

The Life of Zhao Shao'ang and His Art

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Plate 1

Photo of Zhao Shao'ang taken in his later years. (After *A Collection of Paintings and Calligraphy of Professor Chao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Regional Council, 1990]: 13)



A celebratory exhibition “The Pride of Lingnan: In Commemoration of the 110th Birthday of Chao Shao-an”, open at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum on May 22, 2015, showed more than 130 paintings, calligraphy, live sketches for art lessons, poems, letters and other documents by Zhao Shao'ang (Chao Shao-an) (1905-1998), and put on a comprehensive display of the story and art of the second-generation Lingnan master (Plate 1).¹ Born in Guangzhou, Zhao Shao'ang moved to Hong Kong in 1948 and continued the mission of his late teacher Gao Qifeng, devoting his life to art education and inspiring countless students through his lessons and his art.² Although he is internationally

“The Pride of Lingnan: In Commemoration of the 110th Birthday of Chao Shao-an” was a touring exhibition co-organized by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Guangzhou Museum of Art. It was first shown at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum from May 23 to September 7, 2015, and later at the Guangzhou Museum of Art from September 25, 2015 to January 3, 2016. The Hong Kong Heritage Museum also collaborated with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department in publishing a catalogue for the exhibition. See: Hong Kong Heritage Museum ed. *The Pride of Lingnan: In Commemoration of the 110th Birthday of Chao Shao-an* (Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2015).

- 2 The main reference to Zhao Shao'ang's biography are Kwan Kwok-huen. “Lingnan huapai di er dai zongshi Zhao Shao'ang 嶺南畫派第二代宗師趙少昂 (Zhao Shao'ang: The Second-generation Lingnan Master).” *Zhuanji Wenxue* (Biographical Literature), Taipei, vol. 72, no. 6 (1998): 47-53; Liang Fenglian. *Painting Life: The Biography of Zhao Shao Ang* (Fuzhou: Haifeng chubanshe, 2005) (in Chinese).

known for the colorful Lingnan style that captures both the form and the spirit and his work is collected by museums and individuals in Europe, the Americas and Asia, he was determined to put down roots in just Hong Kong and Guangzhou. By reviewing his life's journey and artistic experience, this essay reveals how the Lingnan artists preserved and explored Chinese painting in the 20th century when the old met the new, and when the blending of east and west was prevalent, and helps to provide valuable information to the study of Hong Kong art history.

Enlightenment about Art at Early Age

Originally named Zhao Yuan, Zhao Shao'ang was born on March 6, 1905 in the Shayuanli village in Panyu, Guangdong Province, which was the place of origin of his family, and assumed the courtesy name of Shuyi. His father Zhao Keduan was a local businessman and they lived as a bourgeois family of comfortable means. However, Zhao Shushen, the first son of Zhao Keduan, died of disease in 1913. Zhao Keduan was grief-stricken at his son's death and died later in the same year. Zhao Shao'ang's mother had to force herself to recover from grief as the burden of raising the children fell on her and her alone. Zhao Shao'ang started studying at a private school at the age of eight and relied on his mother's meagre wages of a maid for the school fees and household spending. After only three years, he dropped out and worked at a silk shop of his brother-in-law He Xingqiao due to financial difficulties. He took great interest in painting since an early age and would learn to paint after work. He first learned from the famous *Jieziyuan huazhuan* (Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual), and later copied genuine works by both ancient and contemporary masters, developing an adequate understanding of the predecessors' techniques and styles after copying different models continuously and enjoying the title of "little painter".³ The support from his mother played a crucial role in his early artistic life. She always held up an oil lamp for her son when he was painting at night, and her hard work and encouragement deeply touched the

3 *Jieziyuan huazhuan* comprises four volumes. Compiled by Wang Gai (1645-c. 1726) from Li Liufang's (1575-1629) teaching materials and published in the 18th year of the Kangxi reign (1679), the first volume is devoted to landscape only. The second volume was published in the 40th year of the Kangxi reign (1701) and was divided into four sections: plum blossom, orchid, chrysanthemum and bamboo, all of which were drawn by Zhu Sheng (c. 1617-1691) and Wang Yun'an. The third volume was also published in the 40th year of the Kangxi reign and is a collection of birds, flowering plants and insects by Wang Gai, Wang Shi and Wang Nie. The fourth volume focuses on portraits and figure drawings but it is likely to be an additional volume published under the name of Li Liufang for his fame. Later, there is Chao Xun's (1852-1917) edition of the figure portrait collection and it is also regarded as the fourth volume of the book. As one of the most circulated painting manuals in China, it has been recarved and reprinted many times since its compilation. It has been used as the teaching material by many renowned Chinese painters including Huang Binhong (1865-1955), Qi Baishi (1864-1957), Pan Tianshou (1897-1971), Feng Zikai (1898-1975) and Fu Baoshi (1904-1965). For the records of *Jieziyuan huazhuan*, see: Yu Shaosong. *Shuhua shulu jieti* (Taipei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1968): 11-14; Xie Wei. *Zhongguo huaxue zhuzuo kaolu* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1998): 482-484.

young artist. After she died in 1944, Zhao Shao'ang asked Xu Beihong (1895-1953) to inscribe a signboard for his studio "Meng Xuan Tang" (Daylily Dream Hall, traditionally interpreted as a yearning for mother), and then invited Zhao Heqin (1894-1971), Feng Kanghou (1901-1983), Chen Yushan (1904-1987) and Zhang Xiangning (1921-1958) each to carve a relief seal "Meng Xuan Tang" (Plates 2-5). He even commissioned celebrated sculptors Li Jinfa (1900-1976) and Chen Xijun to make statues of his mother to express his filial affection for her. "I lost my father at a young age and my mother sent me to school by working as a maid. I must study hard to meet her expectations," he once said, determined to thank his mother for bringing him up with his life-time achievements in art.⁴ The hardships he faced, like the dramatic change in the family, his father and brother's death, his mother's hard work to support the family and the poor financial situation, did not leave his feeling listless and depressed. On the contrary, the challenges in life, the love for his mother and the steely determination motivated him to lead an unordinary artistic life.

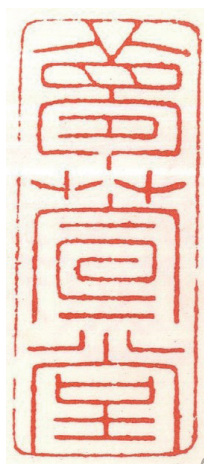


Plate 2

Zhao Heqin, rectangular relief seal bearing the characters "Meng Xuan Tang" (Daylily Dream Hall). (After *The Art of Zhao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 63)



Plate 3

Chen Yushan, rectangular relief seal bearing the characters "Meng Xuan Tang" (Daylily Dream Hall). (After *The Art of Zhao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 63)



Plate 4

Zhang Xiangning, square relief seal bearing the characters "Meng Xuan Tang" (Daylily Dream Hall). (After *The Art of Zhao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 63)

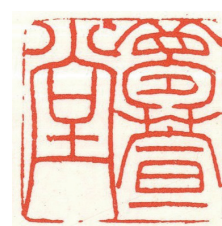


Plate 5

Feng Kanghou, square relief seal bearing the characters "Meng Xuan Tang" (Daylily Dream Hall). (After *The Art of Zhao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 63)

⁴ Zhao Shao'ang put this thought above all others among the sixteen painting ideas he summed up in *Guohua yaojue* (Secrets of Chinese Painting) published in the 1950s. Liang Fenglian. *Painting Life*: 160.

The year 1920 marked the beginning of a new phase in Zhao Shao'ang's learning of art. He experienced limitations in learning art by himself, finding it difficult to make advances in painting techniques. As a result, with the financial help from his brother-in-law, he applied to study at the "Meixue Guan" (Aesthetic Institute) at Fuxue West Street, Guangzhou, where he met Gao Qifeng (1889-1933), his most important mentor. Gao Qifeng, along with Gao Jianfu (1879-1951) and Chen Shuren (1884-1948), were nicknamed "Lingnan Sanjie" (Three Masters of the Lingnan School). Rooted in traditional Chinese art, all of them were students of Ju Chao (1811-1865) and Ju Lian (1828-1904) of the Geshan School, but then they studied in Japan. When they returned to China, they advocated the idea of "compromising between the east and the west, fusing ancient and modern" under the banner of an art revolution, endeavoring to renew traditional Chinese painting. They called their works and themselves "xin guohua" (New Chinese Painting) and the "zhezong pai" (Eclectic School) but the "Lingnan School" should be the most recognized name (Plates 6-7).⁵ Gao Qifeng would teach his students in a traditional manner. He painted in front of his students and explained the techniques, and then asked them to imitate his works at home as he would mark their homework in the next lesson. Presumably he inherited this teaching method from Ju Chao and Ju Lian, who started to teach painting at the "Shixiang Yuan" (Garden of Ten Fragrances) in Geshan since 1865. The Ju brothers are to be regarded as the pioneers in the teaching of modern Chinese painting in the Guangdong region, and they have set an example for their successors.⁶ For a similar reason, Zhao Shao'ang decided to continue Gao Qifeng's mission, forging a long career as a teacher. Gao Qifeng's lecture notes and colophons on the paintings and calligraphy can always offer a glimpse of his art theories and ideas. One of his most quoted remarks is a speech he delivered at a lecture at Lingnan University, Guangzhou because it best explains how the Lingnan School learned from the strengths of both Chinese and western art and tied in with the changes of time:

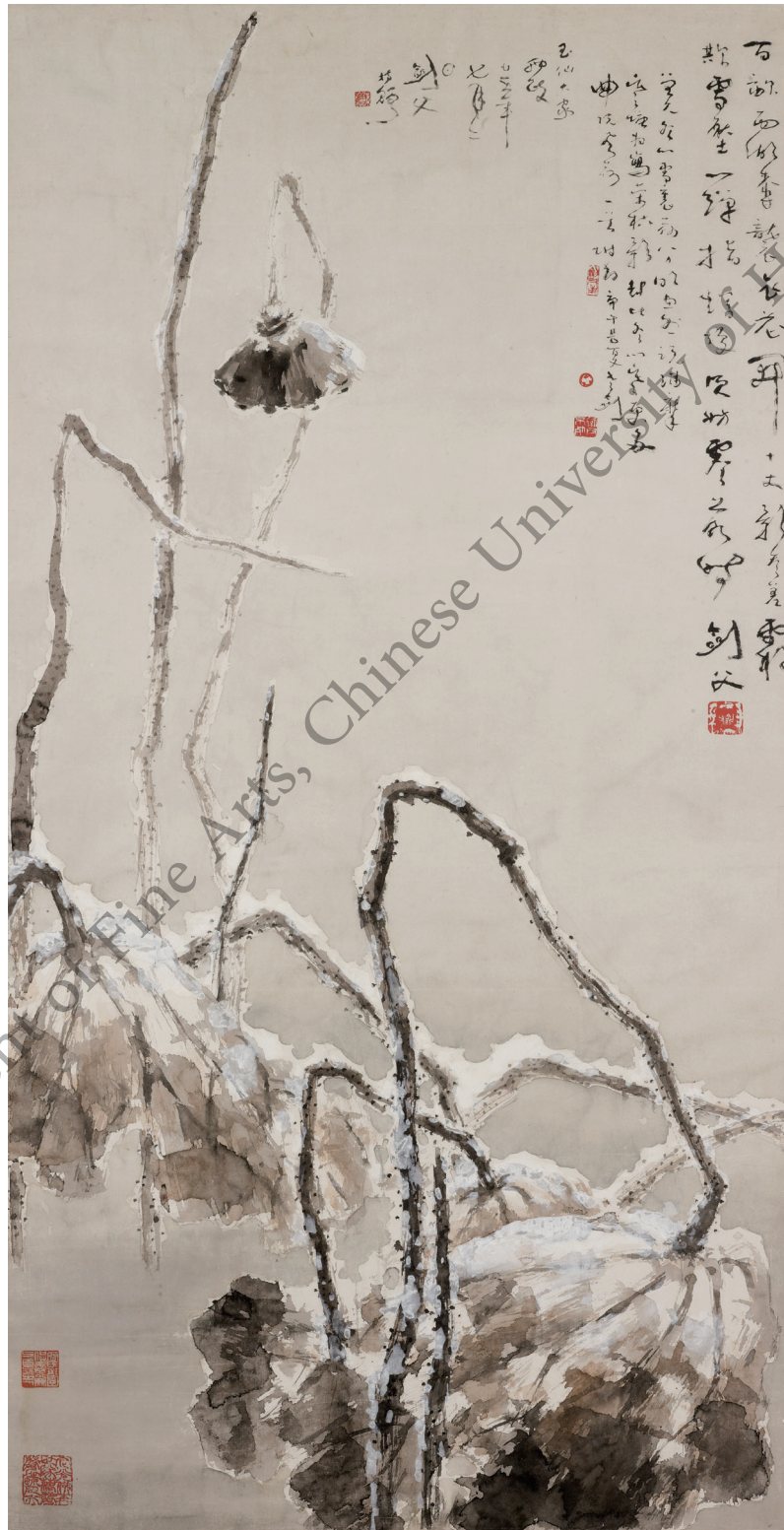
The study of painting is not lifeless; it is full of life and changes. Each era has its own spiritual qualities and experiences. This is why I frequently tell my students

5 For the development, features and ideological values of the Lingnan School, see: Guangzhou meishu xueyuan Lingnan huapai yanjiu shi ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu, No. 1* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 1987); Lingnan huapai jinian guan yanjiu bu ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu: Lingnan huapai jinian guan jianguan shi zhounian wenji* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2002); Lu Fusheng ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu, Duoyun* no. 59 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2003); Zhu Wanzhang. *Lingnan jindai huashi conggao* (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007).

6 See Szeto Yuen-kit. "Xiao zhong jian da – Ju Lian de Shixiang Yuan xiao tiandi 中見大一居廉的十香園小天地 (The Private World of Ju Lian's Garden of Ten Fragrances)." in Guangzhou Museum of Art and Hong Kong Museum of Art eds. *Ju Chao Ju Lian yishu yantaohui wenji* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2008): 60-67; Zhang Xiaodong. "Lingnan xiandai Zhongguo hua jiaoxue de faduan – Qing mo Ju Lian ketu chuyi 嶺南現代中國畫教學的發端—清末居廉課徒芻議 (The Beginning of the Teaching of Modern Chinese Painting in the Guangdong Region: On Ju Lian's Teaching Methods in the Late Qing Period)." *Rongbaozhai* 7 (2013): 154-167.

Plate 6

Gao Jianfu, *Withering Lotus in Snow*, Ink and color on paper, 131x69cm, 1930. Collection of the Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong.



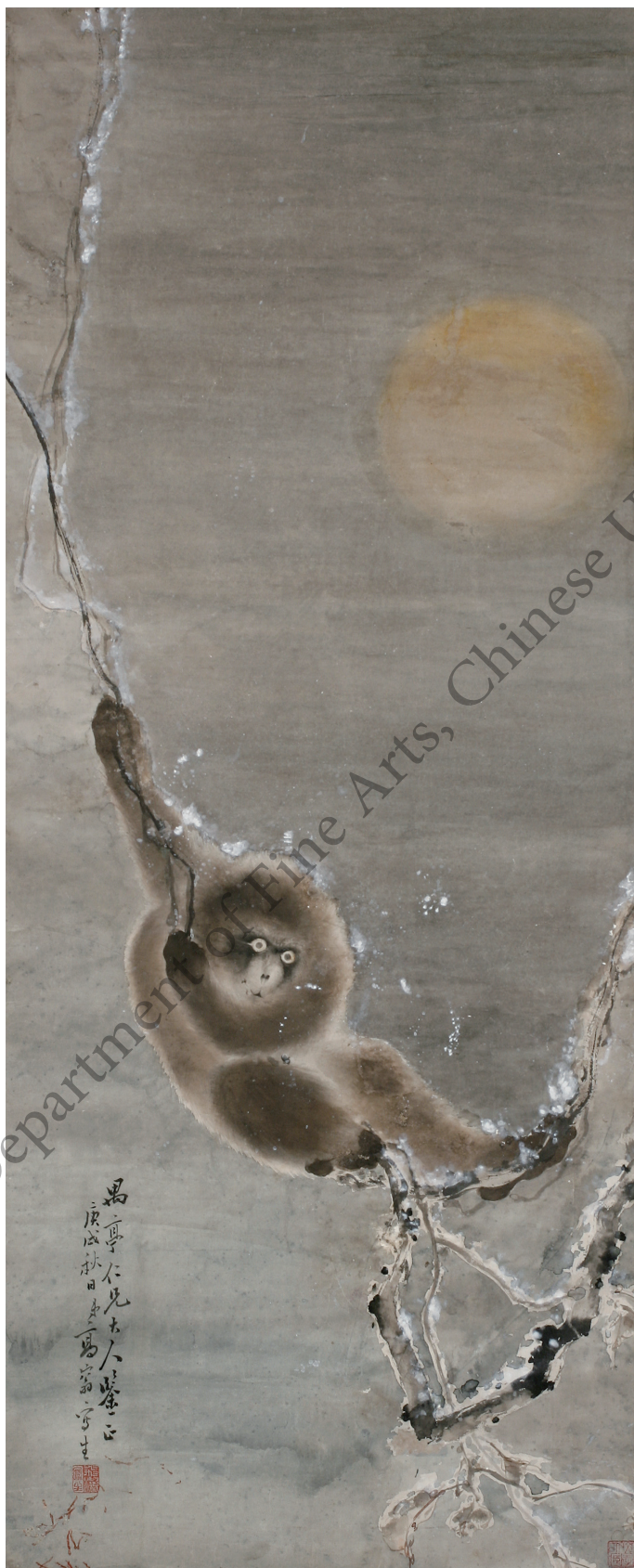


Plate 7

Gao Qifeng, *Gibbon in Snow*, Ink and color on paper, 113x46cm, 1910. Collection of the Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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that we do not paint to build a good reputation or to entertain ourselves. We should work hard to make use of painting, which can correct our nature and benefit society, to define the new spirit of an era by having a deep empathy for people's sufferings and a strong desire to understand human affairs. In addition to anatomy, color theory, light and shade, philosophy, naturology and the origin of the Six Principles, we should study psychology and sociology thoroughly to see the needs of our society. We then use the knowledge of the true, the good and the beautiful, and paint in the style of poetry to influence the grim society, to liven up the boring lives, to mould our characters and to inspire lofty and peaceful thoughts in us. Perhaps the dejected and the faint-hearted might make up their minds, the dubious might restore hopes, the cruel might learn how to love, the sophisticated might become more cultured, and with those the era might take a new direction. If our future generations see the works we have left, they will learn about the mental outlook, virtues and cultural history of our times. Those are the objectives we pursue in painting.⁷

The future and prospects of Chinese painting have been a controversial topic since the beginning of the 20th century. The Lingnan School's artistic ideals of combining the strong elements from China and the west have provoked criticism and challenges from various camps, and the public debate with the "Guangdong Guohua Yanjiu Hui" (Guangdong Painting Society) would be among the most striking discussions.⁸ Fang Rending (1901-1975) wrote an article entitled "Xin guohua yu jiu guohua" (The New and the Old Chinese Painting) in 1926, as asked by Gao Jianfu, and published it in *Guomin xinwen* (Citizen's News) and *Guo Hua* (National Flower) to elaborate on the revitalisation of Chinese painting, rejecting the art practice that "only imitated the models and killed the souls". His article instantly faced a counter-attack from the "Guangdong Guohua Yanjiu Hui" as Huang Bore (1901-1968) did an article mocking the Lingnan artists for their "superficial knowledge stolen from western painting" and their gaudy works. The argument between Fang and Huang has been regarded as a milestone in the history of Guangdong art and

7 Gao Qifeng. "Qifeng lun hua ji tihuashi kuan xuanji 峰論畫及題畫詩·款選輯 (On Painting and the Selected Colophons and Inscriptions)." in Guangzhou meishu xueyuan Lingnan huapai yanjiu shi ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu*, No. 1: 27.

8 The "Guangdong Painting Society" (Guangdong guohua yanjiu hui) was created in 1926 from the former *Guihai hezuo huashe* (Guihai Art Cooperative) founded in 1923. The members included Zhao Haogong (1881-1947), Pan Zhizhong (1873-1929), Wen Qiqiu (1862-1941), Yao Suruo (1878-1939), Li Fenggong (1884-1967), Huang Shaomei (1886-1940), etc. See: Zhu Wanzhang and Guo Yanbing eds. *Guangdong guohua yanjiu hui yanjiu* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2010); Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong ed. *Guardians to Tradition: The Guangdong Painting Society, 1923-1937* (Hong Kong: Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006).

for the study of modern Chinese art history.⁹ The 1920s was a time of controversy and conflict for the Guangzhou art world, and yet Zhao Shao'ang was not perplexed by the debates between the two camps. Since Gao Qifeng's teachings have enlightened him and set out a clear direction for his artistic path, he diligently imitated the traditional masterworks and focused on developing his style, being "guided by the teacher inside his heart and under his wrist," and his talent began to shine with his progress in painting.¹⁰ Zhao Shao'ang's early works were closer to the Gao brothers' paintings, showing the influence of the Lingnan School. For example, in *Wild Goose* (Plate 8) and *Swallows and Pomegranates* (Plate 9), Zhao Shao'ang captured the transcendent spirit of the birds and painted them in a realistic but spontaneous manner while the techniques of "sprinkled powder" and "splashed water" used in the pomegranates give them a mottled texture and a natural effect of light and shade. At the beginning of his exploration in art, he also adopted the techniques of Japanese painting, which emphasised the representation of luminosity, as shown by the big washes of color that brought about the spatial and atmospheric effects and created the leisurely and refined scene.

Gao Qifeng had many students at that time. According to Zhao Shao'ang, among his classmates were Zhou Yifeng, He Qiyuan, Huang Shaoqiang, Ye Shaobing, Xiong Wenjie, Cui Zhiming, Chen Hanpu, Cen Kunwei, Xiao Xian and Huang Qitian.¹¹ In 1929, Gao Qifeng fell ill under the pressure of work and recuperated at the Zhujiang Yiyang Yuan Hospital on the Ersha Island. After his recovery, he built and resided in the Tianfeng Studio near the hospital. Since then Zhao Shao'ang and his classmates had had frequent elegant gatherings at the studio, at which they painted together and commented on each other's works. Among the most famous of those students were Zhao Shao'ang, Huang Shaoqiang (1900-1942), Zhou Yifeng (1890-1982), Zhang Kunyi (1895-1969), Ye Shaobing (1896-1968), He Qiyuan (1899-1970) and Rong Shushi (1901-1996),

9 For the argument between Fang Rending and Huang Bore, see: En Chou. "Fang Huang shiyuan ji 方黃釋怨記 (Fang Rending and Huang Bore Let Go of Their Grudges)." in Huang Xiaogeng and Wu Jin eds. *Guangdong xiandai huatan shilu* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 1990): 204; Huang Dade. "Minguo shiqi Guangdong de xin jiu huapai zhi zheng 民國時期廣東的「新」「舊」畫派之爭 (Argument about the Old and New National Painting in Republican Guangdong)." in Lu Fusheng ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu*: 58-76.

10 Liang Fenglian, *Painting Life*: 19.

11 Zhao Shao'ang. "Gao Qifeng xianshen xiaozhuan 高奇峰先生小傳 (Biography of Gao Qifeng)." in Huang Xiaogeng and Wu Jin eds. *Guangdong xiandai huatan shilu*: 264.

Plate 8

Zhao Shao'ang, *Wild Goose*. Ink and color on paper. 104x39 cm. 1927. Collection of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.



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Plate 9

Zhao Shao'ang, *Swallows and Pomegranates*. Ink and color on paper. 92.5x27.8 cm, 1929. Collection of You Yi Tang. (After *The Tien Feng Legacy: Zhao Shao'ang Paintings and Calligraphy from the Collection of You Yi Tang* [Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010]: 15)

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and they were called the “Tianfeng qizi” (Seven Disciples of the Tianfeng Studio).¹² Found in the collection of the Art Museum of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, *Flowers* (Plate 10) is a collective work by Gao Qifeng and his students in a spring gathering for expressing their spontaneous exhilaration. The colophon reads: “In spring 1932, I gathered my students at the Tianfeng Studio and painted flowers. He Qiyuan painted the peony, Zhou Yifeng the herbaceous peony, Zhao Shao'ang the camellias, Ye Shaobing the roses, Liu Dingshu the orchids, Rong Shushi the red plum blossoms, Huang Shaoqiang the white plum blossoms, Feng Suixin the narcissi, Zhang Kunyi the blue chrysanthemums and I did the wintersweet. To return the favor to Senru. Written and recorded by Qifeng.” Their flowers, with bright colors and beautiful shapes, are all seasonal flowers illustrating the delightful scenery of spring. It is obviously above average in terms of their collective works and is an example of the happy time the teacher and the students had at the Tianfeng Studio. In 1930, *White Peacock* catapulted Zhao Shao'ang to international fame as he won the International Art Gold Medal at the “Belgium Centenary Independence World Fair, Brussels.” This is a recognition of his techniques and skills as well as a symbol of another stage in the progress of his art.

Inheritance and Spreading of the Art of the Lingnan School

The 1930s and 1940s would be the most active time for the second generation of the Lingnan artists in Chinese art history as they formed the backbone of the art world with their successful career in art, and Zhao Shao'ang was no exception. He had become ever more skilful in his handling of ink and color, and was ready to take on more tasks. Therefore, he and his classmates shouldered the responsibility of promoting the Lingnan traditions and ideals by opening art studios, teaching students, establishing art societies and holding exhibitions, stepping up their efforts to make a breakthrough in pursuing a creative career.

In the early 20th century, with the issuing of new ordinances, the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist Government has assisted the development of modern art education. Accordingly, a large number of private and public art schools were opened in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai and

12 As for the title of *Tianfeng qizi*, there were variations of the combination so there were also titles like “Tianfeng liuzi” (Six Disciples of the Tianfeng Studio) and “Tianfeng wuzi” (Five Disciples of the Tianfeng Studio). On their origin and development, see: Zhu Wanzhang. “Jindai Lingnan hua shi shang de Tianfeng qizi 近代嶺南畫史上的天風七子 (The Seven Disciples of the Tianfeng Studio in Modern History of the Lingnan School).” in *Collectors* vol. 5 (2008): 49-55; Zhu Wanzhang. “Tianfeng qizi de yishu chuancheng yu huaxue fengge 「天風七子」的藝術傳承與畫學風格 (The Legacy and Painting Styles of the Seven Disciples of the Tianfeng Studio).” in Chen Ji and Chen Xun eds. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu wenji* (Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2010): 70-88.



Plate 10

Gao Qifeng and students,
Flowers, Ink and color on
paper, 1932. Collection
of the Art Museum,
Chinese University of
Hong Kong.

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Hangzhou, and there has been a remarkable development for art education in Guangdong as well.¹³ Zhao Shao'ang tried his hand as a teacher early between 1927 and 1928, taking up a teaching post at the Foshan City Art Academy, Guangdong. In the following decades of teaching Chinese painting, he had taught at different art schools; meanwhile, he inherited the traditional teaching method used at Ju Lian's "Shixiang Yuan" and continued the private tutorial system adopted at Gao Jianfu's "Chunshui Huayuan" (Spring Slumber Art Studio) and Gao Qifeng's "Meixue Guan" to promote the art of the Lingnan School.¹⁴ In 1930, he and Huang Shaoqiang founded their own art school "Lingnan Yiyuan" (Lingnan Art Studio) at Yiqing li in Shiyifu in Guangzhou's western suburb and their fame attracted many students.¹⁵ The school has trained dozens of painters including Ou Shaoyan, Fu Ridong (1902-1974), Zhou Qianqiu (1910-2006), Zeng Muling, Su Shiju, Li Xiufeng, Feng Manshuo (1916-1986), Huang Zhijian and Liang Canying (1921-2005), though it stopped operating due to the resistance war and reopened in Guangzhou by the end of 1945. After Zhao Shao'ang moved to Hong Kong in 1948, he established a branch of the "Lingnan Yiyuan" in the colony and continued offering art tutorials, forming a bridgehead for the Lingnan School to be the mainstream of the Hong Kong art. His students included Lee Yue-hong (b. 1927), Chiu Sai-kwong (1916-2007), Lam Wu-fui (b. 1945), Irene Chou (1924-2011), Wong Lui-sang (b. 1928), Fang Zhaolin (1914-2006), Gu Mei (b. 1929), Au Ho-nien (b. 1935), etc. For his teaching methods and ideas, he followed Gao Qifeng's practice and demonstrated the use of ink and brush in the lessons so that his students could observe and learn his skills and techniques. Most of the sketches he did during the lessons are in ink and color and have the clear-cut composition, executed crisply and unwaveringly with the freehand brushwork. The forms of the objects are faithfully accurate to show the vitality and spirit while the fusion of ink and color washes displays spontaneity. His sketches are great teaching materials for art students (Plate 11). Zhao Shao'ang had two square intaglio seals bearing the characters "Lingnan Yiyuan" (Plates 12 and 13) carved by renowned seal carvers Chen Yushan and Lin Jin (1923-2004), and the seals reflect the footprints he left as a teacher in Hong Kong and Guangzhou for half a century, especially the long time he had spent in Hong Kong. Chiu Sai-kwong once commented, "Looking around in today's art

¹³ For the development of art education in modern China, see: Pan Yaochang. *Zhongguo jin xiandai meishu jiaoyu shi* (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2002); Wu Jialing. *The Art Education and Painters of China in the Early Twentieth Century* (Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji gufen youxian gongsi, 2006) (in Chinese).

¹⁴ Between the 1930's and the 1940's, Zhao Shao'ang had been an art professor at the National Central University, Guangzhou Institute of Arts, Guangzhou Municipal Art College, Canton University, National College of Law and Guangzhou College of Art, and this shows his contribution to art education in Guangzhou and the promotion of the Lingnan School. See: Huang Hongyi. *Lingnan Huapai* (Changchun: Jilin meishu chubanshe, 2003): 177.

¹⁵ Initially when the "Lingnan Yiyuan" opened in Guangzhou, Zhao Shao'ang taught Chinese painting and Huang Shaoqiang was responsible for the western painting. However, there were far too few students in the western painting class so it was mostly just Zhao Shao'ang teaching at the school. In 1935, Huang Shaoqiang left it and started the "Minjian Huaguan" (People's Painting Studio). See: Liang Fenglian, *Painting Life*: 32.



Plate 11

Zhao Shao'ang, *Sketch*.
Ink and color on paper,
29.7x37.2 cm. Undated.
(After *Collections of Zhao
Shao'ang Art Gallery*
[Guangzhou: Guangdong
lüyou chubanshe, 2000]:
173)

world, the Lingnan Yiyuan is the art school with the most number of students.”¹⁶ Apparently Zhao Shao'ang had nurtured a large number of talented artists for the Lingnan School, and their close teacher-student relationship needs no more superfluous explanations.

Apart from opening art studios, Zhao Shao'ang and his classmates were committed to establishing art societies and taking part in the society activities in the 1930s and 1940s, exchanging views and learning from the fellow artists regularly. While they focused on their art practices, they also modelled on the activities of the traditional literati, organizing elegant gatherings, painting, writing and commenting on each other's works. Regarded as a symbol of cultivation, their practices had a profound impact on the development of art societies in both Hong Kong and Guangzhou, and attracted much attention for the Lingnan School. For example, Zhao Shao'ang, Huang Shaoqiang, He Qiyuan and Zhou Yifeng established “Meixue She” (Aesthetic Society) in spring 1926; Gao Qifeng and his students at the Tianfeng Studio, Zhao Shao'ang, Huang Shaoqiang, He Qiyuan, Ye Shaobing, Zhang Kunyi and Zhou Yifeng set up the “Meixue Yuan” (Aesthetic

16 Chiu Sai-kwong, “Xun Lingnan pai de gen 嶺南派的根 (Finding the Root of the Lingnan School).” *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), June 19, 1983.

Plate 12 (left)

Chen Yushan, square intaglio seal bearing the characters “Lingnan Yiyuan” (Lingnan Art Studio). (After *The Art of Chao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 62)



Plate 13 (right)

Lin Jin, square intaglio seal bearing the characters “Lingnan Yiyuan” (Lingnan Art Studio). (After *The Art of Chao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 62)



Academy) in June 1931 and held exhibitions to show the members' works; Zhao Shao'ang, Huang Shaoqiang, He Qiyuan, Zhou Yifeng, Ye Shaobing and Rong Shushi, the “Tianfeng liuzi”, excluding Zhang Kunyi, formed the “Liuren Huahui” (Six-person Painting Society) in Guangzhou in 1934 and immediately organised the “Exhibition of the Liuren Huahui” at the Buddhist Studies Association in Hong Kong; the “Tianfeng liuzi” also created the “Suihan She” (Suihan Painting Society) in Hong Kong in 1939 to arrange regular exhibitions of painting and calligraphy, and even published the first volume of *Suihan ji* (Catalogue of the Works by the Suihan Painting Society's Members); Gao Jianfu, Zhao Shao'ang, Guan Shanyue (1912-2000), Yang Shanshen (1913-2004) and Li Gemin (1882-1978) set up the “Jinshe Huahui” (Jinshe Painting Association) in Guangzhou in 1945.¹⁷ It would be fair to say Zhao Shao'ang had remarkable success in his societal activities at that time. The Lingnan artists' practice of forming societies kept on in the 1950s and 1960s. It represents the fashion of the literati at the time and has immeasurable significance for both the Lingnan School and the development of Chinese art.¹⁸

17 For the art organisations Zhao Shao'ang and his classmates started or took part in, see: Zhu Wanzhang and Chen Xun, “Lingnan huapai huodong nianbiao 嶺南畫派活動年表 (A Chronicle of the Activities of the Lingnan School).” in Lu Fusheng ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu*: 261-290; Xie Wenyong. *Guangdong huaren lu* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou meishuguan, 1996); Cheung Wai-ye. *A Study on Art Societies in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999); Zhu Wanzhang. “Jindai Lingnan hua shi shang de Tianfeng qizi” and “Lingnan huapai de bainian yanjin 嶺南畫派的百年演進 (The Development of the Lingnan School in the Last Hundred Years).” in Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe and Guangdong Museum eds. *Paintings of Lingnan School* (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin meishu chubanshe, 2002): 5-9.

18 The societal activities of the 1950s and 1960s Zhao Shao'ang and his classmates engaged in included: Zhao Shao'ang, Yang Shanshen, He Qiyuan, Huang Bore, Zhang Shaoshi (1913-1991), Lin Jiantong (1911-1994), Li Fenggong (1884-1967), Wang Shangyi (1905-1972) and Li Yanshan (1898-1961) formed the “Bingshen She” (Society of Bingshen) in Hong Kong in 1956 and often hosted “Bingshen Exhibitions” of the members' works. They also established “Xianggang Zhongguo Meishu Hui” (Hong Kong Chinese Art Association) in the same year. In the following year, Zhao Shao'ang, Yang Shanshen, Huang Bore, Li Yanshan, Lu Shoukun (1919-1975), Ding Yanyong (1902-1978) and Li Xipeng (b. 1910) created the “Qiren Huahui” (Seven Artists Club) and organized the “Qiren Lian Zhan” (Joint Exhibition of the Seven Artists). In 1961, Zhao Shao'ang instructed his students to form the “To-day's Chinese Art Association”, of which the members would hold exhibitions and published catalogues regularly. See: Zhu Wanzhang and Chen Xun, “Lingnan huapai huodong nianbiao”: 261-290; Cheung Wai-ye. *A Study on Art Societies in Hong Kong*.



Plate 14

Zhao Shao'ang, *Deer*. Ink and color on paper. 18x51 cm. 1933. (After *Collected Works of Prof. Zhao Shao'ang* [Hong Kong: Jigu zhai youxian gongsi, 2005]: 9)

Zhao Shao'ang had hosted and participated in numerous one-man and joint exhibitions. Ever since he won the gold medal at the 1930 Brussels World Fair, he joined the "Exhibition of Chinese Art" in Moscow, Paris and Berlin (1932-1933), the "West Lake Exposition of China and Japan" in Hangzhou (1933), the "Second National Fine Arts Exhibition" (1937) and the "Third National Fine Arts Exhibition" (1943) sponsored by the Education Department in Nanjing, and held one-man exhibitions in Nanjing, Tianjin, Beijing, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Guilin, Qujiang, Guiyang, Chongqing, Chengdu, Macau, New Zealand and Lisbon.¹⁹ In 1934, Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) wrote a foreword for Zhao Shao'ang in one of his exhibitions in Beijing, "Mr. Gao Qifeng died a year ago. A brilliant student of his, Mr. Zhao Shao'ang brought with him his own paintings to the capital for the exhibition. Anyone who saw his paintings would think Gao Qifeng were alive to paint them. As the firewood is consumed the flame is passed to another, so the saying goes. Mr. Gao would have no regrets, and it would be pleasurable for the whole of the art world."²⁰ It is clear to see that Zhao Shao'ang truly received Gao Qifeng's techniques for his painting style. Take as an example a fan painting *Deer* (Plate 14). The deer hides itself in the grass, looking straight ahead in an aggressive way. The exquisite brushwork gives a vivid demonstration of the accuracy of the animal and shows that the artist could create a high level of realism. Other examples include *Dragonfly and Autumn Reeds* (Plate 15) and *Butterfly and Plantain Tree* (Plate 16) of the 1930s, which capture precisely the natural charm. Zhao Shao'ang applied color washes to the background with high skills. The dragonfly and the butterfly, characterized by meticulous brushwork, offer a delightful contrast to the impressionistic boneless reeds and plantain tree, deriving explicitly the Lingnan School's characteristic of mingling elements of free brush painting with finely detailed

¹⁹ For the one-man and joint exhibitions of the 1930s and 1940s Zhao Shao'ang hosted and participated in, see: "Biography." in Hong Kong Museum of Art ed. *The Art of Zhao Shao'an* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979): 9-10.

²⁰ Kwan Kwok-huen. "Lingnan huapai di er dai zongshi Zhao Shao'ang": 48.

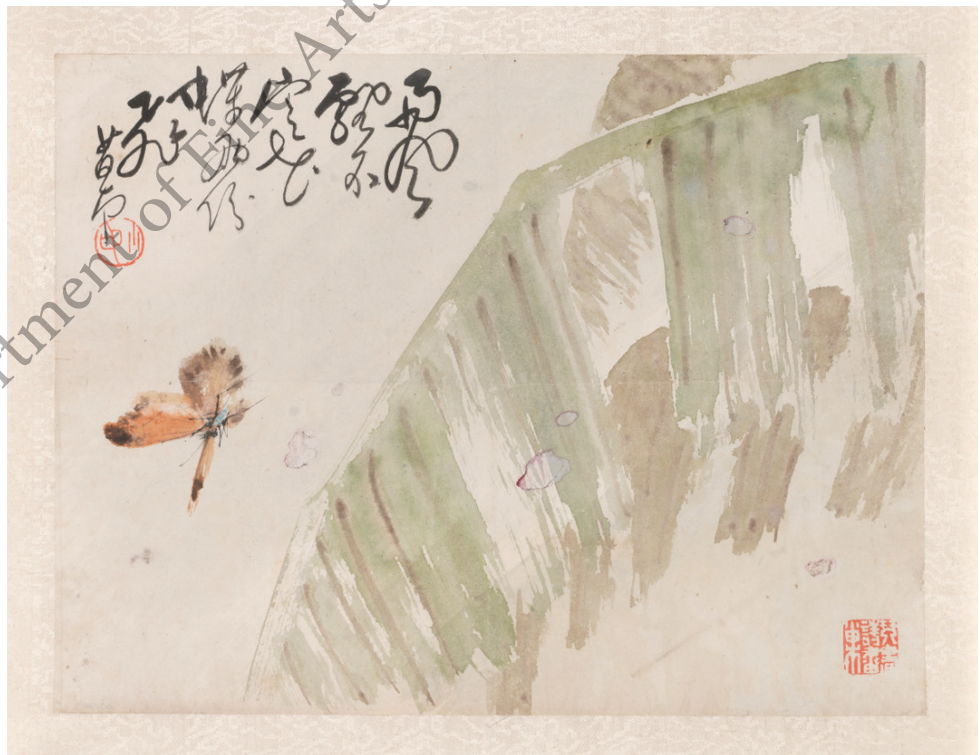
Plate 15 (top)

Zhao Shao'ang, *Dragonfly and Autumn Reeds*. Ink and color on paper. 28x37 cm. 1930s. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum.



Plate 16 (bottom)

Zhao Shao'ang, *Butterfly and Plantain Tree*. Ink and color on paper. 27x37 cm. 1930s. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum.



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painting, and what he had learned from Gao Qifeng. Though his paintings emitted elegance and gentleness, little by little they began to indulge in their own spontaneity. Xu Beihong posted “Zhao Shao’ang huazhan qishi” (A Notice about Zhao Shao’ang’s Exhibition) on Chongqing’s *Zhongyang Ribao* (Central Daily News) in 1944. The small announcement summed up the first half of Zhao’s life and highly applauded his artistic attainments and personality:

Zhao Shao’ang, a native of Panyu, studied under celebrated painter Gao Qifeng at a young age. People praise him for his prodigious talent and for surpassing his teacher. He has found domestic and international fame ten years ago. Lin Sen, the late Chairman of the National Government, and Oskar Trautmann, the German Ambassador to China, were real connoisseurs of art and had bought many of his artworks, holding him in high esteem. He has been a filial son so he always stayed with his mother. While Hong Kong is under the Japanese occupation, he is not frightened. He goes to mainland China to promote his art in Guangdong, Guangxi and Guizhou. He is very popular wherever he goes because of his talent, honesty and sincerity. His art is beloved by many, and his moral character is even more admirable. I dedicated the following poem to him: “An heir to the Southern School of Art, / Mr. Zhao imparts life to flowers and birds. / An old rider amidst autumn wind in the Northern Frontier, / Has cherished deep admiration for his brilliant spring scenery.” As Mr. Zhao comes to Chongqing to take up the job offer at National Central University and National College of Art, my fellow men and I took the opportunity to invite him to exhibit his paintings so as to publicise the new art and to respect the wishes of the cultural circles.²¹

Xu Beihong’s poem is a concise summary of Zhao Shao’ang and becomes the most common remark about his bird-and-flower paintings. What is more, he defined Zhao Shao’ang as “the best bird-and-flower painter in China and without parallel.”²² His praise represents his deep appreciation for Zhao Shao’ang’s bird-and-flower paintings and his full recognition of his mature style of this period.

Besides painting birds, flowers and insects, Zhao Shao’ang also mastered landscape painting, seeking inspiration from nature. In the article “Wo de xiandai huihua guan” (My Views on Modern Painting), Gao Jianfu stressed that “one must be faithful to nature when looking for subjects

21 Kwan Kwok-huen. “Lingnan huapai di er dai zongshi Zhao Shao’ang”: 49.

22 Liang Fenglian, *Painting Life*: 57.

Plate 17

Gao Qifeng, square relief / intaglio seal bearing the characters “Feipu Xiesheng” (Painting from flying waterfalls). (After *The Art of the Gao Brothers of the Lingnan School* [Hong Kong: The Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1995]: 122)



to paint from life.” Gao Qifeng always used a relief / intaglio seal bearing the characters “Feipu Xiesheng” (sketching from flying waterfalls) (Plate 17). This shows that “search for the most unusual peaks and then start painting” has been the main idea of the Lingnan School.²³ With the Gao brothers’ teachings in mind, Zhao Shao’ang had travelled extensively to Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Anhui, Shandong, Hebei, Chahaer, Shaanxi, Yungang and the Great Wall after 1934. A few years later when the Japanese troops invaded Hong Kong, he retreated to Guangzhouwan and visited Guangxi, Hunan, Guizhou, Yangshuo, Sichuan, Chongqing and Guilin. The rich travel experiences opened his eyes up to art expression. He expressed his feelings about the mountains, rivers, temples and other scenic spots at the tip of his brush, creating landscape masterpieces one after another. *Mountains of Guilin* (Plate 18), completed in 1945, depicts the magnificent peak standing alone in the landscape, and the artist’s colophon reads: “My impression of Duxiu Peak when travelling to Guiling.” Painting the gathering dusk with his usual color washing techniques, Zhao Shao’ang added ink strokes and dots with agility and ease, and adeptly gave rough texture to the rocks and vitality to the trees. His use of colors and brushes seemed to have gone into another state by this time. *Mount Wu* (Plate 19), painted in 1946, has an interesting composition as Zhao Shao’ang cleverly divided the painting in half using the mists and clouds. Such composition allows the viewers to look down to the meandering river passing through the Wu Gorge and at the same time to look up to the peak amid the clouds, capturing the splendid scenery of natural beauty. A little boat chugs along the river that faintly reflects the mountains on the two sides, giving a sense of mystery that brings to mind the myth of the King Xiang dreaming about the heavenly maiden of Mount Wu, and all these are the work of his simple brushwork, application of wet ink and color, and the rendering of light and shade. The Tang painter Zhang Zao said that painters should understand “externally all creation is their master, internally they would find the mind’s source.” Zhao Shao’ang took this remark to heart and had a seal inscribed with those words (Plate 20), marking the signature of both his art and teaching throughout his life.

²³ Gao Jianfu. “Wo de xiandai huihua guan 我的現代繪畫觀 (My Views on Modern Painting).” in Guangzhou meishu xueyuan Lingnan huapai shi ed. *Lingnan huapai yanjiu*, No. 1: 19.



Plate 18

Zhao Shao'ang, *Mountains of Guilin*. Ink and color on paper. 103x56.5 cm. 1945. Collection of You Yi Tang. (After *The Tien Feng Legacy: Zhao Shao'ang Paintings and Calligraphy from the Collection of You Yi Tang* [Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010]: 38)

Plate 19

Zhao Shao'ang, *Mount Wu*. Ink and color on paper. 132.2x66.7 cm. 1946. Collection of You Yi Tang. (After *The Tien Feng Legacy: Zhao Shao'ang Paintings and Calligraphy from the Collection of You Yi Tang* [Hong Kong: Sotheby's, 2010]: 40)

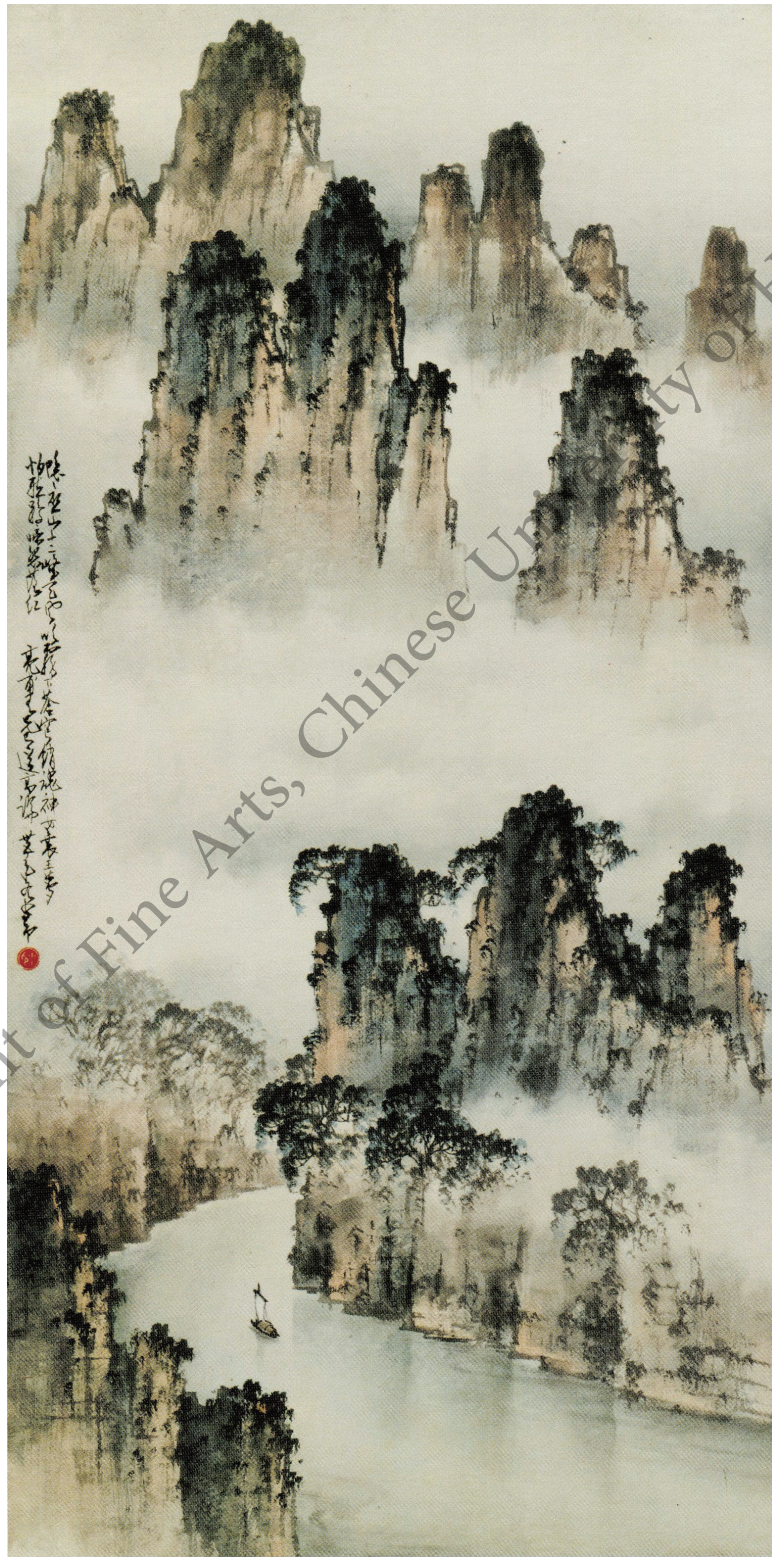




Plate 20 (left)

Zhang Xiangning, square relief seal bearing the characters “Wai shi zao hua zhong de xin yuan” (Externally all creation is my master; internally I have found the mind’s source). (After *Masterworks by Chao Shao-an: The Charming Cicada Studio* [San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1997]: 189)

The Zenith of Artistic Career

The square seals bearing the characters “Zuji Ying Mei Fa Yi Rui De Ri Yin Fei zhuguo” (I have left footprints in such nations as England, America, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, India and the Philippines) (Plate 21) and “Dong du Fusang xi fang Yinglun Ouzhou zhuguo” (I have sailed east to Japan, visited England in the west and other nations in Europe) (Plate 22) respectively are the two leisure seals Zhao Shao’ang always used on his 1950s and 1960s paintings. As he toured around Europe, the Americas and Asia to have exhibitions, went on exchanges and gave lectures, the seal inscriptions themselves are a lively portrait of his international reputation in art. At the beginning of the 1950s, Zhao Shao’ang joined the exhibition at the Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, at the invitation of the *Asahi Shimbun*, and the exhibition was the first cultural event between China and Japan since the war, attracting a high number of visitors. He then visited Singapore and Malaysia in the following year and organized one-man exhibitions in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang. The exhibitions were successful. His paintings were sold out and the Lingnan style was extremely popular with the people there. In 1953, he finally began his trip to Europe and the US. He held one-man exhibitions at various museums, universities and libraries in London, Manchester, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Chicago, Paris, Lausanne, Rome, Canada, Germany and Australia, and gave lectures and demonstrations at the invitation of Leeds University, Harvard University and University of California. All of them were well received. His artworks are held in public and private collections throughout Europe, the US and Southeast Asia. The extensiveness of his travel is immensely impressive, and shows that he had established himself on the international stage, bringing the Lingnan School to a high point of its development.²⁴

Plate 21 (middle)

Feng Kanghou, square intaglio seal bearing the characters “Zuji Ying Mei Fa Yi Rui De Ri Yin Fei zhuguo” (I have left footprints in such nations as England, America, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, India and the Philippines). (After *Masterworks by Chao Shao-an: The Charming Cicada Studio* [San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1997]: 189)

Plate 22 (right)

Unknown carver, square relief seal bearing the characters “Dong du Fusang xi fang Yinglun Ouzhou zhuguo” (I have sailed east to Japan, and visited in the west England and other nations in Europe). (After *Masterworks by Chao Shao-an: The Charming Cicada Studio* [San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1997]: 189)

²⁴ For the one-man and joint exhibitions of the 1950s and 1960s Zhao Shao’ang hosted and participated in, and the collection of his works, see: “Biography.” in Hong Kong Museum of Art ed. *The Art of Chao Shao-an* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979): 9-10.

Zhao Shao'ang presented his views about creating art in the 1950s and raised sixteen of them in *Guohua yaojue* (Secrets of Chinese Painting) by drawing upon his several decades of artistic experience. This could be regarded as further progress of his artistic achievements. His views represent his own experiences, values and artistic style, and reveal his opinions and attitude about the development of Chinese art. They are listed as follows:

1. *I lost my father at a young age and my mother sent me to school by working as a maid. I must study hard to meet her expectations.*
2. *I follow the teachings of my mentor Gao Qifeng and started the "Lingnan Yiyuan" twenty years ago to promote art education.*
3. *One should uphold the Six Principles of Chinese Painting and study anatomy, perspective, physics and optics, learning extensively and harmonising Chinese and foreign knowledge of the past and the present.*
4. *With the most basic brushwork, one can achieve both formal and spiritual likeness, present vitality, the trends in art and literature and the poetic mood. He should try to open up the realm of the true, the good and the beautiful using poetic elements like expositions, analogies, metaphors and associations.*
5. *One should take reference from the theories and principles of the worthy predecessors but do not simply venerate them and compromise his personality as a result of being fettered by ancient methods.*
6. *If one observes quietly and experiences nature, in time he will see the wondrous principles.*
7. *Reading and travelling can broaden one's experience, and with experience there comes erudition.*
8. *One should be magnanimous to embrace whatever may come. For small-minded people, they will only have limited success.*
9. *An artistic life can inspire love, comfort the labor and motivate self-cultivation.*
10. *Art has to be beautiful to be considered art. Flaunting strange ideas and pointing people in the wrong direction are a demonic way of art.*
11. *Along with the teachings from his master, one must create his own style by having the ideas that no one has thought of before. Clinging to the leftover and adhering to the flawed might be desirable for some, but I would not do it.*
12. *Have modesty and study hard. Be contented and exercise self-restraint. Do not be proud.*
13. *One should understand the divine force that created the universe and capture its essence. Together with ideas about interesting subjects, one can develop some remarkable works.*
14. *One should know the nature of brushes, ink, color and paper, and use them well so he can paint at liberty.*

15. *One should get to the bottom of the things with total concentration.*
16. *All things in heaven and on earth represent an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Take for example the climate changes of wind and rain, of sunshine and darkness; the seasonal growth and decay of flowers and trees; the swimming fish and the flying and chirping birds; the joys and sorrows of man; the insects extending their wings and animals roaring and wailing; the mountains in their full grandeur; water in its ebb and flow. All these are material for painting available for the good use of clever artists. There is really no need to depend on the ancient models.*²⁵

The first two ideas are irrelevant to his painting, but they point to the significance of how Zhao Shao'ang had understood and promoted art all his life. Seeing his mother's hard work, he was assiduous in his studies. Gao Qifeng's teaching is the reason he aspired to be a teacher. Therefore, he mentioned his mother and his teacher at the beginning of *Guohua yaojue*. As one of the second generation of the Lingnan artists, Zhao Shao'ang left visible traces of his teacher in his paintings. First of all, he followed the synthesising approach of the Gao brothers. For one thing, he upheld the traditions of Chinese art and firmly adhered to the "Six Principles of Chinese Painting," which include "engendering (a sense of) movement through spirit consonance," "using the brush with the structural bone method," "responding the things, depicting their forms," "applying colors according to kinds," "dividing and planning, positioning and arranging" and "transmitting and conveying earlier models through copying and transcribing." For another thing, he boldly took lessons from modern science like "anatomy, perspective, physics and optics," forming his artistic character through a synthesis of east and west, the past and the present. Secondly, he always pursued simultaneously "formal and spiritual likeness." He captured the spirit of things in their forms because he could "observe and experience" nature to comprehend the wondrous principles of the universe. His long-term observations of everyday life and detail and his efforts in brushwork are evident in his many sketches. *Prelude to Brush and Ink: Zhao Shao-an's Sketches and Paintings*, published by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, is a collection of nearly 200 sketches of landscapes, plants, figures, insects and fish done in fountain pen, ballpoint pen and pencil. Found in the catalogue, *Po Lin Monastery, Lantau Island* (Plate 23) is a quick sketch of Hong Kong's landscape in the 1960s. The artist used a fountain pen instead of a brush to draw a rough outline for the scene. Another sketch, *Orchids* (Plate 24), depicts in detail the flowers' front and back, twisting and turning, stretching and budding. Those sketches are all his material for creation in

25 Ho Seng. "Xie jin wanqian qingtai--lingnan pai dashi Zhao Shao'ang huazhan 寫盡萬千情態 嶺南派大師趙少昂畫展 (Myriads of Spirit: Lingnan School Master Zhao Shao'ang's Exhibition)." *Xiongshi meishu* (Lionart), no. 117 (1980): 47-52.; Liang Fenglian, *Painting Life*: 160-161

Plate 23 (top)

Zhao Shao'ang, *Po Lin Monastery, Lantau Island*. Fountain pen on paper. 28x38 cm. 1962. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum. (After *Prelude to Brush and Ink: Chao Shao-an's Sketches and Paintings* [Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2001]: 82)



Plate 24 (bottom)

Zhao Shao'ang, *Orchids*. Fountain pen on paper. 24.5x29 cm. 1969. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum. (After *Prelude to Brush and Ink: Chao Shao-an's Sketches and Paintings* [Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2001]: 146)



later years.²⁶ Thirdly, Zhao Shao'ang emphasised individuality in terms of his art and that no one should "compromise his personality as a result of being fettered by ancient methods". The leisure seal "Wo zhi wei wo zi you wo zai" (Such as I am, so I do abide) (Plate 25) that Zhao Shao'ang often used in his paintings also makes the same statement.²⁷ In fact, although the three founders of the Lingnan School shared the same artistic ideals, their painting styles differed markedly and each had his own strengths. Gao Jianfu's is characterised by strong momentum and spontaneity, Gao Qifeng's by robustness and elegance, and Chen Shuren's by fineness and casualness. Their students, such as Zhao Shao'ang, Guan Shanyue, Fang Rending, Yang Shanshen and Li Xiongcai (1910-2001), also had their own techniques and styles, displaying their personal qualities. It is particularly obvious in his late years when Zhao Shao'ang had broken away from his teacher's style. He turned away from the meticulous approach and replaced it with the bold and freehand brushwork, showing a more unrestrained spirit and entering another world of chirping birds and scented flowers (Plates 26-27). Besides, erudition and moral character are also very important in Zhao Shao'ang's *Guohua yaojue*. He believed that reading and travelling helped "broaden one's experience, and with experience there come erudition," so he travelled across China and visited Europe and the US, uncovering the secret of "travelling thousands of miles" himself. He also spoke of the relationship between the classification of painters and moral character, and insisted that one should "be magnanimous, have modesty and study hard" so as to succeed in art. This conforms to the literati's tradition of valuing morality and cultivation, which is applicable to commenting on



Plate 25

Feng Kanghou, square relief seal bearing the characters "Wo zhi wei wo zi you wo zai" (Such as I am, so I do abide). (After *Masterworks by Chao Shao-an: The Charming Cicada Studio* [San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1997]: 189)

26 Hong Kong Heritage Museum ed. *Prelude to Brush and Ink: Chao Shao-an's Sketches and Paintings* (Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2001).

27 "Such as I am, so I do abide" is a famous quote from Shitao (1642-1705) in "A Treatise on Change" of his *Huayu lu* (Recorded Sayings on Painting). The original passage says: "Such as I am, so I do abide. The beards and eyebrows of the ancients cannot grow on my face, nor can their lungs and bowels be placed in my belly. I shall vent my own lungs and bowels, and display my own beard and eyebrows. Though on occasion my paintings happen to resemble someone else's, it is he who comes near to me, and not I who deliberately imitate his style. This must be naturally so. When indeed have I ever studied ancient masters without transforming them?" Shitao's style is characterised by exuberant brushwork in later times. Stressing the importance of individuality, he paid no attention to orthodox methods and opposed copying the ancient masters' works. See: Yu Jianhua ed. *Shitao huayu lu* (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2007): 29-36.



Plate 26

Zhao Shao'ang, *Sunflower*.
Ink and color on paper.
96 x 184 cm. 1966.
Collection of Guangzhou
Museum of Art. (After *A
Collection of Paintings and
Calligraphy of Professor
Chao Shao-an* [Hong
Kong: Regional Council,
1990]: 83)

art and writings. In short, Zhao Shao'ang took an inclusive attitude towards painting as he neither clung to the ancient methods nor rejected the western techniques. His pursuit of formal and spiritual likeness and the emphasis on personality and cultivation have provided later generations of artists with principles for studying painting, and also set an example of good characters.

As the Lingnan School rapidly became the mainstream of Hong Kong art in the 1950s and 1960s, the waves of studying painting rose gradually as well. In addition to opening art studios, Zhao Shao'ang accepted the invitation of Liu Yiling (1903-1994), the Chief Editor of *Dengta Magazine* (*Lighthouse Magazine*) in 1963 and began to write about painting methods for the magazine, like "Lun yi hua zhi cheng" (On How to Paint a Painting) and "Yun bi" (Movement of Brush).²⁸ Later he even had a regular column "Shiyong huihua xue" (A Study of Chinese Paintings) on the techniques and skills of the Lingnan School for the magazine. Obviously he did his utmost to promote the Lingnan School and art education. He stated his aims and style in his first article in the column:

28 "Lun yi hua zhi cheng" and "Yun bi" are found in issues 106 and 107 of *Dengta Magazine*. See: Hong Kong Heritage Museum ed. *Brush of Creation: Selected Paintings and Sketches by Chao Shao-an* (Hong Kong: Regional Council, 1995): 6-9.



Plate 27

Zhao Shao'ang, *Egrets and Willow*. Ink and color on paper. 184x 95.5cm. 1969. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum.

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The Chief Editor of Dengta Magazine invited me to write regularly about art, and I happened to have this in mind. But as an unlearned person, what do I have to write on? Thinking that I started the Lingnan Yiyuan more than 30 years ago, I would share with the readers my teaching experience. I would not say my writing is good but hope it will be deemed to be a reference for art students. Therefore I name the column "A Study of Chinese Paintings", which does not involve obscure theories but straightforward ideas.²⁹

No "obscure theories," full of "straightforward ideas" and with simple clarity, Zhao Shao'ang's articles on painting have the reputation of "allowing painting to be self-taught," thus providing the basic principles about the techniques and characteristics of the Lingnan School for the beginners.³⁰ The articles touched on painting flowers and plants, at which he was most skilled, and in each issue they discussed in detail with explanatory illustrations of different plants regarding their painting techniques, forms, characters, varieties and symbolic meanings. For example, he talked about plum blossom in his first article and said, "As China's national flower, the plum blossom defies cold winter and is a symbol of moral courage, integrity and noble aloofness. Therefore I began the column with the plum blossom." He first quoted from an ancient book *Guangqunfangpu* (Register of Flowers) for the plum blossom's characters, features and planting methods. He then shared his views on the flower from a painter's perspective, and lastly the painting process and instructions.³¹ As for the painting methods, he would explain them in separate sections like petals, receptacle, corolla, stamen, pistil and branches, and in each section he would elaborate on the brushwork, ink work, outline, color application and ink dots. Additionally, he specified that the methods, styles and tones of the white and red plum blossoms were different from each other.³² In summary, his articles taught flower painting step by step in a simple way with additional quotations from ancient books and poetry. They are definitely a practical guide for the beginners, and meanwhile the intellectuals would read them for pleasure and in appreciation. He had written in "A

29 Chiu Sai-kwong. Preface to *A Study of Chinese Paintings*. in Zhao Shao'ang and Ho Kung-shang. *A Study of Chinese Paintings* (Taipei: Art Book Co. Ltd., 1990): 5.

30 It is quoted from Liu Yiling, the Chief Editor of *Dengta Magazine*, *ibid*.

31 *Guangqunfangpu* is also known as *Yuding Peiwen zhai guanqun fangpu* (Imperial Edition of the Register of Flowers of the Studio of Admiring Culture). It was compiled and edited by the academicians of the Grand Secretariat like Wang Hao in the 47th year of the Kangxi reign (1708) according to *Qunfang pu* (Compendium of Aromatic Plants) by Wang Xiangjin (1561-1653). It is a botanical encyclopedia, running to 100 volumes. There are eleven sections, including seasons, grains, agricultural crops, vegetables, tea trees, flowers, fruits, woods, bamboos, grass and medical herbs. In each section the compilers explained the plants' names, and then collected the literary descriptions of each plant in different time periods. See: Wang Hao et al. *Yuding Peiwen zhai guanqunfangpu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987).

32 Zhao Shao'ang. *A Study of Chinese Paintings*: 8.

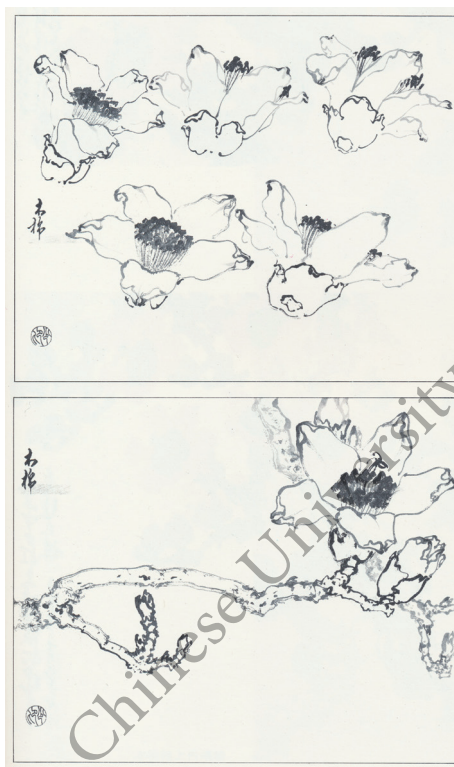


Plate 28 (left)

Zhao Shao'ang and Ho Kung-shang eds. *A Study of Chinese Paintings* (Taipei: Art Book Co. Ltd., 1990).

Plate 29 (right)

Sketches of Kapok Blossoms. (After *A Study of Chinese Paintings* [Taipei: Art Book Co. Ltd., 1990]: 61)

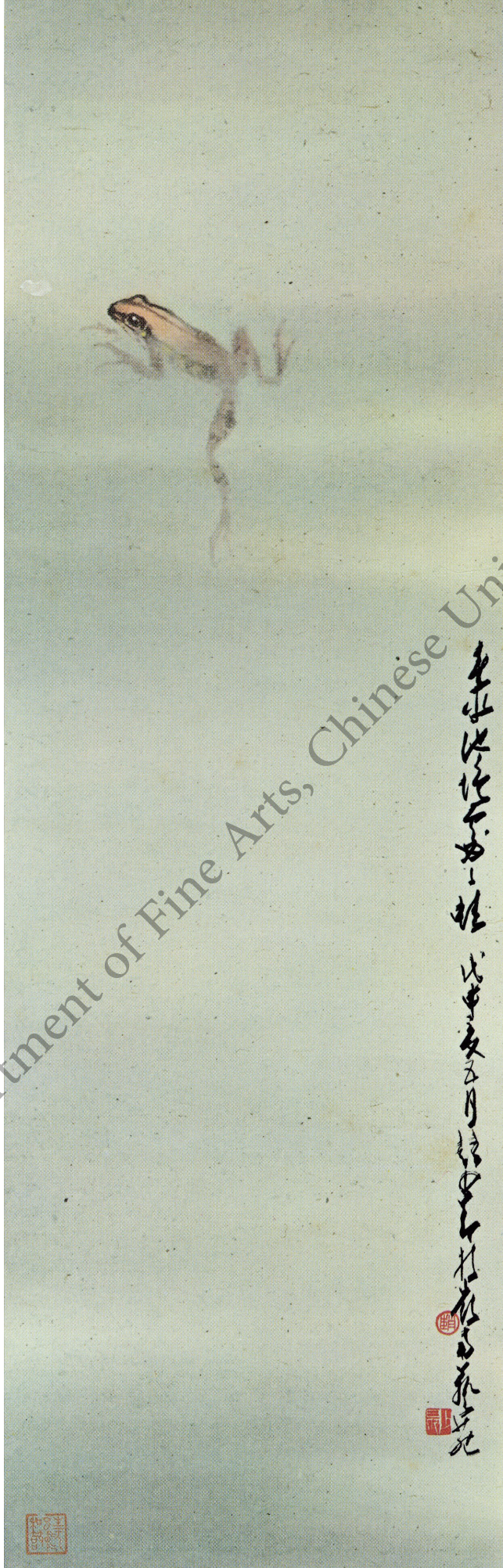
Study of Chinese Paintings” for *Dengta Magazine* for more than four years, and there were nearly seventy articles on various flowers, such as orchid, chrysanthemum, bamboo, peony, herbaceous peony, dahlia, peach blossom, apricot blossom, pear blossom, narcissus and camellia. However, the monthly magazine stopped publishing, and he stopped writing more articles. Fortunately, thanks to Ho Kung-shang, an editor of the Art Book Co. Ltd. in Taiwan, those articles can be read and shared through the compilation of *A Study of Chinese Paintings* (Plates 28-29), which was published in 1988 and 1990. The book allows the readers to get a general understanding of the Lingnan School, and provides first-hand material to study Zhao Shao'ang's art.

Recognition of Artistic Achievements

As Zhao Shao'ang began to feel his age in the 1970s, he curbed his overseas travels and spent more time in Hong Kong to teach, paint and hold exhibitions, deciding on the city to live in before he died. In February 1979, the Urban Council presented the exhibition of “The Art of Chao Shao-an” at the Hong Kong City Hall, and published a catalogue to highlight the artist's achievements and the contribution of the Lingnan School to the development of modern Chinese painting. The exhibits were all works of his later period. There were huge hanging scrolls and small square paintings, including *Butterflies*, *Frog* (Plate 30), *Tiger*, *Fish*,

Plate 30

Zhao Shao'ang, *Frog*.
Ink and color on paper.
48x15 cm. 1968. Private
collection. (After *Recent
Paintings by Prof. Chao
Shao-an*, volume 20
[Hong Kong: Lingnan
yiyuan, 1957]: 5)



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Plate 31

Zhao Shao'ang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue and Yang Shanshen, *Collective Painting*. Ink and color on paper. 104x51 cm. Undated. (After *Chinese Painting: Works Painted in Co-operation by Four Masters of the Lingnan School: Zhao Shaoang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue, and Yang Shanshen* [Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 1983]: 29)

Plate 32

Zhao Shao'ang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue and Yang Shanshen, *Collective Painting*. Ink and color on paper. 90x48 cm. Undated. (After *Chinese Painting: Works Painted in Cooperation by Four Masters of the Lingnan School: Zhao Shaoang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue, and Yang Shanshen* [Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 1983]: 19)



Parrot on Willow Branch and Buddha.³³ Frog is a rare piece of art. In its Chinese title it says “all over,” but there is only a single frog raising its head from the water, its long hind legs kicking water backwards. Brushed over with washes of diluted ink, the pond extends the imagination of space beyond the picture. In March 1983, Zhao Shao’ang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue and Yang Shanshen held an exhibition of their collective works at the Fung Ping Shan Museum in the University of Hong Kong, showing more than a hundred paintings and calligraphy.³⁴ The inscriptions on the works and the composition generally showed the order the artists applied their brushes. As in the painting of Plate 31, Yang Shanshen first depicted the osmanthus with dark ink; after that Li Xiongcai added a pine tree behind Yang’s flower, and lastly Guan Shanyue and Zhao Shao’ang painted the chrysanthemum and Indian chrysanthemum for the final touches. Another example is Plate 32: The painting of vegetables and fruit is characterised by dynamic and swiftness. Guan Shanyue painted the lychees, which extend across the picture from inside the basket. It is followed by Li Xiongcai’s kumquats at the front and Zhao Shao’ang’s loquats next to the basket. In the end Yang Shanshen added the bamboo shoots and finished off the painting. The four painters worked together with their specialities and developed a close rapport with each other. They were able to blend their styles because they always exchanged their ideas on art. They continued their cooperation by holding joint exhibitions at the National Museum of Singapore, Guangdong Painting Academy, the National Art Museum of China, and even in San Francisco. Together they earned themselves greater recognition of the name of the “Four Masters of the Lingnan School”.

Zhao Shao’ang participated in the “Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Painting” at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in spring 1986 with his new work *Cicadas* (Plate 33). In the painting the gnarled trunk branches off into two limbs, and the cicadas that are resting on the higher part of one limb are naturally the focal points. All the six cicadas are in different postures, showing their front, side or back. Zhao Shao’ang had always been a pioneer in painting cicadas as he had published a catalogue *Chanyan ji* (Charming Cicada Collection) in 1936, which was on the subject of cicadas. He had made considerable progress in painting insects in his old age. His cicadas are particularly impressive. He first drew the body with gamboge and cinnabar or ochre, then showed the hardness of the shell and the delicacy of the wings with light and dark ink, and with the brushwork that mixed the elements of freehand impression style and the detailed, elaborate style (Plate 34). Besides, as a symbol of the ideal “gentleman,” cicada shares the same noble and unsullied qualities with bamboo as it rests in the high branches and feeds on the wind and the dew. For that reason, Zhao Shao’ang often put cicada and bamboo together in his works to express

³³ Hong Kong Museum of Art ed. *The Art of Zhao Shao-an* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979).

³⁴ Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong ed. *Chinese Painting: Works Painted in Co-operation by Four Masters of the Lingnan School: Zhao Shaoang, Li Xiongcai, Guan Shanyue, and Yang Shanshen* (Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Museum, University of Hong Kong, 1983).

Plate 33

Zhao Shao'ang, *Cicadas*.
Ink and color on paper.
96x46.5 cm. 1986.
Collection of You Yi
Tang. (After *The Tien
Feng Legacy: Zhao
Shao'ang Paintings and
Calligraphy from the
Collection of You Yi Tang*
[Hong Kong: Sotheby's,
2010]: 93)



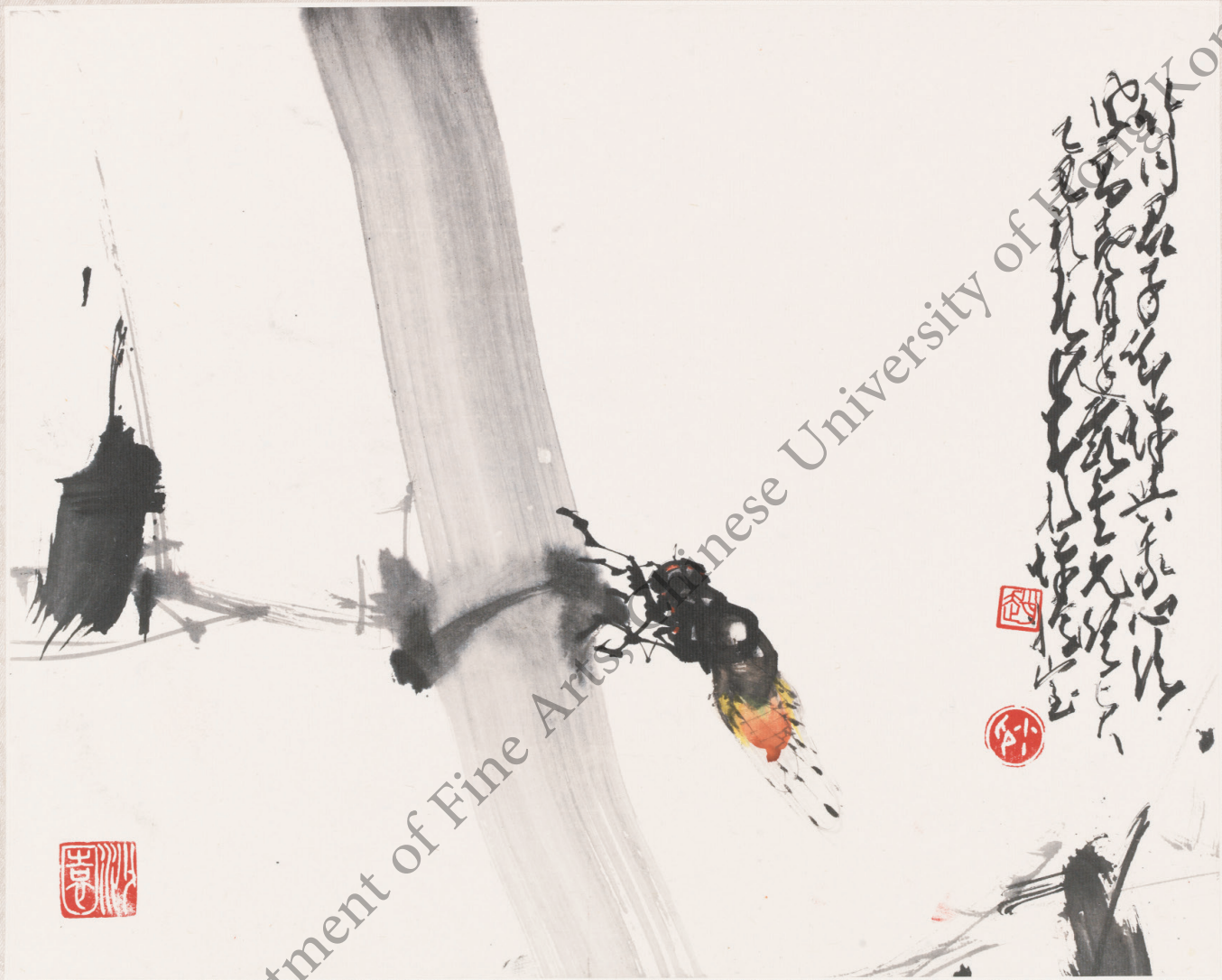


Plate 34

Zhao Shao'ang, *Cicada and Bamboo*. Ink and color on paper. 30x37 cm. 1985. Collection of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.

his personal quest, and even named his studio “Chanyan Shi” (Charming Cicada Studio). The colophon on the painting *Cicada and Bamboo* typically represents the artist’s aspirations using the two metaphors, and it reads: “Bamboo embodies a gentleman’s integrity. / Cicada represents the purity of my heart. / In a strong wind, far the voice will go. / In a heavy dew, my faith will show.” The poem truly reflects his purity, faith and dedication to art since he embarked on a career as an artist and an art educator. In November 1989, the Urban Council and the Hong Kong Museum of Art presented the exhibition “Artist and Art: Contemporary Chinese Painting,” featuring fifty-three paintings by famous contemporary Chinese artists, such as Zhu Qizhan (1892-1996), Liu Haisu (1896-1994), Huang Junbi (1898-1991) and Wang Jiqian (C. C. Wang) (1907-2003). Zhao Shao’ang was also one of the exhibiting artists.³⁵ In December the same year, the exhibition of “Paintings and Calligraphy of Professor Chao Shao-an” was held at the Sha Tin Town Hall, with a display of sixty-six of his old and new paintings. Among the artworks there was a set of five hanging scrolls *Plantain Trees* (Plate 35) and it was one of his most representative works. It was done with the preparatory sketches from life that the artist drew in the rain in a plantain farm near the Shing Mun Reservoir. With the brushwork characterised by dampness and grace and the brilliant colors, the painting vividly depicts the rain beating on the plantains, bursting with vitality and naturalness.

Evolving from the finely drafted style into the expressionistic freehand style, Zhao Shao’ang’s bird-and-flower paintings have developed a sophisticated personal taste in the later years. He preferred a simple composition, spiritual likeness and a simplified description of images so as to restore the evocative resonance of brushwork. Such aesthetic view is especially obvious in his small square paintings. For example, in *Orioles and Willow* (Plate 36) and *Chirping Swallows* (Plate 37), Zhao Shao’ang handled his brush and ink in a broad and swift manner. He painted the branches with the free flowing strokes of a big brush in light ink. Meanwhile, he sketched the birds with raised tails with just a few strokes, and the birds came alive on the paper full of vitality. He had painted the birds and the plants as conceived and showed his own compositional principles and character, proving the great maturity in his using of brush and ink. The seemingly improvised works belie the painter’s decades of artistic experience and his long-term observation of and drawing from nature, thus conveying the delicate balance between expression of feelings and realistic description, and capturing the evocative resonance with the painter’s “single stroke.”³⁶ Moreover, Zhao Shao’ang’s paintings are known for the amount and brilliance of colors. He applied rich and heavy colors to the different shades of ink, and the blend of ink and colors brought about the subtle changes, attracting widespread praise for their pleasurable visual effects.

35 Hong Kong Museum of Art ed. *Artist and Art: Contemporary Chinese Painting* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1989).

36 Guan Shanyue wrote an article singing the praises of Zhao Shao’ang’s “single stroke.” See: Guan Shanyue. “*Shi lun Zhao Shao’ang de huihua yishu* 試論趙少昂的繪畫藝術 (Discussion on Zhao Shao’ang’s Painting).” in Huang Xiaogeng ed. *Guan Shanyue lun hua* (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1991): 29-31.



Plate 35

Zhao Shao'ang, *Plantain Trees*. Set of five hanging scrolls, ink and color on paper. 185x381 cm. 1962. Collection of Hong Kong Heritage Museum.



Plate 36.
Zhao Shao'ang, *Orioles and Willow*. Ink and color on paper. 29x37 cm. 1984. (After *A Collection of Paintings and Calligraphy of Professor Chao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Regional Council, 1990]: 53)



Plate 37

Zhao Shao'ang, *Chirping Swallows*. Ink and colour on paper. 30 x 38 cm. 1990s. (After *Collected Works of Prof. Zhao Shao'ang* [Hong Kong: Jigu zhai youxian gongsi, 2005]: 66)

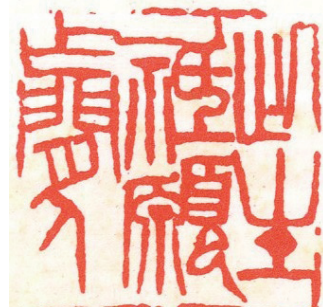


Plate 38

Zhang Xiangning, square relief seal bearing the characters "Ci sheng zhi yuan zuo xianren" (I would wish to be an unoccupied person). (After *The Art of Chao Shao-an* [Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979]: 63)

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Zhao Shao'ang had devoted most of his life to art, and won multiple awards and honours since the 1980s as the icing on the cake of his career. In 1980, he was awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth II (b. 1926) from the then Governor Sir Murray MacLehose (1917-2000) in recognition of his success in art.³⁷ In 1991, he received the "Art Achievement Award," the highest accolade bestowed in the fourth Artists of the Year Award, from the Urban Council and the Hong Kong Artists' Guild, and his student Fang Zhaolin was the Painter of the Year, carrying a special significance of the teacher passing his art on to the student. His achievement and contribution were praised again in 1994 when he was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in the 148th degree congregation at the University of Hong Kong. In 1998, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council presented Zhao Shao'ang with the "Lifelong Attainment Award," and later in the same year, he died aged 94. Zhao Shao'ang spent most of his life in Hong Kong and worked steadily for the development of the local art scene. Ever since he settled in Hong Kong in 1948, he had been proactive in promoting art education and exhibitions' activities, having much success with his hard work, and in spreading Chinese culture to the world using Hong Kong as the springboard. He has been defined as a Hong Kong artist in history. Therefore, the numerous awards he had are not just recognition of his personal artistic achievements, but also an acknowledgement of his contribution to the local art and culture.

Following the maxim "everything is illusion but there is truth in art; time flies and one should do his best work," Zhao Shao'ang always strove for excellence with great enthusiasm for art and became one of the most important successors of the Lingnan School in the 20th century, finding enormous fame on the international art scene.³⁸ Reviewing his eventful and near century-long life's journey, he began his career in Guangzhou, and later settled in Hong Kong, making every effort to promote art in the small city. As for his art, he created with his brush an enchanting spring garden full of the singing of birds and floral fragrance. He metaphorically introduced himself as a cicada because the insect perched on the highest branch of a tree and symbolised moral integrity. He transferred the amazing scenery he had seen in the north and the south of China onto his paintings that would attract everyone's attention. He captured not only the forms but also the spiritual charm of the animals so as to make his objects lifelike. As for his style, he aspired to

37 MBE refers to Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, the fifth grade within the British order of chivalry. King George V established the Order on June 4, 1917 to fill gaps in the British honours system and to reward contributions outside the Civil Service.

38 The maxim is carved on a bamboo brush holder Zhao Shao'ang had used in his early years, which is now in the collection of the Guangzhou Museum of Art. See: Wang Jian. "Luhuo chungqing de jingjie, yasu gongshang zhi gaofeng — shi lun Lingnan huapai dashi Zhao Shao'ang xiansheng de pinghe yu huaniao hua yishu 爐火純青的境界，雅俗共賞之高峰——試論嶺南畫派大師趙少昂先生的品格與花鳥畫藝術 (Great Maturity and Appreciation by Both Elite and General Audiences: A Study of the Lingnan Master Zhao Shao'ang's Characters and Bird-and-flower Paintings)." In *Yuehua shilun congkao* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe, 2008): 60.

modernize Chinese painting as he followed the revolutionary idea of the Lingnan School, weaving the strands of western ideas and techniques into the traditional Six Principles of Chinese painting and creating works with his own experiences and understanding of life. That is why his artworks represent the changes of style in modern Chinese painting and take on an epochal significance. He is also the hero that made the Lingnan School and Chinese art popular overseas as he left a number of his footprints inside and beyond Guangdong province. In addition to creating new works, he took his teacher's teaching to heart and engaged in all types of activities to contribute to the cause of art. He summarized his years of experiences and reflections on art and wrote articles about them whenever he had the chance, sharing with others his artistic ideals and painting principles. Having reached the zenith of his career after decades of devotion to art, Zhao Shao'ang managed to have a leisure attitude at heart and stated that "I would wish to be an unoccupied person." (Plate 38) Such carefree and open-minded attitude and indifference to fame and fortune are the key to his success in art and in life.³⁹ Although "The Pride of Lingnan: In Commemoration of the 110th Birthday of Chao Shao-an" closed in September 2015, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum has set aside the "Chao Shao-an Gallery" for a permanent display of its own collection of his artworks to commemorate his achievements, as well as to open the door to his world of art.

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³⁹ As seen from a poem *Self-identification* written by Zhao Shao'ang: "I would wish to be an unoccupied person. / Going forth alone, I am content with my lot. / Plum blossoms are not like the illusionary world; / Through cultivation they embody the void of dust." See: Zhao Shao'ang. *Zhao Shao'ang zi xie shi* (Poems and Calligraphy by Professor Zhao Shao'ang) (Taipei: Art Book Co. Ltd., 1991): 48.