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# The germination of the sense of community for the Chinese nation and transformation of landscape painting in the early 20th period（1900–1936）

Junping Liu

**Abstract**

1900–1936 is a key turning point in modern Chinese art, witnessing both the transformation of literati painting and the rise of the sense of community for the Chinese nation. Using this as a framework, it examines landscape painting's functional shift, practical exploration, and exhibition mechanisms. The "Art Revolution's" realism extended nation-state construction into visual culture; Huang Binhong's "Inner beauty", Gao Jianfu's "Compromise between China and the West", and Xu Beihong's "learning from nature" each answered how landscape painting could shape national spirit. The 1929 and 1937 national art exhibitions provided institutional platforms for public display and national identity construction. Together, these forces turned landscape painting from private literati expression into public national visual representation—an early form of the sense of community for the Chinese nation in art. Landscape painting thus became a medium for expressing national destiny, uniting emotions, and building shared visual memory, completing a spiritual leap from "self-cultivation" to "social commitment" and laying historical and aesthetic foundations for later "people's nature" turns in art.

**Key Words**

The sense of community for the Chinese nation; landscape painting; art revolution; sketching; national Art Exhibition

## 1. From "freedom" to "consciousness": the awakening of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community in the early 20th century

Fei Xiaotong made a far-reaching judgment in The Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation : "The formation of the pattern of pluralistic integration of the Chinese nation has its own characteristics : in a fairly early period, 3000 years ago, in the middle reaches of the Yellow River appeared by a number of ethnic groups and the gradual integration of the core, known as the Cathaysian, like a snowball generally rolling bigger and bigger, the surrounding alien absorption into the core. It is called the Han nationality by other ethnic groups after having the East Asian plains of the Yellow River and the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The Han nationality continues to absorb the ingredients of other ethnic groups and growing, and infiltration of other ethnic groups inhabited areas, constitute a network of cohesion and contact, laid the foundation of many ethnic groups in this territory united into an indivisible unity, become a free national entity, through the national consciousness and called the Chinese nation".[1] This thesis provides a fundamental analytical framework for understanding the awakening of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community in the early 20 th century. The so-called "being-in-itself"means that in the long historical process, the Central Plains and the surrounding ethnic groups have formed a pluralistic unity of "you come and I go, I come and you go, I have you, I have you"through contact, mixing, connection and integration ; the so-called "consciousness"refers to the fact that this free entity is given a clear name, boundary and political meaning under the catalysis of external pressure, and becomes the object of consciousness and recognition by members. From 1900 to 1936, it was the key period of the transition from " being-in-itself " to " being-conscious. "

The Jiawu fiasco constituted the starting point of this transition. Before that, the identity framework of the scholar-bureaucrats in the Qing Dynasty was still "the world " rather than " the country,""culture " rather than " race." The reason why the defeat of Jiawu was far more powerful than the previous defeats, and the thoroughness of the defeat——the collapse of the whole Beiyang Navy and the great cut of the Maguan Treaty——has changed from a rhetorical warning to a perceptible realistic prospect. It is in this context that "nation"has

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changed from a classical term to a mobilized political concept. Liang Qichao introduced the perspective of social Darwinism in “On the General Trend of National Competition”and asserted that “nationalists are the driving force for the creation of modern countries”.[2] He also called for “Hehan, Heman, Hemeng, Hehui, Hemiao and Hezang to form a large nation”. This formulation of " great nationalism " marks that the elite class began to consciously integrate the originally scattered ethnic identity into a higher level of " Chinese nation " identity. However, the landing of the concept of “Chinese nation” is not smooth. At the beginning of the 20 th century, the revolutionaries and reformists launched a fierce debate on ethnic issues. Zhang Taiyan in the Refutation of Kang Youwei's Revolutionary Book to “historical nation”as the boundary, emphasizing the “racial boundary”can not be eliminated, its nationalism with a strong anti-Manchu color. This position was effective in mobilizing the people to overthrow the Qing court, but it planted a hidden danger logically : if the definition of “nation”depended on the exclusion of “others”, how would the newly established republic accommodate a large number of non-Han ethnic groups in its territory ? After the Xinhai Revolution, the proposal was a response to this hidden danger. The significance of this expression is that it expands the scope of members of the “Chinese nation”from a single Han nationality to the main ethnic groups in the territory of the Qing Empire, so that the “community”has a spatial outline consistent with the territory of modern countries.

Before and after the May Fourth Movement, the consciousness of the Chinese nation community experienced a qualitative deepening. If the “Republic of the Five Nationalities”is mainly a top-level design of the elite, then the ideological enlightenment of the May Fourth period infiltrated the national consciousness downward to young intellectuals and urban people. In 1917, Li Dazhao published the “New Chinese Nationalism”, highlighting the “new Chinese nationalism”, advocating that “the reconstruction of the Chinese nation and the resurrection of the Chinese nation should be the key to the greatness”.[3] This expression elevates the “Chinese nation” from a descriptive sociological concept to a subject with action appeal. At the same time, when Sun Yat-sen systematically expounded the Three People's Principles in 1924, he made a more theoretical analysis of the relationship between “nation” and “state”. He pointed out that Chinese people “only have familism and clanism, no nationalism”.[4] This diagnosis hits the core problem of the awakening of community consciousness: the identity leap from clan to nation requires an imaginary bond that transcends blood and geography. Sun Yat-sen's attempt to define the nation by “natural force”——blood, life, language, religion, customs and habits just shows that this bond is being consciously constructed and elaborated.

In this ideological context, it is not accidental that art has become an important carrier of community consciousness. When the “Chinese nation”as an ideological concept is still in the process of shaping, visual art provides a way of perceptual cohesion before concept and program. The “landscape”in traditional landscape painting has never been a pure natural object. It carries the metaphor of “Jiangshan”and the emotional projection of “homeland”. However, in the tradition of literati painting, this projection is highly dependent on the shared knowledge of the literati circle-ink origin, sectarian pedigree, poetic allusions-ordinary people are excluded from this meaning system. When painters in the early 20 th century began to replace copying with sketching and replacing ' hills in the chest ' with real mountains and rivers, they were actually doing something that had not been systematically done before in landscape painting: transforming “mountains and rivers”from literati 's private symbols into national visual representations that can be recognized and empathized by a wider group of people. Huang Binhong 's pursuit of " inner beauty, " Gao Jianfu 's “eclecticism between China and the West”and Xu Beihong 's “learning from nature”have different paths, but they all point to a deep proposition: how landscape painting can change from the retreat of “being good at oneself”to the spiritual field of “helping the

world”in an era of cohesion. The driving force of this transformation is the germination and projection of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community in the visual field.

To sum up, the awakening of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community from 1900 to 1936 presents a clear logical clue : the defeat of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 gave birth to the introduction of “nation”as a category of salvation ; the debate between revolution and improvement forced the boundary of the “Chinese nation”to expand from a narrow race to an inclusive nation ; the May 4th Enlightenment pushed this concept from elite discourse to a broader social consciousness. The transformation of landscape painting provides a visual, sensible and propagable form of existence for this community consciousness which is still in the process of conceptualization. When the painters walk out of the study and face the real Chinese mountains and rivers, what they depict is not only the natural scenery, but also a “territorial portrait”of a national community that is being called, imagined and constructed. This visual practice constitutes an indispensable dimension in the process of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community from “freedom”to “consciousness.

## 2. The crisis of landscape painting visual reconstruction and the awakening of national consciousness

At the beginning of the 20 th century, China was in the abyss of internal and external troubles. The humiliation of the defeat of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, the invasion of the Eight-Power Allied Forces, the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution and the subsequent turmoil of the warlord 's melee made the " national salvation " the most urgent proposition of the whole society. Under this grand historical background, as the core carrier of traditional culture, Chinese painting, especially landscape painting, is facing an unprecedented survival crisis and value revaluation. The long-standing " antique " and " copying " atmosphere of traditional landscape painting has been regarded by the pioneers of the New Culture Movement as the culprit leading to the malaise of national spirit and the separation from real life. Chen Duxiu called for the " art revolution " on the " new youth " and advocated the " life of the king 's painting. " The core logic is that the old literati painting cannot reflect the reality of modern China and cannot bear the responsibility of awakening the people and uniting the national spirit.



Figure 1: Gao Jianfu, The Flame of the East Battlefield. 166×92 cm. Ink painting, 1932, Guangzhou Art Museum Collection.

However, is landscape painting really just a synonym for staleness ? In the wave of ' art revolution ', a group of artists with profound traditional foundation and modern vision, such as Huang Binhong, Gao Jianfu, Xu Beihong, etc., did not simply abandon the tradition, but tried to find a new way in the ' integration of Chinese and Western ' and ' integration of ancient and modern '. By introducing the concept of western realism and advocating the creative transformation from copying to sketching, they tried to get landscape painting out of the study and face the magnificent and devastated mountains and rivers of the motherland. This process is not only a technical innovation, but also a spiritual remodeling. It marks the beginning of landscape painting from personal emotional catharsis to the common concern for the fate of the nation, from the reclusion of the ' little self ' to the responsibility of the ' big self '.

As a modern concept, the ideological origin of the sense of community for the Chinese nation can be traced back to the process of nation-state construction in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China. Fei Xiaotong pointed out in the The Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation that the Chinese nation as a free national entity The Chinese nation, as a conscious national entity, has emerged in the confrontation between China and Western powers in the past century, but as a free national entity, it has been formed over thousands of years.[5] This conscious process not only occurs in the ideological discussion and social practice, but also deeply penetrates into the production and dissemination of visual art. During this period, although the concept of "Chinese nation"as a modern ideological concept has not yet been fully finalized, through the proposal of "five-ethnic republic," the rise of nationalism and the development of a series of national salvation movements, a sense of "national" identity based on common history, common land and common destiny is quietly being nurtured among intellectuals and artists. As an artistic form of depicting "great rivers and mountains", landscape painting has naturally become the best container for carrying this sense of community. When painters begin to record the real mountains and rivers with brushes and express the changes of the times, they are actually building a visual "national community", so that the viewer can feel a common emotion and identity beyond the region and class when staring at the picture.

From 1900 to 1936, at the historical node of the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the founding of the Republic of China, the unification of the Northern Expedition and the eve of the Anti-Japanese War, the anxiety of national survival and the demands of modernization were intertwined, forcing landscape painting to respond to a series of fundamental questions:Can it continue to carry the cultural mission of "heart for heaven and earth "? In what ways should it participate in the spiritual construction of modern nation-states ? Is its "nationality"the shackle that hinders progress, or the resources that can be mobilized? The deep motivation of the transformation of landscape painting in this period is not simply the evolution of style or the innovation of techniques, but the germination and projection of national community consciousness in the visual field. The functional transformation of landscape painting from "literati "to "national representation", the practical transformation from "copying the ancients"to "learning from nature", and the spatial transfer from "study"to "public display"constitute the initial form of the community consciousness of the Chinese nation in the field of fine arts. It should be noted that the definition of "embryonic period" means that this paper focuses not on the artistic expression of mature national community consciousness, but on the source state in its genetic sense. At this stage, the artists have not yet formed a clear and unified"Chinese national art"program, but their practice has unconsciously laid the foundation for the national symbolic function of landscape painting in the later period of comprehensive anti-Japanese war.

As early as the beginning of the 20 th century, Chinese art based on copying has quietly begun the transformation of Westernization. Lin Fengmian made a sober diagnosis of the form of Chinese painting in the "future of East-West art": "Oriental art, the composition of form, is inclined to the subjective aspect. Often because the form is too underdeveloped, but can not express the emotional needs, the art of boredom when the play, so that art in society lost its considerable position."[6] The change of form and even schema is also the starting point of western modern art revolution. Throughout the history of Chinese painting for more than two thousand years, the language of Chinese art is not static, which is closely related to the geographical span and the mixed state of ethnic groups. However, since the formation of the pattern of Chinese painting in the Song Dynasty, the literati and ink painters have not stepped out of this tradition for thousands of years. As for the literati paintings in the late Qing Dynasty, the calligraphers and painters created under the long-standing criteria, and the paintings represented by the ' Four Kings

' painting style have been filled with rigidity and inheritance. At the end of the 19 th century, China was in a moment of rapid change. In the environment of internal and external troubles, the literati could no longer describe the elite life in the unfettered and indifferent mountains and rivers. It was at this time that the tendency of westernization sprouted in the coastal area of Guangdong. Due to the signing of a series of unequal treaties such as cutting land and opening ports, the southeast coast inevitably became a channel for Western culture to flow into China. The ' Shanghai style ' thus stepped onto the stage of history. Unlike the constant painting themes of the temple sergeants, the Shanghai style art gradually made the picture closer to the taste of the citizens. Wu Changshuo is one of the representatives. He integrated epigraphy and calligraphy into the language of painting and completed the ' ancient meaning ' of the new era. It is worth noting that Wu Changshuo swept the previous gray and dark colors of Chinese paintings. The bright colors of his flower and bird paintings are unprecedented in Chinese paintings before, which is due to his use of Western pigments. Pan Tianshou once stressed : “The color aspect of Mr. Changshuo 's painting is also the same as the layout, which can open up the old sets of the ancients. The most obvious example is to like to use western red. Western red is from the shipping opened later in China, before Ren Bonian, no one used this red to draw Chinese painting, with Western red, it can be said to start from Mr.Chang Shuo.”[7] Of course, Wu Changshuo 's attempt to westernize Chinese painting also stopped here. He still adhered to the tradition of poetry, calligraphy, painting and printing. But his famous students set off the first climax of the Westernization of Chinese art more than ten years later.

On the study of Chinese landscape painting in the 20 th century, the academic circles have achieved fruitful results. Previous studies have focused on the ideological trend of “art revolution”, the establishment of Xu Beihong's realism system, the innovative practice of Lingnan painting school and Huang Binhong's ink theory. However, there are relatively few studies on the systematic investigation of landscape painting in this period from the macro perspective of “the sprout of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community”. The existing literature often focuses on the style evolution of the art itself, or on the one-way influence of politics on art, but less on how artists actively participate in the construction of the image of the nation-state and the shaping of national consciousness through specific creative practices ( such as sketching, exhibitions ). Zhang Ziyi, a part of the dissertation, pointed out that contemporary landscape painters, while absorbing Western culture, deeply explored their own unique charm and showed the characteristics of the new era, which provided a reference for understanding the early transformation, but did not deeply explore the particularity of this specific historical node from 1900 to 1936.[8] When studying the New Jinling School of Painting, Lin Miaomiao combed in detail the transformation of traditional landscape painting by sketching activities in the 1950 s, and emphasized the logic of ' thought changes, pen and ink cannot remain unchanged '. In fact, this logic has sprouted as early as the 1920 s and 1930 s, but the forms of expression at that time were more diverse and complex.[9] Zhang Yi praseo's research focuses on the transformation of Yan'an spirit in landscape painting in the early days of the founding of new China.[10] Although the time span is slightly later, his discussion on the paradigm transformation of from seclusion to realism provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the transformation of landscape painting from 1900 to 1936. In addition, the research on art exhibitions during the period of the Republic of China, such as Cui Guangxiao's combing of contemporary exhibitions, although mainly concerned with the new traditional Chinese painting exhibition of the second national art exhibition of the Ministry of Education during the period of the Republic of China, has methodological enlightenment for understanding the historical role of the national art exhibition of the Ministry of Education at that time.[11] The remarkable achievements of the new traditional Chinese painting are also inseparable

from the art exhibition activities organized by the masters of the new traditional Chinese painting movement and their followers on the art stage in the 1930s.The research of Ye Yuanqin, Sun Mengzhuo and other scholars discussed how landscape painting carries the spirit of the times from the perspective of historical themes and lofty artistic conception. These perspectives have important reference value for analyzing the germination of national consciousness in landscape painting from 1900 to 1936.

### 3. The reflection of national visual experience : art revolution and landscape realism

In 1917, Chen Duxiu published the article “Art Revolution” in the New Youth, which officially opened the prelude to the reform of modern Chinese art.[12] Chen Duxiu, the standard-bearer of the New Culture Movement, wrote： “If we want to improve Chinese painting, we must first reform the life of king painting. Because to improve Chinese painting, we must adopt the realistic spirit of foreign painting..... People say that Wang Shigu's paintings are the culmination of Chinese painting. I say that Wang Shigu's paintings are the total end of Ni Huang Wenshen's Chinese evil paintings..... When it comes to the skills of description, Wang 's painting is not only far less than that of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, but also can not catch up with Wu Mojing ( Wu is a Catholic, his painting of the scenery is quite influenced by Western painting ). Such painting is authentic, such a social idol, if not knocked down, is the biggest obstacle to the input of realism and the improvement of Chinese painting.”The Wang painting here refers to the orthodox literati painting represented by “Four Wangs”( Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, Wang Hui, Wang Yuanqi ).

In the course of the reform of Chinese ink painting in the 20 th century, in order to solve the problem of the old and empty stereotypes of ink painting since the late Qing Dynasty, there were two roads : one road led by Huang Binhong and Pan Tianshou, returning to nature while adhering to China's consistent brush and ink tradition ; the other way is to introduce a complete western art teaching system by Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, advocate realistic painting, and require painters to face nature.[13] However, these two roads have adopted the method of “sketching” invariably. In fact, as early as in ancient China, “sketching”was one of the ways some literati created. For example, Shi Tao, Wang Lv and others were advocates of “sketching”, and dating back to the Song Dynasty in China, there was even a climax of ' sketching '. Of course, Shi Tao 's concept of “searching all the world 's strange peaks and drafting” is far from the concept of painting in the 20 th century, which is the pursuit of scientific and objective painting. The reason lies in the different views of nature between the East and the West. But it is the introduction of sketching that makes Chinese painting break the long-term barriers and radiate new vitality.[14] The tradition of sketching has also been preserved, and with the change of the times, the concept of sketching is also changing imperceptibly.

Secondly, realism painting stimulates people 's common concern about the “national destiny”by expressing social reality. During the period of 1900-1936, China was faced with the grim situation of internal and external problems, social unrest and people 's livelihood. Realistic painters no longer evade these realities, but use brushes to record the cruelty of war, the suffering of people 's livelihood, and the hardships of construction. These works are not only a true reflection of reality, but also a profound reflection on the fate of the nation. They awakened people 's awareness of the danger of the nation and inspired people 's fighting spirit to save the nation. Finally, realism painting constructs the ' national aesthetics ' with modern characteristics by integrating Chinese and Western artistic languages. Under the impetus of the “art revolution”, many painters began to try to combine the western perspective, light and shadow, color and other techniques with the traditional Chinese ink and artistic conception to create a new landscape painting with both national characteristics and modern atmosphere. This new landscape painting is not only the inheritance and development of traditional landscape painting, but also the

artistic expression of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community. It shows the world the unique charm of Chinese culture, but also shows the world the spirit of the Chinese nation.

From the perspective of functionalism, the transformation of landscape painting in this period can be summarized into three levels : from “self-entertainment”to “enlightenment”——the core function of traditional landscape painting is the literati 's “God”and “sleeper tour”, which is the spiritual adjustment of privateness. In the context of national crisis, Cai Yuanpei 's idea of “replacing religion with aesthetic education”endows art with the mission of public enlightenment, and landscape painting is expected to bear the function of cultivating national patriotic emotion ; from “detachment”to “intervention”——literati landscape painting pursues the spiritual transcendence of “coming out of the world”, while the new era requires art to “enter the world”.Gao Jianfu 's radical attempt to incorporate aircraft and tanks into the theme of Chinese painting is not the mainstream of landscape painting, but it marks a fundamental change. From “learning from the ancients”to “learning from nature”——this transformation is the most substantive. The core of the “FourWang' tradition is “learning from the ancients”, while the new era requires “learning from nature”. Only by facing the real Chinese mountains and rivers can we create new landscape paintings with national characteristics, rather than relying on the “copy” of the ancients' model.

In the autumn of 1934, Xu Beihong led the students of the Art Department of Central University to sketch in Tianmu Mountain, and later recalled to write this frame of Ancient Hall Old Pine. The picture uses the low palace wall to cover the root of the ancient Chinese fir, and the situation of the Chinese fir is reflected. The composition machine is clever and powerful. Putting it in the dual context of the germination of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community and the transformation of landscape painting from 1900 to 1936, the significance of this work goes beyond sketching practice.After returning from Europe, Xu Beihong 's core is to transform the realistic spirit from the reality. The painting of Tianmu Mountain is the practice of this proposition : the painter faces the real mountain and the real wood, captures the upright structure and the vast texture of the ancient fir with pen and ink, rather than imitating the old draft in the studio. This attitude of " learning from nature " makes landscape painting turn from the private world of literati 's pen to the public gaze of land and scenery. When Gushan stands on the screen with a nearly monumental volume, it evokes not only the fun of forests and springs, but also a common understanding of the land underfoot and the long life it carries. 1934 is the key year for the spread of the concept of “Chinese nation”from elite discourse to social consensus. Previously, the “five-ethnic republic”has established a modern nation-state framework, and the deepening of the national crisis in the 1930 s further gave birth to the consciousness of community consciousness. In Xu Beihong 's works, the old hall and the ancient fir are the relics of civilization built by human beings and the natural growth of thousands of years of life. The painter did not choose the strange scenery of famous mountains and rivers, but gazed at the ordinary ancient wood in front of the old temple in a mountain. This solemn writing of ' ordinary things ' reveals a kind of consciousness of embedding personal artistic work into national collective narrative. As a result, this work has gained a special position at the intersection of landscape painting transformation and community consciousness germination : sketching makes landscape painting gain real flesh and blood, and the deep gaze of the homeland, one tree and one temple makes this realistic concern sublimate into the confirmation of the common foundation of the nation. Xu Beihong 's “lingering” with his pen and ink is not only an ancient shan in Tianmu Mountain, but also a awakening nation 's look back on its own long life.

## 4. From copying to sketching : the practical exploration of Huang Binhong, Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong

The slogan of “learning from nature” is easy to mention, but the practice is very different. Huang Binhong, Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong respectively represent three different ' sketching ' paths, and their answers to the question of “how landscape painting participates in the construction of national consciousness” are also different. Huang Binhong ( 1865-1955 ) is a great master of Chinese landscape painting in the 20 th century. Although his artistic practice seems to be different from the radical idea of “art revolution, ”in fact, his in-depth practice of “learning from nature” provides another possibility for the modern transformation of landscape painting. Huang Binhong was deeply influenced by the traditional “four kings” in his early years and was good at copying the ancients. However, he was not satisfied with the simple imitation of the ancients, but advocated the combination of “learning from the ancients ”and “ learning from nature”. Huang Binhong 's “learning from nature” is not a simple sketch of scenery, but an in-depth observation and deep understanding of natural mountains and rivers. He traveled all his life to famous mountains and rivers, and his footprints spread all over the north and south of the river. He advocated that “the picturesque mountains and rivers, the inner beauty of the quiet, ”and believed that the highest realm of landscape painting is to express the “inner beauty” of nature, that is, the inner vitality and spiritual temperament of natural mountains and rivers. In order to achieve this goal, Huang Binhong has made bold innovations in pen and ink techniques. He put forward the theory of “five strokes and seven inks”, emphasizing the ' flat, stay, round, heavy, change ' of pen and ink, as well as the ' thick, light, broken, splashing, accumulation, coke, and residence' of ink. These techniques not only enrich the expressive force of Chinese painting, but also provide a powerful tool for expressing the natural “inner beauty”. Huang Binhong 's “learning from nature” is actually a transcendence of traditional " copying". He is no longer satisfied with copying the pen and ink of the ancients, but tries to draw inspiration from nature and create a pen and ink language with personal style. Although his landscape paintings retain the charm of traditional pen and ink, they are full of vitality and vitality, showing a unique style of “black, dense, thick and heavy”. This style is not only a true portrayal of the natural mountains and rivers, but also an artistic expression of the perseverance and endless spirit of the Chinese nation.

Huang Binhong's practice has important implications for the germination of the Chinese nation 's community consciousness. Through the in-depth practice of " learning from nature", he closely combines his personal artistic pursuit with his love for the mountains and rivers of the motherland, showing a deep patriotism. Although his landscape paintings do not directly express social reality, they arouse people 's love and attachment to the land of the motherland through the affectionate depiction of natural mountains and rivers, thus condensing national emotions on the spiritual level. The uniqueness of Huang Binhong is that his " learning from nature" has never been separated from the foundation of traditional pen and ink. After his lecture in Guangxi in 1928, he began a ten-year “life tour”, which covered Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan and other places. But his sketching method is very different from the western ' sketching '. He called it “tour”: first, “ tour the mountains and rivers” for a comprehensive observation, then “sit and look at the lack of pain” in-depth experience, and then “mountains and rivers all I have” things I am integrated, and finally “think twice” into a painting. The core of this way of sketching is that “giving up is not by people, giving up can be by people”——the painter is not passively recording the immediate scene, but actively selecting, refining and transforming. His large number of sketches are mostly sketched out, taking the general trend, and the completed works created accordingly are repeatedly “dyed and stacked layer by layer”, and “write the spiritual essence of natural creation” in scene

recall and spiritual understanding. “Wong is grateful and obvious, and his ability to learn is far from vulgar. Alas, the words of the Weng also said that the death of the country must first die of its learning”.

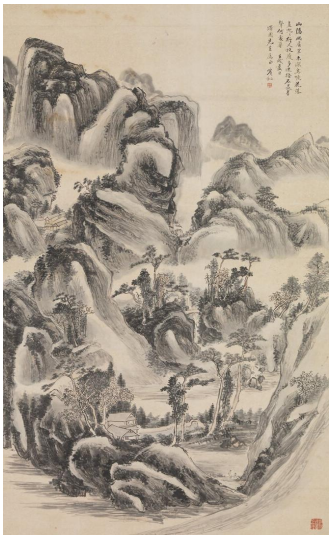


Figure 2: Huang Binhong, Secluded Retreat in the Mountains. Water ink. 1922.

Huang Binhong 's black, dense, thick and heavy painting style and rich and colorful pen and ink contain profound national cultural spirit and aesthetic orientation of natural beauty..... Although the connotation and extension of Huang Binhong 's “Hunhou Huazi”are dynamic and variable, he unifies the nationality, naturalness and ink expression of Hunhou Huazi in the pursuit of “inner beauty ”and “consistently”. This understanding is also summarized from the context of the development of Chinese culture. Huang Binhong 's pursuit of " inner beauty " - the high unity of " inner beauty " of nature and " inner beauty " of pen and ink expression - is essentially looking for the eternal value of transcending the times for national art. When he used the gold and stone pen to communicate with the painting theory, and took “vigorous and gorgeous”as the highest realm, what he insisted on was not only a personal style, but also a cultural position : the artistic spirit of the Chinese nation did not have to depend on Western realism. It has its inherent and self-sufficient value foundation. He often says:“Huang Binhong mentioned in the 'painting section' : 'The same nationality is special, and it is short.'[15] People can 't create nature, people can create art. People leave the nature, just like the water without a source ; people should not be natural slaves, nature should be used for me.[16] The material he collects is entirely to create services. Huang Binhong wrote the article “Art Exhibition of Chinese Painting, “ which was contained in the third issue of “Art View” in 1929.This article mainly describes the Chinese painting part in the exhibition, and points out his painting proposition in the first paragraph : “I browse for four times, because I think my country 's calligraphy and painting are homologous, with detailed historical records, school changes, focusing on pen and ink, learning from the law, and never moving.[17] During this period, there was also a heated discussion on the issue of " national form. "In October 1938, Mao Zedong put forward the " Chinese style and Chinese style " in Yan 'an, which made the debate more obvious. This artistic debate, which began in the field of literature, soon affected the whole art field. Ba people said in his article : “But the development of new literature to today, our literary style and style, obviously to the ' total Westernization ' aspects of the breakthrough. ”[18] For a time, the discussion of “total westernization” and “national form” was bubbling up. “The nationality of traditional Chinese painting, not seen in ink,which is the earliest national cultural consciousness proposed in the assimilation and assimilation of different nationalities and cultures.”

Gao Jianfu ( 1879-1951 ) was one of the founders of the Lingnan School of Painting and an active advocate of the “art revolution”. He studied in Japan in his early years and was deeply influenced by Western realism and Japanese painting. After his return to China, he put forward the idea of “new Chinese painting”, advocating “compromise between China and the West, integration of ancient and modern”, trying to use Western realism to transform Chinese traditional painting. The most prominent feature of Gao Jianfu 's “new Chinese painting” is “realism” and realistic concern. He advocated that painters should go out of the study, go to the society, and record various scenes in real life with brushes. His landscape painting is no longer

limited to the traditional recluse theme, but began to show modern life, social change, war disaster and other realistic themes. For example, his works such as “The Flame of the East Battlefield” and “Bombing Map” directly depict the cruelty of war and the suffering of people's livelihood, and have a strong realistic critical spirit. Gao Jianfu 's “from copying to sketching” is a complete change. He is not only against copying the ancients, but also against the simple “landscape painting”. He advocated that “sketching” should be “freehand ”, “writing God ”, and “writing the spirit of the times”. He believes that painters should not only observe the shape of nature, but also understand the spirit of nature and feel the breath of the times. Although his landscape painting retains the charm of traditional pen and ink, it is full of modern atmosphere and realistic care, showing a unique style of " new traditional Chinese painting". The practice of Gao Jianfu plays an important role in promoting the germination of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community. Through the creation of “new Chinese painting”, he closely combines his personal artistic pursuit with the theme of the times of saving the nation from extinction and survival, showing a strong sense of national responsibility. His landscape painting is not only a true reflection of reality, but also a profound reflection on the fate of the nation. They awakened people 's awareness of the national crisis and stimulated people 's fighting spirit to save the nation.

Contrary to Huang Binhong 's " internal transformation" path, Gao Jianfu chose the " eclectic Chinese and Western " transformation route. In his early years, he studied in Japan and launched the “New Chinese Painting” exhibition in Guangzhou in 1908. The tour of South Asia from 1930 to 1932 - India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Ceylon, Myanmar - further deepened his artistic thinking. In November 1930, Gao Jianfu went to India to hold a personal exhibition, investigation and sketching. He successively traveled to India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Ceylon, Myanmar and other countries to copy ancient murals and sketches. During this period, he also climbed the Himalayas. Until February 1932, Guangzhou literary and art circles held the ' Welcome Mr. Gao Jianfu Return Exhibition. Gao Jianfu 's “sketching” has a strong sense of cross-cultural dialogue and public communication. As early as 1927, he planned to establish the “Oriental International Art Association”, trying to connect Asian countries with art as a link. During his stay in India, he communicated with the Tagore family, participated in the “China-India Joint Art Exhibition”, climbed the Himalayas to sketch, and copied ancient murals. His trip to South Asia is not only an artistic investigation, but also a “national diplomacy” with visual art as the medium. Through exhibitions and exchanges, he shows the modern face of Chinese art to Asian neighbors and looks for external resources for the transformation of Chinese painting. The ' compromise between China and the West' proposed by Gao Jianfu was recognized by Tagore, which also deepened his understanding of the origin of Chinese and Indian painting. The imitation and sketching of grotto murals and buildings on the way became the inspiration and motivation for Gao Jianfu to continue to deepen the reform of new Chinese painting. The national consciousness behind this path is open and competitive. Gao Jianfu does not regard “nationality” as the essence that needs to be adhered to, but believes that only in the dialogue and competition with heterogeneous culture can Chinese painting gain new vitality. The reason why his“eclectic China and the West” is recognized by Tagore is that it responds to the common concern of Asian intellectuals : how to maintain cultural subjectivity under the impact of Western modernity.

Xu Beihong ( 1895-1953 ) was one of the most influential artists in the history of Chinese art in the 20 th century and a firm advocate of the “art revolution”. He studied in France in his early years and was deeply influenced by Western realism. After his return to China, he put forward the famous assertion that “sketch is the basis of all modeling”, and advocated the transformation of traditional Chinese painting with Western realism. Xu Beihong 's “from copying to

sketching" is a systematic and scientific change. He is not only against copying the ancients, but also against the traditional "freehand" painting. He advocated that painters should carry out strict sketch training, master scientific modeling methods, and then use these methods to express the theme of Chinese painting. Although his landscape painting retains the charm of traditional pen and ink, it is full of scientific rationality and realistic spirit. His "Tagore portrait", "Jiufanggao" and other works, although mainly figure painting, but its realistic spirit has also profoundly affected his landscape painting creation. Xu Beihong 's "realism" is of great significance to the germination of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community. By constructing a scientific realism system, he provided a solid theoretical basis and technical support for the modern transformation of Chinese painting. Although his landscape paintings do not directly express social reality, they show a rational and scientific national spirit through the accurate depiction of natural mountains and rivers. They have awakened people 's understanding of the motherland and stimulated people 's confidence in the future of the nation.



Figure 3: Xu Beihong, Ancient Hall Old Pine. Ink painting, 86.4×76.4 cm, 1934.

Xu Beihong 's sketching idea most aggressively points to "science" and "reality". He asked Xu Beihong once said in 1947 "the decline of world art and the revival of Chinese art" : "The reason for the decline of Chinese art is because of the emphasis on literati painting. Wang Wei 's poems have paintings, and the paintings have superb works such as poetry. It must be fascinating and no problem. However, his end has become a tree that does not know how to draw a tree, a mountain that does not distinguish between far and near, a stone that cannot be polished, and a water that does not drink".[19] This almost positivist view of art is in line with its position of " re-evaluating the history of Chinese painting with realism as the standard." One of the most important contents of his more than 600,000-word article is to re-evaluate the history of Chinese painting based on the standard of realism. The conclusion is to praise flower-and-bird painting and depreciate landscape painting and figure painting. The so-called "the highest art in our country belongs to painting, the most beautiful thing in painting is flowers and birds, followed by landscapes, and the most humble figures." However, Xu Beihong 's contribution to landscape painting is mainly reflected in the practice of theoretical advocacy and criticism. When he tried to infiltrate western painting sketch into the basic teaching of Chinese painting, he encountered resistance in Beiping painting circle. Ironically, he found some realization of his ideal in Qi Baishi 's landscape painting. The Qi Baishi Picture Book, which began planning in September 1930, was written in June 1931 and published in 1932, can be said to be the result of Xu Beihong 's hard work. This is Qi Baishi 's first and last book of landscape painting. In view of the prominent originality of Qi Baishi 's landscape and the accusation that it is considered rough and has no origin, Xu Beihong seized the word "change" from beginning to end in the preface, and made his own explanation of "change". He believes that art should "change", and "change " is the highest realm of art, the so-called "to change and stop", but it must be "positive change" - "the right person can know the change, the change is the change of the right". He believes that Qi Baishi's landscape is a positive change with the "virtue of the mean". It has both the grace of "having everything and commanding", and the vastness of "true internal filling", the subtlety of " creating nature"and not "out of context". Xu Beihong 's praise of Qi Baishi reveals a dimension that is often neglected in his thoughts :

the “realism”he pursues is not mechanical realism, but the activation of creative national expression with the spirit of realism. The reason why he believes that Qi Baishi 's landscape is “deeply in line with nature” and “unique” is that Qi Baishi “can stand on his own without an ancient person”while maintaining a deep connection with the traditional spirit. This view of “positive change” is essentially a personal answer to the era proposition of “how to unify nationality and modernity”.[20]



Figure 4: Zhao Wangyun, Road of Exile, Chinese painting, Tianjin Commercial Press. No. 24, 1935.

In the 1930s, with the deepening of the national crisis, Chinese landscape painting has undergone a profound transformation from the classical ideal of “harmony between man and nature”to the modern struggle narrative of “man conquers nature”.Zhao Wangyun 's Road of Exile is a representative work of this transition period : a solitary boat struggling on the choppy river, a boatman struggling to support a pole, passengers curled up in the cabin, and the waves of the river are depicted as “threatening others” with phagocytic power. This structure breaks the presentation of nature as an idealized utopia in traditional landscape painting, and puts the relationship between man and nature in an antagonistic tension . Examining it in the context of the germination of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community from 1900 to 1936, the significance of this work goes beyond style exploration. Zhao Wangyun is famous for his “rural sketch”. Most of his characters are farmers, refugees and other people at the bottom of the society. The scene of displacement depicted by the " road of exile " echoes the social reality of large-scale migration due to war and famine in the 1930s. When the individual on the solitary boat is placed under the threat of turbulent waves, the picture evokes not only sympathy for a specific scene, but also a perception of the common destiny of ' compatriots ' - those who struggle on the river. The life is the epitome of the national community at a time of crisis.

## Conclusion

The introduction of realism in landscape painting is of great significance to the germination of the consciousness of the Chinese nation community. During the period of 1900-1936, China was in a moment of deep national crisis. How to condense the national spirit and awaken the people's consciousness was the most urgent task of the society at that time. Realistic painting, with its characteristics of “truthfully expressing nature” and “truthfully expressing society”, has become an important tool for building a sense of national community. First of all, realism painting awakens people 's visual cognition of “country” and “nation” by depicting the real mountains and rivers of the motherland. In traditional landscape painting, landscape is often abstract and symbolic, which is the carrier of literati 's feelings. In the realistic landscape painting, the landscape is specific and real, and it is a true portrayal of the motherland. When painters use brushes to record the changes of rivers and mountains, land issues, and mountains and rivers, they are actually constructing a visual “national image”, so that when the viewer gazes at the picture, he can feel a strong sense of national pride and belonging.

Although the artistic ideas and practical methods of the three painters are different, they are all committed to the transformation of “from copying to sketching”, all trying to transform traditional landscape painting by “learning from nature”, and all trying to inject realistic care and national spirit into landscape painting. Their practice together promoted the modern transformation of landscape painting from 1900 to 1936. The practical differences between Huang Binhong, Gao Jianfu and Xu Beihong are rooted in their different understandings of the relationship between “national consciousness”

and “artistic change”. Huang Binhong internalized the national spirit into the “inner beauty” of pen and ink, and the change took place in the subtle deepening of traditional language ; gao Jianfu puts nationality in the field of cross-cultural dialogue, and change means the expansion and hybridization of boundaries ; Xu Beihong placed the national spirit on the dialectical movement of " positive change".

Taking realism as an “important tool” for building the consciousness of national community does not mean that realism is higher than freehand brushwork, or that freehand landscape cannot carry the national spirit. The rise of realism is a response to the reappearance of crisis in a specific historical context. It is aimed at the drawbacks of literati painting that follow the program, are divorced from reality, and are difficult to communicate with the wider public. However, freehand brushwork and realism are not diametrically opposed, and the two are in a dialectical relationship. Freehand is not simply abstract or escape, it has its own cognition and expression of energy ; the “Inner beauty”pursued by Huang Binhong is itself a deep expression of the national spirit. Realistic is not a mechanical realistic copy ; xu Beihong's “learning from nature” is rooted in the traditional context of “learning from nature”. His view of “positive change” shows that realism aims to activate creative national expression, rather than passively copying appearance. The difference between the two lies in the different degree of visual directness and public commensurability, but both of them are involved in the construction of national visual consciousness. Therefore, the real contribution of this period is not that realism “overcomes” freehand brushwork, but that the tension between the two expands the expressive vocabulary of landscape painting, so that it can not only respond to the particularity of Chinese aesthetic tradition, but also carry the universality of modern national experience. Only by acknowledging this dialectical relationship can we avoid the linear narrative of “realistic progress theory” and understand the transformation from 1900 to 1936 as a pluralistic reconstruction of visual language.

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