**Ma Yiping On Arhat**

**Soliloquy**

For me, painting is joy. I do it just for fun. It is a part of my life, but not all of it. There are more meaningful things in the world than paining. In photo-image time, painting has already lost its glory of old days. It has been dethroned from the mainstream of visual arts. As a kind of art, painting once played an important cultural role for religion and politics, for the living and the dead. As the rapid development of digital technology, however, electronic media has changed concept of contemporary art a lot. Photo-image has occupied most space of our vision. When we face the traditional painting, it only remains a lingering spiritual yearning. But it can not stop artists from painting, because most people are actually the followers of these spiritual products.

Grown up in Heze, the home of peony, I learned traditional Chinese realistic painting on peony at the beginning of my career. Then, I was influenced by Mr Dong Qingyuan (Dong Chao), learning modern oil painting. After becoming a Buddhist, most of my painting works are on the theme of Buddhism. My painting career is going with the change of my life and the environment. All the arhat painting works in this book are collected from the painting practices imitating Master Guanxiu's works during these years. Art, on earth, is of people. Therefore, it should always comply with the people and the time, no matter it is highbrow or lowbrow, refined or vulgar.

According to Theravada Buddhism, arhat has attained nirvana and enlightenment, which our common people can not easily reach. Although it has been a long time since I become a Buddhist, I am still far from being proficient on Dharma. Learning arhat painting is because the Karma of being a Buddhist, as well as my collection hobby. My interests in arhat painting came from years of painting experiences on bizarre rocks. I firstly imitated Master Guanxiu's works and then learned from the paintings on ancient tomb walls. These experiences help me a lot on arhat painting. A casual and unrestrained style highlights my painting works, although I try to pursue the Buddhist realm. Because I worked many years on oil painting, the color of my painting work cannot get rid of the influence of western art. The lacking of study on Chinese traditional painting and my rejection against its stylization make the style my arhat works more casual.

I want to thank my teachers for giving me instructions during these years, and thank the collectors for their support and great kindness.

**It is better to say "expressing" rather than "drawing" on Ma Yiping's arhat painting, because he presents a Zen image full of selfness in a most straightforward way.**

**A Genuine Painter Ma Yiping: Expressing Selfness on Arhat Painting**

By Meng Xianping 2015

I firstly saw Ma Yiping's arhat painting was in a contemporary oil painting exhibition in Haidai Museum of Art last winter. During the exhibition, more than twenty painters gathered in the museum's reception room. When I walked around during the break, an arhat painting on the wall attracted me. The arhat in the painting is really weird-looking: he has a frowning forehead, shrugging arms and the long eyebrow hairs reaching to the knee. However, with quietly elegant color and casual brushwork, the painting is exquisite and delicate. After a discussion with other painters, I realized this painting, which signatured "Zi Liao Shan Ren", is Ma Yiping's work. It made me feel puzzled and a little bit shocked. And till now, we have become close friends, a question remains unsolved: why a oil painter, who has regarded western aesthetics as theoretical support for decades, insisting using vivid oil paint to express his real life experience, can be so familiar with the traditional Chinese ink painting, and can profoundly comprehend the Zen image?

There is a inner conflict bewteen Ma Yiping's art and temperament, who is seeking the truth of art and life along two different directions. In one direction, he tries to use life motif to create a visual image filled with philosophy thought: the appliances such as empty bottles, amphora, road; the living material such as flowers, fruits, bodies. With all these, his thought can touch the meaning of life, void of existence, eternity of the world. Although with so many constructivist and abstractionist artists as foundation, this road was still filled with uncertainty and hardship. To Ma Yiping, the most difficult part is the oil painting art of philosophy thought direction shoulders too much responsibility which has surpassed the art itself. So the exploration of oil painting art will keep the artists farther and farther away from their own nature and real spirit. The thickness of canvas and oil paint, the proposition of life and society, the accumulation of thinking and pictures produce heavy pressures to artists, forcing them to seek another possible road of art: is there one possibility that the relation between painting and life is not expression but unification? Can artists find their ways to express their own nature directly during the creation and experience the essence of their mind during the process of painting? Surely, during the artistic creation these years, the Chinese ink arhat paintings, which Ma Yiping produced inadvertently, represent another pole of the conflict between his art and soul. That is also another direction of his road on seeking the truth of art and life.

It is his pursue to the own nature deep in his mind to make Ma Yiping devote himself into the arhat paintings. During his school days, he love to ponder over the human nature and life. From Descartes, Hume, to Nietzsche, Husserl, western philosophy was his key to the door of existence. From impressionism, Cezanne, to Malevich, Morandi, Modernism art gave him opportunity to explore existing and manifestation. In his oil painting works on the theme of life around 2000 and his many attempts over a decade, his focus is to express his newest experiences which were gained from the expression of his thinking on life. This kind of gradual pushes have never reached the original point which seems not so far. However, an important event in Ma Yiping's life in 2008 at Xiaobao Village in Beijing, when he became a Buddhist, made a significant impact on the change of his view of life. What is Dhamma practicing mean? It is a question he has realized but cannot explain yet. Actually, from what I can see, the fundamental effect of becoming a Buddhist is change his understanding of life and existence from "outer observation" to "inner reflection", from "otherness" to "selfness". Undoubtedly, Zhouyi and Eight Diagrams which he obsessed during his boyhood, Chinese ink painting and writing which he admired in his youth time, all the cultural gene are about "inner reflection". However, only that year, at his middle-age, when he finally go beyond the material pursuing and survival pressure, Ma Yiping began to thoroughly soak himself into Dhamma practicing. This means a decisive spiritual transcendence, a complete resolution to his own nature's exploration.

Chinese Buddhist philosophy, especially the Zen culture, speak highly of the thorough understanding of selfness. According to Zen, selfness is one's own nature, Buddhata, and origin of heart Master Wuzu said, "To attain supreme enlightenment, one must be able to know spontaneously one's own nature or essence of mind, which is neither created nor can it be annihilated. From ksana to ksana (thought-moment to thought-moment), one should be able to realize the essence of mind all the time. All things will then be free from restraint. Once the Tathata (Suchness, another name for the essence of mind) is known, one will be free from delusion forever; and in all circumstances one’s mind will be in a state of "Thusness". Such a state of mind is absolute Truth. If you can see things in such a frame of mind you will have known the essence of mind, which is supreme enlightenment.". One's own nature and essence of mind is original truth, knowing spontaneously one's own nature is returning to nature without any barrier. The purpose of Zen is to make people "see their heart directly, think things without ponder", this realm attributes human's thinking on the world to the discovery of mind essence and implement of selfness. Therefore, to all living things, the best example of Buddhism practicing is arhat. Arhat is a common people, who has attained enlightment and nirvana through practice Dhamma. Arhat is free from human desires and passions, exceeding life and death, full of wisdom. Arhat is not an unreachable deity, but a tangible sage; he is not majestic heaven, but person with emotions; he is not a perfected avatar, but a person with flaws and rough experience. The essence of arhat explains the nature of Buddhism, that is to find one's true self. For this reason, studying, observing, portraying and respecting arhat become a special feature of Chinese traditional culture. And Master Guanxiu in the Five Dynasties initiated the arhat image, which was foreign-appearanced, weird-looking and extraordinary, setting the example for later generations to understand the spirit of arhat.

Ma Yiping's Dhama practice accompanied with enlightenment of selfness and discovery of arhat spirit. Beginning from modern art, he was once a radical modernist. Forced by living, he once also dedicated himself into anxious and fierce mundane life. However, after 2008, an extraordinary and refined temperament quietly began to highlight his personality charm. He stays calm and collected, but diligent in thinking; he is quiet and reticent, but always goes straight to the point; he is low-pitched, but with a batch of faithful supporters. Talking to him, you completely don't have to worry about trapping into the misanthropic topics which are peculiar to contemporary artists. Because he is tolerant, considerate and willing to offer help. He has reach the realm of "Buddha land of benefiting sentient beings". Actually, the arhat image in Ma Yiping's paintings vividly interpret the true value he is practicing. Inheriting Master Guanxiu's essence, echoing Qianlong Emperor's comment, Ma Yiping's arhat paintings have convinced cultural origin. On spiritual temperament of arhat, Ma Yiping changes their foreign appearance into tangled hair and plain clothes, changes their weird-looking into naive charm. The changes reflect his exploration on the kindness of human nature as well as the change of his own mind, body, appearance, emotion and manner during his Dhama practice.

Arhat painting provides Ma Yiping opportunity for expressing his own nature. As well as Xu Wei, Ma's arhat image, to a great extent, comes from the ink and water language. The brushwork, ink, color and composition in his arhat painting are mostly unconscious, which was different from his long-time study on oil painting techniques. In one of his painting which portrays Master Huineng, the cursive postscript "not the wind, nor streamers, benevolent beckoning" seizes the essence of Huang Tingjian's calligraphy, demonstrating Ma's accomplished handwriting skill. However, according to Ma, he never had a tough training on calligraphy. Then what does he rely on? That is what Master Yongjia said, "become enlightened straight away". As well as Ma Yiping's arhat painting. Before 2000, the painter made an experiment on a painting series called "Chinese ink deconstruction", portraying weird human body images in real life with a caricature style. But he soon dropped this idea. Perhaps he realized, lacking of culture and transcendence, the frankness and courage of this kind of so-called "new literati painting" could be reduced to the original nature of common people. However, in his arhat paintings, flying and graceful lines, casual and enshrouding dots, simple and elegant colors represent the tolerance and freedom of a transcender, and a selfness natral expression of Zen. Therefore, for Ma's arhat painting, it is better to say "expressing" rather than "drawing", because he presents a Zen image full of selfness in the most straightforward way. Nevertheless, as well as Ma's Dhamma practicing, his painting is a continuous process. The conjunction of arhat image, brushwork, design and sentiment must be better and better in the future.

**A Spirit Overhead - Ma Yiping's Painting**

By Yu Liang in Liuyuan Garden, NanJing

Some say, art makes human human. When the commercialization tide fiercely sweeps everything, shaking our spiritual homeland and even challenging our moral bottom line, it seems that everyone can feel the winter chill. Then, art becomes the best choice for spirit consolation. That is to say, people nowadays begin to discover and locate the art again. Obviously, as a painter, Ma Yiping seize the opportunity of the era.

His road of art is rugged and rough, but his status and painter works clearly indicates that art has became his spiritual homeland. And just so, he makes people feel art's importance on the way home of their spirit. Ma Yiping's artistic life can be considered as the example of the spiritual odyssey of new generation painters. Coming from a village of Cao County, Shandong Province, he entered Heze University, and then went to study in Beijing Painting Academy after resigning from his work. After finishing the study, he came to Zhaoyuan City in Shandong, then settled down in his studio in Songzhuang Art District in Beijing. However, those who keep up their efforts often achieve their goal, and those who keep on walking often reach their destination. His experience and painting works already gave enough confidence to other diligent painters nowadays.

From Ma Yiping's painting works, we can see the determination and insistence of an artist who has dedicated himself to his art career. Art is product of spirit. If we mechanically consider painting as pure techniques of brushwork, the soul of art will be dispelled. The core of Chinese literati painting is moral character and humanistic spirit. Ma Yiping's paintings tell us his "selfness philosophy" It is almost an ultimate thinking, but he has comprehended the essence of life through his individualized art language (Buddhist theme paintings). Among Ma Yiping's works, I like the Buddha portrait most. It is said that, feeling no me, no others, no emptiness, no form, and it’s all free and easy contemplation. Due to a good art creation state and confidence on technique, a common but remarkable feature highlights Ma Yiping's paintings, which always bring the viewer a pleasant and relaxed feeling.

Perhaps it is because he is good at both oil painting and traditional Chinese painting, the brushwork in his traditional Chinese painting can always be free from conventions. This kind of extraordinary freedom on painting skills is based on his aesthetic connotation pursuit, which is to find one's true self. With the inspiration on true self, the aesthetic interest of his painting work shows a valuable transcendent style. A painter's essence of mind should have the temperament of poet, so do Ma Yiping. The crucial part of a poem is its image, which decides its level. And the core of image is the expression of one's own nature. As the ancients said, poems can only be known by the comprehension of its image. For Ma Yiping, the atmosphere of contemporary art has kept his paintings away from the convention of traditional Chinese painting. However, we can see from the image of his painting, the aesthetic connotation still inherits the ancient legacy. I mean, the style and features of his painting should be highly appreciated, as many people nowadays look down upon tradition in the name of innovation. Especially, the self-conscious choice of Ma Yiping, who has experienced the noise and distractions in contemporary art circle, is more convincible.

**Arhat**

By Ma Yuanyuan In Capital Normal University

Sanskrit: Arhat, Pali: Arahant. Arhat in Sanskrit means "asaiksa", that is getting rid of all worries and attaining Arahantahood. That is to say, the one who has reached the enlightenment has nothing to learn. The meaning of arhat also includes "foe destroyer", "ajati" and "lokavidu". Arhat deserves respect for they are free from all the human desires and passions，attaining nirvana. Before the end of life, arhat travels around, practicing and spreading Dhama in the world. In layman's terms, arhat is the person far advanced along the path of enlightenment, and getting rid of all the worries.

Since the third Dharmacakra of Buddha, thousands of Buddhists attained Arahantahood. Arahat profoundly influences sculpture and painting, in which, the classic works include the Five Hundred Arhats, the Sixteen Arhats or the Eighteen Arahats. The porpularity of arhat in common people not only enriches Buddhist connotation in China, but also becomes an important theme in art creation. Painting and sculpture is two most common types among its various forms. The sculptures of the Sixteen Arhats, the Eighteen Arhats or the Five Hundred Arahats can be seen in many Buddhist temples in China. And the Ten Arhats, the Sixteen Arhats or the Eighteen Arhats are also the major form of painting art.

Among the disciples of Buddha, the most outstanding ones are the ten arhats by his side. With their remarkable bahavior and capability, they are the backbone of early development of Buddhism. Among the ten arhats, the fisrt one is Mahakasyapa, who is foremost in ascetic practices; the second one is Ananda, foremost in retentive memory; the third one is Sariputta, foremost in wisdom; the fourth one is Subhuti, foremost in understanding of emptiness; the fifth one is Punna, foremost in teaching dharma; the sixth one is Maudgalyayana, foremost in supernatural powers; the seventh one is Katyayana, foremost in explaining Dharma; the eighth one is Aniruddha, foremost in divine insight; the ninth one is Upali, foremost in keeping precepts; the tenth one is Rahula, foremost in esoteric practice.

The portraits of the ten disciples has appeared early in Yungang Grottoes of the Northern Wei Dynasty. The ten portraits surround a major portrait of Buddha in the eighteenth cave of the grottoes. After Tang Dynasty, Zhang Sengyao painted portraits of "Ten Disciples of Buddha" and "Ten Eminent Monks". However, works themed with the ten arhats are rarely seen in contemporary Buddhist painting. With casual brushwork and extraordinary form, the ink paintings of ten arhats in this book, bring a confucianist temperament, reflecting an independent spirit in contemporary ink painting art of arhat.

In painting area, the Sixteen Arhats has the most widely influences. The earliest record of the Sixteen Arhats' names was in the book "Sixteen Arhats and Eighteen Arhats" by Master Shiziguoqingyou in the 2nd century A.D. When Master Xuanzang in Tang Dynasty translate the book, the names and files of the Sixteen Arhats were translated into Chinese and began to spread. The Sixteen Arhats were soon worshipped by Buddhists and refined scholars in China. According to the book, the Sixteen Arhats include: Pindola, Kanakavatsa, Kanaka, Gopaka, Nagasena, Nakula, Bhadra, Kalika, Vajriputra, Subinda, Panthaka, Rahula, Angaja, Vanavasin, Ajita and Cudapanthaka. However, the book doesn't record the Sixteen Arhats' appearance. So the artists have to create various extraordinary even weird arhats images according to the common sense of Buddhism and the monk figures in real life.

The theory of the Eighteen Arhats originated in Tang Dynasty, and was widely accepted in Song Dynasty. The Eighteen Arhats was made by the original Sixteen Arhats with the addition of other two. The names of the two additional arhats vary from different versions of story. The facticity of the Sixteen Arhats make them the favorite subject of ancient painters in China. Wang Wei in Tang Dynasty complished forty-eight painting works of the Sixteen Arhats. However, the most significant work in the history is Master Guanxiu's painting "Portrait of Sixteen Arhats". In Tang Dynasty, the Buddha figure was gradualy secularized, becoming quite realistic. Nevertheless, on the contrary, Master Guanxiu endowed the arhats in paintings a mysterious and deterrent power by exaggeration and transformation. All the arhats in his paintings are in foreign and weird looks. The painting style of Master Guanxiu originated from his cultural cultivation and the historical background. Becoming a Buddhist when he was seven, Master Guanxiu is proficient on lotus sutra and good at poems and calligraphy. He is widely known for his figure painting, which is prominent in Chinese art history. There are many documents recording his arhat paintings. According to the book "Famous Paintings in YiZhou", Master Guanxiu learned after Yan Liben, making sixteen arhat paintings, in which, all arhats are looked foreign and extraordinary, some are eating, some have high noses, some lean on pinetrees and stones, some sit by hill and water. When others asked, he explained, "that is what I saw in my dream".

Master Guanxiu lived in the Five Dynasties, which is a special era for Buddhism. Introduced into China in Han Dynasty, Buddhism developed through Wei, Jin and Sui Dynasty, prevailing in Tang Dynasty. However, in the end of Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties, the devastation of Buddhism and the chaos caused by rise and fall of dynasties brought a disaster to Buddhist classics, temples and monks. Although Buddhism didn't totally disappear over the hundreds of years, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for people to touch with Buddhism. As there is no record on arhat's appearance then, we believe the arhat's image in Master Guanxiu's painting was originated from his meditation over Zen. It is the fantastic transformation of the Zen realm. Master Guanxiu said, the images of those Buddhist figures is not from "the real life record", but "what he saw in his dream". Later, his "dreaming arhat" was highly praised and followed by other painters. It was set as an example, for Chinese painters over a thousand years to create a large number of arhat images with Chinese characteristics.

In contemporary Buddhist painting area, the Sixteen Artat painted by Ma Yiping inherited the unrestrained and casual style and steady brushwork from Master Guanxiu, bringing out a elegant and classical taste. With the most direct way, the painter represent a Zen intention full of the interest of his own nature. The disinterested attitude to life and the devout respect to Buddha can be felt from his casual brushwork. After becoming a Buddhist, Ma Yiping keeps himself away from all the worry and anxiety, creating more exaggerated and remarkable arhat images. Under the effect and direction of Zen, he has attained the transcendency, elegance and freedom, which make us feel spiritual realm in the painter's subconsciousness.

**A Brief Introduction of Ma Yiping**

Ma Yiping was born in 1969 in Cao County, Shandong Province. His ancestral home is Zhaoyuan City in Shandong. His literals include "Ziliao Shanren", "Liaoliao Jushi" and "Ziliao Fayuan". Influenced by family tradition, Ma has been fond of calligraphy and painting since childhood. Ma left the hometown travelling around during his early life. Western culture deeply impressed him during his college time. He learned after his teacher Mr. Dong Qingyuan in Beijing, 1991, then staying in the city for years. He came back to his hometown, Zhaoyuan City of Shandong Province in 1993, engaging in oil painting for over a decade while running a business. Later, he devoted into the study on Chinese traditional culture of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. After concentration on the study and creation of the traditional Buddhism painting "Sixteen Arhats" for many years, most of his works are influenced by Guanxiu, the "Master Chanyue". With a natural, unrestrained and casual style, his works break a fresh ground in contemporary Buddhist painting area.

He studied contemporary art in Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2007, then settled down at Xiaobao Village and Lama Village in Songzhuang Art District in Beijing. He later became a Buddhist, following Vajra Master Gengqiu Zeweng of Aiwang Temple in Tibet to practice Nyingma of Tantra doctrine, with the Dharma name of Xianqu Dudjom.

智慧第一舍利弗

Foremost in Wisdom - Sariputta

解空第一须菩提

Foremost in the Understanding of Emptiness - Subhuti

多闻第一阿难陀

Foremost in Retentive Memory - Ananda

天眼第一阿尼律陀

Foremost in Divine Insight - Aniruddha

神通第一目犍连

Foremost in Supernatural Powers - Maudgalyayana

持戒第一优婆离

Foremost in Keeping Precepts - Upali

说法第一富楼那

Foremost in Teaching Dharma - Punna

头陀第一摩诃迦叶

Foremost in Ascetic Practices - Mahakasyapa

议论第一迦旃延

Foremost in Explaining Dharma - Katyayana

密行第一罗睺罗

Foremost in Esoteric Practice - Rahula

十六罗汉

The Sixteen Arhats

尊者度拔

Pindola

尊者迦伐蹉

Kanakavatsa

尊者堕誓

Kanaka

尊者拔迦

Gopaka

尊者迦犀

Nagasena

尊者提蜜多友

Nakula

尊者没跋

Bhadra

尊者迦理迦

Kalika

尊者伐那弗多

Vajriputra

尊者戍迦

Subinda

尊者半托迦

Panthaka

尊者怙

Rahula

尊者因揭

Angaja

尊者伐婆斯

Vanavasin

尊者阿氏多

Ajita

尊者注荼半托迦

Cudapanthaka