

Contemporary
Anthropologies
of the Arts in China

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Edited by

Robert Layton and Luo Yifei

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-2092-7

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-2092-9

Research for this book was partly supported by a National Natural Science Foundation of China grant awarded to Luo Yifei (grant number 16BA010).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT LAYTON

The papers in this volume present the contributors' own research into diverse aspects of the anthropology of art in China. In the course of their essays they refer to important elements of Chinese history and culture that are central to an understanding of their work. This introduction aims to provide further aspects of that background which may be unfamiliar to English readers.

A history of the concept 'art', (艺 Yi) in China

艺 *Yi*, *art*, belongs to a category of nouns associated with plants, as is indicated by the superscript. Han Jiantang (2009:66) explains that the character originally depicted a person kneeling to plant a tree, which was later generalised to signify skilled technique. This brings the meaning of *yi* close to that of the classical Greek term for art, *techne*, signifying skill, art, craft, medicine, 'know-how', care of animals and cultivation of the land.

In ancient China, the "Six Arts" comprised an education system taught since the Zhou Dynasty (1046-771 BC). All young nobles learned archery, riding a horse, etiquette, music, calligraphy and mathematics. Painting was not one of the six. During the Six Dynasty period (220-589 CE), however, the original system of six arts was superseded. *Yi* and *shù* (艺术, art+technique) were brought together as a phrase for the first time. *Yi shù*

included painting but also calligraphy, architecture, astronomy, alchemy, medicine, divination and the game of *I-go*. The term *hua jia* (expert painter) was recognized. From the Six Dynasties to the Qing (1644-1911), there was no change in the meaning of *yì shù*. During this long period, educated people didn't call themselves artists, but *wen ren* (cultured people, literati; in this volume see He Ming and Hong Ying, Chapter 3). The *wen ren* practiced painting with brush-pen and ink and writing poetry as pastimes, not as a profession. They were living a style of life with an artistic flavour. Typical themes in their brush pen paintings included mountains and water (expressive of ideal fengshui, the balance between yin and yang), birds on a branch and human figures such as famous scholars or philosophers.

The usage of the term *yì* is closely connected with the Confucian social order and the influence of the Confucian education system. In traditional Chinese society, the *wen ren* generally supplied bureaucratic officials (*shi*) and were clearly distinct from the other three classes, peasants (*nong min*), craftsmen (*gong jiang*) such as masons and carpenters, who worked with their hands, and businessmen (*shang ren*). Aspiring officials among the *wen ren* had to succeed in a rigorous examination system in which they demonstrated their knowledge of the classics identified by Confucius.

Confucius's most important follower Mencius, when expounding the interdependence of people playing different roles, said: "Some labour with their minds and some labour with their strength. Those who labour with their minds govern others; those who labour with their strength are governed by others."

The *wen ren* looked down on the professional painters employed by the emperor as craftsmen. By the end of the Han Dynasty, 'these largely anonymous professionals' were separated from the literate aristocracy by a gulf 'that was to have a profound influence on the character of later Chinese art' (Sullivan 1999: 65), although Clunas (2009: 141) dates the origin of prejudice against court artists to the northern Song Dynasty, some seven hundred years later.

The distinction between the scholar-amateur and the less prestigious professional artist was weakened during the eighteenth century, when literati style paintings were made for sale to businessmen ‘eager for access to the trappings of high culture’ (Clunas 2009: 191), but the present meaning of *yì shù* as art came, via Japan, from modern Western influence. The term ‘artist’ - *yì shù jiā* (art technique master) – was taken up during the Republican period (1912-1949) when people discovered that professional artists in Europe had a high status (Sullivan 1999: 281). The term was not adopted to legitimate making money from art. The artist was still seen as an idealist, but one that now had a career and belonged to a body of professionals associated with scholars working in art colleges. He or she produces 艺术品 *yì shù pǐn* (art technique objects; works of art), or ‘fine art’ 艺术品 *měi shù pǐn* (beauty technique objects; Cf Clunas 2009: 202). Note, however, that the contemporary meaning of ‘artist’ in China is extended to musicians, actors, novelists and poets. The Chinese anthropology of art includes the study of music and dance, as exemplified by the contributions of Yang Mingkang, Xiang Yang and Se Yin to this volume. The importance of beauty in Chinese art appreciation is demonstrated by the contributions of He Ming and Hong Ying, and Zhou Xing, to this volume.

Folk arts such as woodblock printing, jade carving and cotton weaving were long dismissed as crafts, *shou gong* (手工, hand work; in this volume see Fang Lili’s chapter). The term 民间艺术 *min jian yì shù* “Folk Art” or, literally, ‘art among the people’ also came from Japan, at a time when Japanese anthropologists were researching the designs in folk art rather than its function and technique (i.e. its qualities as craft). The phrase appeared twice in a special issue of the Chinese art journal *Yifeng* published in 1933 (Lufkin 2016: 20). Chinese folk arts can be divided into two broad categories, those expressing *hopes* (*xī wàng*, 希望) for a good life that carry one forward optimistically, as seen in paper cuts, embroidery and resist-dyed cotton and, secondly, those mediating

relationships between people and gods. Hopes are expressed through a well-known system of symbols and homophones that has developed over hundreds of years. Homophones include fish (*yú*), which is pronounced in the same way as ‘abundance’, and bat (*bianfú*), where *fú* also means ‘luck’ or ‘good fortune’. Symbols include fruit such as pomegranate with many seeds representing the desire for many children, and the ‘three friends in winter’, early flowering plum, pine (because it is evergreen) and bamboo for its straightness are three plants that symbolise strong friendship.

Offerings (*jì sì pǐn* (祭祀品)) are made to folk gods represented in woodblock prints or statues in order to achieve an outcome one wishes for. (On the latter see Xiang Yang’s references to ‘sacrifices’ at a temple fair in this volume, chapter 6). To be efficacious, the god must be invited into his or her representation with offerings and prayers before they can be addressed with requests for wishes such as success in an examination or birth of a son.

Daoist gods

I was very fortunate that in 2017 Terry (Tian Yuan) and I were able to spend over three hours with Mr Qi Cheng Ning, a senior priest at Taiqing Temple, Laoshan, Qingdao, while he took us around the temple and answered questions about aspects that had puzzled me during my reading on Daoist religion [see endnote 1].

Taiqing temple was founded about 2,100 years ago, during the Han Dynasty. It is one of the two foremost temples belonging to the strict Quanzhen (‘Complete Realisation’) school of Daoism, surrounded on three sides by mountains and on the fourth by the sea. Mr Qi explained that ‘Daoism has many gods. Each brings good luck. Some come from folk religion, some from people’s hopes for good health or children. Some have definite duties, some less so’. There is, however, a strict system according to which Daoists distinguish between two types of god. He explained:

The *Xiantian* are the gods who existed before sky and earth came into being. They have a special *qi* [the elemental power pervading the universe] in their bodies. The *Houtian* originated as respected common people. They lived after sky and earth came into being, but made much effort to do good things.

When I asked whether Daoism had influenced folk art, Mr Qi replied firmly that traditional art is the foundation of Daoist religion; Daoism absorbed the great things from traditional art and dance. The temple's second courtyard was the earliest courtyard constructed. It houses the San Guan Hall, the hall of the three lords, or governors, of sky (*Tian Guan*), water (*Shui Guan*), and land (*Di Guan*). When Daoist religion was established 2,100 years ago these three gods were already worshipped in folk religion, because people already depended on sky, earth and rain. He identified *Shi Wang Mu*, The Queen Mother of the West (see Wang Mingming 2014), and *Bixia Yuanjin*, the Mount Tai Grandmother (*Yuanjin* = female god), as other *Xiantian* absorbed into Daoist religion.

In Shandong folk beliefs *Tiān Guan* (the heavenly high official), governor of celestial affairs in orthodox Daoism, ranks below the Jade Emperor *Yù Huáng Dì* (玉帝), referred to in this volume by Zhou Xing. In the famous novel *Journey to the West* the Daoist heaven is described as a walled city ruled by the Jade Emperor and occupied by officials of many ranks. According to folk religion, *Tiān Guan* is in charge of daily affairs in heaven.

The military fortune god Guan Yi (Guan Gong) is one of the *Houtian*. He was a powerful general in the civil war that broke out at the fall of the Han Dynasty, celebrated in the novel *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Historically, he is famous as a warrior and an ally of Liu Bei, who founded the Shu kingdom (AD 221-263) in Sichuan. He was captured by the rebel king of Wei, Cao Cao. Cao Cao tried to bribe Guan Gong to change sides but throughout his captivity he remained loyal to Shu. Although the novel attributed superhuman deeds to Guan Gong, his life

was recorded in the historical account written by Chen Shou during the 280s – 290s CE, immediately after the wars ended, and Chen Shou documents Guan Gong's steadfast loyalty to Shu throughout his time in captivity (Ran Zhang, *pers comm*). His loyalty commends him to ordinary people, who often display a painting or woodblock print of him in their homes to bring them good fortune. He is mentioned in this volume by Fang Lili and Xiang Yang.

Annual temple fairs celebrate local or national gods and provide the context for local markets. Xiang Yang gives a vivid account of a fair in which he participated (see chapter 8) and his case study names a range of deities. Amongst goods on sale at temple fairs may be models that bring good fortune. In eastern Shandong Huo Ba Li village is famous for making roly-poly dolls that cannot be knocked over. A young woman who wants a child buys one of the dolls at the village's fair. As explained by Mr Zhang Kai, a leading maker of dolls in Huo Ba Li, the annual 'doll fair' coincides with the 'Dragon Goes Up' festival on February 2nd according to the lunar calendar, when nature wakes up after sleeping through winter, and the agricultural year begins. Couples who recently married go to the temple site to pick up a doll, bringing with them a red ribbon, which the artist will tie around the doll for them, to get a child from heaven. In the neighbouring province of Henan, black painted clay toys with colourful decoration are made in a village of Huanyang County and sold at their annual village temple fair. Some are whistling toys for children, of which a phallic-shaped "turtle" is the simplest. 1 RMB will buy you many of these. If a young woman wants a child, she will go to the temple fair, buy a basket full of toys and give them to children as she makes her way home to her village. In response the children sing a song to make her happy [endnote 2].

Seasonal festivals

Among traditional Chinese seasonal festivals, contributors to this volume refer to the Lunar New Year, the Spring Tomb Sweeping festival and the mid-Autumn festival celebrating the goddess of the moon.

The New Year, or Spring Festival

Chinese New Year is probably most famous among English-speaking researchers into Chinese folk art for the burning of the Kitchen God's print, sending him to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor on the household's behaviour during the year. During the year a poster of the kitchen god is stuck on the kitchen wall. Couplets written on strips of auspicious red paper placed around the poster read (for example), on the left hand strip, 'the people said, please god express good things in heaven', on the right, 'when he comes back to earth he brings good things' and across the top, 'people think the kitchen god is master/host in the home'. As one Shandong villager explained to us, 'In the countryside the Kitchen God is the governor of the affairs of the courtyard, so no bad behaviour must take place... the place on the wall is where you pray to him, but he is everywhere in the courtyard'. A week before Lunar New Year, on the 23rd of the last month, each courtyard places special food on the altar shelf below the print: dumplings, fried food and something sweet, to make the god's mouth sweet when he reports to heaven. Three incense sticks are lit and members of the household kneel on the floor and bow their heads toward the poster. Then the poster is burnt, together with a small straw model or paper-cut of a horse or a small print of the Kitchen God riding his horse. This sends the Kitchen God to heaven. If his report is good, the household will be rewarded with a good harvest and financial prosperity the following year. On the first day of the New Year, a fresh poster is placed on the wall, and the kitchen god invited back into the home. New Year celebrations end with the Lantern Festival. Processions carrying red lanterns were traditionally accompanied by dancing, acrobatic displays

and the performances of traditional folk opera (see Fang Lili's account of New Year celebrations in chapter 2, below).

Qing-Ming (bright and shining), or Tomb Sweeping Festival

Tomb-sweeping Day traditionally took place 15 days after the spring equinox, but it has now been fixed on 5th April in the solar calendar and is marked by a three-day holiday. People buy yellow paper (associated with gods and ancestors) and paper 'money' to burn at their ancestors' graves as an act of worship, ensuring their forebears have adequate means to subsist in the next world. The village graveyard lies some way from the community to keep ghosts – whose descendants have failed to care for them – at bay. Girls living in the countryside return to their natal village, which is generally less than ten kilometres from where they live, the day before the ceremony, taking spirit money to be burnt at their natal family's ancestral tomb.

The mid-Autumn festival and 'worshipping the moon'

The Moon Festival *Zhongqiu Jie* (see Zhou Xing in this volume) is held on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month, the night of the full moon. Moon cakes are eaten in celebration. Chang E, the goddess of the moon, is one of the folk deities incorporated into Daoism. She is associated with the legend of the hare in the moon who mixes the magical elixir of life in a mortar. Little et al (2000: 288) reproduce a beautiful painting of Chang E, from the late Yuan or early Ming dynasty, standing in a moonlit landscape. She was said to have stolen the elixir of immortality from her husband, and is worshipped, particularly by women, at the Mid-Autumn Festival, when they seek her help to become skilled in weaving and embroidery.

Village opera

Village opera performances play an important role in transmitting knowledge of famous novels to formerly non-literate village people.

Characters from operas are, in turn, depicted in woodblocks, traditional toys and paper-cuts. Among the paper models burnt at village funerals to make the deceased comfortable in the next life are models of opera characters made on a wood and clay frame, dressed in colourful paper clothes. In this volume, Fang Lili describes the cultural importance of folk opera.

Anti-tradition

The New Culture movement

At the start of the twentieth century China was deeply humiliated by its inability to resist the annexation of territory by Britain, Germany and other foreign States. After 1914 Japan controlled export trade from Qingdao in Shandong (Huang 1985: 129), while Fei Xiaotong (2011 [1953]: 125) described Shanghai in the 1940s as ‘a community of dependent consumers and parasites’ exporting raw materials produced in its rural hinterland to Europe, but consuming imports within the city itself. ‘Straws of various sizes thrust into the rural areas suck out the wealth of China into these ports.’

Thousands of Chinese were nonetheless travelling to study in Europe where they learned about scientific method, democracy, and theories of social evolution as a progressive force. Young Chinese thinkers sought a modern Enlightenment (*wen ming*, literally ‘shining culture’ but the term used today for ‘civilization’). Among them, a group of writers established the *New Culture Movement* and argued, through their publications, that if China was successfully to confront the West it must abandon its own cultural inheritance and adopt both Western thought and a simple, pragmatic writing style (Furth 1983, Carter 2016). Most influential was the group’s journal *New Youth*, launched in 1915. Its founder Chen Duxiu had no respect for Western nationalism and imperialism, but he thought Westerners ‘had done a better job of encouraging innovation and individualism’ than China (Zarrow 2016: 115). Chen and others were

particularly angered by the West's refusal to return the former German colony around the port of Qingdao to China. Instead, the West agreed to allow Japan, which had occupied the area at the start of the First World War, to keep this coal-rich area of Shandong Province. Protests in Beijing on May 4th 1919 against the decision became known as the May Fourth Movement (Zarrow 2016: 118-9; in this volume, see the chapter by Zhou Xing).

Mitter (2004: 230-232) identifies the New Culture Movement's main goals as overturning the Confucian veneration of age, wisdom and experience, utter rejection of the Chinese past, and iconoclasm. Chinese Nationalists were simultaneously engaged in an 'anti-superstition' campaign, destroying town and village temples as representatives of 'feudal culture'. Mao Zedong was immersed in the turmoil, working at that time as an assistant librarian at Peking University, where the head librarian Li Dazhao later became one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party (Mitter 2004: 44).

The description of China's past, up to the defeat of the Qing Dynasty in the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, as 'feudal' and its beliefs as 'feudal superstition', is echoed in the contributions of Wang Jie, Luo Qin and Se Yin to the present volume. According to Huang (1985, 1991) it was Stalin who introduced the concept of China as a stagnating feudal economy. Stalin forbade discussion of Marx's Asiatic mode of production based on the self-sufficient multi-caste villages of India, because Marx and Engels had characterised the Asiatic Mode as in equilibrium (Gates 1995: 18). The 'conventional' Marxist tradition formulated by Lenin and Stalin asserted that all societies followed the same inevitable, progressive evolutionary path, from 'primitive' to slave, feudal, capitalist and ultimately socialist (Huang 1985: 6fn and 1991: 300).

In fact, the application of Marxist theory to China was widely debated by Chinese political thinkers during the first half of the twentieth century. China's failure to progress was widely attributed to 'feudal customs which

were a drag on politics; feudal values..., [and] the economics of agrarianism interdependent on both' (Furth 1983: 377).

What did they mean? Although the Zhou dynasty was characterised by feudal government in the sense used to describe medieval European states, Qin Shi Huang Di, the first emperor (259-210 BC), introduced the principles of bureaucracy and an exam system to determine entry into the administrative hierarchy. To a greater or lesser extent bureaucracy has characterised Chinese state government ever since. Dirlik (1978) contends that early twentieth century Chinese political thinkers on both the right and the left accepted that the type of feudal society characteristic of Medieval Europe had disappeared from China during the Zhou dynasty, but disagreed as to what had replaced it. Was there a two thousand year hiatus between the end of feudalism and the start of capitalism? For KMT (Republican) writers, Imperial China had been dominated by a mercantile economy and governed by the educated elite. For Communist writers, aspects of feudal society had persisted, particularly the subjection of peasants to rural landlords (see especially Dirlik pages 62-82). Duara (1995: 173) claims that *fengjian* – Chinese feudalism or Landlordism – was introduced, as a concept, to evolutionist discourse in China by Liang Qichao, as early as 1902 [endnote 3].

The Chinese Communist Party first established itself in Shanghai, in the region where peasants were suffering greatest exploitation by landlords and where Western merchant capitalism had its greatest impact. Forced out of Shanghai by the Republican government, and then from a base in Jiangxi, in 1934 Communist forces had undertaken the Long March to Northwest China, where they established a new base at Yan'an, in the rural, western province of Shaanxi.

In an influential essay composed in Yan'an during 1939 as part of textbook on the Chinese Revolution and the Communist Party, Mao noted that 'China's feudal society had developed a commodity economy and so carried within itself the seeds of capitalism, [and] China would of herself have developed slowly into a capitalist society' (Mao 1965 [1939]: 309).

Instead, Western colonialism had thwarted this process by turning China into a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society – a phrase that Mao repeats several times in the course of the essay and which established Communist orthodoxy. He replaces the traditional Confucian conception of social class in China with the quasi-Marxist model in which *landlords* are clearly distinguished from other classes.

The lure of folk art

Chinese intellectuals' interest in folk art was prompted by the revolutionary upheavals of the early twentieth century and the need to form a dialogue with ordinary people. Woodcut New Year pictures were the folk art that most attracted Chinese intellectuals during the 1930s and '40s. Many Republicans saw the high art of dynastic China as tainted by its origins in a discredited and discarded social system. They considered that embracing folk art would broaden the cultural appeal of Chinese art and promote democracy. Lu Xun, a leading member of the New Culture Movement, was an early advocate: 'If we take the Han dynasty's stone-cut images and Ming-Qing book illustration as references and also pay attention to the so-called "New Year pictures" that are enjoyed among the common folk and blend these with new European styles, perhaps we will be able to produce a better sort of print' (quoted Lufkin 2016: 52, from a letter written in 1935 to the Chinese Modern Print Association). Lu Xun's letter stimulated the Modern Print Association to devote three issues of their journal *Modern Print* to folk custom and everyday life in southern China. A foreword to the second issue states, 'Woodcut, since it is a kind of folk art, is replete with sincere, direct and NAÏVE qualities and strong expressiveness' (quoted Lufkin 2016: 59, capitals in original). The writer and his colleagues adopted the use of colour characteristic of folk prints, in contrast to the plain black in which they had been working. Lufkin notes that, when these artists were growing up during the 1910s and '20s, they would probably have seen traditional folk prints in their own homes.

Against this enthusiasm, the influence of cultural-evolutionary theory in early 20th century China led to the problem of regarding folk art as the product of an earlier stage in social evolution. Lufkin blames the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) for the idea that art was originally tied to religion and that its evolution took place through the separation of the aesthetic from religion and magic. Educated artists grumbled that New Year prints were full of images of gods and often used in religious rituals: they too were “contaminated” by their association with traditional Chinese culture.

Mao's 'talks' at the 1943 Yan'an conference

In 1943 Mao summoned numerous writers and artists who supported the Communist cause but who were living in Shanghai or Beijing to Yan'an to experience rural China in person, and reformulate their art (in this volume, both Luo Qin and Wang Jie refer to Mao's talks at Yan'an). Urban writers had demanded the right to criticise Party cadres for their failure to live according to Communist ideals, but Mao took the writers and artists to task for their inability to empathise with ordinary people. The urban intellectuals of the time had lost even the contact that their forebears maintained with the peasantry, such that all social classes had enjoyed the same popular literature and opera (as described by Fei Xiaotong 2011 [1953], and in this volume by Fang Lili). Mao forthrightly defended the validity of popular forms of literature and art against such prejudice.

Evidently in contrast to other arguments advanced during the conference, Mao asserted there had never been a unifying love of mankind since society split into classes, so there could be no art or literature that transcends class. ‘In a society composed of classes and parties, art... must obey the political demands of its class and party’ (quoted in McDougall 1980: 75). ‘Human nature only exists in the concrete.... We uphold the human nature of the proletariat, while the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie uphold the human nature of their own class’ (79).

Many of the artists who came to Yan'an were from Shanghai, which Mao, in his 'talks' again describes as 'a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society ruled by big landlords and the big bourgeoisie' (84). This is why, he said, they have had such difficulty adapting to the ideology of a place where, for the first time in Chinese history, the workers, peasants, soldiers and the popular masses held power. We need, Mao argued, to ensure art and literature become components of the revolutionary machinery. Writers and artists must therefore understand the language of the popular masses. To do so, they must become one with the masses by undergoing 'a long and possibly painful process of trial and hardship' (a phrase that foreshadows the subsequent 1968 policy of sending students to the countryside to be 're-educated'). Although literature and art in their natural form, i.e. in real life, are more vivid and interesting, people demand art and literature that have been processed in the mind of the writer or artist to render characters and events more typical and idealised, and therefore more universal. As related by Dikötter (2016: 27-8), this was no academic conference: 'young volunteers were interrogated in front of crowds, forced to denounce each other to save themselves. Some were locked in caves, other subjected to mock executions' (see also Lufkin 2016: 144-154).

Flath (2004: 140-143) describes how urban woodblock artists responding to Mao's 1943 exhortations to study folk art soon learnt the visual "mass language" of village woodblock prints and were filling their art with images of coins, lucky bats, auspicious flowers etc. Some prints adhered too closely to the folk originals, for example one with figures that were recognizably the kitchen god and his wife had replaced the traditional instruction with the caption, 'Go up to heaven to report our production, return to take part in the Resistance war'. A print of a farmer and his wife under a 1950 calendar were criticised as 'the stove [kitchen] god in farmer's clothes'. Artists were urged to get the right balance between 'old *style*' and 'new *content*'.

The two phases of persecution

After the Communists came to power in 1949 the Government took up the challenge of the New Culture Movement to eradicate ‘feudal superstition’ through its campaign against the ‘Four Olds’: old thinking, old customs, old habits and old culture. The campaign went through two phases. From 1952 to 1965 people were not allowed to practice, or reproduce images deemed to belong to the Four Olds. It was only in 1966, at the start of the Cultural Revolution, that material manifestations of the Four Olds were searched out and destroyed.

Until about 1956, New China’s government continued to promote agricultural co-operatives (*he zuo shè*) or ‘mutual aid teams’ (*hù zhù zǔ*). Such groups were set up voluntarily, the farm land was pooled and the products shared among members. Detecting a ‘high tide of socialism’ in the countryside (Mitter 2004: 194), Mao decided to seize the initiative and impose compulsory collectivisation of village land and labour (Cheng and Seldon 1994: 653). The scale of collectivisation was progressively increased up to 1958. Local markets, seen as capitalist institutions, were banned. A woman born in 1949 told us that until 1957 her older sister used to take her mother’s paper cuts to market: ‘double happiness’ characters and ceiling decorations, both made for weddings, and window decorations for New Year, when the paper window panes were renewed. A painter of family ancestral scrolls recalled to us with amusement the phrase quoted by Friedman et al (1991: 127-8), that those who, like him, continued making and selling their arts in secret were denounced as the ‘Capitalist Tail’ of society that had to be cut off. Members of communes were not paid in cash, but in work points. An elderly woman told us that after the family land was given to the government of New China they worked in the *ren mín gōng shè*: *peoples’ work community* (人民公社), i.e. the commune, to gain credits. The most you could earn was 10 credits (work points) a day, equivalent to 0.12 RMB [3.6 RMB a month], a fraction of what people were earning in cities. Dikötter provides a detailed study of

the system of work points or credits and similar values to those we were told about are quoted in Dikötter (2010: 51). The credit system is also documented in Potter and Potter (1990, chapter 3) and Smith (2016: 196).

In 1958 Mao declared that China would overtake Britain and the United States within five years, thanks to the 'Great Leap Forward' (1958-1962). 'People's communes' (each encompassing a rural town and its hinterland) were promoted with promises of much more food to come. To feed factory workers, food was requisitioned in huge quantities from rural communes. Local Party cadres in charge of agricultural collectives vied with each other to exaggerate the amount of surplus crops their communes could produce in order to gain favour with their superiors. Accepting these claims at face value, so much food was taken to the cities that villagers were left with little or nothing to eat and mass starvation ensued (Dikötter 2010: 127ff).

Women in the weaving villages of southwest Shandong who came of age in the 1950s and '60s learned few weaving designs from their mothers. From having only worked in the home, women were 'liberated' to work alongside men on the land. As one explained, she and everyone else worked in the fields, even in rain and snow, because they needed the credits. They did all kinds of work: bringing water, ploughing, planting seeds, etc. Even her mother, who had bound feet, went out to work in the fields. Wu (2015: 117) writes that during her study of paper-cutting in Yan'an, 'Many elderly women recalled a scene from the socialist past: one needed to start needlework at night, after a day of collective labour in the fields, plus endless housework....' Eyferth (2012: 389) records: 'In busy times, it was not uncommon for women to sleep only three or four hours every night'.

During the Great Leap Forward, painting evoking folk art, but omitting traditional religious themes and aspirations for wealth or high status, became one of the principal ways in which government policy was communicated to ordinary people. Skilled artists who could produce propaganda in the form of woodblock prints or freehand 'peasant

paintings' were recruited to work in special collectives where they could earn a greater number of credits. Such 'Peasant Painting', supposedly the spontaneous expression of support for government policies by village artists, was encouraged at rural communes both during the periods of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76, see Fang Lili in this volume). The style of much peasant painting is influenced by Soviet Socialist Realism, where human achievements are attained through co-operation, with no help from the gods. According to Crozier (2008: 66) Peasant Painting originated in 1958 among villagers in Hu Xian Commune, Shaanxi Province. Unlike trained artists, the painters of Hu Xian were valuable to the Communist Party because they were not 'contaminated' by a bourgeois background, yet their work was relatively sophisticated and used bright colours. Peasant painting continues to be used to promote Provincial and National government campaigns in China such as President Xi Jinping's 'China's Dream', the aspiration that the unplanned social consequences of China's economic growth would be channelled into the rejuvenation of Chinese culture, restoring the country's former greatness.

Recovering tradition

The revival of folk art

After 1976, when the Cultural Revolution came to an end and life returned to normal, a number of researchers in Shandong cycled around villages in their area, collecting examples of traditional arts in order to ensure work that had survived the Cultural Revolution was preserved. As far as villagers are aware, there was never an official announcement that the Cultural Revolution had ended, simply a decline in the severity of policing its principles until the more courageous of artists and craftspeople found they could return to traditional themes with impunity. When the market economy was re-established by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 many also helped villagers develop new designs which they hoped would sell for a

higher price in local markets. Wang Yonghai, Director of the Yangjiabu Woodblock Society, explained this was part of a national programme:

After the Cultural Revolution almost everything in China had been destroyed, from the economy to the culture. Recovering the economy was the first priority. Central Government policy was that every town should develop one industry; every county or town should have one type of product, one famous brand. Each town was to decide, what is ours? Given the destruction of industry, hand crafts were easier to get started. Local leaders with foresight set up a society to study papercuts, woodblocks, cloth dyeing and so forth.

Once the attempted suppression of traditional culture came to an end the demand for traditional arts sprang back to life. Many people attributed the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution to the fact that the gods had been neglected. According to Smith (2016: 199), ‘millions were convinced that the famine had come about because they were no longer free to practice the rituals designed to harmonise relations between the spirit and human worlds’. At the start of the 1980s, we were told, so many customers came to Yangjiabu village in Eastern Shandong demanding woodblock prints that they had to be held back at the northern entrance to the village, where old ladies were paid by workshops to bring customers to them. Greatest demand was for posters of the kitchen god. Adam Chau (2005) notes that the north of Shaanxi Province was also experiencing a momentous revival of popular religion during the 1980s.

Support for traditional arts was formalised through the recognition of China’s intangible cultural heritage and its leading practitioners, in 2008. Xiang Yang (this volume chapter 6) describes the unease of Party cadres, who had been thoroughly inculcated with the idea that seasonal festivals were to be condemned as feudal superstition, when they found themselves now promoting them as intangible cultural heritage. The concept originated in Japan, particularly with regard to traditions such as Noh theatre, when it was realised that preserving masks and costumes in

museums neglected the fact that the material (tangible) aspects of the tradition were only brought to life during performances, knowledge of which was an aspect of intangible heritage. The particular importance of intangible cultural heritage in Japan arises from the fact that, ‘since most of the works of art and architectural structures in Japan are made of relatively weak materials such as wood, paper and lacquer, they have been preserved through appropriate repairs carried out regularly through time’ (Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, n.d.: 22). In 1954, the Japanese Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, enacted in 1950 to protect material heritage, was amended to recognize the holders of important intangible cultural properties, defined as those who embody to an outstanding degree the relevant skills and techniques associated with drama, music and craft, in order to ensure the continued existence of the tangible cultural heritage.

Techniques in Japanese folk culture were recognized in the Japanese legislation as ‘objects’ for protection in 2004. They were characterized as customs associated with farming and fishing, rites of passage, entertainments, visiting houses at New Year to bring good wishes, and traditional performing arts that seek help from the gods. Because intangible folk cultural properties were regarded as aspects of the normal life and customs of ordinary people, it was considered impracticable to recognize anyone as holding such skills to an outstanding degree. Since 2008 the Chinese Government has, on the other hand, adopted a policy of identifying skilled folk artists as local, regional or national masters and provides funds to help them transmit their skills to the next generation (in this volume see Fang Lili and Wang Jianmin).

Independently of government policy in China a movement to celebrate the cultures of China’s Golden Age, when it was ruled by ethnically Han dynasties, the Han, Tang and Song (i.e. up to 1279) has grown up, known as the Hanfu movement, the subject of Zhou Xing’s chapter in this volume. This represents a definitive rejection of the policies of the New Culture Movement and the Cultural Revolution and can be linked to

China's rise in power and global status since the return of the market economy, giving its people renewed self-respect for their past.

In the city of Boshan, Shandong, we met members of the Yan Shan Club, a local manifestation of the Hanfu movement. One explained that they were particularly dedicated to promoting the traditional coming of age and marriage ceremonies, providing the period clothes free to anyone who wanted to borrow them. The coming of age ceremony is very popular. Each member of the girl's family must in turn show their respect for Confucius. Men in the society perform fighting, with swords on their backs. They shoot arrows at a target and the loser must drink a quantity of alcohol (CF the Six Arts taught during the Zhou Dynasty and continued up to the Six Dynasty period). Members of the Yan Shan club also give public demonstrations of how to wear Hanfu clothing to show the costumes are practical to wear, not too complex. I asked when it became acceptable to show an interest in traditional culture again and was told the first society promoting Han clothing was established in 2005, but such clothing had already been popularised by the many historical costume dramas broadcast on TV. Maybe, the speaker added, it was forbidden to show an interest during the Cultural Revolution, but even during the Cultural Revolution it was deep in people's minds, and so easily revived.

Organisation of this book

The remainder of the book opens with three general essays. Fang Lili presents a review of the history of art in China which demonstrates the novel opportunities and challenges for the anthropology of art in a complex society with written records that go back three thousand years. She traces the history of artistic culture in China from the system of rites (etiquette) and music introduced by the first king of the Western Zhou dynasty, around 1,000 BC to regulate social order, and she outlines the complex interaction that has taken place over centuries between urban and rural arts (or high art and folk art). Anthropology as the study of 'other cultures' was at first equated, in China, with the study of ethnic minorities.

Professor Fang describes how the anthropology of art in China has since broadened its scope to include rural Han society and urban culture, and how its research methods have been developed to give Chinese art anthropology a distinctive character, taking advantage of written records to understand the dynamics of history.

He Ming and Hong Ying present a spirited argument for keeping an open mind as to the character of art in diverse cultures. They warn against taking the centrality of aesthetics in Chinese art appreciation as a criterion for defining what is art in other societies. Professors He and Hong advocate an interactive and processual approach, a hermeneutic spiral or dialogue between the researcher and the people with whom (s)he works, through which they can arrive at a mutual understanding of what characterises art in any particular local context.

One of the striking differences between social anthropology in the UK and China is the importance given to ethnomusicology in China, and this is illustrated in the following three chapters. Yang Mingkang, himself an ethnomusicologist and professor at China's Central Conservatory of Music, addresses what is currently a lively debate in Chinese anthropology: should ethnomusicological research be conducted by ethnographers or musicologists? Professor Yang advocates the value of adopting anthropological research methods in the study of folk music.

Se Yin, a cultural anthropologist from Mongolia, describes a shamanic ritual that offers psychological comfort or healing to young women who have been jilted in love or trapped in unhappy marriages. Xiang Yang looks in detail at the interaction between the Great and Little traditions in Han culture, exemplified through the historical links between high art and folk art which, he shows to be aspects of a common culture. Professor Xiang's account of a rural temple festival in which he participated is vivid and evocative, and exemplifies his underlying argument that rural music cannot be separated from the performance of the rituals in which it is embedded. Luo Qin's chapter then moves the focus from rural to urban, looking at the special challenges of studying urban music, especially

music that is close to home, in other words, music that is part of the researcher's own culture.

The following two chapters look in opposite directions, one forward to a Utopia, the other back to a Golden Age. Wang Jie notes how writers on Communism, from nineteenth century Europe to twenty-first century China, have represented history as progressing toward a socialist Utopia which, implicitly, justifies tragedies that may occur along the way. Professor Wang illustrates his analysis with a recent Chinese film in which the fictional central character, a village girl from the far north-west of China, travels to Shenzhen, the heart of urban industry on the southern coast, in search of her personal vision of the 'Chinese Dream'. Her journey ends in tragedy. Zhou Xing's chapter, on the other hand, describes how members of the urban middle class (successors to the *wen ren* of Old China) seek to recreate aspects of the Golden Age of Han culture, before it was destroyed by the Manchu invaders from beyond China's north-east border who established the Qing dynasty. Their Hanfu movement represents a final break from the demeaning of China's own heritage initiated by the New Culture movement at the start of the twentieth century, and an unashamed celebration of China's own civilisation.

The final contribution by Professor Wang Jianmin provides a fitting conclusion to a book on China's contribution to the anthropology of art by arguing for a theoretical perspective on the anthropology of art based on Chinese philosophy rather than Western concepts. Highlighting the move in studies of material culture toward an emphasis on the active role it plays in creating and sustaining social relationships (Mauss on the 'spirit of the gift', Appadurai on the social life of things, Gell on art and agency), Professor Wang draws attention to the ancient Daoist distinction between *qi* and *dao*, which he characterises as the material form and the metaphysical nature of things.