

Between Worldly and Otherworldly: Li Yanshan's *A Land Untarnished*

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Introduction

In the summer of 2011, the Hong Kong Museum of Art held an exhibition on the art of Li Yanshan (1898-1961).¹ Li Yanshan, given name being Yaochen 耀辰, courtesy name Juduan 居端; alternative courtesy name Yanshan (研山 or its variant, 硯山), and a string of studio names, including Sujing Pavilion 蘇井亭, Fenyan Terrace 鳳研樓, Zhuqing Loft 佇晴閣, Shixihu House 石溪壺館 and Shuangtiedi Lodge 雙鐵笛樓. Born in the village of Huangwan in Hetang of Xinhui, Guangdong, Li attended the Guangzhou Middle School and studied painting under Pan He 潘龢 (1873-1929). He studied law at the Peking University in Beijing in the 1920s. He later returned to Guangdong to join the judiciary while participating actively in the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society 廣東國畫研究會. Between 1932 and 1936, Li served as president of the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts. After the civil war, he settled in Hong Kong and led the reclusive life of a scholar.

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Plate 1
*Li Yanshan: His
Paintings, Calligraphy
and Poems*

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Plate 2
*Mountain Dwelling on a
Summer Day*,
Li Yanshan, Ink on
paper, 129.9 x 48.1cm,
1953. The Collection of
the Li Yanshan Family.

Like many of his peers at the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society, Li Yanshan was a traditionalistic artist. Apart from those landscape paintings completed in Hong Kong in his late years, most of his works was devoted to copying and learning from the techniques of the great masters. After Li's death, his son, Lee Wan-woo 李允鈺, organised a commemorative exhibition of his father and published a catalogue of paintings in the family collection². The cover of the catalogue features the artist's rendition of Wang Meng 王蒙's *Mountain Dwelling on a Summer Day* 夏日山居圖, evidently a homage to the Yuan dynasty master: twisted mountains, *niumaocun* (牛毛皴 cattle-hair stroke) and giant pine trees in the foreground. Underneath the pine trees, in front of a hut, sit two relaxed gentlemen having a leisurely conversation, a scene that echoes Wan-Woo's view on his father: "He is a traditional painter who learned from tradition and lived a reclusive life in the mountains."

Li Yanshan's obstinate persistence in traditional painting put him at odds with the Chinese painting community of the 20th century that emphasised change. No sooner after the commemorative exhibition, there was this critique from an anonymous reviewer:

There's no question of Li Yanshan's mastery in traditional Chinese painting... I, however, believe that all because Li had immersed too much in poetry, calligraphy and painting, he disconnected himself from reality. In the end, he was fettered by tradition because of his strict adherence to it, capturing only the form but not the spirit, the individual strokes but not the whole picture.”³

Their merits and demerits notwithstanding, Li's Chinese paintings in the traditionalist approach can hardly be described as “disconnected from reality”. In fact, there was a group of painters, politicians and businessmen actively engaged in the creation, appreciation and criticism of traditional paintings in the Guangdong of Li's time. The Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society was such an organisation.⁴ There were also a number of literati-officials in the Nationalist Government who were educated in the classics and had a taste for traditional art. For various reasons, many of these literati-officials moved south to Hong Kong when the Anti-Japanese War broke out in 1937 and brought with them these “traditionalist” factors to the art community of Hong Kong. The kind of soil in which Li's art was nurtured was subsequently brought into Hong Kong. His adherence to tradition was not merely a personal choice but the epitome of a collective cultural spirit. That the group passed into oblivion in art history in later years was closely tied to the political decline of these officials.

By referencing Li Yanshan's signature painting, *A Land Untarnished*, and the postscripts written by Hu Yisheng 胡毅生 and Chen Rong 陳融, this essay will attempt to shed light on the nature of Li's relationship with the two men, as well as to offer a glimpse into the ebb and flow of the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society.

A Land Untarnished

A Land Untarnished 青山無恙 is a handscroll measuring 500 centimetres in length, ink and colour on paper. The name of the painting came from the four characters *Qingshan Wuyang* 青山無恙 written on the title panel of the scroll. Unfolding the scroll, the painting begins with a meandering river flowing slowly along a line of trees that spread their roots over rocks on the banks. The river and the mountain scene then give way to the subject matter – a giant semi-open cave. A scholar holding a staff walks into the cave. The scroll ends with the riverbank becoming barren, the scenery fading into the misty river. In the postscript, Li wrote: “Returned home after an exhausting journey to the comfort of my family and friends. In return of their hospitality, I completed the painting in three days. Hope they like it. Winter of the Year of *Bingxu* 丙戌. Li Yanshan at Quzhu Studio 趣竹軒”.

The Year of *Bingxu* was 1946 on Western calendar. Therefore this scroll was painted when the artist returned home to Quzhu Studio in Xinhui, Guangdong, after the turbulent war years, completed in

the company of his family and friends in three consecutive days. According to Lee Wan-woo's article⁵, his father first sought refuge in Hong Kong when the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937. Later when Hong Kong fell to the Japanese, he had to flee again to Macau, just days before the Chinese New Year of 1942. In 1943, he passed through many places and arrived at the French concession of Guangzhou Bay (now Zhanjiang) where he enjoyed a spell of stability before he had to move again shortly before the war ended, this time to Maoming. The turbulent period that Li underwent during the war was described in the postscript as "an exhausting journey".

In the summer of 1949, shortly after he completed the scroll, Li returned to his hometown of Guangzhou after a long absence, taking the work with him and presenting it to Hu Yisheng 胡毅生, a key political figure of the Kuomintang (the KMT, or the Chinese Nationalist Party). On its title panel, Hu wrote the four characters, *Qingshan Wuyang*, together with a supplementary note:

Niu Shihui 牛石慧 wrote his well wishes for four things in the postscript to his painting – his country (the land) was listed first. Living in the dying years of the Ming dynasty, he witnessed the cavalry of the Manchus sweeping through his country and took to writing to assuage pain that could never be eradicated. Now returning home after the war, Brother Yanshan showed me his recent work, a long handscroll, and I took to writing this postscript to join in the celebration. The four-character phrase *shanhe bianse* (山河變色 The country in upheaval) after the character, *heng* (橫) [through his country], has been left out.

Hu Yisheng, the first month of summer, 1947.

Plate 3
A Land Untarnished,
Li Yanshan, handscroll,
ink and colour on paper,
31.7 x 476.1cm, 1946.
The Collection of the Li
Yanshan Family.



The postscript to Niu Shihui's painting that Hu mentioned above refers to the text attached to *Huahui Tu* (花卉圖 Flowers), collected by Huang Bore 黃般若, another core member of the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society. It reads "I have well wishes for four things: the country, my old friends, books I collected and beautiful flowers." Huang Bore's studio, Four Well Wishes Studio 四無恙齋, was thus named after this. Huang was active among the art and cultural circles in Guangdong and it is fair to assume that the art lover Hu Yisheng had seen the painting and availed himself of the quotation.

Reading Niu's original postscript, it is a matter of opinion as to whether "The Land Untarnished" experienced by Niu Shihui, a royal descendant of the declining Ming court, comes close to Hu's imagination of "Living in the dying years of the Ming dynasty, he witnessed the cavalry of the Manchus sweeping through his country and took to writing to assuage pain that could never be eradicated." However, a common theme of war – the Japanese invasion of China and the Manchus' intrusions – is an example of historical allusions that was a popular source of subject matter for poetry of the time⁶. The title "A Land Untarnished" echoed the social reality of 1947, in the way it related an old classic to the victory in the war against Japan: a country that survived one calamity after another was a good enough cause for celebration. The tone that Hu Yisheng set in the postscript made it an even more vivid political metaphor. This landscape painting by Li Yanshan, accompanied by Hu's description, seems to recreate in ink a land that has endured calamities and remained intact.

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When Hu's postscript struck a note of "celebration", another postscript took on a much more melancholic tone. In the autumn of the same year, Li Yanshan presented the work to Chen Rong 陳融, another important figure of the Nationalist Party in Guangzhou. In the postscript, Chen wrote:

Being aware that I am a layman in the appreciation of paintings, I once asked Yanshan, "The brush strokes of this scroll are magnificent, with elegant distant view and detailed close-up. I wonder of which style it is?" Li said smilingly, "It probably resembles the style of Huang Gongwang 黃公望?" Yun Shouping 惲壽平 once said, "Huang Gongwang was the best of all painters of his time. Shen Zhou 沈周 later inherited his magnificent boldness; Liu Jue 劉珏 and Dong Qichang 董其昌 his graceful carefreeness; my later grandfather Yun Xiang 惲向, and Zou Zhilin 鄒之麟 each part of his style. The rest were mediocre, painting mostly poor imitations, mostly tigers and carving wild geese. The essence of Huang Gongwang's art was thus reduced to dust and dirt." This work by Yanshan wastes not an extra drop of ink in constituting texture, applying colour without subduing the strokes and creating a spiritual realm that brings tranquillity to one's mind. The artistry of painting calm ponds and undulating mountain ranges illustrates his comprehension of Huang Gongwang's light colours techniques. Vigorous yet graceful, this is truly a masterpiece after all those scholars. If there were a chance, it will be great to ask the master of the Ouxiang Studio [aka Yun Shouping] and see if he would occur with my view.

Gripping your brush you roved, only to find dead ends on the road. 抗筆天涯傷路窮

Yet all that had unfolded before your eyes you recorded in your heart. 縱橫收束入玄中

For ten years, painter, we have been apart. 十年一別丹青手

Now you're no longer the yesterday you I know. 吳下真非舊阿蒙

The wind and rain have subsided, the path ahead still treacherous. 風雨初淨道途艱

Too longing to see my home, the ten-thousand-mile journey home was made with heartache. 鄉土攪心萬里還

But the mountains are pale and the rivers wretched, 慘淡峰巒淒厲水

As shrouding this country is the deepest gloom of a new kind. 新愁無限此江山

Rambling words on Yanshan's painting written to meet his request for an inscription Rong, early autumn, the Year of *Dinghai* 丁亥

In addition to complimenting the artistry of Li Yanshan, the postscript also included the poem: "Gripping your brush you roved, only to find dead ends on the road. Yet all that unfolded before your eyes you collected in ink"⁷ Similar with Hu Yisheng, Chen Rong also tied this landscape painting with the milieu of wartime. The state of mind conveyed in Chen's poem, however, is distinctly different from that in Hu's writing. In Chen's eyes, "the mountains are pale and the rivers

wretched”, which stirred in him “the deepest gloom of a new kind”. In contrast to Hu Yisheng’s “*A Land Untarnished*”, Chen’s writing oozed a deep sense of sadness and grief. Chen Rong, as the writing suggests, might have reservation about the title “*A Land Untarnished*” by Hu.

Then again, the different interpretations of the same painting by the two KMT figures appear to reflect the similar and circuitous paths of their political careers.

Hu Yisheng, Old Man of the Sui Studio

Hu Yisheng (1883-1958), an elder of the KMT with a life filled with mysteries, a suspect in the Liao Zhongkai 廖仲愷 case⁸ which tainted his reputation so badly that his life story was seldom documented in both mainland China and Taiwan.⁹ Born Hu Yanluan, alternative courtesy name being Suizhai 隋齋 (aka Old Man of the Sui Studio 隋齋老人), Hu Yisheng was the paternal cousin of Hu Hanmin 胡漢民. He was native to Ji’an in the Jiangxi province but his grandfather moved the family to Guangzhou, where he went to high school shortly after the Coup De’tat of 1898.¹⁰ He went to Japan in 1903 to further his studies and joined the Tongmenghui (the Chinese United League) as one of the early members. Many members of Tongmenghui who were from Guangdong, such as Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 and Hu Hanmin, were initiated by Hu. He later took part in an array of revolutionary activities across the country, gathering intelligence in different regional provinces and liaising with local revolutionary forces. From 1907 onwards, he took an active part in uprisings, including the Battle of Zhennan Pass and the Huanghuagang Uprising, until the success of the 1911 Revolution.

A revered KMT elder hailed for “drawing up military plans and making bombs and mines singlehandedly”¹¹, yet Hu’s career in politics after the founding of the Republic was not a smooth sailing. Appointed as commander of the Navy in 1911, Hu was notoriously dubbed “King of Killing” for advocating “killing to stop killing” to eradicate bandits in the country. In the spring of the following year, he sought funding of \$100,000 for the purchase of ammunition, but the money went into his own pocket as all other members fled when the Second Revolution failed. Words soon spread that Hu had absconded with embezzled funds.¹² After the death of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 in 1916, he still managed to secure a significant position in the government. But when the KMT adopted a new policy of “Alliance with Russia and Acceptance of Communism”, Hu was effectively sidelined because of his adamant anti-communist stance¹³. Despite having family ties to the prominent Hu Hanmin, he did not share political affinity with the cousin. Among a series of recently released telegraph correspondences from the 1930s collected by Hu Hanmin in the Harvard-Yenching Library¹⁴ were letters to Yisheng, in which Hanmin only wrote of his concerns for the health of his sickly elder brother Hu Qingrui 胡清瑞 without a single word on politics. The existence of this cousin was, in fact, an impediment that hindered his career. In 1921, the position of chief of staff was left vacant by the death of Lin Xiuhai 林修海, Hu Yisheng was the most qualified candidate to take over. Sun Yat-sen, however, opposed to his appointment on the ground that his cousin was already in high office, being head of the civil service.¹⁵ When Yisheng announced plans

to run for mayor of Guangzhou, Hanmin, the then governor of Guangdong, pledged support to his rival Wu Chaoshu 伍朝樞 to avoid becoming the subject of malicious gossips. Yisheng then lost in the race.¹⁶ All these odds withstanding, it was the assassination of Liao Zhonghai that proved to be the last straw that broke his back as a politician.

On 20 August 1925, Liao Zhongkai, staunch supporter of Sun Yat-sen's "Alliance with Russia and Acceptance of Communism" policy, was assassinated. Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石, Wang Jingwei and Xu Chongzhi 許崇智 formed a special investigation team which listed members of the right-wing camp who had voiced vehement opposition to the "accept Communism" policy as prime suspects. As founder of *The Citizen's News* 國民新聞, Hu Yisheng had splashed his anti-Communist views over its pages; other suspects were seen meeting at his pen and paper shop Wenhutang 文華堂. Placed on a wanted list as the main culprit, Hu once went into hiding overseas until Chen Gongbo deemed him a "nonsensical literati" at the National Congress of the KMT in 1926, effectively clearing him of being a suspect. The investigation of Liao's death ended with Chiang and Wang ousting Hu Hanmin from power. As a key right-winger in the party, Hu Hanmin was placed house arrest by Chiang as a result of their disputes over the new provisional constitution in 1931. Hu was forced to resign from all party roles. He spent the last years of his life in Hong Kong and Guangzhou and passed away in 1958.¹⁷

The political career of Hu Yisheng took a dramatic twist after the death of the cousin and the start of the War of Resistance. Luo Yiqun 羅翼群, a KMT party member who did not leave the mainland, recalled that at a meeting in Chongqing sometime between the spring and summer of 1942, Chiang Kai-shek raised the issue of the compilation of a party chronology when they were having dinner and suggested inviting Hu Yisheng and Feng Ziyou 馮自由 to join the editorial committee in Chongqing. Hu Yisheng's arrival in Chongqing was greeted by Liu Jiwen 劉紀文, Deputy Director of the Audit Bureau, and Hu was later appointed as a policy advisor.¹⁸ After the war, he was made a delegate at the KMT National Assembly held in November 1946 and an advisor to the Nationalist Government in April 1947.¹⁹

That Chiang Kai-sec would put Hu Yisheng in his cabinet was probably because of Hu's resolute stance against the Communists. Nevertheless, when he wrote the postscript to Li Yanshan's scroll in the summer of 1947, his political career had taken a turn for the better as his status was confirmed as a party elder. An article in Jian Youwen's *Da Feng Ten-day Journal* 大風旬刊 in 1939 gave a positive account of his revolution activities and poetry, calligraphy and painting, as well as the grand reception he received in Chongqing. To Hu Yisheng, the success of the resistance efforts not only kept the country but also his political career and status "untarnished". Despite the grim tone of "he witnessed the cavalry of the Manchus sweeping through his country and took to writing to assuage pain that could never be eradicated", it is not difficult to comprehend the joyous sentiment of "celebration".

The circumstances, however, were very different to the writer of the second postscript, Chen Rong.



Plate 4
Chen Rong
Huangmeihuawu Shigao

Chen Rong, Master of the Yong Garden

Chen Rong (1876-1955), courtesy name being Xiezhi協之, alternative courtesy name Yongan顛庵, study names Qiumenglou秋夢樓, Yong Garden顛園, Qixin Tower棲心樓, Huangmeihui House黃梅花屋, Yuexiushan Hall越秀山堂. After graduating from the Jupu Academy菊坡精舍 founded by Chen Li陳澧, he enrolled in an intensive course at the Hosei University in Japan. He returned to China in 1904 and joined the Chinese United League. After the establishment of the Nationalist Government, he was invited by Xia Tonghe夏同龢 to teach at the Guangdong Law and Political Science Academy and the Guangdong Police Academy, and was appointed dean of the Law and Political Science School. In 1913, he was concurrently appointed director of the Preparatory Office of the Division of Justice. He moved to Hong Kong after the failed Second Revolution but returned to Guangzhou in 1917. By then, many of his early students had risen to prominence. With an impressive résumé and an extensive network of contacts in the judicial circle, Chen was the man of the time. He was appointed as head of the Guangdong High Court in 1920 and head of the Justice Department of Guangdong the following year. After the Northern Expedition, he was made director of Political Affairs of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing. With Hu Hanmin being pushed aside over the new provisional constitution disputes in 1931, Chen Rong returned to Guangdong and formed the South-western Political Affairs Committee and served as secretary-general. He bowed out of politics following the death of Hu Hanmin and the dissolution of the Political Affairs Committee.²⁰



Plate 5
“An Inscription on Li
Yanshan’s Landscape
Long Scroll”,
Huangmeihuawu Shigao

Chen Rong was the elder brother of Chen Shuzi 陳淑子, wife of Hu Hanmin. Hu had been his closest alliance and bosom friend throughout his political career. When Hu stepped down in the 1930s, most of his private telegraph correspondences were with Chen Rong. In the letters, the two talked about anything and everything, the usual complaints and grievances, political commentaries and “confidential talks”. Learning the latest happenings on the mainland from Chen, Hu was able to mastermind anti-Chiang and anti-Communist activities towards the establishment of the New National Party²¹ in Hong Kong.

Compared with cousin Hu Yisheng, brother-in-law Chen Rong was certainly of greater significance politically, being held in a much higher regard in the party. During the War of Resistance, however, Hu went from strength to strength despite a bumpy start in the Nationalist Government, while the foundation Chen Rong laid for his political career was completely uprooted. In 1936, Hu Hanmin spent the last moments of his life playing chess with Chen in Yong Garden 頤園 before he went into a coma caused by hypertension. Chen himself went to Vietnam following the dissolution of the South-western Political Affairs Committee during the war and thereafter abstained from politics. His sister Chen Shuzi died in Chongqing in 1942. Chen returned to Guangzhou after the war and found that Yong Garden had already been reduced to rubble by the Japanese. To make matters worse, Chen was forced to abandon his on-going project of compiling the *Qingshi Jishi* (清詩紀事 *Annotated Anthology of Qing Poems*), as the over 20,000 books collected were lost. Even though he was appointed advisor to the Nationalist Government in 1948, his state of mind was a world apart from Hu’s, a man whose career was taking a turn for the better. And perhaps more importantly,

Plate 6
*Discussing Poetry
 at Qixin Lodge*
 by Li Yanshan,
Huangmeihuawu Shigao



he was an active participant of a string of anti-Chiang activities, a backbone member no less, even carving out his own stronghold with the founding of the New National Party. Chen, therefore, was left in the lurch as the Nationalist Government was holding ambivalent attitudes towards members of the conservative camp. The lines in the postscript: “The wind and rain have subsided, the path ahead still treacherous/ Too longing to see my home, the ten-thousand-mile journey home was made with heartache/ But the mountains are pale and the rivers wretched/ As shrouding this country is the deepest gloom of a new kind” are a poignant expression of his dark, gloomy mind.

Between Worldly and Otherworldly

Chen Rong and Hu Yisheng, two elders of the KMT, one devoted to revolutionary causes and the other to the establishment of a judicial system, shared a common interest. Both men belonged to a generation of Chinese literati who displayed virtuosity in the classics and a taste for traditional art. It was this tenacity and spirit of traditional painting that insinuated Li Yanshan into the circle of Chen and Hu.

Nurtured by a refined education in traditions, Chen Rong was well versed in calligraphy and literature, demonstrating brilliant intellectual ability and high scholarship. His book, *Du Lingnan Ren Shici Jueju* (讀嶺南人詩詞絕句 *On the Four-line Poems of the Lingnan Poets*), set the trend of critical studies of poetry. In the late 1920s, in view of the many errors in Xu Shichang 徐世昌's *Wangqingyi Shihui* (晚晴簃詩匯 *Collected Poems of Wanqing Lodge*), Chen resumed his plan to compile the project “Qingshi Jishi” (清詩紀事 *A Collection of Qing Poetry with Notes*), which marked him the first scholar to take up such a project.²² When Chen was in office in Guangdong, he built Yong Garden at the foot of Yuexiushan (near Fazheng Road, by the side of the Law and Political Science Academy) and went on to establish the Yong Garden Club, playing host to poetry and literature gatherings attended by famous poets and scholars such as Mao Guangshen and Chen Yan. He was highly conversant with epigraphic calligraphy, with *Huangmeihuawu Shigao* (黃梅花屋詩稿 *Poetry of the Yellow Plum Blossoms House*) and several publications to his name.

Chen Rong was Li Yanshan's most important sponsor during the earlier years. Li's painting, 樓心樓談詩圖 *Discussing Poetry at Qixin Lodge*, served as an illustration on the preface to Chen's *Huangmeihuawu Shigao* which contains the poems, “贈硯山緗碧子樞君碧[璧]並呈若粟” (To Yanshan, Xiangbi, Zishu, Junbi, and also for Ruosu's Appreciation), “題李研山花月宦消夏圖” (An Inscription on Li Yanshan's Painting of Leisured Officials Passing Summer), “題李研山山水長卷” (An Inscription on Li Yanshan's Landscape Long Scroll), “題李研山老翁畫扇三用前韻” (An Inscription on Li Yanshan's Old Man Painting Fan, using rhyme of previous verse the third time).²³ When Li, a graduate of law from the Peking University, returned to Guangzhou in the 1920s and began a career in judiciary, his paths invariably crossed with those of Chen, a most important figure in the legal field. The solid technique in traditional painting Li learned from Pan He soon made him the most popular member of Chen Rong's Yong Garden Club 顯園俱樂部. The artist did the painting, 顯園雅集圖 *A Cultured Gathering at Yong Garden*, as a gift to mark the club's gatherings. His work 蒼松十聯屏 *Painting of Old Pines on Ten Sequential Panels*, a painting presented to Chen Rong on the occasion of his birthday, was the most “eye-catching”²⁴ piece among the gifts. In 1931, when the position of president of the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts became vacant, Li won the job with the support of Chen Rong, thereby bidding farewell to a career in law and justice and embarking on one that revolved around painting. Chen wanted Li to join him to take refuge in Vietnam during the war. But Li failed to make the trip as his arrival in Hong Kong coincided with the eruption of the Pacific War and all sea routes were subsequently blocked.

Hu Yisheng was also a literatus adept at calligraphy and poetry. His publication, *Juechen Xiangshi Shicao* (絕塵想室詩草 *Poetry of the Free-of-Worldly-Thought Room*)²⁵, was a collection of folk poems and songs imbued with regional flavours such as “*Lingnan Lizhi Ci*” (嶺南荔枝詞 Litchi from Lingnan) and “*Lingnan Mudan Ci*” (嶺南牡丹辭 Peony of Lingnan). It also features a series of reciprocal poems composed with his intellectual friends, including the *ci* poet Liu Jingtang 劉景堂 (courtesy name Borui 伯瑞, 1887-1963)²⁶ and Chen Rong.²⁷ He also wrote inscriptions on paintings, such as “題遺民彭竹本(睿壘)畫竹” (An Inscription on the Bamboo Painting by Peng Zhuben (Ruixun), Survivor of the Times), “題馮魚山畫憤樓額” (An Inscription on Feng Yushan's Painting of the Hall Sign),²⁸ in addition to taking an interest in calligraphy and seal-caving. His alternative courtesy name Suizhai 隋齋, which was inspired by the tablet of the Sui dynasty in his early collection.²⁹ His works of literary couplets and seal-carving were published in *Da Feng Ten-day Journal of Hong Kong* in 1939 and *Yihai Zazhi* of Taiwan in 1978. Stories of the friendship between Hu Yisheng and Li Yanshan were noted in one of the poems, “題李研山峽山紀遊畫冊” (Inscribing Li Yanshan's Painting Album of Travels in Xiashan)³⁰. In the chronology of Li, his son Lee Wan-woo mentioned that Hu became friends with the artist when the latter returned to Guangdong after his studies at the Peking University and that both were members of Chen Rong's Yong Garden Club. The two also jointly took part in Chinese calligraphy and painting exhibitions in Hong Kong.

Li completed the long handscroll after the war in 1947. He then took the painting to Guangzhou and asked his two friends to each write an inscription, possibly trying to gain their political support. The same year in Li's chronology saw him come under pressure from the Government, which demanded

the restructuring of the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts.³¹ His restructure plans failed, and the place of the college was taken over by the Guangzhou Art School newly founded by Gao Jianfu 高劍父. Did it set off a political tug-of-war and how did things pan out? It is impossible to find out, given the lack of historical records available. But it can be reasonably deduced that the two elders could do little about the situation, with Chen, Li's art sponsor, retiring from politics in 1936 and Hu having little *de facto* political power.

But the fact remained, with Chen Rong's backing, that members of the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society were treated with favouritism during Li's tenure at the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts in the 1930s. In his capacity as president, Li masterminded the restructuring of its Chinese painting faculty and recruited members of the society as professors, including Zhao Haogang 趙浩公, Li Fenggong 李鳳公, Zhang Guchu 張谷雛, Lu Zhenhuan 盧振寰, Huang Junbi 黃君璧, Lu Zishu 盧子樞 and Feng Xiangbi 馮湘碧. The president made a splash on the art scene when he set up an offshoot of the society at the college and launched the publication of the college magazine, *Art*. According to Wu Zifu 吳子復³², a graduate of the college who later taught at the Guangzhou Art School, the "Compromise Style" (折衷派)³³ gradually gained prominence with the advocacy of the politically influential Gao Jianfu, though traditional art was still prevalent in the society, its foundation too solid to be shaken. That the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society boasted over 200 members with branches in as far as Hong Kong and Dongguang were a testament of its influence. But the time changed and the political fortunes of his sponsors in the conservative camp also waned, while victory in the War of Resistance drove the popularity of Chiang Kai-shek to new heights. Gao Jianfu, on the other hand, had won the support from Zhu Xiuxia 祝秀俠, Chief of the City Education Bureau and Secretary-General of the City Government. During the war years, Zhu served as Confidential Secretary of KMT's Overseas Department of the Central Government in Hong Kong under Wu Tiecheng 吳鐵城, one of Chiang's lieutenants, representing KMT's central authority, which gave him a clear upper-hand. In 1947, Hu An 忽庵 wrote at the start of the essay, "現代國畫趨向" (A Direction of Modern Chinese Painting): "The Gao brothers and Chen Shuren 陳樹人 of the 'Compromise Style', who had taken part in revolutionary activities leading to the founding of the Nationalist Government and well accustomed with the ideologies

Plate 7 (left)

"A Passion for Tradition: The Art of Li Yanshan", Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011.

Plate 8 (right)

Guided tour of the exhibition "A Passion for Tradition: The Art of Li Yanshan"



of the May Fourth Movement, enjoyed a political status unparalleled by those old-timers who were concerned with no other things but their own moral uplift. Chen Shuren got into politics by chance; Gao Qifeng was honoured with a state funeral; and Gao Jianfu, the favourite of the party, received the support of core KMT members...”³⁴ Regardless whether the works of Gao Jianfu were accustomed with the “ideologies of the May Fourth Movement”, the sarcasm in “those old-timers who were concerned with no other things but their own moral uplift” was likely directing at people like Chen Rong who stayed away from the wars. How the weathercock of the art circle changed its direction was thus self-evident.

Art criticisms later tend to describe Li Yanshan as a dedicated and otherworldly artist who took little interest in worldly matters. Yet, in reality, his many “worldly” experiences, including participation in May Fourth activities at the Peking University and his presidency at the Guangzhou Municipal College of Fine Arts, suggested that he was not quite that otherworldly. Nevertheless, old-fashioned literati who had rendered him support politically lost their power for a multitude of reasons. In the end, orthodox culturalists such as Li Yanshan had to join these conservative politicians to exile themselves to Hong Kong, where they began a new life.

Acknowledgement: *A Land Untarnished* and *Retreat in the Summer Mountains* are the Collection of Li Yanshan Family, reprinted with the permission from the Family.

Plate 7 and 8 are provided by Hong Kong Museum of Art.

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¹ Editor’s note: The exhibition, “A Passion for Tradition: The Art of Li Yanshan”, was held between 10 June–16 October 2011 at the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

² Lee Wan-woo (ed): *Li Yanshan: His Paintings, Calligraphy and Poems* (Hong Kong: Oriental Culture Publishers, 1975) (in Chinese).

³ Xing: “看李研山遺作展的感想” (Reflections on the Posthumous Exhibition of Li Yanshan’s Works), *Arts Monthly*, No 3, 1 June 1977, p52, in Chinese.

⁴ To learn more about the Guangdong Chinese Painting Research Society, see the Guangdong Provincial Museum and the Art Museum, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (eds): *Guardians to Tradition: The Guangdong Painting Society 1923–1937* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006), in Chinese.

⁵ Lee Wan-woo: “李研山的書畫藝術及其生平紀要” (Li Yanshan: His Art in Calligraphy and Painting and His Life Chronology), in Li Yanshan, op cit, p13, in Chinese.

⁶ Huang Dade黃大德: “黃般若年表”(A Biographical Chronology of Huang Bore) in Huang Bore and Huang Dade (eds): *黃般若美術文集 (A Collection of Essays on Fine Art by Huang Bore*, Beijing: People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 1997), p325, in Chinese.

Two examples are Chen Yinke 陳寅恪's poems, “已卯春日劉宏度自宜山寄詩言擬遷眉州予亦將離昆明往英倫因賦一律答之” (An Eight-Line Poem Written Prior to My Departure from Kunming for England in Response to a Poem from Liu Hongdu Before His Moving to Meizhou on a Spring Day in the Year of Zimao) and “夜讀簡齋集潭州諸詩感賦” (Inspired by Reading the Various Poems of Tanzhou Collected by Jian Studio in the Night), collected in 陳寅恪集·詩集:附唐笈詩存 (*Collected Works of Chen Yinke, Poetry: Tang Yuan's Poems Appended*, Beijing: New China Bookstore, 2001), pp27-28, all in Chinese. See also Hu Wenhui's analyses of the two poems in his essays, “抗戰悲觀論” (A Pessimistic View of the War of Resistance) and “宋明歷史的重演” (Repeating the History of Song and Ming), in Hu Wenhui 胡文輝 (ed.), 陳寅恪詩箋釋 *Notes on Chen Yinke's Poetry*, Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2008), pp193-208, all in Chinese.

- ⁷ This Chinese poem, entitled “題李研山山水長卷” (An Inscription on Li Yanshan's Landscape Long Scroll), was included in Chen Rong's collected poems. Chen Rong, 黃梅花屋詩稿 *Huangmeihuawu Shigao* (thread-bound edition; place of publication unknown), p32A. Based on Hu Yisheng's inscription and Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽's preface, the year of publication should be 1948.
- ⁸ Further details of the Liao Zhonghai case can be found in the investigation records compiled and released by the KMT left-wingers Luo Yiqun 羅翼群 and Ye Shaohua 葉少華 and the remembrance of the two men. Luo's “廖仲愷被刺前後” (Before and After Liao Zhonghai's Assassination) and Ye's “廖案史料補充” (Historical Supplements to the Liao Case), in the book 政治暗殺秘聞 (*Inside Stories of Political Assassinations*, Beijing: Chinese Literature & History Press, 1988), pp1-17 & pp18-22, all in Chinese. Hu Yisheng gave his response to the case in an interview with Dai Wanglan 戴望嵐 in Chongqing. Wanglan: “憶胡毅生生前一夕話” (Remembering a Conversation with Hu Yisheng before His Death), in *The Observation Post*, No 580 (Hong Kong: The Observation Post Press, 1 September 1981), p26, also in Chinese.
- ⁹ In writing the life events of Hu Yisheng, the author used the following articles as references: Zhou Xingliang 周興樑: “胡毅生” (Hu Yisheng), in Xiong Shanghou 熊尚厚, Yan Ruping 嚴如平 (eds): 民國人物傳·第十一卷 (*Minguo Renwu Zhuan, Volume 11*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2001), pp96-101; Pei Wei 佩韋, “胡毅生及其詩書” (Hu Yisheng and His Poetry and Calligraphy) in *Typhoon*, No 52 (Hong Kong: Typhoon Society, 1939), pp1632-1633; Zhi Weng 芝翁, “隋齋老人胡毅生” (Hu Yisheng, Old Man of the Sui Studio) in *Yihai Zazhi* 藝海雜誌, No 9 (Taipei: Yihai Zazhishe, January 1978), pp14-21. All in Chinese.
- ¹⁰ Zhi Weng, op cit: “Hu Yisheng, Old Man of the Sui Studio”, para 3, p14: “[Hu Yisheng's] ancestors hailed from Ji'an in Jiangxi. His grandfather, Xiesan 燮三, left home and took up office in Guangzhou during the reign of Emperor Xianfeng of Qing, and later settled in Panyu in Guangdong. Xiesan had three sons. The eldest son Wenzhao 文照 had seven daughters and sons, including Qingrui 清民 and Hanmin 漢民, and the second son, Jinpu 金甫, was father of Yisheng, which made Yisheng and Hanmin paternal cousins.”
- ¹¹ Pei Wei, op cit: “Hu Yisheng and His Poetry and Calligraphy”.
- ¹² Zhi Weng, op cit: “Hu Yisheng, Old Man of the Sui Studio”, para 4, p15.
- ¹³ Editor's note: With the intention to form an alliance with the Soviet Union, the KMT adopted a new policy that offered individual membership to communists. This policy, referred to as “Alliance with Russia and Acceptance of Communism” in history, led to widely divided opinions within the party. Hu Yisheng was a vehement opponent to the policy.
- ¹⁴ Chen Hongmin 陳紅民 (ed): 胡漢民未刊往來函電稿 (*Unpublished Telegraph Correspondences of Hu Hanmin*, Nanning: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005), pp425-426 (In Chinese only). The relationship between Hu Hanmin and Chen Rong will be discussed further in the following sections.

¹⁵ From Xiang Yu 香羽: “胡毅生佚事補述” (Supplementary Anecdotes of Hu Yisheng), para 4: “Because of his fiery temper, Mr Sun disapproved his appointment, saying instead: ‘Hu Zhantang [Hamin] is already serving as head of the civil service, if Yisheng were to be appointed chief of staff, the cousins would be commanding both the civil and military administrations and would risk becoming a target of malicious intent.’ This was in fact a roundabout way of saying no to Hu.” *The Observation Post*, No 696 (Hong Kong: The Observation Post Press, 1 July 1986), p28. Zhi Weng, however, did not mention this, saying instead, “As Lin Xiuhuan passed away on the 15th, his defence chief of staff post was deputised by [Hu] Yisheng... Yisheng was a frank and open person, rather rough and forthright, and contempt for bureaucratic practices.” Managing the many requests for meeting Sun Yat-sen, Hu would simply send away people whom he thought were unworthy to meet Sun, leading him to be described as overbearing. “Yisheng also realised the odds against him and withdrew” (para 3, p15) referred to his resignation from the acting post of the defence chief of staff on his own accord.

¹⁶ Zhi Weng, op cit, para 6, p16. Zhou Xiangliang, however, stated: “[Hu] was thwarted by the embezzlement case” (para 6, p99). The saying that the cousins should not serve in the same office was more than likely a convenient excuse and it was difficult to explain Hu Yisheng’s rocky political career, though one can learn much about the cousin’s estranged relationship in politics from these commentaries.

¹⁷ For details, see Chen Hongmin: *Handian li de Renji Guanxi yu Zhengzhi: Du Hafo-Yanjing Tushuguan* “*Hu Hanmin Wanglai Handiangao*” 函電裡的人際關係與政治：讀哈佛 燕京圖書館藏「胡漢民往來函電稿」 (Personal Connections and Politics in Telegraph Correspondences: Reading “Hu Hanmin’s Telegraph Correspondences” Collected in the Harvard-Yenching Library, Shanghai: Joint Publishing Company, 2003), in Chinese only.

¹⁸ Luo Yiqun, op cit: “Before and After Liao Zhonghai’s Assassination”, pp1-17. Regarding the discrepancies of the time of Hu’s visit to Chongqing, Dai Wanglan put down the year of his interview with Hu in Chongqing as 1941, but accordingly to Luo Yiqun, Hu did not arrive in Chongqing until after 1942. Zhi Weng also cited Lin Sen 林森’s journal documenting his trips to Emei Mountain and Qingcheng (para 1, p14), in which he described his encounters with Hu Yisheng in Emei, Sichuan and Qingcheng (para 1, p14) between 1939 and 1940. Based on Lin’s accounts, Dai’s information is accurate and that Luo had probably got the time of the meeting with Chiang Kai-shek wrong.

¹⁹ Zhou Xingliang, op cit.

²⁰ For biographical information on Chen Rong published in mainland China, see Li Sifu 黎思復, Kuang Zhenqiu 鄺震球: “廣東司法界派系及其主要人物” (Parties of the Guangdong Judicial Circle and their Principal Figures), in *Guangdong Sifajie Paixi Ji Qi Zhuyao Renwu*, Vol 11 廣州文史資料 • 第11輯 (Guangzhou: People’s Publishing House, 1964). For materials published in Taiwan, see Lin Guanghao, “陳融與嶺南才女” (Chen Rong and the Talented Lady of Lingnan), in *Kaleidoscope* (Taipei: Kaleidoscope Press, October 1981), pp63-65. For Hong Kong publications, see Xiang Yu, “記民初廣東之法界「四大天王」” (About the ‘Four Kings’ of the Guangdong Judiciary in the Early Years of the Republic), in *The Observation Post*, No 609 (Hong Kong: The Observation Post Press, 16 November 1982), p22. All in Chinese only.

²¹ Chen Hongmin, op cit: Personal Connections and Politics in Telegraph Correspondences: Reading “Hu Hanmin’s Telegraph Correspondences.

²² Ching Chung-shan 程中山: “A Preliminary Study of Chen Rong’s *Qingshi Jishi*” (清詩紀事成猶未，誰識兵塵在眼前——陳融《清詩紀事》初探), in *Chinese Studies*, Vol 26, No 3 (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies, September 2008), pp263-289. In Chinese with English abstract.

²³ Chen Rong, op cit in Note 8: *Huangmeihuawu Shigao*. “To Yanshan, Xiangbi, Zishu, Junbi, and also for Ruosu’s Appreciation”, p20B (this poem was a gift to Li Yanshan and some members of the Guangdong

Chinese Painting Research Society, including Feng Xiangbi馮湘碧, Lu Zishu盧子樞, Huang Junbi黃君璧 and Yao Ruosu姚若粟); “An Inscription on Li Yanshan’s Painting of Leisured Officials Passing a Summer Day”, p31B; “An Inscription on Li Yanshan’s Landscape Long Scroll”, p32A; “An Inscription on Li Yanshan’s Old Man Painting Fan using a previous rhyme for the third time”, p33B. All in Chinese.

- ²⁴ From Li Sifu, Kuang Zhenqiu, op cit: “Parties of the Guangdong Judicial Circle and their Principal Figures”. The article was published in Mainland China and the quoted remark was made in a derogatory tone.
- ²⁵ Hu Yisheng: *Juechen Xiangshi Shicao* 絕塵想室詩草 (thread-bound edition, with the title inscription by Chen Rong and the preface by Liu Jingtang), in Chinese. According to Liu Jingtang’s preface, the book was published in the winter of the Year of *Xinmao* 辛卯 (1951). Zhi Weng mentioned in his essay that Hu’s students “had raised funds among themselves to publish a collection of his poems on the occasion of his 70th birthday.” Since Hu was residing in Taiwan at the time, the book was presumably published in Taiwan.
- ²⁶ In his preface to Hu’s *Juechen Xiangshi Shicai*, Liu Jingtang wrote about “meeting again after twenty years.” From the large amount of reciprocal poems and *ci* works by Hu with “Borui” (Liu’s courtesy name) collected in the book, it is evident that there was an uninterrupted correspondence between the two friends. For the life story of Liu and his works in *ci*, see Huang Kunyao, “劉伯端詞事繫年” (A Chronolog of Liu Borui’s Works), in *Sino-Humanitas*, No 2 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, January 1996), pp187–256, in Chinese.
- ²⁷ Their *ci* poems can be found in *Juechen Xiangshi Shicai*: “和協之除夕韻” (Reciprocal Poem for Chen Rong’s New Year’s Eve Poem), p13B; “歲暮得伯瑞詩成二絕句並寄協之都門” (Reciprocal Poem for Borui’s to Chen Rong at the end of the year”, p14B; “過棲心樓見黃梅得協之歸港訊卻寄” (Poem when I get the message from Chen Rong at the Qixin Tower), p15A; “答協之師韻即送其歸京” (Reciprocal Farewell Poem for Chen Rong while he back to Beijing), p15B; “越秀山堂雅集呈顯園主人” (Poem for Chen Rong at the Yuexiushan Hall Gathering), p19A; “題越秀山堂雅集圖” (An Inscription on the Painting of Yuexiushan Hall Gathering), p19B. All in Chinese only.
- ²⁸ See p14A and p17A in *Juechen Xiangshi Shicai* respectively.
- ²⁹ Zhi Weng, op cit, para 1, p18.
- ³⁰ *Juechen Xiangshi Shicai*, p17A. Xiashan, also known as the Yang Zhen Gorge.
- ³¹ See “Li Yanshan’s Biography and Chronology of Art Events” (author unknown), compiled with information furnished by Huang Dade (according to the Preface), in *A Passion for Tradition: The Art of Li Yanshan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2011).
- ³² Wu Zifu: “二十五年來廣州的繪畫印象” (An Impression of the Guangzhou Painting in 25 Years) in *Wu Zifu Yi Tan* 吳子復藝譚 (*Art Prose by Wu Zifu*, Guangzhou: Lingnan Art Publishing House, 1994), pp145–156. In Chinese only.
- ³³ Editor’s note: According to Wu’s article (para 1, p146), the “Compromise Style” originated from “a batch of Japanese paintings that the Gaos (Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng高奇峰) brought with them from Japan...”, a painting style that “is infused with Western techniques and draws comparisons between different forms. The style is a compromise (hence the name of the Style) between traditional Chinese painting and Western painting that was still relatively novel at the time.
- ³⁴ Refer from Li Weiming李偉銘: “藝術與政治二位一體的價值模式——二高研究中一個耐人尋味的問題” (The Value Model of the Intergration of Art and Politics ~ A Question for Thought in the Research on the Gao Brothers), para 4, p416, in *Yizhushi Yijiu, Vol 1* 藝術史研究 • 第一輯 (Guangzhou: Sun Yat-sen University Press, 1999), pp391–443. In Chinese.