semi-abstraction, since with the help of the title, one does not need to be very imaginative to discern the “representational” content of the work. However, in _The Sound of the Waves_, traces of the brush are minimal. In place of painterly elements, blotted ink patterns were introduced and superimposed on layers of other techniques. As the earliest documented example made with obvious non-brush techniques, this painting marks the beginning of Wang’s journey of technical experimentation and invention. At that time, he was trying a number of techniques including blotting drops of ink from wax paper or glass onto his painting — an experiment inspired by printing methods, utilizing images seeped through from the back of the painting, applying strokes with inked sponge,
rubbing a wet image from one picture to another, etc.\textsuperscript{36} He might have used all of these techniques in this example, with the result that it looks like an eclectic experiment of accidental, textural effects.

Another important aspect of these two works lies in the use of bright colors, which had been little explored by C. C. Wang before. His use of contrast between masses of bold color, and between light and dark, according to the artist, was primarily influenced by European and American artists, such as Gauguin, van Gogh, Modigliani, and Klee, and by fellow artists at the Art Students League.\textsuperscript{37} He would further investigate these new modes of color later on, especially for creating tonal and light effects in his landscapes. Along this line of experimentation is also the later example \textit{Abstract Landscape} (fig. 14) dated 1969. Although the work was done mostly with the brush and without brilliant color, it is a study of brushmarks versus accidental effects, organic versus geometric shapes, and asymmetry within symmetry and the rectangular composition. The bold ink bands forming a geometric image on the left may remind one of the blank-and-white abstract paintings by Franz Kline (1910-1962). Nevertheless, though important by their experimental nature, attractive and original in their own right, these works are, as Richard Barnhart suggested, “without distinctive artistic character and virtually unrelated to the painter’s heritage.”\textsuperscript{38}

Primarily a landscapist, C. C. Wang did not wait long to adapt his experiments to his most beloved subject. \textit{Landscape} (fig. 15) of 1961 is clearly a step forward from \textit{The


\textsuperscript{37} Silbergeld, \textit{Mind Landscapes}, 56.

Sound of the Waves in this respect. Here, it is not known whether the artist already had in mind a particular composition for the work before he impressed ink and color on the paper with a sponge-like object or another piece of inked paper. However, ink and color washes, water, and patches of impressed textures interact with each other semi-randomly, resulting in an unplanned or half-planned abstract image on which Wang added lines and strokes to delineate houses, groves, and shrubs, in the foreground, and mountain ranges in the background. A bright color similar to that in Fruit and Basket fills up paper that would have been either left blank or just touched with light ink in a traditional landscape. The contrast between light and dark, together with the strong sense of movement suggested by the freely applied ink wash and textures, lends great drama to the composition. Although bold, the presence of the brush is sparse; this painting marks C. C. Wang’s initial step in combining brush strokes with textures achieved by non-brush techniques and accidental effects. However, the combination is not yet an integrated one. In this example, the brush strokes only perform the very “narrative” function of indicating landscape elements. These strokes overlaid on the ink wash do not seem to blend with the rest of the pictorial elements. In large part, this work is still experimental and transitional.

Flowing Water in Spring River (fig. 16) is, compositionally and technically, a more unified combination of brush strokes and impressed textures, and of “narrative” details and accidental effects. Though still rather isolated from each other, the mountain forms in this work are mediated by earthen planes and dark ink patches to create a loose C-shaped composition. With this work, a method of structuring composition half-randomly and half-consciously began to appear.
Around the same time, Wang also tried pre-treating the painting paper by folding it and creating creases which gave rise to more textural variation, as in *Landscape* (fig. 17). Compared with that in the previous two examples, the vigorously applied brushwork in this painting is better integrated with the impressed textures, unifying the mountain forms into a more coherent bird’s-eye-view composition, unlike the traditional frontal view he had mostly used before. In contrast with the powerful and dark mountains, the soft ochre washes mediate between the bottom and middle sections, and the palely inked upper portion of the picture, breaking the otherwise rather enclosed mountain cell. The composition, like the C-shaped structure in *Flowing Water* would reappear quite often in Wang’s landscapes in the next two decades.

C. C. Wang’s experiments of applied ink textures marked by accidental effects would prove to be significant for his development of a personal landscape style. Yet, it has to be noted that such non-brush accidental effects were not without Chinese precedents: painting anecdotes as early as the eight century told of artists pouring or splashing ink on paper, spattering it, blowing it, applying it with their hands, fingers and hair, and even rolling bodily in ink on paper.³⁹

³⁹ For example, it was recorded that Wang Xia 王洽 (a.k.a. Wang Mo 王墨; d. ca. 805) had contrived his painting while drunk by spattering ink on silk in a random manner, kicking at it with his feet or rubbing it with his hands, etc.; and according to the forms produced, he would make mountains and rocks, clouds and water with rapid brushwork. He was known by his contemporaries as “ink-splasher Wang” (Wang Pomo 王潑墨). See Zhu Jingxuan, “Tangchao minghua lu” (Record of famous painters of the Tang dynasty), ca. 840, in *Meishu congshu* (Compendium of works on art), ed. Huang Binhong and Deng Shi (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1986) 2: 1007. Other “eccentric” methods of painting were also noted in section III “On Painting Materials, Tracing and Copying,” in chapter II of Chang Yen-yüan [Zhang Yanyuan], “A Record of the Famous Painters of all the Dynasties,” ca. 847, in *Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, trans. William Reynolds Beal Acker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954), 190. See also Paul W. Kroll, “An Addendum to the History of T’ang Art: Painting on Water,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 3 (July - September 1983): 599-600.
Another representative work of the artist’s transitional stage is *Clouds in the Mountains of the Immortals* (fig. 18), in which dynamically wrinkled textures are achieved by pressing ink-drenched wrinkled paper over the scene. The fissured forms that resulted resemble rugged rock surfaces. If there were not the few clustered huts on the lower right and the waterfall on the lower left, no sense of scale or distance would be given to the textured forms, which might then be seen as a total abstraction instead of a landscape vision. Here, traces of the brush are minimal and overwhelmed by the impressed textures, lending an impression close to Abstract Expressionist painting. This is an early example of the use of wrinkled textures made with inked Chinese painting paper of the absorbent type. Later on, the artist would use paper of varying absorbencies to create different kinds of wrinkles, drier and more linear, than the ones in this work.

The idea of conceiving landscape imagery through random configurations and textures, especially those found in nature, is not without precedent in the history of Chinese painting either. Shen Gua 沈括 (1031-1095) wrote of the important Song-dynasty painter Song Di’s 宋迪 (ca. 1015-ca. 1080) advice on achieving a natural flavor for landscape paintings:

You should first look for a damaged wall, and then stretch plain silk against it. Gaze at it day and night. When you have looked for a sufficient length of time, you will see through the silk the high and low parts, or curves and angles, on the surface of the wall, which will take on the appearance of landscape. As you hold this in your mind and your eyes consider it, the high parts will become mountains and the low parts, water; crevices will become valleys and cracks, torrents; the prominent parts will seem to be the foreground and the obscure, the distance. As your spirit leads and your imagination constructs, you will see indistinctly the images of human beings, birds, grasses, and trees, flying or moving about. Once they are complete in your eyes, then follow your imagination to command your brush. Silently, through your intuitive apprehension (*shenhui* 神會), the natural
scene will be spontaneously achieved, and [hence] it will be unlike the work of men; this is called the “live brush.”

Interestingly, Stanley-Baker discussed C. C. Wang’s works in the late 1960s in this way:

Wang was more or less controlled by the natural marks. *They* determined the configuration of the landscape. Working from the conditions provided by gravity, absorbency of the paper, disposition of fibers in the paper, its characteristics in wrinkling, Wang proceeds like a mountaineer, cautiously going over the “traces” to find a foothold here, a plateau there and is literally led to the final product.

What C. C. Wang did in *Clouds in the Mountains* corresponded closely to what was suggested by Song Di. The same kind of naturalness, innocent of human intent, was what Wang had always sought to achieve in his painting and what he saw as equivalent to good brushwork. However, he would never be satisfied with just having an equivalent and entirely abandon the brush. The prominence of spontaneously achieved textures and the little traces of the command of the brush here set this painting as a transitional piece that would be followed by works in which “natural fissures” are fused seamlessly with brushwork in more identifiable mountain forms.

Also of significance in this phase is his use of the horizontal rather than the vertical format he favored earlier. With the horizontal format, he could make use of the painting surface more effectively, especially when he at the same time had greatly reduced inscriptions to simple details of name and date written unobtrusively. In terms of color, the artist also began to employ hues of different intensities, not only for their descriptive function, but also for creating mood and drama.

---


Though fully aware of ancient examples of the use of accidental effects, such as Wang Xia’s, which may be seen as Tang-dynasty action painting, C. C. Wang considered them more as rare eccentricities. He could not remember what exactly, if anything, prompted his initial use of applied textures, but he thought it was probably a Western inspiration. However, during this period, Wang began to spend more time outside of America and was not insignificantly exposed to artistic trends in the East. In the early 1960s, when he divided his time between New York and Hong Kong, a group of artists in the then-British colony were seeking to adapt their art to contemporary trends while retaining some Chinese characteristics. These artists were initiating what became known as the New Ink Painting Movement, following a similar trend in Taiwan. The most representative figure of the group was the movement founder Lu Shoukun 呂壽琨 (1919-1975), who combined aspects of the Chinese ink painting heritage with the semi-abstract structures and gestural brushwork of Abstract Expressionism.

---

43 See note 39. Paul W. Kroll, a noted China scholar, remarked: “In the history of painting, East or West, there are only so many basic methods and techniques. Even the more unusual modes of ‘action painting’ of some mid-twentieth century American artists, when considered from a sufficiently broad perspective, are seen to be merely distorted replications of methods practiced by certain Chinese painters of the late eight century ... The habits of these [eighth-century] eccentrics have, of course, been unknowingly imitated by dozens of modern neoteric daubers attempting to discover ‘new’ forms of painting.” See Kroll, “Addendum,” 599. However, Kroll’s provocative view was regarded as debatable by scholars and art historians. See Don Ahn et al., “Roundtable Discussion,” in Asian Traditions, Modern Expressions: Asian American Artists and Abstraction, 1945-1970, ed. Jeffrey Wechsler (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1997), 48-57.

44 Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 29.

45 For more information on the New Ink Painting Movement, see Li Junyi, Xianggang xiandai shuimohua wenxuan (Selected essays on modern ink painting in Hong Kong) (Hong Kong: Xianggang xiandai shuimohua xiezui, 2001). For studies on modern ink painting in Taiwan, consult Huang Kuang-nan, Taiwan shuimohua chuango zu yu huajing yinsu zhi yanjiu (Creation and context: a study on the ink paintings of Taiwan) (Taipei: National Museum of History, 1999).

46 For more discussion on Lu Shoukun, see Chu-tsing Li, Trends in Modern Chinese Painting: The C. A. Drenowatz Collection (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1979), 172-176.
his works are semi-abstract landscapes done in a spontaneous manner with “controlled accidents,” with dynamically applied washes of ink superimposed and touched with free brushstrokes suggestive of landscape elements. The activities of Lu and his fellow painters in Hong Kong could hardly escape the eye of C. C. Wang, who during the late 1950s and the early 1960s, was teaching Chinese painting in a university there. That this moment of breakthrough to a contemporary idiom in Hong Kong matched Wang’s days of intense experimentation may not be coincidental.

In Taiwan, one of the most powerful forces in the promulgation of modern ink painting, which inspired the New Ink Painting Movement in Hong Kong, was the Fifth Moon Group (Wayue huahui 五月畫會) founded by Liu Guosong 劉國松 (b. 1932) in 1956 to fuse together the ideals of a group of young artists dissatisfied with the stagnation of Chinese art. As C. C. Wang could again spend time in Asia after the late 1950s and was closely associated with Hong Kong’s art scene in the early 1960s, he was no less aware of the artistic climate in Taiwan. A friend of Wang, Liu Guosong was among the first and most distinguished Chinese-born painters, who achieved notable success in experimenting with textural methods, blending Chinese and Western approaches, and developing distinct artistic personalities. His experimentations with Western techniques include collage, rubbing, indirect application of ink, etc., but it was his exploitation of custom-made heavily-fibered mulberry paper that became most representative of his art (fig. 19).\(^{47}\) By first applying ink and color on the paper with a big brush and then pulling long strands of fibers out from the surface according to his compositional ideas, thus leaving bright white streaks in large inked patches, he created intricate semi-random

textures with a sense of naturalness similar to that of C. C. Wang’s fissure marks.\textsuperscript{48} In 1966, Wang and Liu were included in “The New Chinese Landscape” exhibition that traveled throughout America and featured works by three older-generation artists with new techniques and three younger ones from the Fifth Moon group.\textsuperscript{49} It is not known whether Wang was consciously paying attention to the activities of these younger Taiwanese artists. However, their experimental spirit was so very much in the air that one pursuing a breakthrough in Chinese painting could hardly overlook them. The Abstract Expressionists in New York might have exerted first-hand influence on C. C. Wang’s exploration of new techniques, but artists working in the East with concerns similar to his may also have had a subconscious impact on him at that time.

In addition, in America, C. C. Wang was not alone in exploring new possibilities for Chinese painting. Zhang Daqian, probably the most renowned Chinese artist of the twentieth century, shared with his friend C. C. Wang prominence as a collector of Chinese paintings. The two men both had profound knowledge and training in the traditional painting style although Zhang was interested in a wider range of subjects than Wang. Zhang lived abroad after 1949, first in Argentina and Brazil, and after 1969, in California until 1976, when he moved to Taiwan. During the period in which Zhang resided in the U.S., he and C. C. Wang frequently look at and discussed paintings together.\textsuperscript{50} In the mid-1960s, the two artists traveled to Europe together. Although Zhang’s superb traditional skills were highly recognized, it was his development of

\textsuperscript{48} Occasioned by a gift of painting paper from Liu, C. C. Wang had in fact produced a landscape borrowing Liu’s technique of pulling out fibers in 1984. See Silbergeld, \textit{Mind Landscapes}, 110 and 114.


splash-ink painting after 1960 that became his most remarkable artistic achievement. By the 1960s, the versatile painter had been exposed to Western artistic ideas, particularly those of Picasso and the Action Painters. As he was at the same time suffering from failing eyesight, he turned away from detailed depictions to bold, splash-ink landscapes in almost total abstraction. After splashing ink and color on paper, he would lead the flow of the ink splatter with the brush and by rotating the paper before adding a few “narrative” details of houses or trees. Zhang’s excursion into new realms had an enormous impact on many Chinese painters in recent history. The success in technical innovations of Zhang Daqian, a traditionalist with a similar background and of the same generation as C. C. Wang, must have been an incitement for Wang to probe a new path.

Another expatriate Chinese artist who was close to C. C. Wang in this period was Chen Qikuan. The Western-trained architect, who worked in America in the 1950s, was adept in calligraphy from an early age. Also practicing painting, Chen was inspired by the vigorous abstract art that dominated the American art scene during the time and started experimenting with alternatives for modeling brushstrokes and devising new methods for texturing landscapes. In the 1950s, when C. C. Wang seemed to have lost confidence and direction as a painter, Chen Qikuan was a frequent visitor to New York and to

---


53 Recalling Zhang Daqian’s exhibition at the Mi Chou Gallery in 1957, C. C. Wang said, “He sold his works at very low prices and few people bought them. We began to discuss this, and Chang Ta-ch’ien [Zhang Daqian] wondered what we should do next. He had no confidence in himself, and I didn’t know what to do either.” Wang’s own exhibition in 1959 was not a success either. He added that his art was stuck within “the circle of old fashioned composition” and he did not know what he could do at all with his
Wang’s home, and the two men liked to discuss painting together.\textsuperscript{54} Their shared search for new ideas and techniques must have to some extent inspired Wang in his own new exploration.

The artists discussed above were the few among the many with the quest of modernizing Chinese painting, but they were the representative ones who in one way or another were relatively more relevant than others to C. C. Wang’s development during the 1950s and 1960s. Wang himself did not consider any of the artistic practices, whether past or present, near or far, as direct sources for his accidental textural effects but located his inspiration in chance discoveries and experiments, particularly in his own works using Western watercolor paper.\textsuperscript{55} However, it is very unlikely that his full awareness of all the historical precedents and concurrent trends played no role during his period of experimentation. Although C. C. Wang was profoundly knowledgeable in the history of Chinese painting, it was only during this period, when he was exposed to contemporaneous artistic movements in the East and the West, that the range of past experimentation came into play in his art, leading him to develop a distinctively personal painting style.


\textsuperscript{55} Silbergeld, \textit{Mind Landscapes}, 48.
CHAPTER 5


In his experimental period, C. C. Wang’s paintings were very dependent on non-brush techniques. Nevertheless, no matter how he was nourished by the confluence of new ideas and technical innovations, he was insistent that the strength of brushwork could not be sacrificed. He maintained (and would maintain for the rest of his life) that brushwork is the firm, indispensable foundation of Chinese painting.\(^{56}\) Accordingly, for Wang, the next task was to make use of the new techniques that he deemed fit to interweave with what he regarded as the most fundamental. As he said in the 1970s, he “mix[ed] the brush techniques of the grand style ‘literati’ with all textural effects.”\(^ {57} \) To achieve a balance between the two, he toned down the accidental effects that he had used very boldly before. Wrinkled textures used in a more subtle way were what he chose to employ most often.

By crumpling a separate piece of paper, dipping it in ink and then pressing it on the painting paper to leave wrinkled marks on the latter, Wang created a distinct kind of wrinkled textures, which served not only as textures for mountains but also, and perhaps even more, as an inspiration or push for an image from his mind, determining how he

---


painted a particular work. He saw this process as a kind of “getting acquainted” with the painting in progress, in a way similar to how Pollock described how he painted.\textsuperscript{58} Wang also compared it to Shitao’s idea of “one stroke” painting (yihua 一畫), which he interpreted as meaning that “the artist’s exhilaration or inspiration carries him through a painting on an uninterrupted surge of creation…”\textsuperscript{59}

*Landscape No. 227* (fig. 20) is an example of the “in-process” creation stimulated by the accidents of wrinkled lines. In this work, the semi-random configuration resulting from wrinkled textural patterns served as the basis on which Wang articulated the composition. He modeled horizontally layered mountain forms through shaded washes and brushwork, thus constructing order in the seemingly random. The impressed textures here, more linear and “controlled” than the white or uninked fissures in *Clouds in the Mountains* (fig. 18), are so well integrated into the rendition of the landscape substance and the brushwork that there is a strong tactile appeal, while the textures and brushwork are hardly distinguishable from one another. C. C. Wang said, around this time, that he himself sometimes had to look at the works very closely to make sure where his brushwork was.\textsuperscript{60} In fact, based on an extended definition of brushwork,\textsuperscript{61} he considered

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid. This is a general interpretation of “one stroke” painting. There are others suggested by scholars. See Earle Jerome Coleman, *Philosophy of Painting by Shih-T’ao: A Translation and Exposition of His Hua-P’u* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 16-19 and 35-40. For a more in-depth study of the theory, see Ju-hsi Chou, “Quest of the Primordial Line: The Genesis and Content of Tao-chi’s Hua-yü-Lu” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1969).
\item \textsuperscript{60} See C. C. Wang’s untitled essay in Katz and Wang, *Mountains of the Mind*, n.p.
\item \textsuperscript{61} His broadened definition of good textures being equivalent to good brushwork was very well articulated by James Cahill: “If we were to try to isolate the quality most treasured by connoisseurs of Wang’s group in the paintings they most admire — the landscape of the great Yuan masters such as Huang Kung-wang [Huang Gongwang], Ni Tsan [Ni Zan], and others, of Tung Ch‘i-ch‘ang [Dong Qichang], of Wang Yuan-ch‘i” [Wang Yuanqi] — we would find it not so much in the strength or beauty or interest of individual
\end{itemize}
his well-mingled textures and brushwork as a collective whole that transcends the brush, and seems to transcend the artist’s control, to become natural.\(^\text{62}\) As Wang stated more concisely, “Brushwork is not restricted to the brush!”\(^\text{63}\)

In this painting, if the landscape elements of trees and cottages were absent, the mountain forms, though reminiscent of granite walls, might appear like mere abstract planar surfaces for the play of striking textures. By crowning the hard-edged mountain ridges with round and schematic trees, the artist emphasized the contours of the mountains. It is also through the small scale of the trees and huts that the textured forms become a chain of mountains instead of rocks. Such use of miniaturized landscape elements to contrast the scale of mountains can be found in traditional Chinese landscapes since the Five Dynasties (907-960) and the Northern Song epoch. In terms of color, although Wang had painted works of brighter color during the period, this painting displays a return to the reliance on ink complemented by light indigo and yellow ochre, the types of color preferred by traditional literati painters and by C. C. Wang himself earlier. The gentle layering of light ink wash creates a subtle network of tonal gradations and imbues the landscape with a three-dimensionality, and a shimmering and ethereal quality amidst shade and light. This sensibility regarding effects of light and shade had

\(^{\text{62}}\) Silbergeld, *Mind Landscapes*, 47.

\(^{\text{63}}\) Stanley-Baker, “Closed Cycle,” 27; and Doran, “Artist as Collector,” 78.
rarely been explored by traditional Chinese painters, perhaps with the exception of Gong Xian 龔賢 (ca. 1619-1689). In composition, although the horizontal lining of more or less squarish forms appears a little monotonous, the overall zigzag structure of the mountain ranges brings in a sense of movement and recession.

This work is similar to quite a few other paintings of the 1970s in how textures and brushwork are combined, forms are modeled, and miniaturized features are added although some later examples are more animated in composition and tone. It is obvious that Wang, in the early 1970s, had already assimilated the new techniques he gained from experiments earlier, using them selectively and adjusting them to his native artistic heritage in an increasingly mature way. In a review for a 1973 exhibition of C. C. Wang’s works, Richard Barnhard described Wang until the late 1960s as “always interesting but somehow [an] unintegrated painter,” probably referring to the fact that his works by then were either traditional Chinese landscapes or Western-style abstractions, which were hardly related to one another as if done by different hands. He, however, complimented that many of the artist’s latest works “so powerfully and richly join the experience of the 20th century to the enduring truths of Ni Tsan [Ni Zan] and Tao-chi [Shitao] that one can no longer hesitate to join the name of C. C. Wang to those of his most distinguished predecessors.”

_Landscape No. 327_ (fig. 21) is perhaps a good example to illustrate Wang’s painting process as a constant negotiation between the brush and textures. In this piece, the wrinkled textures in the lower middle portion are darker and heavier. To unify his brushwork with textures, the artist modeled rocks into more rugged and angular shapes.

---

64 Barnhart, “Recent Paintings,” 460.
The contours of these shapes are again accentuated by vegetation, but this time in much
darker ink with denser brushwork. Following the textures, the rock forms are built up into
a C-shaped mountainscape perceived from above, recalling the point of view employed in
the 1965 Landscape (fig. 17). Added one by one from bottom to top, the mountain tops
are rounded and highlighted by vegetation in a fashion that may remind one of a
traditional way of landscape formation, one that the artist had used some forty years
before in Landscape after Wang Shimin (fig. 3).

In C. C. Wang’s period of artistic maturity, a group of works produced in the early
1980s stand out as distinctively different from other paintings in terms of style. These
works involve the technique of applying color wash to the back of the paper. For example,
in Landscape No. 472 (fig. 22), the front of the paper was inked with impressed and
folded textures, whereas the back side was painted with a white wash. A blue hue was
also applied to the back in the portions corresponding to water, while additional
alternating patches of white and ochre were added to the back to provide initial forms for
the mountains.65 All these textural and back-painting effects were then modeled by the
brush into mountains. The successive layering of color, especially the wash of blue water
pigment, to the back not only lays an undertone, but also gives a veiled quality to the
landscape, which thus appears with a slightly mysterious sense of obscurity. For some
examples in this stylistic group, layers of pigments are painted over brushwork on the
front. The obliteration or veiling of brushwork was regarded by Joan Stanley-Baker as
not only a breaking away from the brushwork-oriented literati tradition that was laid
down in the Yuan dynasty, but also a move to reach the even more ancient aesthetic of the

---

65 The painting process is described in greater detail in Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 108.
Song and pre-Song periods, when the brushwork ideal had not evolved and a more tactile aesthetic was emphasized.\textsuperscript{66}

Most of these works were painted in the year following the painter's two surgeries in 1982. C. C. Wang's daughter, Yien-koo Wang King, described her father as in a state of dream, living in a world of his own during that time.\textsuperscript{67} This may explain the haunting and otherworldly quality in this particular group of works, whose development seemed to be largely a result of the artist's changed mentality due to his critical physical condition. As Wang gradually recovered his health, he returned to the use of style and techniques more typical of the rest of his artistically mature period.

Although the evolution of C. C. Wang's paintings into a distinct personal style was largely characterized by his seamless combination of brushwork and imprinted textures, he did not use this combination all the time. According to his own estimation, he used the texturing technique only about half the time.\textsuperscript{68} During the 1970s and 1980s, he shifted between works with texturalization and paintings done entirely with the brush; particularly in the 1980s, his works began to show less reliance on impressed textures. However, he did not return to the strictly traditional style he used in the first phase either.

*Landscape No. 450* (fig. 23) is an example using no imprinted textures of any kind. Featured instead is a brushwork mode reminiscent of that of the Yuan master Ni Zan, which C. C. Wang admired most. Here, Wang adopted the dry, and sometimes angular brushwork of Ni Zan (fig. 24), characterized by a feeling of exquisite simplicity.


\textsuperscript{67} Yien-koo Wang King, interview by author, March 21, 2006.

\textsuperscript{68} Silbergeld, *Mind Landscapes*, 50.
that he referred to as “brush naiveté.” However, the forms rendered with this
brushwork were constructed in a compositional mode considerably more dramatic and
monumental than Ni Zan’s. As suggested by Arnold Chang and Jerome Silbergeld, by the
1980s, the conventional compositional models which dominated Wang’s works in the
early years were already liberated through years of exploration with new compositional
possibilities presented by accidental textural effects. Therefore, like this example, other
works completely done with the brush in this period were created with the combination of
a new compositional sensibility and a relatively traditional mode of brushwork. Also
displayed is a more creative, sometimes striking, mode of coloration which evokes a
generally darker and more mysterious atmosphere. The style of these works shows a
partial return, much moderated by modernism, to C. C. Wang’s roots.

Not only the result of the artist’s broadened compositional vision, the particular
composition of Landscape No. 450 with mountains receding diagonally into the distance
might have been inspired by Chinese prototypes. This compositional mode was
commonly used by C. C. Wang since the early 1970s as seen in Landscape Nos. 305 and
910 (figs. 25 and 26). While compositional precedents of this type can be traced to a
more distant past, both Arnold Chang and Jerome Silbergeld have compared Wang’s
works of this structure to Zhu Da’s Landscape (fig. 27) of the late seventeenth century,
which was in Wang’s collection. However, Wang’s paintings feature more varied tonal

69 C. C. Wang regarded Ni Zan, Dong Qichang and Wang Yuanqi as the exemplars of “brush naiveté.” See Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 44.


71 Arnold Chang, “Modem Dialogue,” 32; and Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 52.
and textural changes. The result is a further enlivened movement of the mountains in an overall more unified scheme that can be distinguished from traditional works in a similar composition.

According to Silbergeld, the implicit logic underlying the structural linkage of mountain formations in Wang's works can be related to the Chinese geomantic notion of "dragon veins," which refers to an earthly pulse channeling nature's inherent spiritual energy through the terrestrial system — a notion that was generally in the minds of ancient landscapists as a compositional principle.\(^7^2\) While this idea may be shared by C. C. Wang as evidenced in many of his works, his compositions were probably also inspired by ancient masterpieces, particularly those in his own collection, all of which he had thoroughly studied.

Apart from Zhu Da's painting, other works in C. C. Wang's collection may have had no less impact on his works. While the lessons on composition learned from the semi-random textured configurations were always in his mind, for some of Wang's works that are distinctly more animated than others in composition, his inspiration might have come from Riverbank (fig. 28), one of his most treasured possessions.\(^7^3\) For example, in Landscape No. 880126 (fig. 29), the slanting form of the central mountain and the restless, overall diagonal movements suggested by rocks highlighted by the bright blue

---


\(^7^3\) C. C. Wang had regarded Riverbank as his most important possession since its acquisition in 1968. He even named his studio after the painting as the "Riverbank Hall" (Xi'an tang 西岸堂) or "Thatched Hut on the Riverbank" (Xi'an caotang 西岸草堂). The painting is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. See Maxwell K. Hearn and Wen C. Fong, Along the Riverbank: Chinese Painting from the C.C. Wang Family Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 160-161. Wang even had life-sized photographic reproductions of the painting hung in his studio, along with several important original paintings, to serve as his "teachers." See Stuart, "Singing Brush," 51.
trees recall the highly animated landforms in and the dynamic composition of Riverbank attributed to Dong Yuan 董源 (d. 962). Echoing the notion of “dragon veins,” C. C. Wang’s comment on Riverbank was that the “landscape elements are arranged naturally, in accordance with the principles of geomancy ....” Such is a characteristic found also in Landscape No. 880126.

While C. C. Wang considered the brushwork of the Yuan masters, particularly Ni Zan, as best because of their naturalness, naiveté, and their sheer charm, independent of the subject and form, he was less inspired by them in terms of composition. As Wang’s paintings matured, there emerged in his works a revival of the grand compositional style from the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song period, represented by Dong Yuan and Fan Kuan 范寬 (ca. 960-ca. 1030). As he himself stated, “I have tried to develop Yuan-type brushwork and combine it with the Northern Sung [Song] concept of composition .... Combining Ni Tsan [Ni Zan] and Fan Kuan — that is my purpose.”

In Landscape No. 850901 (fig. 30), rock forms were rendered in an ascending fashion with a painstaking build-up of short and dry brushstrokes. Contrasted by the miniaturized cottages in the center, the mountainscape exhibits an aura of monumentality, which is a distinctive characteristic of Northern Song landscapes. As in Fan Kuan’s

---

74 However, this attribution and the authenticity of the painting have caused much debate, resulting in a symposium and the publication of an entire volume dedicated to it. See Judith G. Smith and Wen C. Fong, eds., Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999).


76 The idea that Wang’s compositional style was inspired by Northern Song landscapes has been suggested by much scholarship, including that of Arnold Chang, Hugh Moss, Jerome Silbergeld and Joan Stanley-Baker, among others.

77 Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 51.
Travelers amid Streams and Mountains (fig. 31), exemplary of monumental Northern Song landscapes, the impression of size dramatically heightened by the use of a leaping scale is present in Wang’s Landscape No. 850901. Also found in both paintings are, borrowing Wen Fong’s words, “peaks of cosmic proportions.” Equally effective is the use of “narrative” elements of cottages in most of Wang’s landscapes which, like the additive images of architecture and human activity in Fan Kuan’s painting, offer a temporal dimension to the work by suggesting the idea of traveling in the scene.

Another influence on Wang’s landscapes of stunning monumentality may be Yu Chengyao 余承堯 (1989-1993) (fig. 32), one of the relatively few twentieth-century painters whose works Wang admired enough to collect. The landscapes of the former military general and self-taught painter are characterized by a vast procession of meticulously detailed hills in firmly controlled compositions of fantastic grandeur. His huge vistas may have been an inspiration for C. C. Wang’s monumental landscapes, particularly after the two artists met again face to face in the later eighties in Taiwan.

C. C. Wang had repeatedly made analogies between painting and music, likening composition to the lyric or verbal element of a song, and brushwork to the voice, with voice not being simply a matter of technique but a complex idea involving purpose.


79 For a more detailed discussion on monumental landscapes of the Northern Song, see Fong, “Monumental Landscape Painting,” 121-140.


81 Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 44.
intentions, clarity, expression, and personality. Wang described brushwork as “something that appears to be technique, but goes beyond [it]” like the way “a well-trained voice delights a listener regardless of the words sung.” Thus, although he had come to put great emphasis on composition, it was still brushwork, or what he called the brush-voice, that meant most to him. By combining art-historically derived brushwork and his new sensibility with naturalness inspired by controlled accidents, by the 1980s he had accomplished something beyond skill:

Sung [Song] brushwork [which is adjusted to compositional or descriptive ends] is like opera singing. Yuan brushwork [which is far more abstract] is like jazz.... Opera has more skill, but jazz has naiveté. Naiveté has to be original. Now my singing has become just like jazz music.

C. C. Wang the connoisseur summarized the ways to appreciate Chinese painting under two major headings: breadth, which includes subject matter, compositional variety, etc.; and depth, which refers to the work’s inner spirit and the artist’s personality as revealed in the brushwork. In the 1970s and 1980s, while exploring new possibilities in composition, C. C. Wang the artist had developed a unique, unmistakable brush-voice, achieving both breadth and depth.

The third phase of C. C. Wang’s artistic journey was one of progression from experimentation to selective synthesis, merging together his experience and knowledge that spans the entire history of Chinese painting and encompasses modern and contemporary art from the East and the West. One of the seals he impressed on his

---


84 Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 44.

paintings reads “not [derived] from others, not from myself, not from the past, not from the present” (wuren wuwo, feigu feijin 無人無我,非古非今). What is true is that all from the others and himself, past and present, had been melted into one that corresponds to none.
CHAPTER 6

PHASE IV (LATE 1980s – 2003): DIVERGENCE WITH A COMMON DENOMINATOR

By the late 1980s, C. C. Wang was already in his eighties. It has been studied that traditional Chinese painters, after reaching old age and entering the last years of their careers, developed distinctive tendencies, some intensifying earlier characteristics, some simplifying their established style, some turning more raw and free, while some became repetitive. Yet never had there been an aged artist who had as dramatic and diverse changes, in both style and subject, as C. C. Wang did after the age of eighty. If the landscapes from phase III are considered Wang’s trademark image, then what the restless artist did in his late period was a move away from this established brand name.

In the late 1980s, C. C. Wang began to suffer from cataract problems, which lasted until the early 1990s before his cataract “matured” enough for an operation. During this period, his worsened eyesight may have hampered him in painting works with great details. Perhaps because of this, as well as his own artistic choice, it was also around this time that he not only turned to a diversity of subjects but also started to paint


87 Mrs. Yien-koo Wang King does not remember exactly when her father had the surgery, but Stanley-Baker said the artist was still waiting for the cataract to “mature” when she was writing “C. C. Wang and the Rebirth of Painting and Calligraphy,” which though not dated individually, was written for an exhibition catalogue published in 1994. From Wang King, interview by author, March 21, 2006; and Stanley-Baker, “Rebirth,” 9.
in a generally more simplified style that exhibits a more direct use of the brush. From the early 1990s to the early 2000s, he still painted landscapes, but not as many as in the previous two decades. In the early 1990s, the subjects of still lifes and flowers also reappeared after decades of preoccupation with landscapes. Then in his last years, he painted some works focusing on the basic components of landscapes — rocks. Throughout this entire time, he was also moving more and more in the direction of abstraction, which was best manifested in his calligraphic images and abstract works. This chapter will discuss his late career based on the division of his works into these five categories.

**Landscapes**

From the late 1980s to 2003, C. C. Wang’s landscapes are characterized by a few reductions. Not only did he paint fewer landscapes, also reduced was the use of impressed textures, which in this period appeared only occasionally. The monumental landscapes that dominated his previous phase also gave way to less panoramic scenes. While sharing these characteristics, his landscapes can still be divided into two main stylistic types, one being more painterly, and the other, by contrast, more linear.

*Landscape No. 911217* (fig. 33) painted in 1991 is an example with almost no linear brushwork in either outline or modeling. With this work, Wang turned to a wet brush and use of wash. Though executed with a fluid brush, the multiple layers of ink wash managed to shade the mountains into substantial solid forms. Another work done in a similar style is *Landscape No. 930800C* (fig. 34), one in a series of paintings of Mt. Huang (Huangshan 黃山) that C. C. Wang created prior to his visit to the mountain in
Known for its spectacular scenery of monumental, craggy peaks, and its seas of fog or “seas of clouds” as they are more commonly called, Mt. Huang has been such a popular subject for Chinese landscape painters since the late Ming dynasty that the term “Mt. Huang Painting School” emerged in the twentieth century. However, in this series, Wang did not depict the mountain with the dry and linear brushwork, and angular forms preferred by past generations of artists in their Mt. Huang paintings, and instead used rich ink wash, which the latter had mostly avoided. This may be a result of C. C. Wang’s impression of the mountain during his first visit to it in 1987. Arnold Chang, who was on the trip with him, said: “Unfortunately, it rained the entire time we were there and the mist was so thick that we saw hardly anything at all of the famed vistas.” Perhaps this is why Wang, in anticipation of the 1993 trip, painted a misty image of the mountain, making use of the fluid brush he increasingly employed.

In this Mt. Huang painting, C. C. Wang used a heavily-fibered paper. The ink washes applied to it thus align itself to the existing fibers to create textures more subtle than the imprinted fissures in his earlier landscapes. However, these “fiber textures” actually encompass the entire painting surface and serve more as background texture for the work as a whole than for the mountains in particular. What deserves more attention is the use of moist brushwork, the plays on ink tonality, and particularly the use of small horizontal ink patches in the depiction of the two mountain ranges. One may find this

---

88 Exhibition of C. C. Wang, 114-115.


type of brushwork close to that in the Yuan painter Fang Congyi’s 方從義 (active ca. 1340-1380) *Cloudy Landscape* (fig. 35), which was in Wang’s collection.

*Cloudy Landscape* is in fact not typical of Fang’s paintings, which mostly feature drier, more linear, and longer brush strokes, and are generally in a style similar to those of the four masters of the Yuan. However, as James Cahill wrote, “This landscape emphasizes Fang Congyi’s skilled brushwork, which he wielded to display a new expressionist mode underscoring shifts in both form and meaning .... In this painting, the influence from Song painters Mi Fu and Mi Youren [1074-1151] is evident.”\(^91\) So did C. C. Wang carry his skilled brushwork over to a new expressionist mode. If the Song-dynasty artists Mi Fu and Mi Youren had been an influence for Fang, it is equally likely that they were an inspiration for Wang, who in the years when he was engaged with art-historical studies, had painted in styles after a variety of ancient masters, including Mi Fu. There are no reliable paintings by Mi Fu extant today although a number of his works of calligraphy have survived. However, it is said that his painting style was followed, further developed, and refined by his son, Mi Youren.\(^92\) A comparison between C. C. Wang’s *Landscape No. 930800C* and Mi Youren’s *Cloudy Mountains* (fig. 36), which was also once in C. C. Wang’s collection, is worthwhile here.

Although the two mountain ranges in Wang’s painting are in dramatically different ink tones, they were rendered technically in the same way, built from an accumulation of ink dots of non-descriptive character. This technique is reminiscent of


Mi Youren’s use of horizontal ink dabs, known as “Mi-style ink-dots” (Mi dian 米點), in portraying misty mountains. In this work, formal details dissolve into images intended to suggest the natural, thus lending a quality similar to the simplicity and casualness of Mi Youren’s piece although Wang applied his ink dots more freely than Mi. It is as if Wang was rendering through the vehicle of landscapes the innate quality of Creation, the inexhaustible flavor of nature like the intangible mist. It is perhaps equally valid to say that he was at the same time exploring moist and saturated brushwork through a new landscape style. What Wang ventured into was similar to Mi Youren’s idea of “ink play” (moxi 墨戲), 93 which stressed the expressive possibilities of painting, the play with the properties of the brush and ink. After exploring expressive brushwork in paintings of flowers and small genre subjects (figs. 7 and 9) early in his transitional phase, C. C. Wang, in his mid-eighties, returned to plough a similar turf, yet this time, with more subtlety.

This loose ink style, relying more on a fluid brush, was not limited to Wang’s works of Mt. Huang although his interest in it may have grown when he painted the Mt. Huang series. In the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, he painted works such as Landscape (fig. 37) in a similar style with some variations, in monochrome ink or with color.

Another prominent style of landscape during this period is characterized by forms outlined with the brush and filled with ink or color wash, with little or no texturing by the brush or other means. In fact, he had painted a precursor to this type of works in 1986

---

93 It has been recorded that the notion of “ink-play” were used by the seeders of literati aesthetics, such as Wen Tong and Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), in poems or colophons on paintings. Mi Fu also had the idea of painting being like a game, but it was Mi Youren who emphasized the concept of art as “ink-play.” For a detailed discussion, see Susan Bush, The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Chi-ch’ang (1555-1636) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 70-72.
(fig.26). However, such works appear more often after the late 1980s, with increasing emphasis on lines in which the presence of the Chinese brush is unmistakable (hereafter referred to as brush-lines).

*Landscape* (fig. 38) of 1988 is an early example in which the outline mode is combined with semi-randomly applied textures and ink washes. While the lower portion of the painting is occupied by impressed textures, which may represent water or earth, the upper two-thirds is reserved for ink wash, on which brush-lines are applied to give form to a mass of rocks. Unlike the 1986 example, the brush-lines here are wetter and, as indicated by the right side of the rock mass, were applied when the ink wash underneath was not entirely dry. As a result, they partially diffused into the ink wash. This, together with the closeness of tone between the lines and the wash, gives a soft quality to the forms. Also of note with this work is the circular format, which the artist had rarely used before but employed quite frequently in his late period. The round format had been used for paintings on silk mounted as fans since ancient times and is particularly associated with Southern Song court painting. With the use of this particular format in a small scale, the cropped scene appears more focused. This in fact echoes the concentrated and close views of landscapes which also dominate Wang’s works in regular formats during this period.

The emphasis on brush-lines can be further illustrated by works done in his last years, such as a leaf from a landscape album (fig. 39) of 2001. Using ink of a dark overall

---

64 Although painted fans are known to have existed from at least the fifth century, fan painting, as a type, was only recognized as an established genre of Chinese painting since the Song dynasty. The fan shape allowed painters to display their expertise in managing a composition in an unusual format. See Jessica Rawson, ed., *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 354.
tonality, the bold lines in this painting readily stand out amidst the light color washes. The shifts between dry and wet brush-lines winding and twisting dynamically from bottom to top highly energize the rock forms. While in the previous phase, brushwork was concealed in accidental textures to create a natural whole, here brushwork is paramount and animated as if taking on a life of its own. The bold and raw use of brush-lines here did not come from C. C. Wang’s early training in the orthodox painting tradition but from the early Qing individualist Shitao, whose works Wang had ardently collected but whom he only began to appreciate after he expanded his visual horizon in his trips to Japan and the U.S. in the late 1940s.

Shitao was known for his originality and great variety of painting styles as opposed to the Orthodox School’s method of painting that imitated ancient styles. In his Landscape (fig. 40), grand, sweeping lines serving as contours and crevices of the rocks are in such movement that they resemble a network of pulsing veins. It is as if Shitao was not so much depicting rocks but exhibiting the forcefulness of brush-lines, and through them the movement of his own hand. On Shitao’s landscape style, Wen Fong has commented: “... [it] is calligraphic rather than pictorial, with its thickening-and-thinning brushstrokes animating the flat material ground of the paper surface.” The same can be said of C. C. Wang’s piece, although his play with the properties of lines, ink, and color was less bold than that of Shitao, who in this extraordinary work used multiple contours and, unprecedented in his time, dots in color.

95 Wen C. Fong, “Calligraphy as the Matrix of East Asian Painting,” Bijutsushi rōnsō 20: 133.

96 I have to thank Mr. Arnold Chang for showing me another painting of C. C. Wang in a similar style and alerting me of the relationship between it and Shitao’s work.
At about the same time, C. C. Wang also used the linear mode in a more descriptive way as in *Landscape No. 201215* (fig. 41). With minimal texturing, the painting features predominantly dry and angular brush strokes that serve chiefly as outlines for rock forms, thus providing a rugged appearance to the mountains. This sense of ruggedness is, however, softened by the gentle color washes of subtle gradation. In composition, this work corresponds more to Wang’s paintings in phase III, by capturing a relatively panoramic scene, but it still does not have the forbidding, majestic quality of his older landscape paintings. Like the previous two examples of his work, it differs from his trademark landscapes by further de-emphasizing textures of any kind and by exploring the various possibilities of freer brush-lines.

With his landscapes, C. C. Wang as an aged artist did not intensify his best-known stylistic characteristics or simplify them. Rather, he took on something quite different with a partial return to his early engagement, in which the notion of brushwork was predominant. Although he was not then doing works for art-historical study, he was again obsessed with the brush and the line — this time in an unrestrained manner neither confined by the orthodox tradition nor reliant on technical facility.

**Flowers and Still Lifes**

C. C. Wang had painted birds and flowers in his early years of artistic training. Then in the 1950s, he produced works of flowers and small genre subjects out of the need to accommodate market taste. Not taking these subjects very seriously, he once remarked that he could paint flowers, but they were decorative, not too subtle and not deep enough
for him. By the early 1990s, he did not necessarily changed his view, but he had again become an explorer and shaken off the mental shackles of many traditional landscape painters who often considered flowers as a trivial subject or a "lesser" genre.

In an interview in 1992, when asked if there was something that he had not done or would like to do in landscape, C. C. Wang said: "I wish I could use different subject matter to develop what I think is a good brush.... Same kind of brushwork, same idea of tradition but some other subject matter." In the following few years, he did return to some subjects he had abandoned for decades. Between 1993 and 1995, he painted a series of works depicting flowers and objects randomly arranged on his table, as well as street scenery viewed through his window. As his daughter recalled, he by then had become more housebound. Even though he had never really painted according to what he saw, and he always called his landscapes "mountains of the mind" (xiongzhong qiuahuo 胸中丘壑), everything he saw was a potential source of inspiration. Quite naturally, with him spending more time at home, his attention was drawn more and more to things immediately around him.

Not unlike one of the new directions he took with his landscapes, in his works of small genre subjects, C. C. Wang put great emphasis on the brush-line. Still Life No. 940000 (fig. 42) is an example of the artist's play with brush-lines and color planes. In composition, Wang transformed much of what he had learned from his landscape

---

97 Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 24.


paintings to this still life, particularly the utilization of the entire picture surface. The lack of empty space in Wang’s work is rarely found in traditional small genre paintings. While serving simply as outlines of objects, the lines in this painting exhibit a variety of calligraphic brushwork. The brushes, brush pot, books, and the stack of ink plates on the left were rendered with dry and stern lines, whereas the flowers were delineated with wetter, swifter, and smoother lines. Yet, most attractive are the crisscrossing lines on the far right done, slowly but with great strength, as if having been carved into the paper. Outlined with Wang’s skilled calligraphic hand, the objects were rendered through the juxtaposition of color planes, which set the objects in some sort of motion against an ambiguous dark background.

In the 1950s, when Wang had his experiments with Western-style painting, he was particularly interested in the study of the relations between formal elements, as shown in the still life in casein from 1956 (fig. 11). At that time, while modeling forms with color planes, C. C. Wang brought to his Western-style painting strong linear elements from his traditional training with the brush. Some forty years later, the artist once again engaged with the play of linear and planar rhythms, but with the Chinese painting medium. James Cahill saw Wang’s mid-1990s flower paintings as explorations of relationships between European and Chinese, especially the Shanghai School styles, with Zhao Zhiqian 趙之謙 (1829-1884) and Wu Changshi 吳昌碩 (1844-1927) meeting Henri Matisse (1869-1954) and Emil Nolde (1867-1956).100

Some of C. C. Wang’s still lifes from the 1990s feature striking color not usually found in traditional Chinese painting. For example, the bright yellow ambiguous background in *Still Life No. 940706* (fig. 43) hardly recalls any Chinese precedents. This liberated use of color and the application of dark outlines are both characteristics of Matisse (fig. 44) and Nolde. However, unlike Matisse’s or Nolde’s, Wang’s outlines embody the unique properties of the Chinese brush and ink on paper when executed by a hand skilled in calligraphy. In this respect, his use of calligraphic lines in works of flowers and still lifes, particularly in *Still Life No. 940000* (fig. 42), came close to the style of the representative figures of the Shanghai School of painting, Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshi. Zhao and Wu were known for their commitment to calligraphic brushwork and epigraphic elements upon the genre of flower painting. Zhao developed for the brushwork in his painting a noticeably plump and angular manner that he followed in his writing and seal carving. Wu, also known for his seal carving skills, emphasized an epigraphic quality with his brushstrokes producing awkward (in a positive sense), heavy, and emphatic ink lines, which were often accompanied by bright colors (fig. 45).¹⁰¹ C. C. Wang, in painting his flowers and still lifes, did not necessarily have particular styles of these “calligraphy-painters” in his mind.¹⁰² However, like one of the directions he took in landscape paintings during that period, he consciously used assertive brush-lines which he had developed through his practice of calligraphy. In this way, Wang was similar to these masters of the Epigraphic School of Painting within the broader Shanghai School.

¹⁰¹ Fong, *Between Two Cultures*, 29-34 and 56-61.

It has also been said that the bright color in Wang’s 1961 semi-abstract and abstract works (figs. 12 and 13) was “inspired by the brilliant hues of the Fauves and German Expressionists and perhaps especially by Kandinsky, Marin, and Nolde.”103 If it was not coincidental, then C. C. Wang, in the 1990s, was not only taking a renewed interest in flowers and still lifes but also re-exploring the Western sensibility of color and planar arrangements along with the Chinese calligraphic sense of linear aesthetic.

Further illustrating his formal exploration is *Still Life No. 941:00C(a)* (fig. 46), in which lines were introduced not only as outlines of objects but also as random additions serving no particular descriptive purpose, as shown in the stack of pigment storage boxes and the window frame. Here, it seems that the artist was intrigued by the diffusive quality of lines applied on still-wet ink and color wash, and once again by the semi-accidental effects resulting from the interaction between painting elements themselves. With a pale color scheme, the work presents a geometric composition not seen in Wang’s paintings before.

Playful and full of life, this group of flower paintings and still lifes demonstrates that C. C. Wang in his mid- to late eighties was still creative and evolving in a way not unlike his transition of the 1950s and 1960s. With this as an intermediate step, Wang would be further devoted to the play between calligraphic elements and Western formal variations, moving in the direction of abstraction. *Abstract No. 940713* (fig. 47) is more about the inter-effects between line, color, form, and composition than the depiction of the recognizable-enough cluster of houses.

--

Rocks

The practice of including rocks in garden or courtyard design to suggest the essence of a whole landscape has a long history in China. A further reduction to this essence may be represented by rocks on scholars’ desks. Rocks had been a favorite subject of painters from at least the Northern Song dynasty. A native of Suzhou, C. C. Wang had long been familiar with the famous Lake Tai (Taihu 太湖), one of the four greatest origins of rare rocks, in his home town. He began collecting rocks in his twenties; with his appreciation of rocks as God’s creation, as the spiritual union of the universe and man, he filled his home in Manhattan with rare rocks. As the microcosmic model of the macrocosm, these rocks had provided inspirations for his landscape works. However, it was not until his last few years that Wang painted rocks individually as paintings for public view.

In 1998, on the occasion of the publication of a book on scholar’s rocks, which included some from his collection, C. C. Wang offered to make paintings of two rocks owned by the book author. In his last few years when he spent even more time at home, Wang, at his daughter’s suggestion, painted a series of rock paintings, particularly between 2000 and 2002. As a landscapist, he preferred rocks as models in contrast to


106 Hu, preface to The Spirit of Gongshi, 6.

107 Wang King, interview by author, March 21, 2006. Most of C. C. Wang’s paintings of rocks that have been published are dated between 2000 and 2002.
Western painters’ use of human bodies as models. He saw them as the bones and frames of a landscape, as the kernels of nature’s energy; and through depicting their shapes, textures and relationships to each other, he could present the visual manifestations of the underlying principle of nature.

Throughout the history of Chinese painting, different types of texturing brushstrokes (cunfa) have been developed to render different types of rock surface. For example, Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322) of the Yuan dynasty, in depicting rocks, was particularly interested in employing the “flying white” (feibai) brush, which refers to the technique of using dry ink and leaving streaks of untouched paper between splaying hairs of the brush. Formerly concealing his brushwork in accidentally achieved “natural” marks in his landscapes, C. C. Wang turned to exhibit texturing brushstrokes in his rock paintings. Instead of showing preference for a particular style of texturing strokes, he almost used a different type of strokes for each work.

Rock in the Collection of Ms. Kemin (fig. 48) is a painting of a grotesquely shaped rock from Lake Tai (fig. 49). To render the rock’s foraminite structure with penetrating holes, Wang relied mostly on the articulation of long, angular, and dry strokes against a lightly inked background. The twisting brushwork gives rise to the impression that the rock form is in mutation, which is in close accordance with the organic-looking form of

---


the actual rock. The inscription of several lines, an element that had been absent from his paintings for a long time, reappeared in this work. Although this can only be considered incidental since the work was dedicated to a friend, the inscribed poem by the renowned Tang poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) tells of Wang’s fascination with that piece of rock, or perhaps grotesque rocks in general, as the poem reads: “As if having suddenly fallen from the sky, it does not look like one belonging to this world” (Huyi tianshang luo, busi renjian you. 忽疑天上落，不以人间有。).

For the depictions of scholar’s rocks in his last years, C. C. Wang said that they were based on his study of many actual specimens in his studio but that he never painted a “portrait” of a specific rock, perhaps except the two he did for his friend’s book. Thus, apart from the two 1998 rock paintings, his other rock paintings can be seen as “mind images” extracted and transformed from his visual experiences with actual rocks. With the infinite variety in structure and textures of rocks in reality, the artist could play with virtually all kinds of brushstrokes with this subject, imbuing his rocks with different personalities. In Rock No. 210400 (fig. 50), heavily inked brushstrokes were applied forcefully but freely to give form to a ruggedly shaped rock that seemed to have been chiseled, whereas in Rock No. 210115 (fig. 51), ink washes of varying tones were combined with dry brushstrokes to result in a gentle-looking conglomerate rock. Although the two examples were both the painter’s “mind images,” they still retain such representational quality that one would not mistake them for anything but rocks. However,

---

111 C. C. Wang worked on several versions of this painting and another one depicting rocks from Kemin Hu’s collection before he was finally satisfied with them. See Hu, preface to The Spirit of Gongshi, 6.

a further distillation of textural properties into non-representational calligraphic brushstrokes can be found in Rock No. 22090816A (fig. 52), which may be seen as an abstract image, an ink mass overlaid with a few quick brushstrokes.

Roger Goepper, in discussing the texture-drawing of rocks, wrote: “In Chinese painting, so inclined to bestow upon the media an independent value of their own, these brush strokes were soon credited with a function beyond that of pure representation: they were supposed to give the rocks a definite formal expression [i.e., a non-representational expression through the mastery of formal properties of brush strokes].” In this line of thought, C. C. Wang, by taking an element out of a landscape and letting it stand alone without contextual details, presented a pure form that focuses on the beauty of brushwork. Every student who studies Chinese painting knows that before one learns to paint a landscape, one must first learn textural brushwork through depicting rocks. In the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, the section on rocks comes before that on mountains (fig. 53). C. C. Wang in his nineties seemed more playful, bringing himself back to the basics of painting, as if revisiting his teen years when he studied according to the painting manual, but now with one of the best-trained hands on earth. Perhaps he was not that playful but was just proving himself in another way as the popular Chinese saying goes: “The simpler the task, the easier it is to see one’s true capability” (yuè jiǎndàn yuejié yuánzhāng 越簡單越見真章).

---


Calligraphy and Calligraphic Images

C. C. Wang first learned calligraphy from his father when he was about four or five years old, even before he started to paint. After that, he never stopped practicing calligraphy, spending one to two hours on it every day. However, it was not until the early 1990s, when he was awaiting his cataract operation, that he devoted himself even more to calligraphy. Sun-chang Lo, who studied calligraphy under Wang, wrote in 1993 of his teacher practicing calligraphy for six to eight hours daily. It is also quite well known that Wang practiced calligraphy every day by filling pages of old Manhattan telephone directories. According to his daughter, the phone books provided cheap paper on which he felt free wielding his brush. In fact, some of these examples of calligraphy exercise on phonebook pages have been exhibited and published as artworks in the past few years.

From his interest in and practice of calligraphy, C. C. Wang came to realize that “before painting or calligraphy, there was the line and the brush” and that he could always investigate new visual relationships “by returning to the essence of painting and calligraphy, the line and the brush.” As such, with most of his paintings, he stepped back from the image and was drawn more and more to individual elements that make up the image. As shown in the development of his painting, he had long been straining toward abstraction, perhaps subconsciously, but it was in calligraphy that he jumped


117 Silbergeld, “Art without Age,” 8; and Wang King, interview by author, March 21, 2006.

118 Wang, “Comments,” 4-5.
explosively to, what most would say, total abstraction. Nonetheless, in calligraphy, he was no less attached to his native artistic tradition than in his painting.

Before discussing C. C. Wang’s new mode of fashioning calligraphy, a look at his works in formal calligraphic style, which he still constantly produced, is necessary. As he was with his painting, in calligraphy, Wang was nourished by a variety of calligraphic styles and scripts throughout history, from the origin of Chinese characters in pictographs to the mannerly and bold “wild cursive” script (kuangcao 狂草). Calligraphy No. 93041633 (EW) (fig. 54) of four characters reading “Bodhisattva heart” (pusa xinchang 菩薩心腸) is a representative example showing inspiration from the harsh, sharp-edged, angular, and weighty style of characters engraved on Northern Wei stone steles of the fifth and sixth centuries (fig. 55). Writing with a big brush assertively with tremendous strength as if carving with a knife, Wang was not paying as much emphasis on the clarity between individual strokes that make up the characters, as on the weight, firmness, and solidity of the four characters as a whole. Some of the character strokes actually overlap or merge with each other into broad ink strokes, leaving little empty space on the paper. With the knife-edge quality in writing and the maximum use of space in composition, Sun-chang Lo suggested that this calligraphic style of Wang was derived from the compositional principles of Han-dynasty intaglio seals, which are characterized by a minimum of space left between characters and strokes.119 This work, though done in the traditional manner, lying between the general categories of regular (kaishu 楷書) and running scripts (xingshu 行書), illustrates at the same time a personal calligraphic style.

119 Luo, “Xiongzhong qianhuo,” XIII.
developed by C. C. Wang, who had digested styles of calligraphy and other art forms from sources perhaps no fewer than the painting styles he had studied.

An example of his calligraphy on phonebook pages mounted together into one piece may demonstrate the variety of calligraphic styles he had mastered. In *Calligraphy No. 900000A* (figs. 56a and 56b), with the exception of the two lower right sections, which show the same stylistic characteristics within the broad category of running-regular script, all other sections each virtually features a different calligraphic style even though they may fall into the same broad script types. In these exercise works, the writings all follow the structure of character-formation and are thus recognizable although the reading of some of those in the highly abbreviated style may require special training.

However, a lot of Wang’s readable calligraphy can hardly be categorized. For example, *Calligraphy No. C93052036* (fig. 57a) as a whole does not follow any established script types. On an individual basis, each character may loosely correspond to a particular calligraphic style, but they were put together in a way that did not observe any traditional convention. With characters invading each other’s realm, the principle of columnar arrangement based on an imaginary underlying grid is violated (fig. 57b), and the characters were considered in relationship to one another not only as calligraphic lines but also as highly changeable forms in relation to the entire composition. As a result, though readily readable, the writing entails a great sense of design.

C. C. Wang said that the long tradition of painting in China was not a static one, but one with painters, calligraphers, and theorists attempting to redefine the relationship of the brush to form throughout history; and it was through these redefinitions that
Chinese painting and calligraphy was able to evolve and retain their vitality and meaning within Chinese culture.\textsuperscript{120} Having already brought forth the redefinition that brushwork is not restricted to the brush when he concentrated on painting, he further applied it to calligraphy. \textit{Calligraphy No. C93052824A} (fig. 58), a totally readable piece with lines from Li Bo’s 李白 (701-762) poem in running script, was not done with the Chinese brush but a magic marker. Here, one may wonder whether a piece of magic-marker-writing can be considered calligraphy in the Chinese sense. Stanley-Baker has very effectively articulated her argument for the case by pointing out that the notion of brushwielding (\textit{yongbi} 用筆), one of the two key aspects of calligraphy, is not confined to the physical movement of the Chinese brush on paper, but on a deeper level, it refers to “the manner in which the calligrapher’s wrist movements respond to his minutest impulses.”\textsuperscript{121} What distinguishes a calligrapher from a casual writer lies in the speed and the weight shifts in his wrist, which both evolve from and are conditioned by all the original artistic stimuli that have led a calligrapher to develop his own “heart-print” (or “imprint of a personal quality”),\textsuperscript{122} which is similar to the idea of brush-voice. A simpler parallel can be said of the stone steles which, though “inscribed” with the knife instead of the brush, bear the calligraphic quality of the calligrapher’s innermost consciousness and can be regarded no less as calligraphic pieces. In the terminology of calligraphy and painting, there have been since ancient times sayings such as “traces of a leaky roof” (\textit{wulouhen} 屋漏痕) and “worm-holed books and bird tracks”

\textsuperscript{120} Wang, “Comments,” 4.

\textsuperscript{121} Stanley-Baker, “Rebirth,” 10.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 11.
(chongshu niaoji 蟲書鳥跡), which respectively refer to qualities as natural as rain stains, worm-holed tracks in books and marks made by birds in the sand. One may then look deep into the words “brushwork” and “brushweilding,” and find that the inherent quality and potential of calligraphy may lie beyond the physical tool and can be achieved as long as the arm-wrist-hand maneuvering the tool is itself “calligraphic” enough. This is why, with the popular use of non-brush writing tools in modern times, there emerged a term that can be loosely translated as “pen calligraphy” (yingbi shufa 硬筆書法) referring to writing done in a calligraphic manner but with hard-tip writing tools such as fountain pens, felt-tip pens, ballpoint pens, pencils, etc. In Calligraphy No. C93052824A, C. C. Wang’s heart-print is unmistakable as in the first example (fig. 54), but the magic maker may produce an even stronger knife-edge quality and a more weighty yet fluid feeling. For someone as open-minded as Wang, the type of writing tool used was not a major concern. It was his hand and wrist that mattered most. In fact, as with the non-brush textures in his landscapes, he was often fascinated by specific “calligraphic” qualities that unconventional tools might deliver, sometimes perhaps even better than did the Chinese brush. Thus, one should not be too surprised to find that, for some of his calligraphic works that increasingly approach abstraction, he used a sponge-head house-painting brush.

With a more than solid foundation in calligraphy, while having undergone an exciting and successful journey in painting, C. C. Wang by 1993 had embarked on the

---

123 These two terms can be found in some of the seals C. C. Wang impressed on his works.
path of creating what calligraphy theorists call modern calligraphy\textsuperscript{124} (xiandai shufa 现代書法) and what he himself called calligraphic images\textsuperscript{125} (shufa yixiang 書法意象 or shufa xingxiang 書法形象).

The categorization of C. C. Wang’s works with calligraphic elements but done in unconventional ways has been rather confusing. In some publications, his works that resemble written words but actually show no recognizable characters are referred to as calligraphic images, whereas completely abstract ones not at all suggestive of Chinese characters but derived from his calligraphic impulse are entitled Abstract or Abstraction.\textsuperscript{126} However, some publications have treated these two types of works as belonging to the same category of calligraphic images.\textsuperscript{127} In the most recent major publication on C. C. Wang, both types were entitled Abstract.\textsuperscript{128} Such inconsistency in categorizing and titling these works, sometimes even the same piece of work, in different publications reflects the varied perspectives of the editors, but most importantly,

\textsuperscript{124} Yiguo Zhang identified two general trends in contemporary calligraphy. The first is marked by the revitalization of traditional methods, with works concerned with the exploration and rediscovery of classic works and styles. The second trend is so-called modern calligraphy, which departs radically from traditional methods. See Yiguo Zhang, \textit{Brushed Voices: Calligraphy in Contemporary China} (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, 1998), 5.

\textsuperscript{125} For C. C. Wang’s works that combine elements of calligraphy but do not form actual characters, various scholars have used different terms: Arnold Chang and Jerome Silbergeld described the works as “calligraphic images,” Joan Stanley-Baker mentioned them as “calligraphy-paintings;” and Jan Stuart, “painted or manufactured calligraphy.”

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{C. C. Wang: Old Master, New Ideas} (New York: E & J Frankel, 1995); and \textit{Kaikodo Journal} III (Spring 1997).


\textsuperscript{128} \textit{C. C. Wang’s Painting}. 68
illustrates the fragile distinctions to be made among works that may lie anywhere along
the spectrum between the two poles of “character-resemblance” and “abstraction.”
Sometimes the artist might experience a gradual shift in one work, beginning with the
first character in recognizable form but letting his wrist take over afterwards and
producing forms that do not correspond to any preconceived word structure;¹²⁹ whereas
other times, he might mix real characters with meaningless lines that wind across the
paper, or write in an order antithetical to normal brush writing, which progresses from
right to left, top to bottom, thus leaving no clue as to where the composition begins.¹³⁰

For these two different yet closely related types of works, Arnold Chang has
chosen to refer to them separately as calligraphic images and abstractions, suggesting the
calligraphic images as bridging the gap between Wang’s still life paintings and pure
abstractions.¹³¹ Concurring with this view, the following discussion will be based on this
categorization and at the same time attempt to show the blurred distinction by
investigating works in an order that moves from the pole of character-resemblance to that
of abstraction.¹³²

An example of a calligraphic image, Calligraphy No. C93082714A (fig. 59),
again reminding one of the weighty and carved quality of Northern Wei steles, is
composed of three columns, each apparently with three characters. However, as described


¹³² As the works cited in this study will follow the titles used in previous publications, which suffer from
an inconsistency in titling, there may also be an inconsistency in this study between the works’ titles and
their categorization. For example, works entitled Calligraphy may be included in the section on abstraction.
in the exhibition catalogue, they are columns of character-shapes transcending meaning. If one tries to read them as characters, one would be frustrated to find that they are nonsensical, simply strokes and lines blended into character-shapes without considerations for prescribed word configurations.

By the same token, Calligraphy No. 93061718 (fig. 60) is one that looks readable but actually is not. For this piece, C. C. Wang started with a poem in mind when he lifted the brush, but he did not write any complete words; instead, he used only components of characters to create what he compared to a staccato pattern like jazz. In this work, the way that the strokes and lines were executed, the inherent dimension of wrist pressure, and the momentum of forms amidst an intangible sense of linkage throughout the entire work were all derived from principles of calligraphy, particularly the running and cursive scripts.

Calligraphy No. 980708 (fig. 61), which looks somewhat like writing in early bronze or seal scripts, is yet another example of a calligraphic image. As in the previous examples, components of characters are put into play with one another, and the role that individual strokes might play in the construction of an actual character is minimized. In this light, these calligraphic images may be seen as the result of the deconstruction of characters into abstract calligraphic elements and the reconstruction of such elements into character-resembling forms although the process was probably carried out by the artist subconsciously. This notion of deconstruction should be distinguished from that of

---

133 The Exhibition of C. C. Wang, 117.

"deconstructive calligraphy" in the context of Chinese conceptual art. Such conceptual art is represented by so-called "pseudo-character" works, graphs that look at first glance like real Chinese characters but which on closer inspection turn out to be meaningless patterns invented by the artist — a form of art that emerged among the avant-garde artists from mainland China, Taiwan, and overseas in the 1980s.136

C. C. Wang's character-resembling calligraphic images are different from these pseudo-characters in essential conception. For many of the avant-garde artists who have pursued the play with characters and calligraphy, such as Wenda Gu 谷文達 (b. 1955) and Xu Bing 徐冰 (b. 1955), two of the best known contemporary Chinese artists in the international art scene, their art is related to the ideological, literary, or even political role of the Chinese written word. Wenda Gu (fig. 62), by revising standard character configurations, using upside-down, reversed, incorrect, and restructured characters, sought to destroy the underlying structure of the Chinese characters while generally maintaining the Chinese calligraphic style. What he wanted to express was a "skepticism about man's rational capability" and the "destruction of the ideological privilege of Chinese language employed since ancient times."137 He said: "In their outright rejection of classical Chinese traditions and in their suggestion of something clandestine, the


137 Gao Minglu, The Wall, 140.
"Pseudo-Characters Series represented my first brush with a social taboo." Although he was trained in calligraphy, and his works are imbued with certain calligraphic elements, such elements are preserved primarily to create tension between concept and aesthetic concerns, while the concept is one that cannot be detached from the inherent literary content of the “altered” words.

Xu Bing’s famous Book from the Sky was an installation composed of paper and books handprinted with fictitious characters using a set of wooden moveable type carved with pseudo-characters he invented by rearranging elements from real Chinese characters. Though playing with formal elements of Chinese characters, the work was intended to be critical of Chinese culture. As one in the generation that grew up during the Cultural Revolution, Xu Bing saw Mao Zedong’s transformation of Chinese culture as most deeply rooted in his transformation of language by the campaign to simplify characters. He wrote: “This remolding of my earliest memories — the promulgation of new character after new character, the abandonment of old characters that I had already mastered … shadowed my earliest education…. In my own personal experience, this feeling of a culture being turned upside down was particularly pronounced.” Thus, as Silbergeld suggested, the written word became his art, his weapon, and the means for his

---

138 Carol Lufty, “Asian Artist in America: Wenda Gu,” quoted without complete citation in Wu Hung, Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, 1999), 41. In the early 1980s, an exhibition of Gu’s art at Xi’an was closed by the local government as his pseudo-characters were thought to have political motivations. See Wang Yin and Yan Sun, Reinventing Tradition in a New World: The Arts of Gu Wenda, Wang Mansheng, Xu Bing and Zhang Hongtu (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 2004), 25.

critique of Chinese art and culture. Closely related to ideological and cultural concerns, the pseudo-characters in Book from the Sky were all modeled in the rigid Song-dynasty style, one of the standard printed typefaces, entailing little to no calligraphic quality. His Square Word Calligraphy (fig. 63), however, plays with the idea of Chinese calligraphy. The Square Word Calligraphy is a new way of rendering English in the format of Chinese characters by stylizing English letters into stroke-like Chinese-style radicals. To enhance the illusion of the seeming Chinese characters, he assumed Chinese calligraphic principles and wrote the words in the regular script style. With this, he sought not only to combine the very different writing systems of Western and Eastern languages, but also to demystify calligraphy for the Westerners who view Chinese calligraphy with awe and respect.

As Kuiyi Shen suggested, the interest of these artists in dealing with Chinese characters relates to the historical background in which their generation grew up. They were for at least a decade surrounded by “big-character posters,” the government’s propaganda tool during the Cultural Revolution. As such, their works may be literally meaningless, but they were conceived with profound implications about the Chinese written language and along with that Chinese culture. The altered or invented characters were carriers of messages that are ideologically, culturally, and sometimes politically

---


141 Erickson, The Art of Xu Bing, 68.

concerned. Calligraphic elements were involved in these works mostly based on the emblematic value of calligraphy as one of the oldest icons of Chinese art and culture, not for the calligraphic and aesthetic notions of brushwork, rhythm, and movement. In the calligraphic images of C. C. Wang, however, these calligraphic elements are crucial merely because of their inherent, historically-conditioned aesthetic qualities. Wang’s intention of taking apart and reconfiguring character components was a much simpler, and one may say, purer one — to strip his calligraphy of semantic or literary meaning so that both he and onlookers can focus on the essence of calligraphy as a form of visual art. As Yien-koo Wang King said, one should think of her father’s calligraphic images simply as that, without any complicated conceptual intentions, and least of all the ideological, cultural, or political implications of the avant-garde artists.143

Many of C. C. Wang’s works are farther away from the pole of character resemblance. In Calligraphy No. C94011614 (fig. 64), words were transcended to yield to a visual composition of pure rhythm and linear beauty. If his training in and obsession with traditional calligraphy and brushwork had not already become his second nature, these lines might easily fall into the category of random scribbling. Yet with the tip of the brush centered inside the line (zhongfeng 中锋), Wang achieved an extraordinary cursive rhythm by varying his wrist pressure while wielding his brush at high speed.

As he often made analogy between painting and music, brushwork and voice, the notion of rhythm clearly was important when it came to his calligraphic works. Like the Chinese proverb that reads “the brush sings as the ink dances” (bige mowu 笔歌墨舞),

---

he described his routine of practicing calligraphy daily as a singer “vocalizing in a garden to have a big voice;”\textsuperscript{144} recognizing the intrinsic rhythmic and dynamic quality of brushwork. In works like \textit{Calligraphy No. 93061718} (fig. 60), rhythmic effects were created through the combination of broken strokes and shapes of character components. Here, however, he achieved rhythm through the momentum of the energy traveling along the continuous lines across the entire paper, and through the slimness and heaviness in different parts of the lines. His long-time curiosity with accidental effects was also carried over to result in the partial merging of dark brush-lines and light ink spots in the background. Despite this unusual effect, his lines evoke the free, unrestrained quality of the “wild cursive” script practiced by individualist calligraphers including Zhang Xu 張旭 (ca. 675-749) and Huaisu 懷素 (737-after 798) since the eighth century. Another important influence may also be traced to Wang Duo\textsuperscript{145} 王鐸 (1592-1652) whose works referred to as “Rhapsody in Black,”\textsuperscript{146} were characterized by an overall balance achieved by harmonizing the elements of calligraphy instead of emphasizing individual strokes.\textsuperscript{147}

Also bordering on the boundary between calligraphic image and abstraction is \textit{Calligraphy No. C94011615} (fig. 65). With gossamer-like lines done with a felt-tip pen looping, twisting, and following a rough columnar order, the work invokes the “wild cursive” script of the “mad monk” Huaisu (fig. 66). The style of this piece and the

\textsuperscript{144} Stuart, “Singing Brush,” 46.
\textsuperscript{145} Yien-koo Wang King said of Wang Duo as one of the calligraphers C. C. Wang admired. Wang King, interview by author, March 21, 2006.
\textsuperscript{147} Yiguo Zhang, \textit{Brushed Voices}, 11.
previous example, both with lines curving and looping against slightly inked background in a free manner, is the basis for many of C. C. Wang’s abstract works, in which lines were further brought into play with wash, color, form, and composition.

C. C. Wang’s calligraphic images may arouse curiosity about the theoretical tension between the perception of calligraphy as aestheticized handwriting based on a system of lexical communication and that of calligraphy as pure visual forms.\textsuperscript{148} With this in question, one may wonder whether Wang’s works should be discussed in calligraphic terms. However, the distinction between calligraphy and writing or written words was made as early as the eighth century by Zhang Huaguan 張懷瓘 (ca. 714-760) in his \textit{Discussion of Scripts (Wenzi lun 文字論)}. He wrote: “those who know calligraphy profoundly only observe its spiritual brilliance and do not see the character forms,”\textsuperscript{149} thus distinguishing calligraphy as an art not necessarily associated with the forms of the written words. This is further asserted by the fact that the writings done by artists like Zhang Xu and Huaisu, in “wild cursive” script to an often illegible extent, had evolved into a recognized style of calligraphy. As Wen Fong suggested, the theoretical separation of semantic content from visual form is the very factor that elevated the status of calligraphy to that of a fine art.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Robert E. Harrist, Jr. said of Xu Bing’s works as inviting analysis of this tension, which I find even more pronounced in C. C. Wang’s works since the latter adheres to calligraphy more. See Harrist, “\textit{Book from the Sky at Princeton: Reflections on Scale, Sense and Sound},” in \textit{Persistence/Transformation}, ed. Silbergeld and Chang, 32.

\textsuperscript{149} Xiong Bingming, \textit{Zhongguo shufa litan tixi} (Systems of theories of Chinese calligraphy) (Tianjin Shi: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 32.

the forms of the written words by varying degrees and thereby devoid of semantic content, can be analyzed merely based on the calligraphic elements and principles they embrace.

Stanley-Baker identified structural principles (*zhangfu 章法*) and brushwielding as the two main aspects of calligraphy.\textsuperscript{151} Yiguo Zhang, speaking specifically of contemporary calligraphy, said the style of calligraphy is determined by five elements: brushwork, construction of characters, application of ink, composition, and rhythm.\textsuperscript{152} In fact, Stanley-Baker’s structural principles embody Zhang’s construction of characters and composition; her brushwielding adheres to Zhang’s brushwork and application of ink; and the combination of structural principles and brushwielding results in rhythm. Based on these criteria, C. C. Wang’s calligraphic images can be summarized as the manifestation of rhythmically-conscious, historically-derived brushwielding unbounded by traditional structural principles.

**Abstractions**

Using “abstract” as the word for categorization in this context may itself be problematic since the character-rewsembling works discussed above may also be seen as abstract, or at least semi-abstract, when they are stripped of their role as representations of characters. Thus, the categorization here should be regarded more as a convenient, relative framework for ease and clarity of discussion, rather than a rigid, theoretically exact division.

\textsuperscript{151} Stanley-Baker, “Rebirth,” 10-11.

\textsuperscript{152} Zhang, *Brushed Voices*, 5.
From his practice of calligraphy in cursive script to the calligraphic images with curving and spiraling lines, C. C. Wang developed quite a few abstract works with a similar linear rhythm. In *Calligraphy No. 991215* (fig. 67), strong calligraphic traces can be found in the way the brush moves with its tip centered, at varying speeds, and with periodic pauses; in the unmistakable assertive application of wrist pressure; and in the brushwork carried over from his own calligraphy in cursive script. In fact, amidst all the curls and loops, a few characters can be identified as if the artist was playing a game with the viewers. While lines in *Calligraphy No. C94011614* (fig. 64) roughly follow a columnar structure, the ones here flow all over the paper in no apparent order although a certain sense of verticality is evoked by some downward-moving strokes. If the lines in the two previous examples were dancing *against* slightly inked background, then the ones here are actually dancing *with* the red and inked planes between them. As such, strong rhythm is generated not only through linear movement and composition, but also through planar movement as well as color and tonal contrasts. While preserving calligraphic flavor, this work is more about the interaction of formal or pictorial elements done in the same or an even more spontaneous manner he had used in his experimental color abstractions in the early 1960s. Again likening his works to music, C. C. Wang called these new abstractions “‘musical’ paintings, and more specifically … rhythmic improvisations like those of jazz.”

Done with a felt-tip pen, the lines in *Calligraphy No. 201217* (fig. 68) derive from the model of *Calligraphy No. C94011615* (fig. 65) and the style of Huaisu’s “wild cursive” script with gossamer lines. Here, some sense of the written word and the

---

153 Cahill, “Late Period,” 5.
columnar structure is retained although no readable character can be found. The lines, while winding and looping, also serve as contours dividing the spaces between them into planes in a more delicate manner. The entire pictorial plane, broken up into small, organic shapes in light blue and ink of subtle tonal gradations, evokes a transparent quality with the separate yet seemingly overlapping sub-planes. With this, it is quite natural for one to think of the influence of Cubism that involves the fragmentation of forms into planes as observed from different perspectives. The innate allusion of the lines to calligraphy here is balanced with their role as the linear element determining and interlocking with other pictorial elements.

*Calligraphy No. 960100* (fig. 69) may seem divorced from Chinese calligraphy, but on closer inspection, the internal rules of logic C. C. Wang followed are evident. Against the luminous field in soft yellow that may owe to his sensibility with light effects in landscape painting, the lines, wet and forceful in some part, dry and marked with the speed of “flying white” effects in others, bear traces of Wang’s calligraphy training. Recalling influences from all kinds of scripts he had assimilated, this skein of lines may remind one of Wang’s flower and still life paintings with calligraphy and picturing bound together as one. As the lines here are reminiscent of the firm and determined ones that Zhao Zhiqian and Wu Changshi often used in their paintings (fig. 45) as well as those in C. C. Wang’s own earlier works (fig. 59), the meeting pointing here is particularly interesting. While Zhao and Wu developed their lines primarily by fusing calligraphy and seal carving skills to attain an “antiquarian epigrapher’s taste” (*jinshiqi* 金石氣), which refers to a deliberately naïve, slightly awkward quality derived from Han- (206 BCE-220 CE) and Wei-dynasty (386-535) calligraphy on steles excavated during the late Qing
period, C. C. Wang’s lines were a combination of various scripts, with the chiseled “Northern Wei stele” calligraphy an important one. Thus, in specific qualities of the lines, there is a distant link with past calligraphy-painters; in the work itself, there is a coming-together of calligraphy and painting; and in Wang’s development at this point, there is a connection between his abstractions and still lifes.

A closer derivative from Wang’s still lifes may be Abstract No. 940705 (fig. 70), which is a coming-together of Still Life No. 941100C(a) (fig. 46) and the actually semi-abstract Abstract No. 940713 (fig. 47). Through his still lifes, C. C. Wang turned his attention to the relationship between linear and planar forms, with the linear forms originating from his cultivation in calligraphy and brushwork. It was a process of reduction of his subconscious enterprise of myriad artistic experience into a product, in which the linear and the planar, the calligraphic and the painterly cannot be, and was probably intended not to be, distinguished. For the previous several examples, and even more for the pure visual plays in Calligraphy Nos. 990000 and 950600 (figs. 71 and 72), if they are not situated in the context of C. C. Wang’s development, if there is not a kind of “insider’s awareness” of the internal logic that had become the artist’s second nature, one can hardly come to terms with them being his personal — not entirely original perhaps, but definitely personal — achievement.

From about 1994, C. C. Wang made works based on the above models with variations in the degree of calligraphy-likeness, the boldness of color scheme, and the dryness or moisture of ink. Some of them are monochrome ink works; most of them were

done with the Chinese brushes, while others were "lined" with felt-tip pens, magic markers, or sponge-head paint brushes. These works appear in all kinds of formats: vertical, horizontal, square, and round, with some of the vertical and square works mounted as hanging scrolls.

To discuss C. C. Wang’s late abstract works that brought the millennia-old Chinese art of calligraphic line into play with formal-pictorial elements, one can hardly overlook the fact that there have been modern Western painters who worked with a similar style. As described in preceding chapters, Wang had drawn inspiration from Western art at least since the time he settled in America. Before he turned to abstraction, his still lifes were particularly illustrative of his exploration of relationships between Western and Chinese art. His new abstract works reminded James Cahill of the artist’s Western-inspired period during the 1950s and also a reciprocal phenomenon before and around that time among certain American artists who drew on Eastern traditions. As Cahill mentioned, Mark Tobey (1890-1976) and others "discovered Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and used it, without being able to write Chinese characters (or wanting to), for visually absorbing calligraphic abstractions that filled and energized the space they covered."¹⁵⁵ In 1997, at the age of ninety, C. C. Wang recalled his awareness after his arrival in the U.S. of the American artists including Pollock, Kline, Motherwell, and Tobey, noting that, at that time, he did not understand what they were doing.¹⁵⁶ The implication is perhaps that he did now.¹⁵⁷ Not only had he understood their art, with his

¹⁵⁵ Cahill, "Late Period," 5.

¹⁵⁶ See note 33.

¹⁵⁷ Among these artists, Tobey was the only one with whom C. C. Wang spoke. The two artists met at Zhang Daqian’s exhibition at the Mi Chou Gallery in 1957. In the mid-1980s, C. C. Wang said: "I can’t see
abstract works, he in some way seemed to have brought himself close to some of them, particularly Tobey and Kline.

Making use of his studies in Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and inspirations from Eastern philosophy, Tobey developed the technique of “white writing” by using swift calligraphy-inspired brushstrokes, mostly in white, on a colored background (fig. 73). Whether a matter of coincidence or subconscious influence, there is something in common between Tobey’s works in this style and C. C. Wang’s abstractions of slender, looping lines. The most pronounced similarity between their works comes from the use of continuous, swift, curling, and twisting lines informed to varying degrees by Eastern calligraphy. Although Wang’s lines are more calligraphic and less entangled, they share with Tobey’s a manifestation of the power of the brush (or the tool serving the same function as the brush) as an expressive agent. With the same concern for linear rhythm, each line is the gesture of the artists’ hands, and for C. C. Wang, his well-trained wrist as well. Yet, a more obvious connection between the two artists lies in composition. With brushstrokes or lines whirling all over the canvas, Tobey developed a type of all-over composition in which no center can be found. This, probably along with Pollock’s similar compositional approach, had an impact on C. C. Wang, who had come to consider the painting or writing surface with a better sense of wholeness, in addition to the Chinese emphasis on the balance between void and mass (xu shi 虛實).158 As imagery of flux

why he is great. I never think that these people [not specified as to who else apart from Tobey] were as great as the Impressionists.” See Silbergeld, Mind Landscapes, 27. It was perhaps due to Wang’s increased devotion to calligraphy and hence his interest in bolder exploration of lines and shapes as pure visual forms that he came to understand the art of these modern Western artists.

158 Wang considered one of the important things he learnt about Western painting was that it was “meant to be seen from a distance, so composition is crucial….” See Chang, “Ninety,” 11.
rather than solid form, Tobey's paintings were considered "continuum" images because of their non-static nature,\textsuperscript{159} which is also a characteristic of many of Wang's works.

However, what lies behind the visually similar is conceptually different. Mark Tobey's thrusts and curves were influenced by calligraphy, but they use few real Chinese strokes. In fact, there was a long period between his original interest in Chinese brush technique and the first use of the "calligraphic" line in his art.\textsuperscript{160} It was not his primary aim to explore these strokes and lines from within or in relation to other pictorial elements although he must have taken this into consideration for compositional purposes. What he did was to adapt aspects of it to his personal content, to express what particularly interested him in the life of cities, "the lights, the electric cables of the trolleys, the human streams directed by, through and round prescribed limits."\textsuperscript{161} The Chinese notion that calligraphy is fundamentally a line of energy materializing through the brush into the ink-trace fits well with his mode of expression.\textsuperscript{162} For C. C. Wang, the use of calligraphy and brushwork in abstract works can be explained in simpler terms, as will be concluded towards the end of this section.

Franz Kline, one of the foremost Abstract Expressionists, was known best for his "black and white" paintings, in which bands and wedges of black, sometimes also with


\textsuperscript{160} Joshua C. Taylor, "Looking at Tobey's Pictures," in \textit{Art and Belief}, by Dahl et al., 28.

\textsuperscript{161} See Mark Tobey: Retrospective Exhibition, \textit{Paintings and Drawings} 1925-1961 (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1962), 11-12. This notion is particularly true with his series of paintings named after different cities, although his works are also with profound philosophical and spiritual dimensions based on his Bahá'í Faith. See Dahl et al, \textit{Art and Belief}, 13-45.

loops and arcs, are jostled by white (fig. 74). Due to the exceptional economy of his compositions, often with a few massive slashes in black, it was frequently speculated that he was influenced by Eastern calligraphy, or Zen and Asian aesthetics, but Kline denied such links throughout his career.\textsuperscript{163} Although, in 1993, C. C. Wang made the comment that for him, Kline’s art is “noise, not voice,”\textsuperscript{164} at least one of his earlier works bears traces of Kline’s influence (fig. 14).\textsuperscript{165} With his favorite “painting to music” analogy likening brushwork to voice, which led to his use of the term brush-voice, Wang’s harsh comment was probably filtered through specifically Eastern criteria of aesthetic quality, just as the Korean-born artist Don Ahn (b.1937) felt: “Kline’s stroke has a strength, but … not really … that kind of \textit{chi} [also romanized as \textit{qi}, referring to the spirit or inherent energy-flow in calligraphy].\textsuperscript{166} It is a different kind of \textit{chi}, a little coarse.”\textsuperscript{167}

Perceptions of brushwork aside, there are some aspects in the American artist’s paintings that are similar to C. C. Wang’s abstractions. In some of Wang’s abstractions, cropping, magnification of detail, and the powerful, increasingly broad “brush-lines” or bands of straight and curved brushmarks are similar to Kline’s trademark images with

\textsuperscript{163} David Anfam, \textit{Abstract Expressionism} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 169-170. Kline had written in a Japanese art periodical in 1951 that he had been interested in a few Japanese painters (one of whom was a Zen monk painter) and had for many years studied their works and those by earlier Chinese and Japanese painters, which he increasingly loved. He is also known to have had a collection of Japanese prints. Although there was no evidence showing that he was specifically drawn to Eastern calligraphy, David J. Clarke remarked that it is not altogether implausible that an influence, albeit unconscious, was at work. See John Stomberg, \textit{Looking East: Brice Marden, Michael Mazur, Pat Steir} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 20-21; and Clark, \textit{Influence of Oriental Thought}, 207.


\textsuperscript{165} See page 25 and fig. 14.

\textsuperscript{166} For an in-depth investigation of the notion of \textit{qi} in calligraphy, see John Hay, “Human Body,” 74-102.

\textsuperscript{167} Ahn et al., “Roundtable Discussion,” 51.
grand black strokes. Kline emphasized the white background as a positive presence as important as the black, so he actually painted the white. Although C. C. Wang did not paint the white, he had also come to look at space as interlocked with strokes and lines, as something actively engaging with the latter, rather than a field on which the latter performs. It is because of this idea that he began to paint the space, though not in white. Also, on a general level, Kline’s conscious reduction of his idiom to the elemental that can be continually regenerated was largely shared by Wang. However, Kline’s elemental vocabulary was sometimes meant to evoke the known or the recognizable without suggesting literal references, while, quite the contrary, Wang’s abstractions were characterized by their non-referentiality, except perhaps the allusion to calligraphy.

In a brief essay written for an exhibition catalogue for C. C. Wang in 1996, James Cahill suggested, as Wang himself agreed, that some of his abstractions look strikingly similar to Brice Marden’s (b. 1938) Cold Mountain series (1989-1991) (fig. 75), noting that neither artist, presumably, knew what the other was doing. Presumably it was, but not actually. In an article published in January 1994, Sun-chang Lo mentioned that Marden’s paintings done with brushes of ailanthus twigs in response to The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain had aroused great interest from him and C. C. Wang and that

---

169 Anfam, Abstract Expressionism, 170.

170 Cahill, “Late Period,” 5.

they kept discussing those works. Striking or not, the similarity between the two artists’ works may not be coincidental.

Since the mid-1980s, Marden’s paintings have been largely inspired by the formal characteristics of Chinese calligraphy. Cahill found that Marden and Wang adopted, in some of their works, the basic compositional scheme of formal calligraphy, with brushwork configurations aligned vertically and with those alignments progressing laterally like columns of writing. For Marden, although it was actually in his first group of “China-related” paintings, called Diagrammed Couplet, that such a compositional plan was discernable, his work on the Cold Mountain paintings was based on the compositional idea of having couplets arranged vertically on the surface in a grid. However, this compositional idea became barely conspicuous when he linked the forms together for “an all-over unity, a nexus of figures which communicate with each other in a multiplicity of ways.” This results in compositions similar to those in which C. C. Wang followed very subtly the structural principles of calligraphy while playing on ambiguities between forms. However, there is an intricate difference in the starting points assumed by the artists. In the book of the translations of Cold Mountain’s poems, the English and the Chinese are printed in parallel. Although Marden cannot read Chinese, he was interested in the ideographs. To a large extent, he was diagramming calligraphy, treating calligraphy more as drawing in lines with a special quality, even though he has

---

172 Luo, “Xiongzhong qiuqiu,” XIII.

173 Cahill, “Late Period,” 5.


175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.
studied Chinese calligraphy and its theories by himself, and understands how Chinese look at calligraphy and lines in spiritual, philosophical terms. C. C. Wang, however, was fundamentally concerned with brushwork and lines and had seen through the figural or ideographic dimension into the intrinsic properties of calligraphy. It was because of this profound concern that he attempted to liberate brushwork and lines from their ideographic configurations. His compositional structures reminiscent of formal calligraphy were a result of the adherence to an inherent logic, not one of diagramming calligraphy. However, the notion of an all-over unity emphasized by Marden was also at work in Wang’s creations.

The two artists had different starting points because their aims were different. The brushes of ailanthus twigs that Brice Marden used were three feet long, so he worked on his paintings from quite a distance and could only move his brush slowly. As Wen Fong remarked, the slowness of Marden’s lines is “anything but truly calligraphic.”¹⁷⁷ That was because being truly calligraphic was not the artist’s objective. About what his art was actually concerned, the artist himself has been rather contradictory. He said: “The more one works those lines, the gesture disappears and it becomes much more about the shapes…. My painting has to do with the presence of the image. It’s about stasis.”¹⁷⁸ Yet, he also added: “As I worked with the more figural ideas, the paintings became much more about the movement of the body, making the gesture.”¹⁷⁹ Whether it was the presence of image or gesture, the brush-strength and vital energy of brushwork so valued

¹⁷⁷ Wen C. Fong, “Matrix,” 132.


¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 26.
in Chinese calligraphy was not what Marden sought. For C. C. Wang, however abstract his works may appear, the inked lines and strokes are never without brush-strength and speed even though they were not necessarily done with the brush. It might not be his aim, but it was ever-present.

Another interesting aspect of Marden’s work lies in his tool. When he chose the anilanthus sticks, he often kept in mind that there should be a balance between the controllability and uncontrollability of the sticks. By not having complete control of the brush because of the unusual nature and length of the sticks, he could yield to nature a bit of control.\(^{180}\) This is an idea also embraced by C. C. Wang, who allowed his lines to diffuse into moist ink spots for accidental effects. However, it was still C. C. Wang the landscapist who took the “controlled accidents” more seriously. With his landscapes, he combined brushwork with “natural marks” into a natural whole. Yet, when the essence of brushwork is extracted to stand alone and magnified, he opted to rely on his mind-shoulder-arm-wrist and to transmit the principle of nature by making the line of energy materialize through the brush.

Discussions on the difference between lines by different hands can continue without end as Brice Marden said: “It’s difficult to discuss because this whole subject of calligraphy has no equivalent in Western art.”\(^{181}\) Masked under Western-inspired approaches to compositions and pictorial elements, there is the “no equivalent” calligraphic brushwork in C. C. Wang’s abstractions. Wang had studied calligraphy and brushwork his entire life. It was a life-long process of digesting and absorbing the


time-honored tradition, and developing it into a personal style through incorporating the summation of his other artistic experiences. By the time he brought calligraphy to abstraction, it was not something new but had long grown to become part of him; and he had become so familiar with that part of him that he came up with something new with it in a totally free way. By letting his lines dance with shapes, colors, and tones, what he wanted to express was nothing complicated but just the feeling of freedom and creativity. Yet what distinguishes him from others, East or West, is that there is a dimension to his abstractions that is not only personal, but also personally art-historical.

**Phase IV in Relation to Earlier Periods**

Until the present time, brief writings on C. C. Wang’s art in his late period have suggested various interpretations for his rather dramatic changes. Focusing on Wang’s abstractions, James Cahill saw the artist as once again engaging himself with the movement that was underway in America when he moved to the country. Noting that there was a reduction-to-essence in Wang’s late art in general, Jerome Silbergeld remarked that the artist’s calligraphic images and abstractions were manifestations of his ability to reinvent himself with youth and vigor in style during his advanced years, and that his landscapes and rock paintings embodied the characteristics associated with old age — simplicity, roughness, spontaneity, and unfinishedness, displaying not the “polished skill of youth but the artless simplicity and reduced essence of expression [of]

---


183 Cahill, “Late Period,” 5.

184 Silbergeld, “Art without Age,” 6 and 9.
old age.” 185 Joan Stanley-Baker, discussing Wang’s calligraphic images, described him in 1993 as the eighty-seven-year-old boy who had came up with a new toy — a new mode of fashioning calligraphy. 186 Arnold Chang, while surprised by the artist’s jump to abstraction, identified the freedom, creativity, the distinct sense of playfulness, and childlike quality in his late works. 187 Shared by the latter three scholars is the idea that C. C. Wang the elder was becoming young or childlike in his world of art. Wang had always been open-minded to all kinds of artistic stimuli and daring in adopting them in his own art, 188 but it was indeed in his late years that he embraced an entirely fanciful and carefree spirit like a reborn child, though not one with a blank slate. Cahill’s suggestion is not invalid either. In still lifes and abstractions, the artist did return partially to the kind of exciting exploration informed by non-objective Western painting during his transitional and experimental years. However, the 1950s and 1960s were a period of doubt for the artist, who was searching for a personal stylistic direction by experimenting with new ideas and techniques to which he was freshly exposed. By the 1990s, Wang had internalized his native heritage in both painting and calligraphy as well as modern Western artistic ideas. It was through this decades-long internalization that he was completely confident in capturing the essence of Chinese painting and calligraphy by letting free the expression of his innermost feelings and by loosening his hold on that


188 Chang, interview by author, February 17, 2006.
very tradition which had become so rigid for many. It was also because of this internalization of a multitude of artistic influences that the final phase of his career can be seen as a series of revisits to different points of his earlier development and as the constant interaction of these revisits with the utter exhilaration of freedom and creativity.

In addition to the long-time accumulation of artistic experience and confidence, a catalyst for the stark changes in C. C. Wang’s art was his renewed devotion to calligraphy. As Stanley-Baker suggested, it was probably not coincidental that he spent more time on calligraphy instead of paintings that demand detailed depiction when his eyesight worsened.\(^{189}\) Along with this came a more daring approach to art driven by his “nurtured” instinct and his realization of calligraphy and the brush as the essence of Chinese painting.\(^{190}\) Just as the Chinese word for “crisis” (weiji 危機) is composed of two characters meaning respectively “danger” and “opportunity,” it was at least partially due to his impaired eyesight that he found new artistic possibilities, in a way reminiscent of what Huang Binhong and Zhang Daqian underwent.

Two generations senior to Wang, Huang Binhong, who began to suffer from cataracts in his mid-seventies, turned to work in a more expressionistic style, and later a rough and incomplete painting manner as the problem worsened. At age ninety, when he was almost blind, he thought of changing his style.\(^{191}\) Upon recovering his eyesight after an operation, he became the “clearest” ever, as Michael Sullivan wrote: “… his last landscapes have an air of almost ethereal openness and simplicity ….”


\(^{191}\) Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu* (Chronology of Huang Binhong) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2005), 535.
arrived, before his death, at an unclouded freedom and lightness of spirit ...;"⁹² whereas, according to Kuiyi Shen, some of his last works approached total abstraction.⁹³ Zhang Daqian's development of his famous splash-ink painting style in 1960, which marked the last phase of his career, was also undeniably related to his deteriorating eyesight.⁹⁴ Like these two masters, who were thoroughly trained in traditional painting, C. C. Wang was more or less freed from his own established style and led to venture into a new realm by his eyesight trouble. His dive into new waters might be circumstantial at the very beginning, but it was soon a matter of conscious artistic choice, as the artist continued to plough the new path, and even more deeply so, after he regained his eyesight.

Like Huang Binhong, who moved to an almost ethereal and more expressionist style in his late years, C. C. Wang, in capturing the essence of painting and calligraphy, and of expression, underwent a process of distillation, as suggested by Silbergeld. Whether in his landscapes, still lifes, rock paintings, calligraphic images, or abstractions, the emphasis on the expressiveness of his personal calligraphic and brush styles is paramount, while representational content becomes less important. Reinforcing brushwork itself as a pure art form not in service of a pictorial image, Wang, in his calligraphic images and abstractions, liberated brushwork from the construction of character words and let the calligraphic elements interact by chance. His brushwork is


⁹³ Kuiyi Shen, "Traditional Painting," 90. For a detailed study of Huang Binhong's late art, see Jason C. Kuo, "Huang Pin-hung's Late Work" and "The Significance of Hung Pin-hung's Late Work," in Transforming Traditions in Modern Chinese Painting: Huang Pin-hung's Late Work (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), chaps. IV and V.

⁹⁴ Ba, Zhang Daqian yanjiu, 132; and Fong, Between Two Cultures, 195-198.
distilled; all intricate details such as stroke-structures are stripped of, and the remaining essence is magnified. Also, in works of single or paired scholar rocks, it was as if he had filtered out the essence from his mountainscapes and lodged it in a single component of the mountains, with that component monumentalized to stand on its own as a pure form. These paintings of rocks embodying the abstract patterns found in nature are at the same time manifestations of the abstract qualities of calligraphy and brushwork. In Wang’s own words: “We appreciate the quality of the brushwork for itself and admire its beauty. This is like appreciating a beautiful rock. The appreciation is not for the rock, but for the subtle balance, harmony, texture, strength and composition that gives rise to an art form.”

A process of artistic filtration as such, rooted in tradition, with the product approaching abstraction can be said as to be present in Wang’s other works in this phase to varying extents. C. C. Wang, in his eighties and nineties, brought himself back to the Chinese painting tradition in the most basic sense by unlocking many of the shackles of that very tradition.

James Cahill wrote of C. C. Wang’s abstract works as erasing the thin line between calligraphic painting and painterly calligraphy by offering nothing readable either as writing or picturing. The artist himself was probably not concerned with the distinction since he always maintained that Chinese painting is primarily a brush art derived from calligraphy. As he once concisely stated: “... all Chinese art is an extension of calligraphy.” Strictly speaking, calligraphy in the Chinese sense cannot be painterly.

196 Cahill, “Late Period,” 5.
while traditional Chinese painting since the fourteenth century is fundamentally calligraphic, just as Wen Fong argued that there could be calligraphic abstraction but not abstract calligraphy, considering the latter to be a contradiction in terms.\textsuperscript{198} As discussed previously, calligraphy as an art form is not necessarily associated with readable writing. Thus, it is not at all inapt to group Wang’s calligraphic images and abstractions together as calligraphic abstractions. Except occasionally during his experimental years, C. C. Wang, as a life-long upholder of brushwork, had not been calligraphically detached in his art, be it readable, representational, or abstract. His late art, diverse in subject and style, can then be seen collectively as the precipitated product of this spirit, an end-of-the-twentieth-century reinterpretation of the ancient and familiar Chinese assertion that “calligraphy and painting share the same origin” (\textit{shuhua tongyuan} 書畫同源).\textsuperscript{199}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{198} Ahn et al., “Roundtable Discussion,” 55.
\item \textsuperscript{199} The theory of “calligraphy and painting sharing the same origin” was first put forward by Zhang Yanyuan in his \textit{Lidai minghua ji} (Record of the famous paintings of all the dynasties) during the Tang Dynasty. In the section on the origins of painting, he traced the formation of the Chinese written words and concluded that writing and painting, though having different names, were alike in form, hardly differentiable and of the same substance. See Chang Yen-yüan [Zhang Yanyuan], “Record,” 61-80.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

C. C. Wang in China was a bastion of conservatism, pursuing antiquity and refining his art-historical learnings. He was in the close footsteps of his teachers, Gu Linshi and Wu Hufan, both members of the archly-conservative group that revered the orthodox painting tradition of which Dong Qichang was the progenitor and the Four Wangs, the ardent successors. By the early 1950s, the artist was engaged in the reworking and extension of the “approved” styles and conventions of these past masters. Also echoing the practice of his teachers was his collecting activity and connoisseurial training, both of which contributed to his building of knowledge of the whole history of Chinese painting and offered him opportunities to further open windows on the past.

In America, while the art-historical reinterpretations that earned Wang acclaim in China were appreciated by few, the thrilling artistic atmosphere of New York as the center stage of contemporary Western art was conducive to his search for new forms of artistic expression. With studies at the Art Students League, exposure to the Abstract Expressionist manipulation of “chance and accidents” that could be connected with certain ancient painting styles in China, and awareness of the Western-informed
endeavors of fellow artists of the Chinese diaspora, C. C. Wang gradually relaxed his constraints and began experimenting with technical innovations of “controlled accidents.”

From these experiments emerged the wrinkled textures not made by the brush. By adapting the elements of wrinkled textures to supplement his brushwork in what later became his trademark landscape style, Wang not only found a personal way of expressing his affinity to naturalness, but also redefined his relationship with the Chinese-rooted past by resonating with the Western-stimulated present. While the combination of his brushwork and controlled accidents became increasingly integrated over time, a new sensibility with composition inspired by the new technical facility also informed his works done entirely with the brush. Throughout this course of development, he was in constant dialogue with the Chinese tradition. The result was arguably his most distinguished accomplishment — the creation of a modern, personal landscape style that merges the Yuan brush ideals with the Northern Song sense of monumentality.

Virtually all Chinese painters of the past century have sought to address in their art the frequently-discussed issue of modern Chinese art: synthesizing tradition and modernity, bridging East and West. Not many, however, have come to be recognized as significant modernizers of Chinese painting. Still fewer have brought the elite literati painting tradition out of its longtime stagnation or decline to new heights of creative potential. C. C. Wang and Zhang Daqian were by far two exemplars who succeeded. A leisure seal Wang often used in his later years bears the inscription with the double meaning of “good for nothing” and “neither Eastern nor Western” (bushi dongxi 不是東
indicative of a humble attitude about his achievement but also a kind of self-confidence great enough to embrace the play with a humorous self-mockery that no one would mistake. Parallel to this inscription was a remark he made at the age of ninety: “At the highest stage, at the deepest level, there is no difference between Chinese and Western painting … essentially the personal expression is the same.” With the view that successful artists would undergo an evolution of the three stages of perfecting representation, attaining abstraction, and achieving pure creation and expression, he was ceaseless in committing himself to the realization of this belief until the last moments of his life.

Before he achieved a synthesis of divergent traditions and methods, C. C. Wang, through decades of devoted study, inquiry, reflection, and transformation, had internalized the vast scope of the Chinese artistic tradition. At the same time, his interest in certain modern Western artistic styles with aspirations akin to ancient Chinese art grew. Triggered by the threat and opportunity posed by his eyesight problem around the turn of 1990, the wealth of the Chinese tradition and Western ideas he had long internalized found their way to his art in a new fashion, with utter freedom in subject and style through a common process of distillation and abstraction. Characterizing his late art was a sense of artless simplicity and reduced essence of expression underlain by a childlike freedom in execution. His calligraphic abstractions, in particular, done so purely, as if he was swinging the inked brush like a child blissfully immersed in a game, signify an

---

200 See Lu Fusheng, foreword to C. C. Wang’s Paintings, n.p.

201 Chang, “Ninety,” 16.

ever-young and daring creative spirit. C. C. Wang was still daring, perhaps more than ever, in the last chapter of his career. It was, however, not a childlike endeavor attempted from scratch but the unrestrained venture of a gifted child reborn out of the sureness of his brush and complete self-confidence. What the octogenarian-nonagenarian child possessed was a sort of thrilled yet cultivated primitivism.

From the 1990s, C. C. Wang adopted the literary names Liaoran, meaning “thorough understanding in the mind” and Yugong, literally “the foolish old man,” which derived from an ancient fable about a man who removed the mountains with dogged perseverance in the “silliest” way possible — by digging them up bit by bit. Such was the two-fold mentality Wang had in his late years. After a lifetime of hard work, he had a profound understanding of his pursuit but at the same time a “foolish” heart that seeks through the sophisticated to the most basic. At ninety-two, C. C. Wang said: “To understand this [Chinese painting aesthetics in their truest sense] clearly, you must have the skill, have the knowledge, but then you must leave these things behind.” He identified one of his favorite artists, Dong Qichang, as a remarkable painter particularly when Dong could see like a child at the age of eighty, adding that “when he [Dong] understood his own nature, when he became an old child, then he was a master.”

“Returning to youthfulness by reversing old age” (fanlao huantong 返老還童) as the Chinese saying goes, C. C. Wang had come a long way, completing a full circle, to (re)turn to a new beginning and meet the essence of Chinese art, thus bringing himself close to the sixteenth-to-seventeenth-century master in a way with active currency in the

---

203 Doran, “The Artist as Collector,” 79.

204 Ibid., 78.
twentieth century. In the last years of his life, he was not so much looking back but embarking on something new with no falling off in creative energy. The world-renowned architect I. M. Pei (b. 1917), who visited Wang’s studio two months before the artist died, found his most recent works “remarkably forward-looking” but also “traditional with a twist.” That was C. C. Wang the artist at the age of ninety-six.

APPENDIX A

EXHIBITIONS
Thirty-five group exhibitions in China from 1928.

1950  Solo exhibition, Warren E. Cox Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.

1953  "Ostasiatische Kunst und Chinoiserie," group exhibition, Cologne, Germany.

1959  Solo exhibition, February–March, Mi Chou Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.

1966  "The New Chinese Landscape: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists," sponsored by the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund and circulated by the American Federation of Arts, group exhibition touring for two years: October 1956, Taipei, Taiwan; University of Minnesota Art Gallery, Minneapolis, MN; Nelson Gallery of Art (now Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art), Kansas City, MO; the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; the Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; the American Federation of Arts Gallery, New York, NY; and other universities galleries and venues throughout the U.S.

1968  Solo exhibition, October-November, the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, CA, the U.S.

1971  "C. C. Wang: The Artist," May 25-July 25, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, the U.S.

"Chinese Painting at Mid-Century," group exhibition, sponsored by the Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, the U.S.

1972  Solo exhibitions: China Institute in America, New York, NY; Honolulu Academy of Arts, Honolulu, HI; Fresno College, Fresno, CA; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, the U.S.

Group exhibition, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ, the U.S.

1973  "Recent Paintings by C. C. Wang," March 10-April 15, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, the U.S.

Solo exhibitions: The New Gallery, Schacht Fine Arts Center, Russell Sage College, Troy, NY; Chinese Cultural Center, New York, NY; State University of New York at New Paltz, NY, the U.S.

1974  Group exhibition, Watercolor Society, National Academy of Art and Design, New York, NY, the U.S.

1975  Solo exhibition, Columbia University, New York, NY, the U.S.

1976  Solo exhibitions: Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL; The Chinese Culture Foundation of San Francisco, CA, the U.S.
1977  Solo exhibition, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC, the U.S.
Retrospective exhibition, sponsored by the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation and
the International Exhibition Foundation, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY,
the U.S.

1979  Solo exhibition, Museum of Art, The Pennsylvania State University, PA, the
U.S.

1980  Exhibitions in the late 1970s and 1980s: Yale University, New Haven, CT;
University of California, Berkeley, CA; Tulane University, New Orleans,
LA; University of North Carolina, NC; University of Indianapolis,
Indianapolis, IN; Columbia University, New York, NY; and The Chicago
Institute of Art, Chicago, IL, the U.S.

1981  “Calligraphy and Painting by Wu Hufan and His Disciples of the Meiying
Studio,” group exhibition, Shanghai Exhibition Center, Shanghai, China.


1983  Solo exhibitions: Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong; National Museum of
History, Taipei, Taiwan.

1984  “Masterpieces of Two Chinese Artists,” joint exhibition with Wang Fangyu,
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan.

1985  Group exhibition, Hong Kong Art Centre. Hong Kong.

1986  Solo exhibition, Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong.
“Contemporary Chinese Painting,” group exhibition, Hong Kong City Hall,
Hong Kong.
“Hong Kong Art: 1970-1980,” group exhibition, Leal Senado de Macau,
Macau.
“Modern Asian Ink and Color Paintings Exhibition,” group exhibition, the
Tenth Asian Games Arts Festival, Seoul, Korea.
“The Mountain Retreat: Landscape in Modern Chinese Painting,” group
exhibition, February 27-April 13, The Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO;
July 5-August 22, Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra Cultural Center, Hofstra
University, Hempstead, NY, the U.S.

1987  Solo exhibition, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL, the U.S.
“Chinese Art in Transition,” group exhibition, August-September 4, City
Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
1988  "Mind Landscape: The Paintings of C. C. Wang," Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA; Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS; Chinese Culture Center, San Francisco, CA, the U.S.

"Six Twentieth-Century Chinese Artists from the Collection of Murray Smith," group exhibition, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, the U.S.

Solo exhibition of calligraphy, Gallery 456, New York, NY, the U.S.

1992  Solo exhibition of calligraphy, L. J. Wender Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.

1993  Group exhibition, Suzhou Academy of Art, Suzhou, China.

1994  Solo exhibition, National Tsing Hua University Arts Center, Hsin-chu, Taiwan.
"C. C. Wang: Landscape and Calligraphic Images," Plum Blossoms Gallery, Hong Kong and Singapore.
"C. C. Wang Exhibition of Paintings and Calligraphy," September 29-October 16, Pristine Harmony Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan.
"Not Knowing: Affinities in Eastern and Western Art," group exhibition, Gallery Schlesinger, New York, NY, the U.S.

"Art of Ink in America," group exhibition, Gallery Korea, New York, NY, the U.S.
Group exhibition, Elizabeth Wang Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.

1997  “C.C. Wang at Ninety,” February, Kaikodo Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“Artists: 80 Plus and Going Strong,” group exhibition, September 12-October 24, Taipei Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“The Living Brush: Four Masters of Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy,” February 14-August 14, Pacific Heritage Museum, San Francisco, CA, the U.S.

“The Master & Pupil Exhibit of C. C. Wang & Ma Singfoon for Charity,” joint exhibition, sponsored by Sheen Hok Charitable Foundation, Hong Kong City Hall, Hong Kong.

“Calligraphy and Beyond,” joint exhibition with Wucius Wong, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Hong Kong and Singapore.

2000  “Big Apple Chinese,” group exhibition, February, Kaikodo Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“Conceptual Ink,” group exhibition, March 21-May 20, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“Madame Chiang Soong Mei-ling with Other Masters for the Year of 2000,” group exhibition, World Journal Art Gallery, Whitestone, NY, the U.S.

2001  “The Lyrical Brush of C. C. Wang,” September 13-October 6, Plum Blossoms Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“Ten,” group exhibition, November 10-December 10, Kaikodo Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“China without Borders,” group exhibition, June 19-28, Sotheby’s New York, organized by Goedhuis Contemporary, NY, the U.S.
2002  “Line & Landscape,” group exhibition, June 1-August 30, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“The Third International Ink Painting Biennial of Shenzhen,” December 18-January 18, Guan Shanyue Art Museum, Shenzhen, China.

2003  “Peace & Line,” group exhibition, March 27-May 2, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts Gallery, New York, NY, the U.S.
“Radical Line: Innovation in Chinese Contemporary Painting,” group exhibition, October 18-November 9, Bowling Green State University Fine Arts Center Galleries, Bowling Green, OH, the U.S.


2005  “Remembering C. C. Wang,” August 18-December 19, Chinese Historical Society of America Museum and Learning Center, San Francisco, CA, the U.S.

APPENDIX B

FIGURES
Fig. 1. Wu Hufan (1894-1968), *Lofty Scholars in an Autumn Grove*, 1943. Ink and color on paper, 108.7 x 53.4 cm. M. K. Lau Collection, Ltd., Hong Kong.
Fig. 2. C. C. Wang, *Landscape after Lu Kuang*, 1932. Leaf from the album *Ink-play by Shuangwu*, ink on paper, 15.5 x 23 cm. Collection of Mr. Chen-hua Lee.
Fig. 3. C. C. Wang, *Landscape after Wang Shimin*, mid-1930s. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 95 x 45.4 cm. Collection of Mr. Brad Davis and Ms. Janis Provisor.
Fig. 4. C. C. Wang, Landscape after Wang Meng, early 1940s. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 106.7 x 50.2 cm. Collection of Mr. Arnold Chang.
Fig. 5. Wang Meng (1308-1385), *Quiet Life in a Wooded Glen*, 1361. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 177.8 x 64.2 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago.
Fig. 6. Wang Meng (1308-1385), *Thatched Hut in the Western Suburbs*. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 97.5 x 27.2 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 7. C. C. Wang, *Lotus*, 1958. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 62.2 x 49.5 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Cho.
Fig. 8. Xu Wei (1521-1593), *Crab and Lotus*. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 114.5 x 29.5 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.
Fig. 9. C. C. Wang, *Vase and Brushes*, 1966. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 62.2 x 49.5 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Cho.
Fig. 10. Attributed to Muqi (ca. 1200–after 1279), *Six Persimmons*, 13th century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 35.1 x 29 cm. Daitokuji, Kyoto.
Fig. 11. C. C. Wang, *Still Life*, 1956. Casein on wood panel, 66 x 101.6 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 12. C. C. Wang, *Fruit and Basket*, 1961. Ink and color on paper, 27 x 57 cm. Collection of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison.
Fig. 13. C. C. Wang, *The Sound of the Waves*, 1961. Ink and color on paper, 32 x 56.5 cm. Collection of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison.
Fig. 15.  C. C. Wang, *Landscape*, 1961. Ink and color on paper, 40.3 x 57 cm. Phoenix Art Museum.
Fig. 16. C. C. Wang, *Flowing Water in Spring River*, 1964. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 38 x 58 cm. Rietberg Museum, Zurich, Charles A. Drenowatz Collection.
Fig. 17. C. C. Wang, *Landscape*, 1965. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown.
Fig. 18. C. C. Wang, *Clouds in the Mountains of the Immortals*, 1968. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 63 x 97.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 19. Liu Guosong (b. 1932), *The Song of Rain-Fed Waterfalls*, 1966. Ink and color on paper, 75 x 142 cm. Shuisongshi Shanfang Collection.
Fig. 20. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 227*, 1973. Ink and color on paper, 60.7 x 76 cm. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Denis C. Yang.
Fig. 21.  C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 327*, 1975. Ink and color on paper, 60 x 90.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 22.  C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 472*, 1983. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 100.3 x 49.5 cm. C. C Wang Family Collection.
Fig. 23. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 450*, 1983. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 59.1 x 81.3 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 24. Ni Zan (1301-1374), *Pine Pavilion, Mountain Scenery* (detail), 1372. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 101.6 x 43.8 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection.
Fig. 25.  C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 305*, 1974. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 90.1 x 61 cm. C. C Wang Family Collection.
Fig. 26. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 910*, 1986. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 62 x 62 cm. Collection of Jean and Sun-chang Lo.
Fig. 27. Zhu Da (1626-1705), *Landscape*, late 17th century. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 177 x 93 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection.
Fig. 28. Attributed to Dong Yuan (d. 962), Riverbank. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 221 x 109 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Fig. 29. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 880126*, 1988. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 94.5 x 64.5 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 30. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 850901*, 1985. Ink and color on paper, 124.5 x 66.5 cm. Collection of Mr. David Davies.
Fig. 31. Fan Kuan (ca. 960-ca. 1030), *Travelers amid Streams and Mountains*. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, 206.3 x 103.3 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.
Fig. 32. Yu Chengyao (1898-1993), *Mountain Gorges*. Hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper, 292.1 x 362 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 33. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 911217*, 1991. Ink and color on paper, 34.5 x 39.5 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 34. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 930800C*, 1993. Ink and color on paper, 70 x 78.8 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 35. Fang Congyi (active ca. 1340-1380), *Cloudy Landscape*. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 42 x 25.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 36. Mi Youren (1074-1151), *Cloudy Mountains*. Handscroll, ink on paper, 27.3 x 57 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Fig. 37. C. C. Wang, *Landscape*, 2001. Ink and color on paper, 60 x 110 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 38. C. C. Wang, *Landscape*, 1998. Ink on paper, 28.5 cm in diameter. Collection unknown.
Fig. 39. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 210001*, 2001. Leaf from an album of fourteen, ink and color on paper, 30.4 x 46.2 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 40. Shitao (1642-1707), A Man in a House beneath a Cliff. Album leaf, ink and color on paper, 24.2 x 27.9 cm. C. C. Wang Family Collection.
Fig. 41. C. C. Wang, *Landscape No. 201215*, 2000. Ink and color on paper, 75 x 48 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 42. C. C. Wang, *Still Life No. 940000*, 1994. Ink and color on paper, 22.7 x 39 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 43. C. C. Wang, *Still Life No. 940706*, 1994. Ink and color on paper, 58.2 x 48.2 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 44. Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Still Life with Magnolia*, 1941. Oil on canvas, 74 x 101 cm. Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
Fig. 45. Wu Changshi (1844-1927), Wisteria, 1921. Hanging scroll in a set of four, ink and color on paper, 118.4 x 47.4 cm. Shanghai Museum.
Fig. 46. C. C. Wang, *Still Life No. 941100C(a)*, 1994. Ink and color on paper, 42.9 x 21.4 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 47. C. C. Wang, *Abstract No. 940713*, 1994. Ink and color on paper, 69 x 40.4 cm. Collection unknown.

Fig. 49. *Taihu rock in the collection of Kemin Hu*. 
Fig. 50. C. C. Wang, Rock No. 210400, 2001. Ink on paper, 143.5 x 76 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 51. C. C. Wang, *Rock No. 210115*, 2001. Ink on paper, 36 x 37 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 52. C. C. Wang, *Rock No. 22090816A*, 2002. Ink on paper, 35.5 x 37 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 53. Huang Zijiu’s [Huang Gongwang] style of painting rocks, a page from the “Rocks” section, Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting.
Fig. 54. C. C. Wang, Calligraphy No. 93041633 (EW), undated. Ink on paper, 68.5 x 55.5 cm. Private Collection.

Fig. 55. Rubbing of stone tablet commemorating the erection of the statue of Mr. Shiping (portion), Northern Wei Dynasty (386-588).
Fig. 56.  a: C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 900000A*, 1990. Panel from a set of four, ink on telephone book pages, 27 x 22 cm. Collection unknown; b: categorization of scripts for *Calligraphy No. 900000A*. 
Fig. 58. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. C930528244*, 1993. Ink on paper, 91 x 61 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 60. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 93061718*, 1993. Ink on paper, 48.5 x 179.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 61. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 980708*, 1998. Hanging scroll, ink on gold-flecked paper, 65 x 65 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 63. Xu Bing (b. 1955), *Square Word Calligraphy—Little Bo Peep.* Ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Collection unknown.
Fig. 64. C. C. Wang, Calligraphy No. C94011614, 1994. Ink on paper, 60.5 x 67.5 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 65. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. C94011615*, 1994. Ink on paper, 68 x 68 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 66. Huaisu (737-after 798), *Autobiography* (portion). Handscroll, ink on paper, 28.3 x 755 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.
Fig. 67.  C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 991215*, 1999. Ink and color on paper, 97.5 x 44.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 68.  C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 201217*, 2000. Ink and color on paper, 30.5 x 58.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 69. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 960100*, 1996. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 58.5 x 45 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 70. C. C. Wang, *Abstract No. 940705*, 1994. Ink and color on paper, 74 x 72 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 71.  C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 990000*, 1999. Ink on paper, 145 x 183 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 72. C. C. Wang, *Calligraphy No. 9560600*, 1995. Ink and color on silver-flecked paper, 66 x 66.5 cm. Collection unknown.
Fig. 73. Mark Tobey (1890-1976), *Broadway Norm*, 1935. Tempera, 34 x 25.1 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 74. Franz Kline (1910-1962), *Warner Block*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 199.4 x 180.4 cm. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.
Fig. 75. Brice Marden (b. 1938), *Cold Mountain 6 (Bridge)*, 1989-1991. Oil on linen, 274.3 x 365.8 cm. Collection unknown.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works in English


———. “Monumental Landscape Painting.” In Fong and Watt, eds., *Possessing the Past*, 121-140.


Kuo, Jason C. Transforming Traditions in Modern Chinese Painting: Huang Pin-hung’s Late Work. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. See esp. chaps. IV and V, “Huang Pin-hung’s Late Work” and “The Significance of Hung Pin-hung’s Late Work.”


Ledderose, L. “Mi Fu.” In Franke, Sung Biographies: Painters, 116-127.


———. See also Hsü, Hsiao-hu.


———. “Rare Rocks are God’s Creations.” In Hu, et al., *Spirit of Gongshi*, 16.


**Works in Chinese**


Li, Junyi 李俊毅. Xianggang xiandai shuimohua wenxuan 香港現代水墨畫文選 (Selected essays on modern ink painting in Hong Kong). Hong Kong: Xianggang xiandai shuimohua xiehui, 2001.


———. Shanghai bowuguan cang haishang minghuajia jingpinji 上海博物館藏海上名畫家精品集 (Masterworks of Shanghai School painters from Shanghai Museum Collection). Hong Kong: Daye gongsi, 1991.


