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CHINA: ART, WAR AND SALVATION, 1933-1949

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My last lecture in this series on art in China, from the fall of the imperial system to the end of Maoism, concluded by stressing the global connectedness of the situation I was trying to describe, and I want to pick up where I left off.

A 1929 book cover design for a collection of short stories by the writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), draws less on indigenous Chinese forms of picturing than it does on a global language of avant-garde modernism. It is wrapped around a volume of stories by a writer who enjoyed a huge reputation, who was a founder of the politically engaged League of Left-Wing Writers in 1930, and whose impact on the visual arts was as great as it was on literature. The image on the right of the screen shows a modern rendering of a much-mythologized encounter he brokered in 1931 between a group of young Chinese artists and the Japanese woodcut artist Uchiyama Kakichi (1900-1984), a proponent of the new trend among some Japanese artists for the 'creative print' (*sosaku-hanga* in Japanese).

When we think of the great print artists of early modern Japan, the Hokusais and the Hiroshiges, we often forget that they were designers rather than makers of prints, the carving and inking and printing being left in the hands of a whole troupe of skilled artisans. The creative print artist, such as Tokio Mabe (1885-1968), insisted on the necessity for the single personality being responsible for all aspects of the creative process. Lu Xun, himself effectively bi-cultural in Chinese and Japanese, with many Japanese friends and a deep engagement with its contemporary culture, sought to meld that commitment to personal making with the political engagement of a contemporary European artist like the German feminist, pacifist and political radical Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), with whom he corresponded and whose work he himself collected. The result of this sort of interaction can be seen in a print like 'To the Front!' from 1932, with its strongly expressionist contrasts of white and black and its very clear chisel marks, the visible index of the integrity of making associated by Lu Xun and his associates with the artist's hand.

But while it is clearly inspired by ideas about the arts which we might loosely group under the term 'modernism', the woodcut movement is also at least partly a revolt against the modern, or against those aspect of the mass-produced, consumer-driven modern which its proponents abhorred. The 1934 print 'Unemployed' by Li Hua (1907-1994) takes a politically radical position, in its focus on the misery of the urban proletariat (here a sort of universal man who could be in Shanghai or in Chicago), but it also positions itself in opposition to the coloured commercial posters which by now were ubiquitous parts of that urban scene. The poster it is compared with here is selling not soap or cigarettes, but the 'fake state' of Manchukuo, which in 1931 was carved out of the three huge, resource rich provinces of north-eastern China, to the benefit of a Japanese empire which had begun its encroachment on China even before the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911.

But the 1931 annexation of the 'three eastern provinces' marked a massive ramping-up of Japanese ambitions to dominate if not to extinguish the sovereignty of the Chinese Republic. All of the art of the period was created in the shadow of that aggression, even if it chose to respond in very different ways. Li Hua, studying oil painting in Japan in 1931, returned home in enraged disgust at this point; the fact that by 1934 he had taken up the medium

of the woodcut, with its arguably Japanese roots, is just one slightly ironic example of the complexity which individuals had to negotiate.

The rhetoric, especially the retrospective rhetoric, surrounding the woodblock print made it out to be a 'popular' medium, but in fact hardly anybody saw these works at the time. So wedded were key figures to the authenticity of the maker's hand that the works contained in these issues of the journal *Modern Prints* were all actual impressions from the woodblock, no reproductive technologies of the despised mass culture were allowed. The first issue had printed 500 copies, but after criticism from Lu Xun over the use of mechanical presses, the second hand-printed issue was of a mere 50 copies.

If anybody saw these works it was because they were reproduced in the popular illustrated press of the day. This was also the medium through which any size of audience at all saw the work of another strand of the avant-garde, those committed to a practice of painting as part of an international transcendence of mimesis and likeness into a form of painting which could be universal. In a photograph from 1933 the young dandies of the Storm Society (and note please that this is very much a boys' club) stare defiantly at an indifferent world with the avant-garde mix of surliness and bravado seen by this point in artists in Buenos Aires, in Helsinki, in Cairo, as much as in Paris.

One of them is Pang Xunqin (1906-1985), creator of 'The Riddle of Life', which is now a textbook standard in surveys of modern Chinese art, not least because though long lost it is one of relatively few works to which the popular illustrated magazine *Liangyou* ('Young Companions') devoted a full-page colour reproduction. Pang spent a full five years, from 1925 to 1930, in a Paris still globally recognised as the centre of the art world, following in the footsteps of the slightly older Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), whose work I introduced in my last lecture, and whose 'Nude' of 1934 is a rare surviving actual work of the inter-war avant-garde. But neither Pang Xunqin nor Lin Fengmian made a living out of selling work of this kind, for which a Chinese audience simply did not exist. Lin was gainfully employed through the 1930s, as director of the new state-sponsored art academy in Hangzhou, while Pang found work in the world of commercial graphics and design – this was the medium through which a whole range of modernist trends were introduced to a wide audience, if a predominantly urban one.

The artists in China who *were* making a living from their work, often an extremely good living, in the 1930s were artists working in the manner which by this point was firmly understood via the new term *guohua*, 'national painting'. The newspapers were full of advertisements soliciting commissions from the urban middle class, and the actual practice of *guohua* was itself extremely various, a broad spectrum of work that ranged from the extremely historicist to pictures which seem to wish much more to explore new boundaries of the possible in the medium of brush, ink and colours on paper. But at the same time as boundaries were being pushed, boundaries were being drawn, and the self-consciously new practice of *guohua* was becoming circumscribed by a term carefully not used up to now, 'traditional Chinese painting'. This wording comes of course not out of a Chinese context, but out of the presence of works and painters from China in an international one.

In one photograph we see the painter Liu Haisu (1896-1994), his hand thrust nonchalantly into the pocket of his striped trousers, performing in London in 1935, in the context of a wave of exhibitions in European cities in the mid-1930s of 'modern Chinese painting'. These exhibitions almost all collapsed that category into that of *guohua* alone. As the German curator and critic Wilhelm Cohn (1880-1961) wrote in 1934 reviewing the Berlin exhibition, 'Equally popular in China is school of painting which employs the same techniques and subjects as Western oil painting, but this does not concern us here, since it was not included in the exhibition, and rightly so.' The sting is in the tail, 'and rightly so', since it deligitimizes as 'contemporary Chinese art' the equally large range of work not executed in ink and colours on paper. To pause for a moment over just one example of what for Cohn (and his western peers) *isn't* contemporary Chinese art, we might consider 'After the Bath' by Fang Junbi (1898-1986), yet another of those lost works we know only from reproduction, this time not from a magazine but from a volume devoted to the artist's work, a measure of the esteem in which she was held.

There exists a rather lovely photograph of the artist with her classmates and her aged teacher, hers very visibly the sole Asian face in a sea of young Bohemian French-ness. If we go back to the painting, executed many years

after her return from France, we might observe that the posture of the nude figure renders race invisible to us, even as the 'one-stroke-per-leaf' technique of the bamboo in the upper left corner, as well as the circular window which frames it, gestures towards an Asian setting of the scene. Studied and deliberate ambiguity is present too in the way the work is signed by the artist in the bottom right corner, where she has written her name both in French transcription and in Chinese characters, written not with the Chinese brush used equally for calligraphy and painting, but with the squared-off oil painting brush she has used to depict the scene. I find in this picture, as in a whole range of other pictures of this period, a refusal of either/or, of an eastern/western binary, which makes these lost works both poignant and prescient.

Fang Junbi could be, probably would have been at the time, characterised by the rubric of 'new woman', a figure of fascination and fantasy and fear in Republican China, a predominantly urban phenomenon who both stood for the Nation and embodied its vulnerabilities. 'New Woman' (from 1935) was the title of one of the most successful films of Shanghai's hugely popular cinema industry of the 1930s, complementing the nascent global visual culture of Hollywood for Shanghai audiences. Indeed in today's globalised world, if you Google, 'tragic dead film star 1930s' the first thing that comes to you is the story of Ruan Lingyu (1910-1935), star of 'New Woman', dead of an overdose at the age of twenty-four before the film's release; her funeral procession brought Shanghai to a halt. Her celebrity and her vulnerability are the flip-side of the fight for women's place in modern China, much of it carried on the pages of magazines like *Linglong* aimed at an urban and educated female readership.

But at the same time in the world of a wider visual culture the female body was placed into a familiar relationship with modern commerce, as in one advertisement where the new woman, her flesh whitened and her body positioned in the setting of an Italian Renaissance garden, coquettishly sets about the serious business of selling us soap. An image like this is part of the urban scene which is itself pictured in photolithographic posters of the era, as in an image of a hyper-modern Shanghai – this is recognisably Nanjing Road with its department stores and cinemas but there is a surfeit of cars and trams and buses and aeroplanes to underline the heady rush of modernity. The context in which these images were viewed can be seen in a photograph which itself appeared in the illustrated magazine *Liangyou*, allowing its readership to enjoy scopophilically the viewing of humbler fellow-citizens, reduced to enjoying this display of posters pinned up for sale in one of the city's streets; we see on the right the kind of 'sexy new woman' image which was used to market a whole range of goods, along with the very idea of modernity itself.

This is the context in which a viewer might have seen a more decorous but equally complex image of modern womanhood, a poster showing the new woman as mother of the nation. She is clad in the *qipao*, a form of modern dress with only tenuous connections to what woman wore in the imperial period, but which like *guohua* – 'national painting' – would ultimately serve to signify modernity's opposite and enabler, the traditional. Her daughter by contrast wears a Shirley Temple-like dress, and her son a military uniform, with the emblem of the Republic on his cap. A pagoda, signifier of the Chinese land, is dimly visible in the far background. Where is Father? The implication, as in the famous 'What did you do in the war, daddy?' poster, is that he too is in uniform, actively defending the nation that his woman and children love. It needed a lot of defending.

The Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945, known in Chinese as the War of Resistance to Japan, is by any standard one of the most traumatic and devastating of all the conflicts roiled together in the dark mid-twentieth century. Estimates of the death toll vary from the huge to the unthinkably huge; the official statistics of the People's Republic of China count twenty million Chinese dead and fifteen million wounded. Up to half a million Japanese troops also died. The war created ninety-five million refugees, as China's east coast was occupied and government, business, schools and universities relocated to the west.

One image came to stand in the wider world for the savagery of a war waged against civilians without restraint. It is the photograph entitled 'Bloody Saturday', taken by the photographer H.S. Wong (1900-1981) and published in *Life* magazine in October of 1937, showing an abandoned infant in the ruins of a railway station; it has been reliably estimated that 136 million people had seen this photograph within a month of its first publication, and although contested as 'fake news' by Japanese propaganda outlets it was decisive in swinging sympathy behind China's fight for survival, especially in the USA. It is perhaps not so surprising that the image

encapsulating such a brutal, and such a modern, war for the rest of the world should be a news photograph, but today within China itself another work of art is arguably just as famous as *the* visual signifier of the War of Resistance. This is a woodblock print from 1938 made by Li Hua, artist of the 'Unemployed' print discussed above. It is entitled 'Roar, China!', and it takes its name from an anti-imperialist play of the same title by the Soviet writer Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov (1892-1937), first staged in 1926.

Tretyakov was shot in Stalin's purges in 1937, the year before the print was made, and crucially this time reproduced in illustrated magazines, a number of which had participated in the retreat to the new capital of the Chinese Republic in Chongqing, in the south-west of the country. It was the mass media which made 'Roar, China!' an icon of patriotic resistance, in which its bound and brutalised figure reaches for the knife that will free him and wreak revenge on his captors. In the shock and horror of invasion and defeat the woodcut artist's hostility to the commercial media had to give way to an acceptance of the reach and audience that only they could command.

At the same time strong and assertive positions were being laid down about what art could and should and indeed must do. One such voice is that of the leftist writer and cartoonist Chen Yifan (1908-1995), alias Jack Chen, born in Trinidad in 1908 and educated in London and Moscow, experiences which made him a vocal if untypical example of the cosmopolitan Chinese intellectual. He wrote the following in January 1937, just months before the Sino-Japanese War broke out, in an English-language journal but one much read by Anglophone Chinese intellectuals, 'Only that art can be considered modern that is inspired by revolutionary democratic nationalism. The test of a modern art is its value to the progress of China…It is the prime need of China and her millions to be able to see and feel and visualise things realistically…In the creation of a realistic art the artist completely fulfils his social and political duties.' This sense of the artist, like the writer, as having duties would only intensify in wartime. What was perhaps new was the confident assertion that only one style, that of realism, would do in the fulfilling of those duties.

But what did 'realistic' mean, in the end? If we compare two paintings from the year 1937, just at the outbreak of the war; both would have been characterized as *guohua,* though they look rather different. A picture by Wang Jiqian (1907-2003) is by an artist who although young had an established career working in a mode which many collectors at the time found attractive and desirable; this one continues a long-held practice of identifying openly the old master to whose style it is a response, in this case he is the eleventh century Northern Song dynasty landscape painter Guo Xi (c. 1020-c. 1090).

A piece by Xu Beihong (1895-1953) is executed in what are technically the same media of brush and ink, but that is more or less where the similarity stops. For one thing, the Xu Beihong is of a specific real place, as opposed to an idealised and generalised landscape, it shows the distinctive karst topography along the Li River near the city of Guilin, in the deep south-west of China. This had *never* (or hardly ever) been the subject of a painting prior to the twentieth century. Guilin, for all its beauties, was largely off the map of pre-modern elite tourism, and it was only the exigencies of wartime, when the National Central University was relocated out of the reach of the Japanese war machine, which brought Xu Beihong and painters like him to this hitherto remote part of the country. The picture's fixed point perspective, and the representation of the reflection of the mountains in the water, all mark this out as a work which uses a set of picturing conventions which Xu had honed in Paris, even if he had first learned them in China. It falls therefore within the scope of what at least some people, Xu himself certainly among them, understood by 'realistic'.

Guohua and realism are not opposites for him here. He surely felt the same way about a portrait of a coolly-posed Sun Duoci (1912-1975), the artist who at various times in her life was his pupil and also his lover. I think this is one of the most successful and intriguing paintings in Xu's entire (and very large) output. Just as the previous picture shows a real place, this shows a real person, portrayed this time not in ink but in oils, making it not *guohua* but *yanghua*, literally 'foreign painting'. Behind the main figure, which plays ambiguously with stasis and motion through the rocking chair on which she sits, are a number of plaster casts, studio props and teaching aids. Flanked by two classical goddesses, the shorthand for European classical civilisation (not yet at this point dissolved into the mayhem of war) are two plaster casts of death masks, Tolstoy on the left and Lenin on the right, the continuity of culture, literature and art, and the solidity-melting frenzy of revolution in one pairing.

Calm as the scene looks, we have to see this as a wartime painting, realistic certainly, but also pushing at realism's capacity to hold in place the enormity of war, trauma and disaster. I am here taking this painting seriously, but its first viewers surely also saw it in the context of the myriad depictions of the female form which had been part of the visual culture of a pre-war world, and indeed continued to be so in the cities under Japanese occupation. A third picture by Xu Beihong from this period grapples, in this case I think less successfully, with the attempt to hold the painterly possibilities of *guohua* and the life-drawing class within the same framework, the human figure and the expressive brushwork of the tree seeming here to occupy two different and incompatible worlds, for all the painter's sincerity in trying to reconcile them.

But what of this art's value to the progress of China? Were China's millions really demanding the right 'to be able to see and feel and visualise things realistically', as Chen Yifan put it? It is during wartime that we see the first tentative beginnings of artists not only talking about China's largely illiterate, overwhelmingly rural population, but also attempting to talk *to* them. Of course, some artists had always done this, it is just that they were the anonymous makers of images like the woodblock-printed 'door gods' or 'new year pictures' (*nianhua*) which had been produced for some centuries in their hundreds of thousands, probably even their millions.

There were many kinds of *nianhua*, lucky images, scenes from drama, even increasingly political subjects and images of urban modernity (I showed some of these in my first lecture); they were the products of specialist workshops, distributed by peddlers to rural peasant households well beyond the reach of modern media such as newspapers. Some of the most widespread, popular and tenacious types were protective images of deities designed to be pasted up on the doors of village homes, hence their name of 'door gods'. With their keen sense of what often illiterate rural customers actually wanted to buy, it is hardly surprising that the anonymous artists of door-god workshops should turn their hand to images like one extremely rare surviving example of an early resistance war door god, its simple and direct slogan of 'Fight Japan, save China' being the only indication of its contemporary relevance. Without the words (which presumably many people had to have read to them), we would have no idea of what this god was being invoked to protect his purchasers *from*.

The same cannot be said of what is possibly the first attempt by a named, urban artist to co-opt the visual language of the door-god to the immediate necessities of patriotic propaganda, this 'Resistance Door God', originally printed in the magazine *Liangyou* in April 1939. Its artist, Lai Shaoqi (1915-2000), had been one of the activists of the pre-war woodcut movement, high-mindedly dead set in its opposition to the 'ice cream for the eyes' represented by a magazine like *Liangyou*, but it must have been becoming clear to many that high-mindedness would not get the message across.

'Celebrate Victory in the War of Resistance', says the slogan held up by the children, dwarfed by the figure of the helmeted cavalryman and the billowing flag of the Republic behind him, but at this point victory must have seemed far off and far from certain. The image as it comes down to us is only in the periodical's reproduction, in the bold colours which were such a feature of 'real' door gods (although the earlier commitment of Lai Shaoqi was rigorously to the possibilities of black-and white alone). The reach and distribution of such an image, beyond its circulation in the pages of the magazine, is uncertain, and the same is true of another attempt to make the gods and the defenders of the nation coalesce into one another, in a work from 1940 by Han Shangyi (1917-?).

Much closer to the rural originals is another print, which shows the popular newspaper cartoon character Niubizi ('Ox-nose') in the guise of a 'Resistance War Door God', done in the same year. This is the Chinese equivalent of Popeye or Mickey Mouse selling war bonds in World War II, a figure from popular culture certainly, but from an urban popular culture of cheap print and newspapers, one which had relocated itself, and hence, almost fortuitously, put its professional creators in much closer touch with the way the majority of the Chinese population actually lived, and the images they wishes to consume. That majority will have had very little idea who the character of Niubizi was. But they might have recognised this as a sort of door-god, an image very far from the realism which a leftist intellectual like Chan Yifan had claimed that China's millions thirsted for.

The struggles and uncertainties to make art a genuine part of a genuinely national resistance (in a context where 'nation' was itself an unfamiliar concept to many) are visible in a once-famous, long-lost, and recently-

rediscovered work by Xu Beihong, working this time in the medium of oils (despite the sheer difficulty of getting hold of painting materials in wartime conditions). It shows the famous actress Wang Ying (1913-1974), in the role of Fragrance, an impoverished singing girl forced to perform in the street to keep herself and her tyrannical father. The cry of 'Put down your whip!' is directed at him by a member of her audience as her father threatens to beat her for not making enough money to feed them. In the original 1931 version, this was accompanied by exhortations to unite and fight the oppressive nationalist government, but by 1938 the playlet had been rewritten several times to underline themes of patriotic resistance to the Japanese. Its easily-understood call for Chinese to set aside internal differences and unite against an external enemy made it an ideal propaganda vehicle to direct at literate and illiterate audiences alike, and it was performed thousands of times by hundreds of different casts in all parts of China and in the Chinese diaspora. The famous and glamorous stage and screen actress Wang Ying, here dressed-down in the blue and white cotton of a simple peasant girl, performed it in Singapore, which is where Xu Beihong painted his version of it in 1938. Wang Ying went on to perform it for the Roosevelts in the White House in 1942. Very few in China will have seen the painting at the time, but very many will have seen the reproduction of it which appeared in *Liangyou* magazine, more or less when the paint was still wet. Its production showed the artist pitching in to do his patriotic bit, in a way which was not so immediately visible in the other major commission on which he was working at the time, a full size portrait of the British colonial governor of Singapore, clad in full imperial regalia of gilded trousers and feathered hat.

Commissions to paint portraits of British imperial grandees might pay the rent, and might certainly count as a practice of artistic realism, but at this period Xu Beihong (and I am using him here to stand for a number of other artists at the time), did also make serious efforts to find a visual language suitable to wartime conditions and wartime needs, or at least to search within their own existing practice for types of images which could serve those needs.

Few visual tropes of twentieth-century Chinese art are more familiar to global audiences than the numerous pictures of horses which Xu painted at this time, and they are such a cliché that it is actually hard to see them now afresh, or understand what role they might have been trying to play. They were by no means an innovation in Xu's own art (an earlier painting was done as early as 1932), but they were easily assimilated to ideas about vigour, force and dash, all qualities which the Chinese public desperately needed to be able to find in the patchy military response of the Nationalist government to the Japanese onslaught. He must have painted them by the hundreds, although no complete catalogue exists, and they become a kind of artistic gesture which gains both force and a sort of inevitability from endless repetition. They exist alongside work like the Singapore oil paintings, or like the portrait of the Nobel-prize winning Bengali writer and artist Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) which Xu Beihong painted in 1940 as his wartime peregrinations took him to the aged sage's retreat at Santiniketan in British India.

It therefore is a bit dangerous to say, as some textbooks hint, that there was a move from oil painting to *guohua* on ideological or nationalist grounds in wartime. Rather we can say that a rather particular set of wartime iconography can be observed across a whole range of media at this time, so, the theme of animals (as in Xu Beihong's bounding horses and soaring eagles) can also be seen in the work of the photographer Lang Jingshan (1892-1995), whose manipulated photographs, like one of a lion roaring out defiance against a background of lofty peaks, show a coming together of new technologies and old formats to create a new type of synthesis.

Another work by him shows the mighty mountains of China above a sea of cloud, again a work which alludes to rather than copies from pre-modern types of picturing. It is hard not to see here a sort of visualisation of the single most important Chinese wartime slogan, *Huan wo he shan*! 'Give back our land!' (or more literally, 'our rivers and mountains'), a battle cry originally associated with a great patriotic warrior of the eleventh century, but used in the twentieth as the rallying cry for national resistance to Japanese as to other forms of imperialism.

This in turn should make us think about the continued practice of *guohua* in the period of the War of Resistance, as carried out by artists living in the unconquered southwest or in areas under Japanese occupation. I'd like to suggest (and here we might think about the work of British war artists like Paul Nash (1889-1946)), that in

wartime the very act of painting the landscape, painting the *national* landscape, was in itself a political statement, or at the very least an act capable of construing as a mute form of resistance.

The wide variety of works produced by Chinese artists in wartime are not all of them masterpieces, but they include among them a high proportion of works which are of great interest and great singularity. In 1939 control of the great city of Shanghai was split between the Japanese army, who had driven its Chinese defenders out as early as 1937, and the ongoing uneasy presence of the 'International Settlement', effectively a colony under British and American control. It did not fall to the Japanese until 1941, in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbour (this is the setting for J.G. Ballard's great novel 'Empire of the Sun', and the film Steven Spielberg made of it).

The prosperous boulevard of Nanjing Road lies in what was the International Settlement, the pride of not just its colonial masters but of a wider audience who could fantasize about its opulence and modernity through the medium of prints such as these. But the painter Zhao Wangyun (1906-1977) makes this sort of architectural setting the backdrop to a miserable crowd of workers, knocking off from their grinding labours, the heads of the crowd stretching back seemingly to infinity. It is a poignant image of miserable quotidian existence and backbreaking toil, a reminder that for many of China's millions living conditions were awful even before the war made them much worse. It makes the strongest possible contrast with the epic bombast of what may be one of the worst pictures painted in twentieth-century China (at least it never fails to elicit giggles when I show it in class).

Tang Yihe (1905-1944), the artist of 'Victory and Peace', had studied in Paris in the 1930s, and returned to take the post (jointly with his brother) of director of the Wuchang School of Art, based in an important provincial city but one which was scarcely a rival to Shanghai as a trendsetter. Like so many institutions of education, the school was relocated to Sichuan in 1938, and it must have been there that Tang painted his work, transcribing its iconography directly from a great Rubens canvas in Munich which at that very moment was facing its own risks under the assault of Allied bombing. He must have taken it from a postcard, or a precious book laboriously transported out of the war zone.

One presumes that hardly anybody not trained in European art would have grasped the iconography, since naked winged blonde females with wreaths have no immediate connotations of victory in pre-modern Chinese art. The Chinese facial features of the warrior shown cleaning the blade of his bloodied sword are not by themselves sufficient to bring this picture into a Chinese sphere of meaning, and it has to be judged a failure, but there is something just a little heroic I think in its badness, its attempt to conjure a set of symbolic meanings out of intractable material, as an artist of reasonably modest talents tries to make those talents cope with unprecedented demands. All the same, one cannot help feeling that this was not what Chen Yifan had in mind for China's millions.

More immediately meaningful to a Chinese audience would be another work with a man and a sword, this image of the demon-quelling demigod Zhong Kui, a figure firmly out of Chinese mythology. Demons are *guizi* in Chinese, and *guizi* was the abusive term used for foreigners in general and the Japanese in particular at this time. So this is a very deliberately pertinent image in 1941, when it was painted. But is it any better as a picture? The anatomy of the figure (remember anatomy was a subject for which Xu Beihong had won prizes at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris) is frankly pretty dreadful, with the left arm unfeasibly elongated and the right wrist simply unbelievable.

It is perhaps topped by another fairly risible Xu Beihong, his 'Mountain Goddess' of 1943, which attempts similarly to meld the anatomical and mimetic traditions of Paris with the expressive brushwork of certain parts of the *guohua* tradition. Here background and foreground seem to come from two different pictures (a not uncommon problem at this time). We could read this either as another instance of badness in painting, or see it more positively as testimony again to an ongoing refusal to do either/or, either Chinese or Western, to continue even in wartime the struggle for something distinctive *and* modern. But either way there was too much going on for anybody to pay too much attention. Particularly so as a genuinely popular culture disseminated through mass media continued its output in wartime, even if severely restricted by everything from paper shortages to

bombing raids. A spread taken from a 1940 issue of *Liangyou* shows two comically juxtaposed photos in which a crowd of completely naked men appear to ogle a beauty in a fashionable swimsuit. The English caption and the Chinese caption interestingly do not say exactly the same thing, and thus create the sort of ambiguity we have already seen in Fang Junbi's naked bather, signed by her in both languages.

This may not raise much more than a smile, but smiles were in precious short supply as the war dragged on and on. One massive scroll entitled 'Refugees' used the Chinese medium of brush and ink (and a Chinese format and proportions) alongside imported conventions of figure drawing, to try and capture realistically the dislocation and suffering of the millions forced to flee their homes, continuously subject to Japanese attack from the air. In the centre of this section of the long scroll a women holds a dead child, while around her figures cover their eyes and their mouths and their ears to shut out the horrors engulfing them. The unfinished nature of the work, with certain figures just sketched in in charcoal, only adds to its power by pointing to the snatched nature of creativity in a time of terror. Just as realistic, but much more tranquil, even bucolic, is another painting focussing on the lives of ordinary people, 'People of Northern Shaanxi', by Zhuang Yan (1915-2002). Here an old woman, with a piece of knitting or some other form of handwork, stands over a small child, who plays in the mud with an animal, probably a piglet. Here we are definitely in the countryside, among real people, members of the 'China's millions' of whom Chen Yifan spoke. But this sort of picture too would have come under the stricture of bad art, and for reasons quite different from the failures of aesthetics we might attribute to some of the other pictures I have just been discussing.

The title locates the picture to a particular part of China, to the impoverished and arid backwoods of northern Shaanxi province in the north-west, an area beyond Japanese control but also beyond the effective control of the putative government of the Republic of China in Chongqing. We are in Yan'an, capital of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border region, the remote area the size of Portugal controlled from 1937 by the Chinese Communist Party, who had taken refuge there at the end of the epic retreat later memorialized as the 'Long March'. Its population of roughly 1.5 million provided the raw material for the Communist Party's development of strategies which would bring it to total power in China only a dozen years later, but nobody knew this in 1937, and it is important not to see what happened as the only thing that could have happened.

When an artist like Zhuang Yan made his way to Yan'an in 1937 this could hardly be seen as furthering his career, rather the impulse to do so came from an idealistic sense that only the utterly radical positions of the Communists had the possibility of saving China from external invasion, and from the poverty and backwardness which afflicted the vast majority of its rural population. The lustre of Yan'an as revolutionary shrine makes it very difficult now to talk about what actually went on there, so perhaps a set of mythologized images are the best that we can deal with.

I am juxtaposing here for maximum effect two official images, of the nationalist leader Jiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), and of Mao Zedong (1893-1976), who at Yan'an asserted final dominance over his rivals for control of the Party. Both of these are propaganda, the buttoned-up and be-medalled Jiang alongside the folksy and relaxed Mao, but I think they capture something of the attraction to a generation of predominantly young cultural figures – writer, actors, artists - who made their way to Yan'an to 'make revolution'. A good proportion of them are gathered in a photograph (note how few they are), showing Mao in the middle, presiding in May 1942 over the 'Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art', a conference topped and tailed by two speeches from him.

It is a moot point how much Mao Zedong cared about the visual arts (as opposed to literature, which certainly mattered to him a lot and which he was well versed-in as a reader and poet). Certainly his speeches at the 'Forum' say nothing specifically about visual art, and his few concrete examples do not include any drawn from this sphere of creativity. But it is perfectly clear that the same set of prescriptions apply to all creative endeavours. Using the simple 'base and superstructure' model of Soviet Marxism, and quoting Lenin on the role of the arts as 'cogs and wheels in the whole revolutionary machine', Mao states that, 'All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants and soldiers, they are created for the workers, peasants and soldiers, and are for their use.'

Any notion of art as an autonomous realm of activity is ruled out; so Zhuang Yan's muted palette and lack of revolutionary oomph therefore dooms his image of the peasantry to criticism, however realistic it might be. But at the same time (and here Mao shows his formation in the May 4th period), he makes it clear that art has to be *good*; 'What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form, the unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form'. Like much of holy writ (and this is what Mao's 'Talks' would become) there is plenty of scope for ambiguity.

In the first instance it was much easier to address the need for artists to address a rural audience, than it was to think about the 'highest possible perfection of artistic form'. So the woodcut prints made at Yan'an concentrated on the upbeat and hortatory, they lauded the farmer who had achieved high levels of productivity which all should emulate, or they trumpeted the abundant food and clothing which would be available to the peasant household under Communist Party rule. They transformed the Party's army and militia forces into protective door guardians (not 'gods'), borrowing a strategy which as we have seen had already been in place in Nationalist-controlled areas for some years.

But there was always a degree of ambivalence on the part of intellectuals, especially Communist intellectuals, about 'folk' forms of visuality, which were at once deeply authentic and so good, and also deeply tied to superstition, poverty and backwardness, and so bad, very bad indeed. It was much more comfortable to speak about 'the people', than to speak with them, and we can see this in a work like a print produced by a Yan'an-based artist showing peasants demanding a reduction in their rent. The subject-matter is impeccable, both a testimony to Communist success in mobilising the masses, and an exhortation to emulation and further struggle. But the style, with its complex multi-figure composition rendered in austere modernist black and white, moves far away from the colourful immediacy of the images peasants had long consumed. As I showed last time, certain types of 'New Year prints' had been involved with contemporary issues, and had been monochrome, long before the particular circumstances of Yan'an. The audience for an image like this was at least as much a global one – Yan'an was despite the myth no pristine Utopia sealed from outside contamination – and in fact exhibitions of wartime prints by artists from both Nationalist- and Communist-controlled areas were held in Chongqing, while works like this were published and displayed in the USA and Canada as well as in Moscow.

But wartime art in China cannot be reduced to the hortatory woodcut, nor should we read the art of the period through the lens of histories constructed later to make what happened seem like the only thing that could have happened. Artists working in both *guohua* and in oils responded in a wide variety of ways to the particular stresses and the particular dislocations of audiences and art worlds, and this diversity only continued when the sudden surrender of the Japanese in 1945 brought the war to an end. It was very rapidly succeeded in China by the outbreak of an equally destructive and savage four-year Civil War between American-armed Nationalist forces and Soviet-backed Communists. (There was never anything from the very beginning very cold about the Cold War in Asia.)

A prominent historian of the Civil War has written of these grim years as a cultural wasteland, but this assertion is contradicted by the artworks which survive from the period. Indeed, the terrible economic dislocation of the Civil War, with the value of middle class incomes collapsing as the currency did, may in fact have spurred visual artists to produce more, simply to stay alive and feed their families. The 'sketches' of Feng Zikai (1898-1975) were hugely popular with war-shattered audiences, their gentleness a sort of refuge for many. The commercially successful *guohua* masters of the pre-war ear all restarted production in the 1940s, and the range of styles in which they worked was if anything even greater than it had been before the war; there must therefore have been audiences for this work, even if at present very little research exists to tell us how they were configured.

In February 1948, the decision was taken by the Nationalist government to ship those selected treasures of the old imperial collection which had been removed from Beijing over a decade earlier to keep them from the Japanese, to the island of Taiwan. The early nature of this decision points to the collapse of Nationalist morale, but we still need to resist the temptation to see Communist victory as inevitable. Certainly many intellectuals were involved in attempts to find a 'third way' between them, although the murder of the poet Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) by Nationalist assassins in 1946 was a shocking reminder of the limited freedom of manoeuvre they enjoyed. No painter, as far as I know, suffered the same fate at this time, although some like Pan Yuliang (1895-

1977) chose to remain abroad. Equally pensive, even enigmatic, are the faces of Pang Xunqin's modernist 'Couple', filling the whole space of the canvas in a way which seems to seek to blot out the outside world. But that outside world went on, and the commercial art world of posters and graphics, seen in a photograph taken in Shanghai in January 1948 over a year before ultimate Communist victory, remained the way in which most urban audiences engaged, however distantly, with the art world.

A year later in early 1949, when a colourful calendar showing the Communists' political leader Mao Zedong and their military commander Zhu De (1886-1976) was published, the final outcome of civil war was obvious to many. The clear dependence of this image on 'folk' prototypes, images of the Kitchen God and his wife as worshipped at the Lunar New Year, might perhaps have been taken as a sign of the aesthetic preferences of the victors, utterly unknown to most in those major Chinese cities now beginning to fall under Communist control.

Some artists left the country, among them the leading *guohua* star Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). Other scholars and intellectuals returned, keen to be a part of the building of what was being proclaimed as 'New China', rising out of the chaos and misery. Most just remained, with differing degrees of commitment to the new regime, and different resources with which to meet its requirements for an art at the service of the people.

In 1949 Jiang Zhaohe (1904-1986), who just six years earlier had painted the massive scroll recording the sufferings of bombed-out refugees, painted this work, and inscribed it on the very day that the southernmost metropolis of Canton achieved 'liberation'. He wrote on it, 'To work strenuously, to support progress with a rich harvest. In newly reborn China, peasants and workers have united, all parties and factions have united with a single goal. Friendship to China and the Soviet Union, Peace to the world'.

We have no reason to believe the optimism was forced in his case. Nor in that of Hu Yichuan, who must have been at the very same time working on his oil painting 'Breaking the Fetters', an icon of freedom in which the People's Liberation Army strikes the shackles from the feet of the miserably confined. To this veteran leftist radical it may have seemed as if the exhortation of his 1932 woodcut, 'To the Front!' had been answered in full measure, and with total victory, a mere seventeen years later.

What this would mean for artists, their work, and their audiences, in New China will be the theme of my third and final lecture.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Craig Clunas, *Art in China* 2nd edition (Oxford, 2009)

Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Ken Lum, Zheng Shengtian, eds, *Shanghai Modern*, 1919-1945 (Munich, 2004)

Lü Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China* (Milan, 2010)

Felicity Lufkin, *Folk Art and Modern Culture in Republican China* (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London, 2016)

Mao Zedong, 'Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking, 1965)

Paul G. Pickowicz, Kuiyi Shen, Yingjin Zhang eds., *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945*, Modern Asian Art and Visual Culture 1 (Leiden and Boston, 2013)

Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China* (Berkeley, 1996)

Xiaobing Tang, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 2008)