

# WU HUNG

# A STORY OF RUINS

PRESENCE AND ABSENCE IN CHINESE  
ART AND VISUAL CULTURE





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AND VISUAL CULTURE

Wu Hung

REAKTION BOOKS

*To John M. Rosenfield*

Published by Reaktion Books Ltd  
33 Great Sutton Street  
London EC1V 0DX  
[www.reaktionbooks.co.uk](http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk)

First published 2012

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Published with the assistance of The Getty Foundation

Additional assistance from The Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies

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Printed and bound in China

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Wu Hung, 1945–

A story of ruins : presence and absence in Chinese art and visual culture.

1. Ruins in art. 2. Symbolism in art – China – History.
3. Art, Chinese – Themes, motives. 4. Art and society – China – History.
5. Art and history – China.
6. Ruined buildings – China – Psychological aspects.

I. Title

704.9'46'0951-DC23

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# PREFACE

A larger purpose of this book is to think of Chinese art and visual culture globally. As such my project consists of two interrelated aspects, one conceptual and the other historical. Conceptually, a study of ruins in Chinese art and visual culture recognizes alternative histories of ruins and, more fundamentally, acknowledges heterogeneous notions and representations of ruins in different cultural and artistic traditions. The English word ‘ruin’, or *ruine* in French, *ruine* in German and *ruinere* in Danish, has its origin in the idea of ‘falling’ and has long been associated with fallen stones.<sup>1</sup> From here it has gained its primary definition as architectural remains of predominantly masonry structures. This definition laid the basis for constructing a story of ruins in the West, one that has been told and retold countless times by writers, artists and scholars from different disciplines. This story has also influenced, to say the least, the ways in which ruins in other cultures are perceived, represented and interpreted. The art historian Paul Zucker writes in an influential essay: ‘The popular concept of ruins in our time has been created by the Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Horace Walpole on.’<sup>2</sup> This is true not only for Europe and America, but also for many other places around the world as a result of the spread of Western culture and ideas through colonization and globalization. As evidence, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Gebel Barkal in Sudan, Tikal in Guatemala and the Great Wall in China are not only wonders of the world but also the pride of each nation, featured in picture albums and tourist guides in ways no different from those of the Parthenon, Colosseum and Tintern Abbey. These stone or brick structures have become architectural symbols of their countries of origin, and inspire aesthetic appreciation and awe that is deemed universal. Unknowingly, the Western concept of ruins has become a global one.

Thus when ruins in a non-Western visual tradition become the subject of scholarly inquiry, the investigation naturally first focuses on indigenous concepts and representations of ruins. Think, for example, how ‘ruin’ could be conceptualized in a culture that favoured timber architecture – constructions that require constant redecoration and restoration, and disintegrate almost completely after fire or earthquake, or simply through human negligence. Think, also, how the passage of time can be conveyed in a painting tradition that rarely represents architectural ruins but has created endless variations of mountains and trees. But the purpose of this study is not limited to rediscovering indigenous Chinese concepts of ruins and images of the passage of time. Rather, this initial investigation provides a starting point to look into complex historical interactions between China and the West, which have dominated the development of Chinese society, politics and art since the nineteenth century. Along the way, pictorial images of ‘Chinese ruins’ appeared: photography provided an unprecedented means to record ruins and war destruction; one particular war ruin was preserved to become a national monument; the recent urbanization movement has incited many ruin-related contemporary art projects. Whereas ‘ruins’ connect these episodes to make them into a historical narrative, the different images and ideas of ruins offer internal evidence to punctuate this narrative into historical periods and phases.

This book studies the idea and image of ruins from China’s antiquity to the present. Such a macroscopic coverage naturally rejects any totalizing notion of ‘Chinese ruins’. Indeed, what I hope to show is neither an unchanging mode of conceptualization nor a teleological progression of visual representation. Instead, I started the project by tracking down a broad variety of images related to the ideas of ruination and fragmentation, and then exploring their divergent historical, cultural, artistic and technological conditions. In so doing, these disparate examples and their specific contexts have constantly redefined the parameters of my investigation, and have kept me alert to the methodological complexity involved in description and interpretation.

My initial questions about the concept and representation of ruins in traditional China underlie the discussions in chapter One, ‘Internalizing Ruins: Premodern Sensibilities of Time Passed’. These questions prompted me to consider a range of issues, including the idea of the ‘trace’ and its visual manifestations, painting’s relationship with traditional timber architecture, the metaphorical use of images in alluding to the passage of time, and indigenous methods of recording damage and decay.

This investigation, in turn, leads me to identify new modes of ruin representations in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, which are the subject of chapter Two, ‘The Birth of Ruins: Inventing a Modern Visual Culture in China’. Ruins were no longer metaphorical: what we find during this period is the appearance of realistic images of architectural ruins, created first by foreign painters and photographers and then by their Chinese counterparts. Whereas a considerable number of examples followed the imported formula of European Picturesque ruins, such sentimental pictures were vastly outmatched, both in number and in impact, by brutal representations of war ruins, which either celebrated colonial domination or fuelled anti-colonial, nationalist sentiment. Correspondingly, my discussion of these images adopts a new analytical framework, connecting them with a global traffic of technology, images and artists, and with issues such as technological modernity, colonial visuality and a profound sociopolitical movement that reinvented China as a modern nation state.

This interpretative strategy is readjusted again in the third and last chapter of the book. This chapter, ‘Between Past and Future: Transience as a Contemporary Aesthetic of Ruins’, studies ruin images created from the second half of the twentieth century to the present. What happened to those dark, dangerous ruins after the Sino–Japanese war was over and the country strove to pursue a bright future? Why did avant-garde artists and poets re-embrace ruins at the end of the Cultural Revolution? Why has contemporary Chinese art since the 1990s developed such strong interest in urban ruins, as shown in endless examples of photographs, installations, performances and films that document demolished residential houses and dilapidated industrial sites? Answers to these questions are sought in post-war global politics as well as in China’s internal transformation. Only within this context of local–global interaction can we discover how ruin representations have contributed to the resurgence of a modernist movement and the self-definition of contemporary Chinese art.



# ONE INTERNALIZING RUINS:

Premodern Sensibilities  
of Time Passed

清涼臺

薄暮平臺獨上游可憐春色靜  
南州陵松但見陰雲合江水犹涵白  
日流故壁鴉歸宵寂寥廢園花  
發思悠々興亡自古成慨長莫遣  
歌聲到嶺頭

清相遺人極



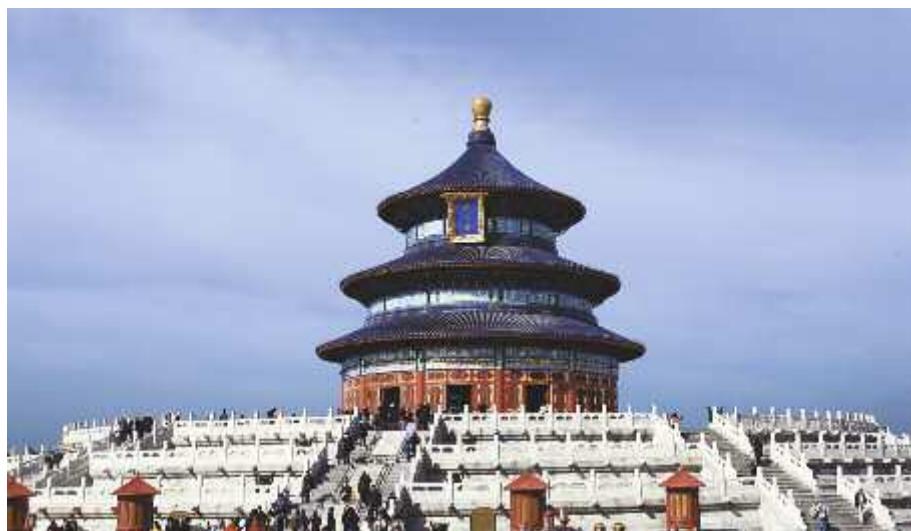
## Where are the Ruins in Traditional Chinese Art?

Several years ago, after re-reading writings by Hans Frankel and Stephen Owen on the Chinese poetic genre *huai* – ‘lamenting the past’ or ‘meditating on the past’<sup>1</sup> – I decided to conduct a survey of ruin images in Chinese painting because such images frequently appear in *huai* poems. The result surprised me: among all the examples I have checked, covering a broad chronological span from the fifth century BC to the mid-nineteenth century AD, only five or six depict ruined buildings.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the architectural structures in a painting show no trace of damage, even if the artist has inscribed a poem next to the image describing their ‘broken roofs’ and ‘ruined entrenchment’ (illus. 1). I was no less astonished when I turned to architecture: there was not a single case in pre-twentieth-century China in which the ruined appearance of an old building was purposefully preserved to evoke what Alois Riegel has theorized in the West as the ‘age value’ of a manufactured form.<sup>3</sup> Many ancient timber structures do exist, but most of them have been repeatedly renovated or even completely rebuilt (illus. 2). Each renovation and restoration aims to bring the building back to its original brilliance, while freely incorporating current architectural and decorative elements.

Although I could simply have continued my search for images of ruins, these initial findings were forceful enough to prompt me to ponder their implications. Logically, I questioned first why I was so surprised by such findings: clearly I, like many other people as I found out later, had presumed that ruins were an integral element of traditional Chinese culture and existed in both architectural and pictorial forms. It is also clear that in making such a presumption I was unconsciously following a cultural/artistic convention that is at odds with the traditional Chinese ways of representing ruins – if such representations indeed existed in art. This realization led to two kinds of reflection, about the origin of such a misconception and about indigenous Chinese concepts and representational modes of ruins.

A contemporary observer has been exposed to various cultural influences, which could have shaped his imagination of ruins in traditional China. The most powerful influence comes from the Romantic view of ruins, which, Paul Zucker argues, still determines today’s popular approach to ruins.<sup>4</sup> This view has a long genealogy in European art and architecture: ruins were depicted in paintings before the Renaissance and entered garden architecture in the sixteenth century. But it was not until the eighteenth century that sentiment toward ruins penetrated every cultural realm (illus. 3, 4):

<sup>1</sup> Shitao, *Qingliang Terrace*, hanging scroll, c. 1700, ink and colour on paper.



2 Temple of Heaven,  
Beijing, built 1406–20.

They were sung by Gray, described by Gibbon, painted by Wilson, Lambert, Turner, Girtin and scores of others; they adorned the sweeps and the concave slopes of gardens designed by Kent and Brown; they inspired hermits; they fired the zeal of antiquarians; they graced the pages of hundreds of sketchbooks and provided a suitable background to the portraits of many virtuosi.<sup>5</sup>

It was this tradition that led Riegl to write his theoretical meditation on the ‘modern cult of ruins’ at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Around the same time, this European tradition also became global, as non-European writers, painters and intellectuals embraced literary and artistic Romanticism and disseminated it in their native countries. In China, as I will recount in chapter Two, ruins became an important painting subject in the early twentieth century; the Picturesque style and sentimental appeal of these images unmistakably reveal their origin (see illus. 76–8, 84, 111).

Although numerous books and essays have been written on the creation of artificial ruins in European gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the relationship between these structures and another type of architectural folly – fanciful imitations of Oriental buildings (illus. 5) – seems to have eluded most discussions. An obvious reason for this oversight is their marked differences in function and appearance: whereas sham Greek or Roman ruins evoked historical memory and melancholic rumination with their solemn and dignified forms, the Oriental follies were exotic ‘eye-catchers’ that conveyed, in Horace Walpole’s words, ‘a whimsical air of novelty’.<sup>7</sup> I would suggest, however, that the repeated

juxtaposition of these two contemporary architectural types points to a deeper concept in Romantic art, in which the Picturesque and exotic, indigenous and foreign, nature and artifice, contribute to a mixture of beauty and the Sublime in an imaginary visual world. The juxtaposition of the two types of follies is found not only in actual gardens but also in design books, *trompe l'oeil* murals, decorative patterns (illus. 6) and theoretical discourses. In writing and speech, Chinese gardens were evoked to justify the Romantic dissatisfaction with formal gardens.<sup>8</sup> The association between the Picturesque and the exotic also explains why some

3 Antonio Canaletto,  
*Rome: Ruins of the Forum, Looking towards the Capitol*, 1742, oil on canvas.

4 The water reservoir of 1748 at the Ruinenberg, Potsdam.

5 Chinese Tea House in Sanssouci Park, Potsdam, designed by Johann Gottfried Büring, 1755–64.





6 Carved and painted 18th-century Chinoiserie panels, originally in the Hôtel de la Lariboisière, Paris.

painters depicted Chinese buildings in the manner of classical ruins. An early example of such cultural coalescence, an engraving made in 1626 by Velentin Sezenius (*b.* 1602), shows a group of buildings, consisting of a half-broken bridge and a dilapidated watermill amid Oriental figures, willow trees and a phoenix (illus. 7).

Among the eighteenth-century European architects who pursued Oriental follies, none was more diligent or influential than William Chambers (1723–1796), the official architect of Princess Augusta and the architectural tutor of her son, the future George III.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, the effort he made to simulate Chinese architecture in English gardens was closely related to his commitment to constructing classical ruins in the same settings.<sup>10</sup> His design for Kew Gardens, near London, typifies this parallel interest: the ornamental follies he built there included, among others, a ruined Roman arch (illus. 8), a ten-storey Chinese pagoda (illus. 9), a ‘menagerie pavilion’ in a typical Chinoiserie style, and a relocated House



7 Velentin Sezenius,  
Chinoiserie design, 1626.

8 William Chambers,  
ruined Roman arch,  
Kew Gardens, 1759.

of Confucius. Going a step further, he wrote in his 1772 *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* that the Chinese actually decorated their gardens with decaying buildings, ruined castles, palaces and temples, half-buried triumphal arches, and ‘whatever else may serve to indicate the debility, the disappointments and the dissolution of humanity; which . . . fill the mind with melancholy and incline it to serious reflection’.<sup>11</sup>

One wonders on what basis Chambers made this claim: although he did visit Canton twice in the 1740s, his account about the artificial Chinese ruins contains little truth.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that at the time he, a young employee in the Swedish East India Company, had not yet received any of the professional training that later made him a renowned architect, and so mistook some broken-down buildings as deliberate aesthetic objects.<sup>13</sup>

It is also possible that he, as his biog-

rapher John Harris says, put his ideas ‘into the mouths of the Chinese’<sup>14</sup> to support his own theory. As we have seen, this had become a conventional rhetorical strategy by the time. Chambers probably never really fashioned a Chinese-style ruin; but such a project would not have been impossible: a ruined bridge he designed in 1762 for Thomas Brand’s estate The Hoo, near Hitchin, has noticeable affinities with a Chinese bridge he proposed for Frederick II’s New Palace at Sanssouci. We can also trace both designs back to Sezenius’s engraving (see above), in which a ruined bridge defines the visual centre.

Part of Chambers’s extravagant description of Chinese gardens was questioned by his contemporaries. Supported by popular lore and images, however, his account of the Chinese taste for ruins seems to have been more willingly accepted. So even in 1967, Rose Macaulay, a British novelist and the author of *Pleasure of Ruins*, still cited him to suggest that ‘The Chinese . . . seem on the whole to have always

taken a view of ruins both more tranquil and more sad.<sup>15</sup> Macaulay, on the other hand, also drew evidence from a more authentic source – traditional Chinese poetry on ruins whose English translations became available after Chambers's day. She quoted, for example, the 1918 translation by Arthur Waley (1889–1966) of Cao Zhi's (182–232) lamentation on war-ruined Luoyang:

In Luoyang how still it is!  
Palaces and houses all burnt to ashes.  
Walls and fences all broken and gaping,  
Thorns and brambles shooting up to the sky.

How sad and ugly the empty moors are!  
A thousand miles without the smoke of a chimney.  
I think of the house I lived in all those years:  
I am heart-tied and cannot speak.<sup>16</sup>

By quoting this and similar poems, Macaulay shifts her focus from ruins as a type of garden architecture to ruins as poetic stimulus and imagery, which defines the poetic genre *huaigu*. To my knowledge, a comprehensive history of *huaigu* has not been attempted; but this history must at least comprise four crucial phases: the emergence of the poetic sensibility of *huaigu* during the Han (206 BC–AD 220),<sup>17</sup> the formation of the poetic genre *huaigu* during the Wei-Jin period (220–420),<sup>18</sup> the popularity of *huaigu* poems during the Tang (618–907),<sup>19</sup> and the continuing imitation and proliferation of *huaigu* poems throughout later periods. The significance of *huaigu* poetry is not limited to literature because it typifies a general aesthetic experience: looking at (or thinking about) a ruined city, an abandoned palace, or a silent 'void' left by historical erasure, one feels that one is confronting the past, both intimately linked with it and hopelessly separated from it. *Huaigu* sentiment is therefore necessarily stimulated by historical traces and erasure, and is defined by an introspective gaze, a gap of time, effacement and memory. 'The master figure there is synecdoche,' writes Stephen Owen, 'the part that leads to the whole, some enduring fragment from which we try to reconstruct the lost totality.'<sup>20</sup> But as we will learn later, *huaigu* sentiment does not always respond to



<sup>9</sup> William Chambers,  
Chinese pagoda in Kew  
Gardens, 1762.

fragmentary ruins, but can also arise from the poet's realization of a vanished historical reality.

The long history of *huai* poetry and its profound impact on Chinese culture easily leads to the belief that similar sentiment and subjects must also exist in other 'sister arts', including painting and architecture, and indeed many people, both in China and in the West, hold this unexamined hypothesis. It is true that parallel representations of ruins in different art forms are found in certain historical situations, for example in eighteenth-century British poetry, painting and architecture. The abundant ruin images created by various European painters over several hundred years have also allowed art historians to contextualize the eighteenth-century examples in a historical process and to connect them with architectural and literary expressions.<sup>21</sup> My unsuccessful survey of ruin images in Chinese painting, however, challenges the universality of this European phenomenon and reorientates a study of ruins in Chinese art in two essential ways. First, because pictorial portrayals of architectural ruins are virtually absent in traditional Chinese painting, we need to uncover other kinds of visual expressions embodying the *huai* experience. Second, because poetry and painting employ different idioms to convey such experience, we need to discard a rigid parallelism between these two art forms, and to rethink their relationship based on a close observation of actual examples. Following these two methodological proposals, the rest of the first part of this chapter discusses the concept and representation of ruins in premodern China beyond a conventional pictorial or illustrative mode.

## *Qiu and Xu: Erasure and Remembrance*

The oldest term used for ruins in the Chinese language is *qiu*. Originally meaning a natural mound or hillock, it also came to denote the ruined site of a village, town or dynastic capital. We do not know when this second usage began. In a divinatory inscription of the thirteenth century BC excavated from the last Shang capital at Anyang, Henan, a royal diviner named Gu asked ancestral spirits if a tripod would come out of a *qiu*.<sup>22</sup> Presumably the tripod was a buried treasure from the past, so the mound that concealed it was likely the remains of an ancient temple or palace. This implication of *qiu* became explicit in Eastern Zhou literature, as evinced by 'A Lament for Ying' (*Ai Ying*), a moving poem that Qu Yuan (340–278 BC) composed before casting himself into the Miluo River:

I climbed a steep islet's height and looked into the distance,  
 Thinking to ease the sorrow in my heart:  
 But only grief came for the rich, blest River Kingdom,  
 For its cherished ways, now lost beyond recall.  
 I may not traverse the surging waves to return there,  
 Or cross south over the watery waste to reach it.  
 To think that its tall palaces [*xia*] should be mounds of rubble [*qiu*],  
 And its two East Gates a wilderness of woods!<sup>23</sup>

Traditional commentary interprets this poem as Qu Yuan's response to the fall of his native country Chu, whose capital Ying was captured by the Qin general Bai Qi in 278 BC. But as David Hawkes has pointed out, the poem itself does not betray a sense of instant calamity; nor does it describe a panic-stricken exodus of refugees from a sacked city.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the stanza cited above seems to embody a distant, retrospective gaze, because to Qu Yuan the former capital must have deteriorated into wasteland. Perhaps as scholars have suggested, Ying was destroyed more than once and the poet was referring to an earlier destruction.<sup>25</sup> In any event, the poem is invaluable to the current study in defining *qiu* as the remains of former palatial halls, and by extension providing us with the first Chinese example of 'ruin poetry'. (As we will see, a fine line should be drawn between ruin poetry and *huaiyu* poetry; the latter may have emerged earlier.) It is a ruin poem because the former palaces were not entirely gone: although the timber superstructures had disappeared due to their vulnerability to fire and natural elements, the foundations remained in the form of 'mounds of rubble'.

Travelling to China's historical sites today, one can still see many such ancient foundations from Qu Yuan's time and beyond (illus. 10). We find plenty of literary records and pictorial images glorifying the brilliant buildings that once stood on top of them. Often imposing terrace pavilions called *tai*, these monumental buildings were constructed as supreme symbols of political power.<sup>26</sup> In the eastern part of Eastern Zhou China, for example, when Duke Jing of Qi built Boqi Tai and surveyed his capital from the top of it, he sighed with satisfaction: 'Wonderful! Who in the future will be able to possess a tall building like this!'<sup>27</sup> In the north, King Wuling of Zhao constructed an extremely tall *tai* that allowed him to overlook the neighbouring state of Qi.<sup>28</sup> In the south, a Chu king ordered an imposing platform made at the site of an interstate conference. Struck with awe, his guests agreed to join the Chu alliance and made a vow: 'How lofty this platform is! How deep the mind it shows! If I betray my words, let me be punished by other states in this alliance.'<sup>29</sup> In the west, Duke Miu of Qin tried to intimidate

foreign envoys by showing them his palaces, which ‘even spirits could not build without exhausting their strength’.<sup>30</sup> None of these buildings still exist, but their foundations, as well as those left by later dynasties, provide material evidence for the historical record.<sup>31</sup> Covered with weeds and shrubs, they rise from fields against the empty sky. Although the height and volume of these foundations have undoubtedly shrunk during the past 2,000 years, what one sees today is basically what Qu Yuan described in the third century BC: ‘To think that its tall palaces should be mounds of rubble, / And its two East Gates a wilderness of woods!’

A *qiū*, therefore, indicates the location of a former building but does not preserve its shape. As such, the term raises important questions concerning the concept of ruins in ancient China. In a typical Romantic vision, ruins are emblematic of both transience and persistence over time – two complementary dimensions that together define the materiality of a ruin. In other words, a classic or Gothic ruin has to be eroded enough and also preserved enough to produce pleasing Picturesque imagery and a desirable mix of emotions in the beholder. To Thomas Whately (*d.* 1772), it is exactly this kind of ruination that makes Tintern Abbey a ‘perfect ruin’: ‘In the ruins of Tintern Abbey, the original construction of the church is perfectly marked; and it is principally from this circumstance that they are celebrated as a subject of curiosity and contemplation.’<sup>32</sup> Numerous paintings, drawings and photographs of this famous ruin support Whately’s observation (illus. 11). ‘The “ideal” ruin’, Inger Sigrun Brodey thus concludes,

10 Remains of the Jique Palace, Xianyang, Shaanxi province, Warring States period, 3rd century BC.



must be grand enough in stature to suggest what it once *was*, and, at the same time, decayed enough to show that it no longer is; grand enough to suggest a worthwhile conquest, yet decayed enough to quell any doubts about who conquers. Ruins can emphasize either permanence – that is, the enduring presence of the past and its still-unextinguished glory – or the *impermanence* of the present and, indeed, of all earthly glories. For this reason, they are capable of evoking emotions as varied as national pride, melancholy, nostalgia, or even utopian ambitions.<sup>33</sup>

It is crucial to realize, however, that such ruminations on the transience and endurance of ruins are all based on a simple fact, that the original classical and Gothic buildings were all made of stone, as were their surviving parts. Only because of this fact could a ruin in Europe, as we read in Pausanias' *Guide to Greece* of the second century AD, acquire a particular sense of monumentality: its solemn, powerful presence not only alludes to an intact monument from the past, but also makes its damaged present fascinating and fearsome.<sup>34</sup> For the same reason, a ruined Greek temple or Gothic church, even when reduced to fragments, can signify the passage of time with its broken and worn surfaces. Differing from the awesome image of half-destroyed Tintern Abbey beheld from afar, minute signs of erosion on stone, produced not by human hand but by nature, demand close reading (illus. 12): ‘The lines are so softened by decay or interrupted by demolition; the stiffness of design is so relieved by the accidental intrusion of springing shrubs and pendant weeds.’<sup>35</sup>

These two views of stone ruins, one focusing on its overall image and the other on its minute details, together redefine a half-destroyed building (or its copy) as an aesthetic object in Romantic art and literature. At the same time, these two views also imply that a building made of wood or straw can never become such an aesthetic object because of the ephemerality of its material. In other words, the materiality of this second kind of building allows no opportunity to generate ‘ruin time’, a concept defined by Florence Hetzler as the ‘maturation process’ of a stone ruin.<sup>36</sup> All this sounds logical in the context of European Picturesque aesthetics. The question is how the ancient

<sup>11</sup> J.M.W. Turner, *Tintern Abbey*, 1794, pencil and watercolour.



12 Temple of Poseidon, Paestum, Italy, 5th century BC.



Chinese, who did not pursue large stone monuments until the first century AD, were still able to develop notions of ruins as we have found in poems like 'A Lament for Ying'.<sup>37</sup> My answer is that this is because the ancient Chinese perception of ruins did not rely on the two views of ruins in the European Picturesque tradition, but instead depended on the notion of erasure: frequently it was the 'void' left by a destroyed timber structure that stimulated a lament for the past.

Significantly, in addition to a natural or artificial mound, *qiu* has a second meaning. An entry in the earliest Chinese encyclopedia *Guang ya* reads: 'Qiu means emptiness' (*Qiu, kong ye*).<sup>38</sup> Compound words with *qiu* in traditional literature, for example, denote 'empty town' (*qiu cheng*), 'wilderness' (*qiu huang*) and 'void' (*qiu xu*).<sup>39</sup> It is also interesting that the character for *qiu* in Shang divinatory inscriptions is written as ䷂ or ䷃, pictographs consisting of two vertical forms (mounds or hillocks?) divided by a gap. The Chinese scholar Zhang Lidong has suggested that the pictograph may have originated from the image of the remaining walls of a ruined city, and has supported this hypothesis with ancient place names such Bo Qiu, the site of an early Shang capital.<sup>40</sup> Regardless of how

reliable this interpretation is, the two significations of *qiu* – architectural remains and emptiness – together construct an indigenous concept of ruins in China.

This is an enduring concept, because we find it underlying images created nearly 2,000 years later, as exemplified by two ‘memory paintings’ by Shitao (1642–1707).<sup>41</sup> A descendant of the Ming royal house, which surrendered its power to the Qing in 1644, Shitao developed a complex psychology toward the past, both longing for it and hoping to escape its grip.<sup>42</sup> The two paintings in question belong to two albums he painted in the last years of the 1690s, both depicting his earlier journeys around Jinling (present-day Nanjing), the first Ming capital and Shitao’s residence from 1680 to 1687. The first image, from the album *Reminiscences of Qinhuai River*, has an unusual composition even among Shitao’s own works: without a larger landscape setting and human traces, the leaf is filled with the image of a desolate *qiu*: a mound of rubble on which brambles grow (illus. 13). Jonathan Hay has connected this image with contemporary descriptions of ruins.<sup>43</sup> One such description comments on the Hall of the Great Foundation (Daben tang), a Ming palace whose name Shitao adopted as one of his many *hao* (studio names). After recalling its history and glorious days, the seventeenth-century commentator Yu Binshuo turned to the building’s present condition: ‘Today the former palace is planted with millet. Seekers after history pass through the ruins, the misty waste spotted with white dew, squirrels amid the clumps of brambles. With a single breath, they all sigh.’<sup>44</sup> Readers cannot miss the similarity between these words and Qu Yuan’s ‘Lament for Ying’.

The second image, less politically orientated but authenticated as a ‘ruin image’ by Shitao himself, depicts his journey to the Flower-Rain Terrace (Yuhua tai) when he lived in Nanjing (illus. 14). According to local lore, the place became a popular scenic spot beginning in the third century and gained its name in 507 from a miraculous event: when the eminent monk Yunguang constructed a platform and lectured on Buddhist Dharma there, flowers fell from the sky. In the album leaf, Shitao has painted himself standing on a large, cone-shaped earthen mound, whose strange form, soft contour and unnatural bareness contrast with



13 Shitao, ‘An Overgrown Hillock’, from *Reminiscences of Qinhuai River*, album of 8 leaves, 1695–6, ink and light colour on paper.



14 Shitao, 'Flower-Rain Terrace,' from *Eight Views of the South*, album of 8 leaves, late 1690s, ink and light colour on paper.

the surrounding landscape. Clearly the painter intends to tell the viewer that it is a man-made mound, not a natural rocky hill. This impression is supported by the poem Shitao has inscribed on the page, which begins with these two lines: 'Outside the city walls stands an ancient terrace in the wilderness. / Today's folks still tell the legend of the flower rain.' He also appended a narrative account to the poem: 'The Flower-Rain Terrace: When I was living in the Qin-Huai region [south of Nanjing], in the evening at sunset, I often climbed this terrace [*tai*] after people had left. Sometimes I also painted it after chanting poems.' The painting shows that the 'platform' he climbed is a naked earthen hill devoid of human construction; it is its barren desolation – its emptiness – that evokes the painter/poet's remembrance of the past.

As these paintings demonstrate, *qiu* as a particular concept and image of ruins never disappeared in traditional China. An important change, however, took place during the Eastern Zhou and significantly enriched people's imagination of the ruin: during this period, another character, *xu*, gained currency to become the main term for ruins. The reasons for this development are complex, but a main

factor must be the different root meanings of the two characters: although their dictionary definitions overlap and the two terms are often used interchangeably, *qiu* means, first of all, a concrete topographic feature, whereas *xu*'s primary significance is 'emptiness'.<sup>45</sup> The introduction of *xu* as a second – and eventually the main – term for ruins, therefore, signifies a subtle shift in the conception and perception of ruins. We can describe this shift as an 'internalizing' process, through which representations of ruins were increasingly freed from external signs, and also increasingly relied on the observer's subjective response to particular places.

Not coincidentally, when *xu* emerged as a major term for ruins during the Eastern Zhou, there also appeared a new type of place name that conjoined the term with legendary sovereigns and earlier dynasties. For example, Eastern Zhou texts record the *xu* of Taihao, Shaohao, Zhuanxu and Zhurong, as well as Xia *xu* (ruins of the Xia dynasty) and Yin *xu* (ruins of the Shang). In pertaining to a perished polity, each place was also connected to the present. The *Zuo Tradition of the Spring and Autumn Annals*, for example, reports that the current states of Song, Chen, Zheng and Wei were located at the ruins of Dachen, Taihao, Zhurong and Zhuanxu.<sup>46</sup> The same text also recalls that when King Cheng of Zhou established local states to 'shield' the central capital, he sent some powerful lords and tribes to Xia *xu*, Yin *xu* and Shaohao *zhi xu* (the *xu* of Shaohao).<sup>47</sup> These *xu*-places, which then became important loci of historical remembrance, attracted people who were searching for knowledge about the past. Confucius, for one, visited the *xu* of Zhuanxu and Zhurong when he travelled to the states of Wei and Zheng in central China.<sup>48</sup> This significance of *xu* has continued to the modern period: from 1928 to 1937 a series of excavations by the Academia Sinica at Yin *xu* (Ruins of Yin) unearthed abundant archaeological remains, including large palace foundations, royal tombs and divinatory inscriptions, identifying the site as the last capital of the Shang dynasty.<sup>49</sup> More recently, Chinese archaeologists excavated Yu *xu* (Ruins of Yu the Great) at Bangbu, Anhui; the initial findings in 2007 dated the site to the late Longshan period, roughly from 2350 to 2190 BC.<sup>50</sup>

No picture from the Shang or Zhou dynasty allows us to visualize these *xu* in early China. Fortunately, some old poems offer a clear image of these spaces. Whereas a *qiu* was distinguished, as we have read in Qu Yuan's 'Lament for Ying', by a 'mound of rubble', a *xu* was more often envisioned as a vast, empty space where the capital of a former dynasty once stood. As an empty site, a *xu* generated visitors' mental and emotional responses not through tangible remains: it is the *site*, not dilapidated structures or surviving platforms, that crystallizes historical memory. This, in turn, means that a *xu* is not identified by external signs but is given a subjective reality: it is the visitor's recognition of a place as a *xu* that stimulates

emotion and thought. The ancient worthy Zhou Feng thus teaches in *The Book of Rites* (*Li ji*): ‘Ruins [xū] and graves express no mournfulness; it is people who mourn amidst them.’<sup>51</sup>

This particular conception of ruins underlies two early examples of *huagu* poetry. The first, recorded by Sima Qian in the *Shi ji* (Historical records), was supposedly written by Jizi, a former prince of the perished Shang dynasty. According to Sima, when Jizi passed the Ruins of Yin at the beginning of the Zhou, he was ‘moved by the destruction of the [Shang] palaces, where the grain and millet now grew. Distressed, he could neither cry out nor weep like a woman. He thus composed the poem “Ears of Wheat” [“Mai xiu”] to express his inner feeling.’<sup>52</sup> The poem does not mention any abandoned buildings. The only image it evokes is a field of wheat and millet, which conceal the old capital under their lush leaves. The same imagery is also employed in ‘There the Millet is Lush’ (*Shu li*), a poem in the *Book of Songs*:

There the millet is lush,  
There the grain is sprouting.  
I walk here with slow, slow steps,  
My heart shaken within me.  
Those who know me  
Would say my heart is grieved;  
Those who know me not  
Would ask what I seek here.  
Gray and everlasting Heaven –  
What man did this?<sup>53</sup>

This stanza is repeated twice more; only the second and fourth lines change: the millet ears and then produces seeds, while the traveller’s grief grows darker and deeper. Again, the poem identifies neither the place nor the reason for the traveller’s sorrow, which are provided later by the Han commentator Mao Heng in a preface:

‘There the Millet is Lush’ is a lament for the Zhou ancestral capital. A great officer of Zhou was passing the former ancestral temples and palace buildings, which were entirely covered by millet. He lamented the collapse of the Zhou royal house and lingered there, unable to bring himself to leave.<sup>54</sup>

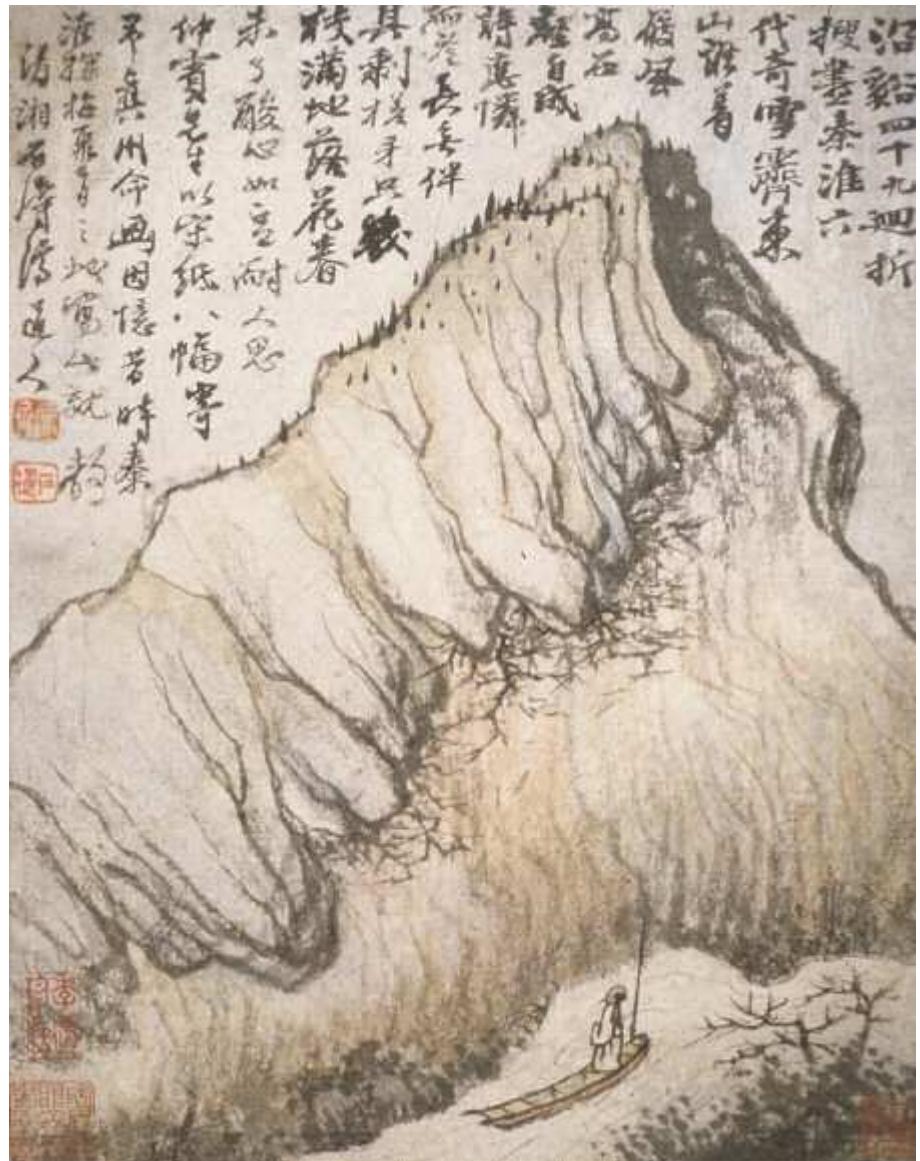
Owen suggests that in providing this exegesis, Mao Heng ‘discovered a *huaigu*’ in this poem.<sup>55</sup> To Mao, the grief of the traveller must have been caused by a direct encounter with the past: what triggered his emotional response was not the field of millet, but the buried Zhou capital, which was absent to view. His discovery of a *huaigu* in the poem thus amounts to identifying the field of millet as a *xu* – the site of ‘the former ancestral temples and palace buildings, which were entirely covered by millet’. In other words, the Han commentator spelled out the (presumed) unspoken message in the poem, as his ‘preface’ constructs a narrative framework to specify the occasion of the poetic expression. Sima Qian supplied a similar framework to ‘Ears of Wheat’: only because of his explanation can we identify the poem as a *huaigu* lamenting the ruined Shang capital.

We find a parallel situation in art: many traditional Chinese paintings depict a traveller in a landscape. The scenes are often charged with intense emotion (illus. 15), but both the traveller and the landscape remain anonymous unless a narrative framework is given. In the latter case, although the artist still rejects a literal portrayal of physical ruins, he identifies the place in the painting as a *xu* and the painting as an expression of *huaigu*. We can again find a typical example of this type of ruin representation in Shitao’s *Reminiscences of Qinhuai River* (illus. 16). Scholars agree that Shitao created this album in 1695–6, for a friend with whom he had travelled along the Qinhuai River near Nanjing a decade earlier.<sup>56</sup> It is uncertain whether the album’s eight leaves depict a continuous journey, but from Shitao’s inscription on the last leaf we know that this particular scene at least conveys the artist’s reminiscences of an earlier pleasure trip, and that the purpose of that trip was *fanggu* and *huaigu* – searching for and contemplating ancient sites. In this case, Shitao and his friend were searching for and contemplating sites of the Six Dynasties (220–589), which established their capitals in Nanjing. We can thus borrow Owen’s formula to describe the painting’s theme as ‘the rememberer being remembered’:<sup>57</sup> the album is Shitao’s reminiscence of one of his previous *huaigu* experiences. As the artist recounts:



15 Wang Meng, *Dwelling in the Qingpian Mountains*, hanging scroll, 1366, ink and light colour on paper.

Along the river with its forty-nine bends,  
 I search for every marvel of the Six Dynasties.  
 Who has walked in wooden clogs after the snow has cleared on the East  
 Mountain?  
 Who has composed poems while the wind roars through the west chasm?  
 Please have sympathy with the lonely plum tree,  
 A few of its bare branches are left;  
 Its flowers have all fallen even before Spring is over . . .<sup>58</sup>



16 Shitao, 'Searching for Plum Blossom along the Qinhuai River', from *Reminiscences of Qinhuai River*, album of 8 leaves, 1695–6, ink and light colour on paper.

Like ‘Ears of Wheat’ and ‘There the Millet is Lush’, this poem does not describe any physical remains from the Six Dynasties, and only uses a plant (in this case the plum flowers) to allude to the passage of time. The scene accompanying this poem employs the same strategy but forges a powerful encounter between the painter/poet with an empty *xu*. In the picture, Shitao stands in a tiny boat on a winding river, looking upwards. Responding to his gaze, the mountain above him seems to suddenly bend over toward him, forming a massive cliff like an enormous lobed overhang, on which bony plum trees grow downward. Far more than a straightforward record of his visit to an ancient site, this painting conveys the sense of a spontaneous ‘spiritual meeting’ (*shen hui*) between the artist and the ancients, who had once wandered there and composed their own poems 1,000 years before.

## The Stele and Withered Trees: Painting and Poetry on ‘Lamenting the Past’

### *Reading the Stele*

‘Ears of Wheat’ and ‘There the Millet is Lush’ connect a destroyed capital (*xu*) with the activity of ‘wandering’. But Qu Yuan’s ‘Lament for Ying’ implies a contemplating gaze: it is the ‘mounds of rubble’ (*qiu*) left by former palaces that concentrate the poet’s eyes and mind. This ‘ruin poem’ thus has a closer affinity with later *huaigu* poetry, whose most important feature is the coupling of trace and gaze. From the third century on, poets routinely and openly spoke about their ‘looking at’ a ruin. Thus Cao Zhi started his lamentation on the abandoned city of Luoyang: ‘On foot I climbed up Beimang’s slopes / and gazed afar on Luoyang’s hills.’<sup>59</sup> Bao Zhao (420–589), on the other hand, ends his ‘Rhapsody on a Ruined City’ (*Wucheng fu*) with these lines:

For this ruined city,  
I play the lute and sing;  
‘As the north wind hurried on,  
    the battlements freeze.  
They tower over the plain  
    where there are neither roads nor field-paths.  
For a thousand years and a myriad generations,  
I shall watch you to the end in silence.’<sup>60</sup>

No traditional Chinese painting depicts a destroyed city or a man looking at a destroyed city. The connection between *huaigu* poetry and *huaigu* painting is forged on a more abstract level. Instead of focusing on either the subject or object of *huaigu*, an artist is fascinated by the ‘meeting’ of the two. What he tries to capture is the powerful feeling of encountering the past face to face at a particular moment. In the next section I will discuss several types of ‘traces’ (*ji*), which index different temporalities and signify different relationships between people and historical ruins. This section focuses on ‘lamenting the past’ as a general theme of pictorial representation. A primary feature of such representations is their non-specificity: although a painting may be related to an event and/or location, its purpose is not to tell a particular story or to depict a specific place, but instead to evoke ‘the tension between transience and continuity, between destruction and survival, [and] between disappearance and visibility’ – poetic implications of *huaigu* that Hans Frankel discovered in reading Chen Zi’ang’s (661–702) poem:

Feeding my horse I look down on the wild land,  
 Climbing high I gaze at the old capital.  
 I lament at the Stele for Shedding Tears  
 And think of the Sleeping Dragon’s design.  
 From cities and towns in the distance I make out Chu,  
 Mountains and rivers half enter Wu.  
 Hills and peaks stand out by themselves,  
 How many worthies and sages have perished!  
 Dark mist cuts across the plateau,  
 The tower at the ford stands solitary in the evening air.  
 Who knows the traveler of ten thousand miles,  
 Cherishing the past as he paces to and fro?<sup>61</sup>

Here we can turn to the painting *Reading the Stele* (*Dubei tu*, also known as *Dubei keshi tu* or *Reading the Stele by Pitted Rock*), perhaps the most powerful work that a Chinese artist has created to realize the general artistic goal of *huaigu* (illus. 17). Measuring 126.3 cm tall and 104.9 cm wide, this fairly large painting weaves a variety of images into a tightly interrelated cluster in the foreground. Near the centre of the composition stands a large stone stele, half surrounded by gnarled trees and layered rocks. A traveller on a donkey has stopped in front of the stele, silently looking at the imposing monument left in the wilderness. (Judging from the distance between the traveller and the stele, it is quite impossible that he is

actually ‘reading’ the text engraved on the monument, as implied in the painting’s title and accepted by previous interpreters.) A servant boy is holding the reins of the donkey while looking at his master intently. The painting is at once still and dynamic. Nothing is moving in the frozen, wintry landscape, and the two men are motionless and seemingly surrounded by deadly silence. At the same time, the painting is disturbingly alive, animated by the shifting ink tones on its surface, the wild, almost grotesque gestures of the withered trees, the layered, wave-like rocks, and the sculpted turtle which, while supporting the stele on its back, curiously raises its head toward the visitor.

The work is traditionally attributed to the tenth-century master Li Cheng (919–967), but most historians of Chinese painting date it to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The attribution to Li Cheng, however, is not entirely meaningless: not only do the ‘dragon claw’ trees show a typical Li Cheng style, but we also find in the twelfth-century *Xuanhe Painting Catalogue* (*Xuanhe huapu*) that two paintings by Li with the same title existed in Emperor Huizong’s (reg 1100–25) collection.<sup>62</sup> There have been different opinions about the painting’s subject-matter: traditionally it was considered an illustration of an episode in the life of Cao Cao (155–220). Travelling with his clever assistant Yan Xiu by the Fen River in Zhejiang, this powerful warlord saw a stele dedicated to the famous ‘filial daughter’ Cao E, who sacrificed herself in 143 to retrieve her father’s body from a river.<sup>63</sup> But Peter Sturman has argued that the stone tablet in the painting is actually the Stele for Shedding Tears (Duolei bei) mentioned in Chen Zi’ang’s poem cited above.<sup>64</sup> Dedicated to Yang Hu (221–278) on Mt Xian at Xiangyang, this stele was one of the most famous memorials in traditional China and has inspired countless *huagu* poems.<sup>65</sup> One of these poems was written by Meng Haoran (689–740) of the Tang, whom Sturman identifies as the traveller in *Reading the Stele* and some other tenth- to twelfth-century paintings. Meng’s poem reads:

In human affairs there is succession and loss;  
 Men come and go, forming present and past.  
 Rivers and hills keep traces of their glory,  
 And our generation too climbs here for the view.  
 The waters sink, run shallow through Fishweir;  
 When the sky is cold, you see deep into Yunmeng Marsh.  
 Yang Hu’s stele is still here:  
 Done reading, tears soak our robes.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Attributed to Li Cheng, *Reading the Stele*, hanging scroll, possibly 13th–14th-century copy of an earlier work, ink on silk.



This poem, especially its last two lines, helps Sturman to link the painting to both the general *huagu* tradition and to a specific historical instance:

Reading stelae is contemplation of the past, *diaogu*, reflection on the passage of history, the actions of great people of former times, and by consequence, reflection on one's own place in history. It was a pattern that was repeated over and over again on Mount Xian, as those who passed through Xiangyang were drawn to Yang Hu's stele.<sup>67</sup>

As inspiring as this is, a careful examination of *Reading the Stele* makes one wonder whether this painting is indeed a narrative work or a portrait – whether it is the painter's *intention* to represent a particular object (the Stele for Shedding Tears), a particular figure (Meng Haoran as the donkey rider) and a specific event (Meng Haoran visiting the tablet). To me, it seems that the painter had the opposite urge, to forge a 'nameless' stele, and thus intentionally left its surface blank. The absence of an inscription must be a deliberate design because the decorative details on the stele's dragon crown and tortoise base are painstakingly depicted (illus. 18). What the painting represents, therefore, is unlikely to be a particular person or event, but is more likely a general situation, in which a traveller feels that he is encountering an anonymous past.<sup>68</sup>

We find a parallel situation in Chen Zi'ang's and Meng Haoran's *huagu* poems cited above: although both poets (supposedly) composed the poems on Mt Xian, their purpose was not to describe their trips or the stele per se, but to use the occasion to speak about the fundamental laws of history and human existence. Thus Chen Zi'ang sighed: 'Hills and peaks stand out by themselves, / How many worthies and sages have perished!' And Meng Haoran echoed: 'In human affairs there is succession and loss; / Men come and go, forming present and past.' *Reading the Stele* delivers a similarly general, abstract message. But following a basic convention of Chinese landscape painting, the painter eliminated *all* identifiable features of an actual place.<sup>69</sup> This convention finds its first clear theoretical expression in the writing of Wang Wei (415–443):

When the ancients made paintings, it was not in order to plan the boundaries of cities or differentiate the locale of provinces, to make mountains and plateaus or delineate the watercourses. What is founded in form is fused with spirit, and what activates movement is the mind. If the spirit cannot be seen, then that wherein it lodges will not move. If eyesight is limited, then what is seen will not be complete.<sup>70</sup>



18 Attributed to Li Cheng, detail of the stele from *Reading the Stele*.

By depicting an empty stele, *Reading the Stele* erases the work's historical specificity and gives the viewer a wider mental space to contemplate the ancients.

### *The Stele and Withered Trees*

If you ask historians of Chinese art about 'ruin images' in traditional Chinese painting, most of them will refer you to *Reading the Stele*. My preceding discussion justifies this response because the painting indeed encapsulates the typical occasion and sentiment of *huaigu*, a Chinese poetic tradition that seems to share many elements with European Romantic poetry on ruins. The problem, however, is that although *every* interpreter of *Reading the Stele*, including this author, immediately takes the stele in the painting as an ancient relic, a closer observation reveals that it is not a ruin in a conventional sense, since it does not betray the passage of time. On a special trip to the Osaka Museum of Art to study this work, I found that the image of the stele does not offer any trace of wear or damage, and its carved decoration is delineated with smooth lines in impeccable precision. We may insist that this painting is the quintessential 'ruin picture' from pre modern China, but to sustain this interpretation we must explore a different visual logic in representing the encounter with the past.

One way to understand this logic is to compare this painting with examples of European representations of ruins. A painting by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), *Churchyard in the Snow* (illus. 19), jumps to mind because of some striking similarities between it and the Chinese work, especially in the general feeling of desolation and loneliness. But there are two major differences: first, Friedrich paints human figures as part of the ruins, so that their black shapes are confused with grave markers.<sup>71</sup> But in *Reading the Stele*, the traveller appears as an observer and contemplator, extending our gaze to the stele (see illus. 17).<sup>72</sup> Second, a ruined church, as an 'anti-icon', dominates Friedrich's painting and is surrounded by grotesque trees, which seem to have been destroyed by a tempest. In the Chinese case, as mentioned earlier, the stele shows no trace of damage; its physical integrity contrasts sharply with the old and withered trees next to it.

Underlying these differences are two divergent approaches to depicting ruins. All images in Friedrich's painting – buildings and trees, figures and tomb stones, clouds and mist – are intrinsic elements of an all-encompassing, ruined world. The painting is a dramatized stage scene prepared for an external audience. Images in *Reading the Stele*, on the other hand, belong to three types of different signs: the traveller as an internal viewer; the stele as the object of his gaze and a symbol of the past; and the withered trees constituting a natural environment

while heightening the sense of devastation and distress. Each of these three images – the traveller, the stele and the old trees – is associated with a separate iconographic tradition in Chinese art and literature. Together they constitute a semiotic network in a *huaigu* painting that represents the theme of ‘encountering the past’. When discussing *qiu* and *xu* I noted a persistent connection between a traveller and a ruined site. The stele and withered trees are the subjects of this section.

The images that betray the passage of time are not the manufactured stele, but the old trees whose damaged forms stress physical hardship (see illus. 18). Thus the stele, though rich in symbolism, only denotes the past but does not represent it. It is the trees that are ‘ruinous’, that, in Osvald Sirén’s words, ‘reflect the incessant struggle of cosmic forces’:

[They] bend and writhe like fettered dragons. Their twisting branches, which seem to end in sharp gigantic claws, stretch out against the empty sky as if seeking some support in their struggle against age, decay and immobility. The apparent movement in the tortured shapes here releases the silent pathos inherent in so many of the painter’s conceptions.<sup>73</sup>

The different images and sensibility of the stele and the trees suggest their divergent roles in a *huaigu* painting. Their chief difference, I believe, lies in their



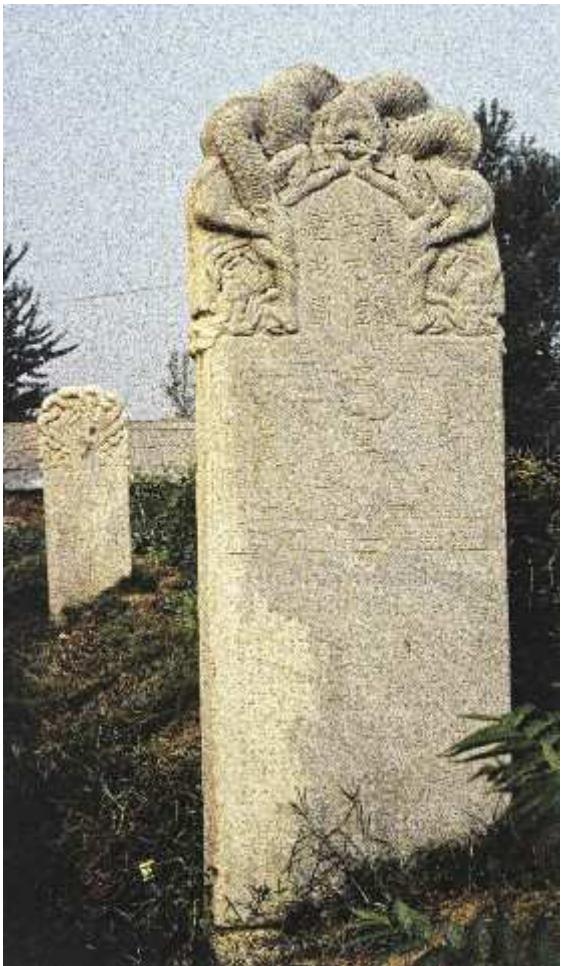
19 Caspar David Friedrich, *Churchyard in the Snow*, 1817–19, oil on canvas.

respective associations with the two essential aspects of the past: history and memory. These two concepts are examined by Pierre Nora in an important article:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism.<sup>74</sup>

From its beginning, the stele, or *bei*, was a chief means in Chinese culture for commemoration and standardization (illus. 20). Established for an individual, it commemorated a man's meritorious conduct in public service or, more frequently, bore a concise biography composed as the 'last words' about a person from a posthumous point of view.<sup>75</sup> Erected by the government, it issued official, authoritative versions of Confucian classics or recorded events of extraordinary historical significance. In short, the stele defined a legitimate site where a *consensual history* was constructed for and presented to the public. When a later historian looked back at the past, it is natural that the stele would serve as a major source of historical knowledge; its inscription would provide evidence for reconstructing obscured events of a bygone era.

Such historical reconstruction, as an intellectual exercise, developed into an important branch of historiography in the Northern Song. The development of this scholarship, known as *jin shi xue* or the 'study of metal and stone', has been a major subject of scholarly attention.<sup>76</sup> Some recent discussions have expanded the existing scholarship by focusing on the form and organization of antique collections, which must have reflected the collectors' conception of the past and also influenced their historical interpretations.<sup>77</sup> This aspect of Song antiquarianism is especially important for understanding the contemporary



20 Abandoned stone steles at Yixian, Hebei province, Ming dynasty (1368–1644).

notion of the stele, because this object, though valued by antiquarians, was not collected like ancient bronzes, jades, paintings or books. What were actually collected were the engraved texts (and later, the engraved pictorial images) that directly contained historical information. A stele was thus necessarily transformed into ink rubbings – a material form analogous to a printed text or a portable painting (illus. 21). Northern Song records mention rubbings as important commercial items.<sup>78</sup> In the Southern Song, according to the *Qingbo Miscellaneous Records* (*Qingbo zazhi*), rubbings of ancient steles were in great demand and were sold by travelling merchants in places south of the Yangzi River at high prices.<sup>79</sup> Through this and other channels antiquarians could build huge collections of rubbings of ancient inscriptions. It is said that Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), the first person to catalogue stele inscriptions, collected some 1,000 ‘rolls’ (*juan*) of ink rubbings. His 1061 catalogue, *Record of Collecting Antiquity* (*Jigu lu*), contained his comments on more than 400 inscriptions.<sup>80</sup>

Antiquarians like Ouyang Xiu and Zhao Mingcheng (1081–1129) did visit steles *in situ*, but such visits were relatively rare, often limited to the

steles located near their travel routes or the places where they held office. Their real passion was finding rubbings of previously unknown inscriptions. Li Qingzhao (1084–1141), the wife of Zhao Mingcheng and one of the most important poets during the Song, recalled the joy of collecting such items during the early days of her marriage:

On the first and fifteenth day of every month, my husband would get a short vacation from the Academy: he would ‘pawn some clothes’ for five hundred cash and go to the market at Xiangguo Temple, where he would buy fruit and rubbings of inscriptions. When he brought these home, we would sit facing one another, rolling them out before us, examining and munching. And we thought ourselves persons of the age of Getian.<sup>81</sup>

The result of the couple's shared passion was the famous *Record of Bronze and Stone* (*Jinshi lu*), which catalogued 2,000 inscriptions in chronological order and also contained Zhao's comments on the historical information in selected inscriptions. If we apply Pierre Nora's concept of *history* to this compilation, it constitutes a written history because it is a 'reconstruction . . . [and] representation of the past' and 'an intellectual and secular production, [which] calls for analysis and criticism'.

The steles themselves were left in their original spots; but the intellectual production conducted in a scholar's studio inevitably enriched their meaning. Interestingly, while the rubbing of a stele was scrutinized for historical information in minute detail, the stele in the wilderness began to acquire the symbolism of History as a totality. It seems that its silent but monumental image gave the past a general shape and meaning – that it symbolized the *origin* of historical knowledge and hence embodied historical authority. Li Qingzhao, for one, more than once employs the image of the stele in her poems: each time this image evokes the sense of historical authority, a silent stone that has witnessed dynasties' rise and fall.<sup>82</sup> The stele was thus both idealized and abstracted. When we return to *Reading a Stele*, we find that the stele in the painting reflects the same idealization and abstraction (see illus. 17). It does not bear an inscription, so that it can be any stele and all steles. While symbolizing the past, it is nevertheless uninfluenced by time and thus transcends time.

The strong relationship between history and the stele is balanced by an equally strong relationship between memory and the withered trees. This natural image is associated with memory because, as I will explain below, although it connects the past with the present, it never lends itself to the construction of a teleological historical process.<sup>83</sup> Instead of referring to the kind of past that the stele records and celebrates, the memory associated with a withered tree has neither dates nor names, but simply a sense of natural decay, death and rebirth. Unlike stele inscriptions, which are always narrative and pedagogical, the image of a withered tree expresses in a lyric form a single, undifferentiated permanence.

Long before the Song, Chinese writers had developed an intense interest in what they called *ku shu* – a withered or lifeless tree. This interest found its first major expression in Yu Xin's (513–581) 'Poetic Disposition on Withered Trees' ('Ku shu fu').

21 Ink rubbing of the Jing Yun Stele, AD 173, found in Chongqing, Sichuan.



Stimulated by a dying locust tree in the courtyard, Yu recalled some beautiful and awe-inspiring trees in their prime, whose trunks were like sculptures created by master artists, whose flowers were like multi-coloured embroidery, and which were even bestowed with honourable titles by emperors and princes. But in time,

none of them could avoid a tragic fate: moss and fungus obscured their shape; birds and worms destroyed their appearance. Frost and dew lowered their branches; dusty winds shook their body and spirit. [This is why] a temple was dedicated to a Pale Tree [Baimu] at Donghan, and a sacrificial altar was built for a Withered Mulberry Tree [Kusang] near Xihe . . .<sup>84</sup>

Yu Xin's exposition on withered trees closely resembles a ruin poem such as Bao Zhao's 'Ruined City', in which the poet always first recalls a place's former splendour and then laments its fatal destruction. A withered tree is a particular kind of ruin, however: it is withered but not dead. This difference is best articulated by the Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi (1130–1200). In a conversation with a student curious about the 'inner character' (*xing*) of 'withered things' (*kugao zhi wu*), he explained that although a withered thing betrays no signs of life (*sheng yi*), it would be wrong to think that it has lost the 'principle of life' (*sheng li*).<sup>85</sup> In fact, according to him, the 'mind of Heaven and Earth' in regenerating themselves is best conveyed by a lonely, withered tree that struggles to be reborn, rather than myriad plants that grow luxuriantly.<sup>86</sup> Understood in this cosmological theory, the power and mystery of withered trees in Chinese painting is actually rooted in a visual and conceptual ambiguity: their ruinous forms possess at the same time an extraordinary energy and spirit.<sup>87</sup> While displaying signs of death and winter, they also offer hope for rebirth and spring. Rather than an image of finality, a withered tree pertains to a chain of perpetual transformation. Like Nora's memory, it 'remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived'. The contrast between a withered tree as a 'living ruin' and a stone stele as an 'eternal ruin' is wonderfully captured in a Song poem by Lu You (1125–1210):

Autumn wind: ten thousand trees wither;  
Spring rain: a hundred grasses grow.  
Is this really some plan of the Creator,

This flowering and fading, each season that comes?  
 Only the stone there on the hilltop,  
 Its months and years too many to count,  
 Knows nothing of the four-season round,  
 Wearing its constant colors unchanged . . .<sup>88</sup>

If withered trees still constitute an atmospheric environment in *Reading the Stele*, they become the principal subject of other Song works, including two paintings attributed to Su Shi (1037–1101, illus. 22) and some imposing hanging scrolls attributed to Li Cheng and Xu Daoning (1000–after 1066). In one of Xu's paintings, called *Old Trees* (illus. 23), five gnarled pines grow from fissures in the rocks and reach the upper edge of the picture, filling out the entire composition with their twisting and turning branches. To Max Loehr, ‘there is an air of mystery and sadness about these trees, deepened rather than lessened by the elegance of form given to their hoary shapes.’<sup>89</sup> Xu was followed by many later painters whose images of old trees aroused similar responses in the viewer. The famous Yuan dynasty artist Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322), for example, once commented on an old snow landscape depicting jackdaws flying over withered trees: ‘As I look at this painting the chill air of distant forests and piled snow is moving. The flock of circling birds has the appearance of hunger and cold, and they seem to be weeping sadly.’<sup>90</sup> The mournful feeling conveyed by these words is echoed by the European commentaries on Picturesque ruins discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Like Romantic depictions of architectural ruins,

22 Attributed to Su Shi,  
*Withered Tree and  
 Strange Rock*, 11th  
 century, ink on paper.





<sup>23</sup> Attributed to Xu Daoning, *Old Trees*, hanging scroll, 11th century, ink on silk.

old trees in Chinese paintings can register both gradual decay and sudden destruction; the Ming master Wen Zhengming (1470–1559) thus inscribed this poem on one of his ‘old tree’ paintings (illus. 24):

Crushed by snow, oppressed by frost, as  
the years and months pass,  
Branches twisted, habit bent down – its  
strength is still majestic!  
An old man remembers Du Ling’s [Du  
Fu, 712–770] sentence:  
[An ancient juniper] startles the world  
before it shows its fine grains.<sup>91</sup>

It is impossible in this short section to discuss the numerous withering trees in Song and post-Song Chinese art; readers interested in these images may consult some excellent studies related to this sub-genre of landscape art.<sup>92</sup> Here I will only discuss two groups of paintings created by Shitao, in which tree images are bestowed with an autobiographical significance, and the concept of ‘rebirth’ is given its clearest visual forms.

The first group was likely created around 1695

and 1696, when Shitao was about 55 years old. The most important image in this group is found in the last scene in a complex handscroll known as *Calligraphy and Sketches by Qingxiang* (*Qingxiang shuhua gao*).<sup>93</sup> Concluding a series of auto-biographical scenes and poems, this image shows, in Richard Vinograd’s words, ‘a withered but beatific figure, with protruding ribs and wrinkled face and neck, wearing a monk’s robe, and meditating with a blissful smile within the hollow trunk of a tree’ (illus. 25).<sup>94</sup> Next to the image Shitao inscribed in large, formal characters: ‘An old tree in the empty mountains: He sits within it for forty small-*jie* cycles.’ Following these words is a passage written in smaller characters, which ends with a rhetorical question: ‘The man in the picture – can he be called the future incarnation of Blind Abbot or not? Ha, ha!’ Since Blind Abbot (Xia zunzhe) is one of Shitao’s adopted names, we know that the meditating monk inside the old tree is a pseudo-self-portrait, representing himself 67 million years from 1696,

雪屬霜凌歲月更枝  
軋蓋僂勢崢嶸老夫記  
得杜陵語未露文章世  
已驚微雨寫寄

伯起茂才





the year he painted the image. (In Buddhist numerology, one small-*jie* cycle equals 16,798,000 years.)

Iconographically, this pseudo-self-portrait of Shitao is related to a type of Arhat (Ch. Luohan) image, invented several hundred years before by Guanxiu (832–912), a famous poet-painter who lived in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties period. Several series of Arhat paintings attributed to Guanxiu depict strange-looking monastic figures seated in deep meditation. Some of them dwell in caves while others sit beneath withered old trees; both their dried-up bodies and their landscape environment seem worn away by the passing of countless aeons (illus. 26). Scholars suspect that these images are Song copies of Guanxiu's work. An imprint that originated in the Song shows further development of this visual tradition. This is one of the famous *Five Hundred Luohans at Mt Tiantai*, completed by Lin Tinggui and Zhou Jichang in 1178 (illus. 27). The composition is roughly divided into two horizontal halves. The lower half is occupied by a group of figures in vivid clothes, including four monks and an armoured man resembling Skanda (Chi. Wei Tuo), the Dharma guardian. Some of them look upward. Following their gaze, we find a withered tree growing out of water and mist. Painted entirely in ink like the landscape, an old monk is sitting inside

previous:  
24 Wen Zhengming,  
*Cypress and Rock*, short  
handscroll, 1550, ink on  
paper.

25 Shitao, *Calligraphies  
and sketches by  
Qingxiang*, handscroll  
(detail of final section),  
1696, ink and colour on  
paper.





26 Attributed to Guanxiu, *Arhat*, hanging scroll, possibly 12th-century copy of an earlier work, ink and colour on silk.

the tree trunk in meditation. His unusual setting, as well as his protruding ribs and wrinkled face, connects the image with Shitao's painting, and in turn links Shitao's self-imagination with the idea of an Arhat – a holy man who has achieved nirvana through gaining insight into the true nature of existence.

This painting can be linked with two other works by Shitao. One of them, a double album leaf created a year earlier, again portrays a figure sitting inside a tree trunk (illus. 28). But instead of offering a close-up view of the figure, this time the painting is composed as a panoramic landscape, dominated by a luxuriant pine tree in front of cone-shaped mountain peaks. All published reproductions of the painting are too small to make out the figure's face. But he seems to have hair and a goatee and thus cannot be a monk. The cone-shaped fantastic mountain in the distance is a standard feature of a Taoist paradise.<sup>95</sup> The painting as a whole also reminds us of the legendary Master Red Pine (Chisongzi), who cultivated the Tao in the Red Pine Mountains and became an immortal. This Taoist association is clinched by Shitao's poem in the painting:

Having climbed all the peaks he makes this tree his home.  
His fluffy hair is covered with vines.  
Ask him what he has seen in the deep mountain:  
'Only birds bringing over fruits and people planting plum trees.'

The third painting is undated; but the signature Blind Abbot places it before 1697, when Shitao abandoned his Buddhist identity and formally presented himself as a Taoist. One of eight leaves in a large album, it represents what is at first sight an unremarkable mountain view, with a variety of trees growing in the mid-ground (illus. 29). The uniqueness of the painting lies in its focal image, a leafless young tree with underdeveloped



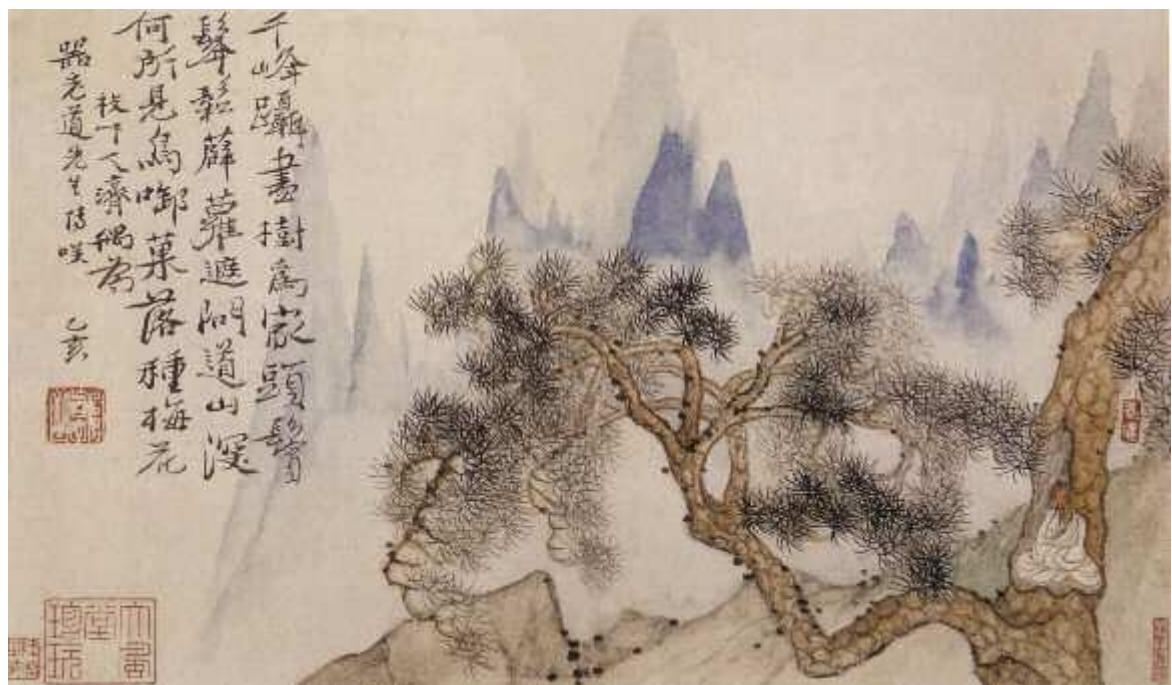
27 Lin Tinggui, *Luohan Meditating in a Tree*, hanging scroll, 1178, ink and colour on silk.

branches. Its stiff posture and striking bareness differentiates it from all other trees in the painting. With its straight trunk placed exactly on the painting's vertical axis, this humble image is given an iconic status and is connected to Shitao's inscription on the painting: 'This is my former incarnation.'

While any relationship between these three images can only be speculative, it is significant that their creation coincided with a major change in Shitao's life: after moving back to the south from the capital, he would soon abandon his long-time Buddhist identity. Relating this change to the 1696 pseudo-self-portrait, Vinograd has interpreted the image as a 'final, somewhat wistful letting-go of a long-maintained role and identity, with its spiritual attainment deferred to a possible future incarnation'.<sup>96</sup> Following this line of reasoning, we may also take the 1695 painting as evidence for his growing attraction towards Taoism. But my central argument here is not about the religious implications of these pictures, but about the role of the tree images in Shitao's conceptualization of selfhood: from the undernourished young tree to the old but energetic juniper, and from the luxuriant pine tree in a Taoist paradise to the hollow tree trunk used as a Buddhist meditation chamber, these tree images encompass millions of years in an imagined lifespan, and embrace conflicting religious and intellectual identities.

A decade later, Shitao created another group of tree images with the deepening theme of rebirth. An album dated between 1705 and 1707 is completely devoted

28 Shitao, 'Hermit within a Hollow Tree', originally part of an album of 5 leaves, 1695, ink and colour on paper.



to flowering plum trees. Never before have we seen death and rebirth represented in such a succinct and dramatic manner. Opening the album we see a plum tree broken into several pieces, but continuing to produce abundant blossoms (illus. 31). The image's visual immediacy is achieved as much from anxiety and frustration as from self-mastery and joy. The unlikely doubling of fragmentation and blossoming shifts the focus of representation from the external world to the painter's subjective response, and transposes the concept of ruins from a pictorial motif into a structural element. The wonderful poem that Shitao inscribed on the picture identifies the plum as a relic from the past, but a relic that is full of life:

Seeing an ancient plum is like meeting  
a 'leftover man' from the past –  
But who sent the plum to mirror the  
ancients?  
Having witnessed the up-and-down of  
the Six Dynasties, it hides itself in  
aloof retirement;  
Though broken, it doubles its spirit at  
the year's end.<sup>97</sup>



29 Shitao, 'This is my former incarnation', a leaf in *Landscape and Flowers*, album of 8 leaves, c. 1690s, ink on paper.

Then there is a painting from his 1707 album *Reminiscences of Jinling*, which shows a close-up of an ancient gingko tree, whose ruinous state is emphasized by the broken and hollowed trunk (illus. 30). Shitao gives this tortured form an ironic sense of monumentality, portraying it as a powerful pillar connecting heaven and earth (in Chinese, *ding tian li di*). According to his poem on the painting, the gingko grows on top of the Green Dragon Mountains near Nanjing (Jinling). During the Six Dynasties it was maimed by a bolt of lightning, but later defied death and sprouted new growth.<sup>98</sup> The idea of death and rebirth in this legend clearly fascinated the artist: while stressing the tree's physical damage, Shitao also painted new leaves growing on a lower branch and on the broken trunk itself. It is difficult to find a stronger proof of the artist's enduring desire for life and art, because when he created this image he had been seriously ill and would die before the year's end.



30 Shitao, 'Old Gingko at Mt Qinglong', from *Reminiscences of Jinling*, album of 12 leaves, 1707, ink and colour on paper.

31 Shitao, 'Plum of Baocheng', from *Plum Blossom: Poetry and Painting*, album of 8 leaves, 1705–7, ink on paper.

## Rubbing as Surrogate Ruin

In *Reading the Stele*, the stele does not bear inscriptions or show traces of damage and decay, although in reality an ancient stele is always worn, chipped and even broken. This representational convention is repeated in a number of paintings that I will discuss later (see illus. 47, 49 and 50). One explanation for this convention is that rather than depicting specific artefacts, the steles in these paintings index abstract concepts, either symbolizing a bygone dynasty or signifying History as an ontological entity transcending any particular event. But my earlier discussion has also implied another reason for this idealistic, trans-historical image of the stele: during the past 1,500 years in Chinese history there has developed a particular form for recording stele inscriptions and registering a stele's physical condition. This is the ink rubbing of a stele, which, like a stele, is also called a *bei*.<sup>99</sup> As the main role of a stele rubbing is to preserve inscribed signs and the traces of the passage of time, it provides exactly what is missing from a painted stele, and in so doing becomes the surrogate of a stele as a specific physical and historical object.

### Rubbing and Steles

The technique of rubbing gained currency in the West no earlier than the nineteenth century, when antiquarians began to use a crayon-like agent to record inscriptions and designs on tombstones. But in China, ink rubbings made from engraved words and images had appeared by at least the sixth century. During

the following centuries, this technique gradually developed into a major means of preserving ancient engravings and transmitting famous calligraphy. Rubbings were made with great care and eagerly collected, and a large body of literature on the historical value and artistic merit of these works accumulated. Commenting on the significance of rubbings for understanding traditional Chinese culture, the early twentieth-century antiquarian Zhao Ruzhen drew this analogy: ‘A gentleman not knowing or understanding rubbings is like a farmer being unable to differentiate the five grains or a carpenter being unable to use a line maker.’<sup>100</sup>

The process of making a rubbing from a stone carving consists of four basic steps.<sup>101</sup> The first is to prepare the object from which the rubbing is going to be made, including getting rid of dirt and moss on the surface, and using a pointed bamboo pick to clean the sunken lines of the engravings. The rubbing maker then fixes a piece of paper on the carving with a light, water-based adhesive, using a large brush to spread the paper smoothly, eliminating wrinkles and folds.<sup>102</sup> Once this is done, he uses smaller brushes to ‘tap’ the paper-covered surface over and over, forcing the damp paper to ‘sink’ into every sunken part, regardless of whether it is an engraved line or a fissure caused by natural decay. Ideally, the paper will completely follow the surface of the stone to reflect its minutest rise and fall. The next step is to apply ink on the paper. The rubbing maker moistens large and small ink pads with wet ink and lightly taps the paper with them, gradually accumulating layers of ink till the desired darkness is reached (illus. 32). After this step, the rubbing is immediately removed from the object. Since the paper becomes wrinkled and stiff when it dries, the last step in making a rubbing is to mount it into a presentable form, either on a scroll, in an album, or as a single sheet with a thin paper backing.

Although these four steps are mandatory, they can be done carefully or hastily. Consequently, the quality of rubbings varies enormously. As the late Qing connoisseur Ye Changchi (1849–1917) wrote in his *Talking about Stone Carvings* (*Yu shi*):

In Shaanxi and Henan one finds all sorts of temple steles and tomb tablets exposed in the wilderness. They are mottled by moss and lichen, blown by strong wind, and baked under the sun. Using rough

32 Workers in the Lintong Museum, Shaanxi, making a rubbing from an ancient stele (2000).



paper and coal-ink, several dozens of rubbings are made from one stele in a single day; the '*dang dang*' sound of pounding is non-stopping. How can a rubbing made this way be of any good? But if one washes the stele sparklingly clean and uses paper of superb quality, and if one spreads the paper smoothly on the stele with a cotton pad and lightly taps it over and over with a brush, then all the characters and carvings, even those of the most delicate kind, would be easily reflected by the rise and fall of the paper. A rubbing made this way would naturally capture the spirit of the stele.<sup>103</sup>

Ironically, although the fame of an ancient monument derived largely from the scholarly attention paid to rubbings, making these rubbings unavoidably damaged the monuments, because the continuing tapping by rubbing makers must gradually erode the engraving. Such ruination caused by human intervention has been the lament of almost every traditional connoisseur of ancient stone carvings. Because rubbing makers always focused on the inscribed characters, the area surrounding a character is often undamaged, whereas the character itself has worn away, leaving behind a smooth depression. On a rubbing made from one such worn stele, as Ye Changchi put it poetically, the words 'look like a flight of white herons or flocks of white butterflies. Even if one studies the rubbing with concentrated attention, not a single brush stroke can be distinguished and not a single character can be recognized.'<sup>104</sup>

Ye Changchi summarizes the 'seven calamities' (*qi e*) that can afflict a stele in addition to the damage caused by war, the elements and animals: floods and earthquakes; the use of steles as building materials; the practice of inscribing over old inscriptions; the polishing of old steles to prepare the surface for new texts; the destruction of steles established by one's political enemies; the making of rubbings from famous steles for friends and superiors; and the collecting of rubbings by officials and connoisseurs. Of these seven, the last two were the most serious because these were widely practised and unavoidable:

A friend came from the Region Within the Pass [the Xi'an area, where many ancient dynasties established their capitals] and told me that the loud sound of making rubbings in the Forest of Steles [Bei lin] continues day and night. How could a stele not perish [under such torture]? Although the virtuous stone [of a stele] is unyielding, how can it resist this way of making rubbings!<sup>105</sup>

Rather than a sudden event, the ‘death’ of a stele resulted from a long process. Ye Changchi left this poignant description:

At the beginning, only the edges of engraved characters become flat and blurred; the sharp edges of the original engraving are gone. When a stele is rubbed continuously day after day, it eventually becomes wordless, sometimes even losing its entire surface like a cicada shedding its skin. If one tries to read such a stele, even by shining a strong light on it, one finds nothing more than the stele’s posthumous soul [*yi bun*], lingering and faintly recognizable.<sup>106</sup>

The irony, however, is that Ye Changchi was himself a major collector of rubbings. He began his *Talking about Stone Carvings* by recalling his early interest in the subject: ‘Whenever I found a blurry rubbing, I would try hard to figure out the damaged characters; even my students secretly criticized me and openly ridiculed my obsession.’ Later, he passed the *jin shi* exam and became an official in Beijing, but his real passion remained finding rare rubbings: ‘After more than twenty years of persistent searching, my collection eventually reached more than 8,000 pieces. Handling and fondling them day and night, I forgot that I have become an old man.’<sup>107</sup> It is difficult to believe that he did not realize the contradiction between this passion for rubbings and the ‘death’ of steles brought about by making these rubbings. Rather, for someone like him who worried about both steles and rubbings, the contradiction was irreconcilable.

As testified to by Ye Changchi and other scholars, from the Song to the Qing, most ancient steles were left in their original locations. Even though an increasing number of them were removed to public places such as Confucian academies in cities and towns, these examples were hugely outnumbered by the unprotected ones. It seems unthinkable that a heavy stone stele is actually more elusive – and in a way more ephemeral – than an ink rubbing on paper. But this is true. A rubbing has a definite temporality, as its imprint attests to a single moment in the history of a stele – a particular condition of the stele that can never be repeated.<sup>108</sup> An extant rubbing is always more authentic than the stele because it has outlived the stele that existed when the rubbing was made. A rubbing connoisseur’s passion, therefore, always lies in finding an earlier and thus more truthful appearance of a stele in an old rubbing.

### *Rubbing Connoisseurship as Scholarship on Ruins*

For Ye Changchi and other traditional scholars of stone carvings, rubbings were distinguished by their material and technique, but most importantly by the quality of their imprints, which should be precise and delicate, capable of conveying the ‘spirit’ of the engraved object. As collectors and connoisseurs, they often wrote next to or even on a rubbing, commenting on its origin, history, condition and significance. Like the colophons accompanying a traditional painting, such messages would become part of a rubbing: they changed the rubbing’s physical appearance and supplied a layer of exegesis bridging the rubbing and the onlooker.<sup>109</sup> In addition to this premeditated human intervention, a rubbing can also be altered by natural elements and accidental events. An old rubbing thus often shows not only the erosion of the original stone but also damage to the rubbing itself over its long transmission.

We can use the ‘Siming’ version of the Stele of Mt Hua to study different signs that an old rubbing exhibits.<sup>110</sup> Well known to calligraphers and antique connoisseurs over the past 300 years, this rubbing is rectangular in shape, fairly large (174 cm long by 85 cm wide), and mounted on a hanging scroll. Numerous colophons are written on the silk mounting surrounding the rubbing. The rubbing itself is a ‘negative’ of the stele; the characters of the inscriptions appear in white against an inked ground (illus. 33). There are two kinds of inscriptions: those from the original stele and those added to the scroll. The original inscription, including the stele’s title and a lengthy text underneath it, tells us that the stele was erected in the eighth year of the Yanxi reign during the Eastern Han, or AD 165. Beside this second-century text, the rubbing also shows several inscriptions written in ‘standard script’ (*kai shu*), a calligraphic style invented after the Han. These include the short passages on either side of the stele’s title, which record the visits of some prominent Tang officials in 829 and 830. Another passage, squeezed between the first two paragraphs of the original inscription, was added to the stele in 1085 by a Song courtier, who represented the emperor at a sacrifice to the sacred mountain that year.

These inscriptions, both original and the later ones, are texts with definitive literary meaning. They are distinguished from other marks on the rubbing, which show the damage the stele suffered continuously over its long history, and hence register the passage of time. Some irregular ‘empty’ areas on the rubbing reveal that by the time the rubbing was made in the mid-Ming dynasty, the stele had lost a large piece on the right and several smaller pieces in the middle.<sup>111</sup> Chips and scratches were everywhere, especially around the edges. But again, this damage in

the rubbing should be distinguished from damage *to* the rubbing. This second kind of damage is exemplified by the six white spots spaced evenly in two vertical rows. Clearly, before the rubbing was mounted, it had been folded for a long time into a rectangular shape of about 60 by 40 cm; the corners of this rectangle were subject to wear over the years. Finally, more than 30 collectors, connoisseurs and scholars wrote colophons and stamped their seals on the silk mounting that frames the rubbing. To read these colophons in sequence is to reconstruct a history of the rubbing's collecting and viewing.

To summarize, the signs and marks that this rubbing bears register six kinds of information in two categories, *inscription* and *damage*:

#### *Inscription*

Original stele inscription dated to AD 165

Additional inscriptions on the stele dated to 829,

830 and 1085

Colophons and seals added to the rubbing (and on its mounting) on various datable occasions since 1810

#### *Damage*

Damage to the stele from the time of its establishment to the time when the rubbing was made (mid-Ming)

Damage occurring to the unmounted rubbing before it was first mounted in 1810

Damage and ageing of the mounted rubbing after 1810



33 'Siming' rubbing of the Stele of the Western Marchmount Hua.

As mentioned above, inscriptions result from intentional human acts; most damage results from unpremeditated natural phenomena and signifies the passage of time. What we find in the rubbing is therefore a twofold process: on the one hand, the layers of *inscription* testify to a continuous effort to bring the stele into the present – to revitalize its meaning and to reframe it within current intellectual trends; on the other, the layers of *damage* always point to the past and always blur inscriptions – hence qualifying the stele as a historical relic. The

branch of historical scholarship that takes both inscription and damage as its subject is rubbing connoisseurship.

Called *beitie jianding*, rubbing connoisseurship is related to, but differs fundamentally from, three other intellectual practices, all of which deal with rubbings but emphasize them as sources of information. Initiated during the Song with the rise of antiquarianism, these three practices are concerned with history, epigraphy and calligraphy. But the purest form of rubbing connoisseurship is the study of rubbings alone, freed from the original stones on the one hand and from the content of imprinted words or images on the other. In other words, rubbing connoisseurship is scholarship that takes rubbings as its sole subject.

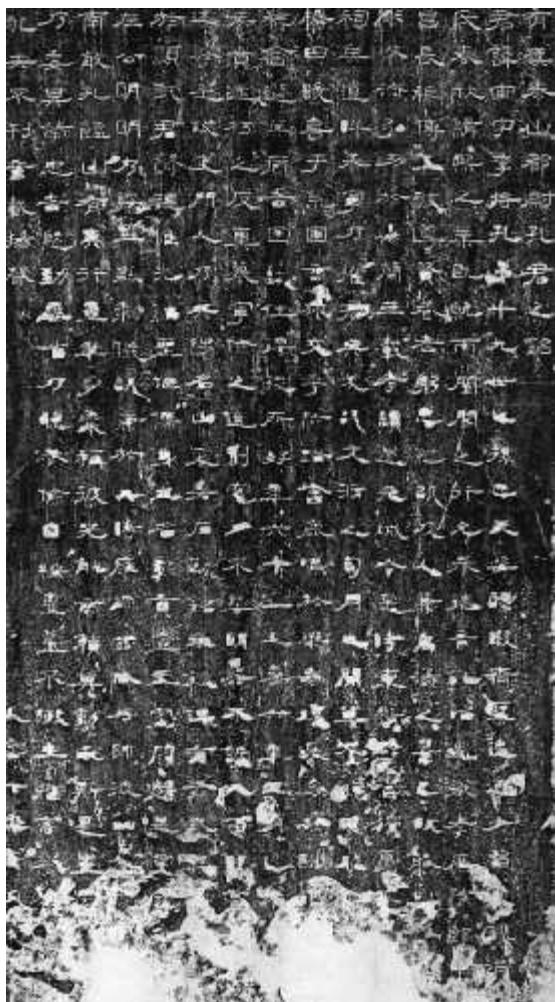
The self-exclusiveness of rubbing connoisseurship implies that the history it discovers or constructs has little to do with a broader, external reality, whether this reality is about society, religion, language or art. Nor does a rubbing connoisseur attempt a general history of the rubbing – what he constructs are numerous ‘micro histories’, each focusing on a series of rubbings that are ultimately linked to a single, original and often elusive object. He arranges these rubbings into a chronological sequence by determining their relative positions. (In this process he also eliminates copies and fakes.) This purpose requires him to derive evidence from a rubbing itself – from its paper, ink, seals and colophons, but most importantly from its imprint, whose minute differences from other related rubbings reveal the changing physical conditions of the original object. In these differences he sees gradual erosion or decay or a sudden splitting or collapse of the stele. His findings thus provide the sense of ‘event’ or ‘happening’ necessary for a historical narrative. Perhaps unique to all scholarly practices, therefore, the principal technique of rubbing connoisseurship is to detect traces of ruination, while its chief accomplishment is to construct a process of ruination.

Here is an example from the 1,200 entries in *Rubbing Connoisseurship* (*Beitie jianding*), a massive compilation completed by Ma Ziyuan and Shi Anchang in 1993. After briefly introducing the layout of the inscription on the ‘Stele of Kong Zhou’ (illus. 34), they comment:

In an early Ming rubbing of the inscription, the last stroke of the ‘kou’ radical in the lower part of the character ‘gao’ – a character in the phrase ‘fan bai yang gao’ – is undamaged, and a space about half an inch wide still remains between the character and the [lower] edge of the stele. In a late Ming rubbing, more than half of the character ‘ci’ in the phrase ‘qi ci yue’ in the tenth column still remains, and the upper-right part of the character ‘shu’ in the phrase ‘shu mo’ in the fourteenth column is still

visible. Down to the Kangxi and Qianlong periods (1661–1795) during the Qing, the character ‘xun’ in the phrase ‘jia xun’ in the first column is still separated from a nearby ‘stone flower’, the upper part of the character ‘ci’ is still intact, and the left half of the character ‘mo’ is only slightly damaged. In rubbings made after the Jiaqing and Daoguang period (1796–1850), however, not only are all these characters seriously damaged, but other characters have become blurred and lost their spirit.<sup>112</sup>

One thing that is striking about the comment is its total lack of interest in the content of the inscription. In fact, a ‘pure’ rubbing connoisseur never perceives or describes an inscription as a readable text; what he sees are always individual characters and strokes. Moreover, his interest in characters and strokes has nothing to do with their original forms, not to mention their literary meaning or aesthetic value. His microscopic vision is instantaneously attracted by the damaged parts of a character or a stroke. The subject of his reading is therefore never the cultural phenomenon of human writing, but only non-literary signs – fissures, cracks, fractures – that display human agency or Nature at work to destroy writing. But when he shifts his eyes to the colophons accompanying a rubbing, he changes his reading method abruptly to treat them as historical documents with intrinsic meaning. These colophons, written by successive collectors and privileged viewers of a precious rubbing over a long period, often contain valuable information about the rubbing’s production and transmission. These texts constitute a basis on which to reconstruct a rubbing’s history; and new arguments about a rubbing’s date often respond to these previous writings. To a later rubbing connoisseur, therefore, colophons on a rubbing both provide historical information and constitute a scholarly tradition that he follows and reacts to. It is possible, therefore, to summarize rubbing connoisseurship as a simultaneous construction of three separate histories: a history of a decaying object as a process of ruination; a history of making rubbings from this object as a process of cultural production;



34 Detail of ink rubbing of AD 164, Kong Zhou Stele.

and a history of rubbing connoisseurship as the continuation of an intellectual tradition. Although the first history is not the ultimate purpose, it is the foundation of the other two histories.

In this way, the 1,200 case studies in *Rubbing Connoisseurship* are all micro-histories of rubbings, not micro-histories of carvings. We may thus borrow Paul Ricoeur's concept of the 'archive' to characterize the three principal roles of rubbings in the making of these micro-histories. First, like archives, a series of rubbings designates 'an organized body of documents' structured and preserved by a person or an institution. Second, like archives, a series of rubbings provides material proof or evidence for a 'history, a narrative, or an argument'. Third, like archives, rubbings have detached themselves from the original object to gain an independent objectivity.<sup>113</sup> For this last point, which implies the separation of documents from monuments, Ricoeur notes a parallel situation in European history:

The development of positivist history at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century marked the triumph of the document over the monument. What makes a monument suspect, even though it often is found *in situ*, is its obvious finality, its commemoration of events that its contemporaries – especially the most powerful among them – judged worthy of being integrated into the collective memory. Conversely, the document, even though it is collected and not simply inherited, seems to possess an objectivity opposed to the intention of the monument, which is meant to be edifying. The writings in archives were thus thought to be more like documents than like monuments.<sup>114</sup>

Although differing in intention and historical situation, a similar 'triumph of the document over the monument' started in China with the rise of antiquarianism and is best realized in rubbing connoisseurship.

### *Rubbings as 'Remnant Things'*

Predictably, the notion of a rubbing's objectivity encourages the construction of its objecthood. Earlier I discussed the physical features of a rubbing: made of a particular type of paper and ink, it is also mounted in a specific format for viewing and preservation. A rubbing is therefore not simply a shadowy 'reference' to an inscribed monument or a conventional 'document' offering textual proof; rather, it has acquired its own material substance, artistic style and aesthetic

tradition. With such properties, a rubbing is conceived as a ‘thing’, and is further associated with the concept *yí wù*, ‘remnant thing’. In ancient Chinese, the term *yí wù* often refers to possessions left behind either by a dead person or a defunct dynasty. But generally speaking, any object that points to the past is a *yí wù* because it is a surviving portion of a vanished whole; by arrangement or accident, it has been severed from its original context to become part of contemporary culture. A *yí wù* is thus characterized both by pastness and presentness: it originated in the past, but it belongs to the here and now. A *yí wù* often shows signs of damage: its incompleteness guarantees its authenticity and it becomes a stimulus for either poetic lamentation or historical reconstruction.

Rubbings not only constitute a particular kind of *yí wù* but also epitomize the essence of a *yí wù*. A rubbing can be a ‘remnant thing’ of an ancient monument, a rubbing collection or a former self; it can therefore confirm its identity as a *yí wù* three times. First, every rubbing of a stele is by definition a ‘remnant thing’ of the stele: it is the skin of the object that has been pulled off the object’s body. As such, it always registers a vanished past; yet at the same time it generates ongoing artistic and intellectual activities and interests. Second, a large group of rubbings accumulated by a devoted antiquarian was always considered a collective body of objects. None of the large rubbing collections established from Song to Qing has survived intact. All have suffered personal or national tragedies. The rubbings were dispersed and destroyed; the leftover ones have become *yí wù* of the collectors and their collections. This transformation of rubbings from collectable *wù* to posthumous *yí wù* is the subject of accounts by a number of rubbing collectors, who watched their beloved collections disappear with their own eyes. Ye Changchi, for example, described his desperation in abandoning the 8,000 rubbings he had spent twenty years accumulating, a decision he had to make when he fled the capital during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.<sup>115</sup> But the most moving account of such an experience is found in Li Qingzhao’s ‘Afterword’ to her husband Zhao Mingcheng’s rubbing catalogue.

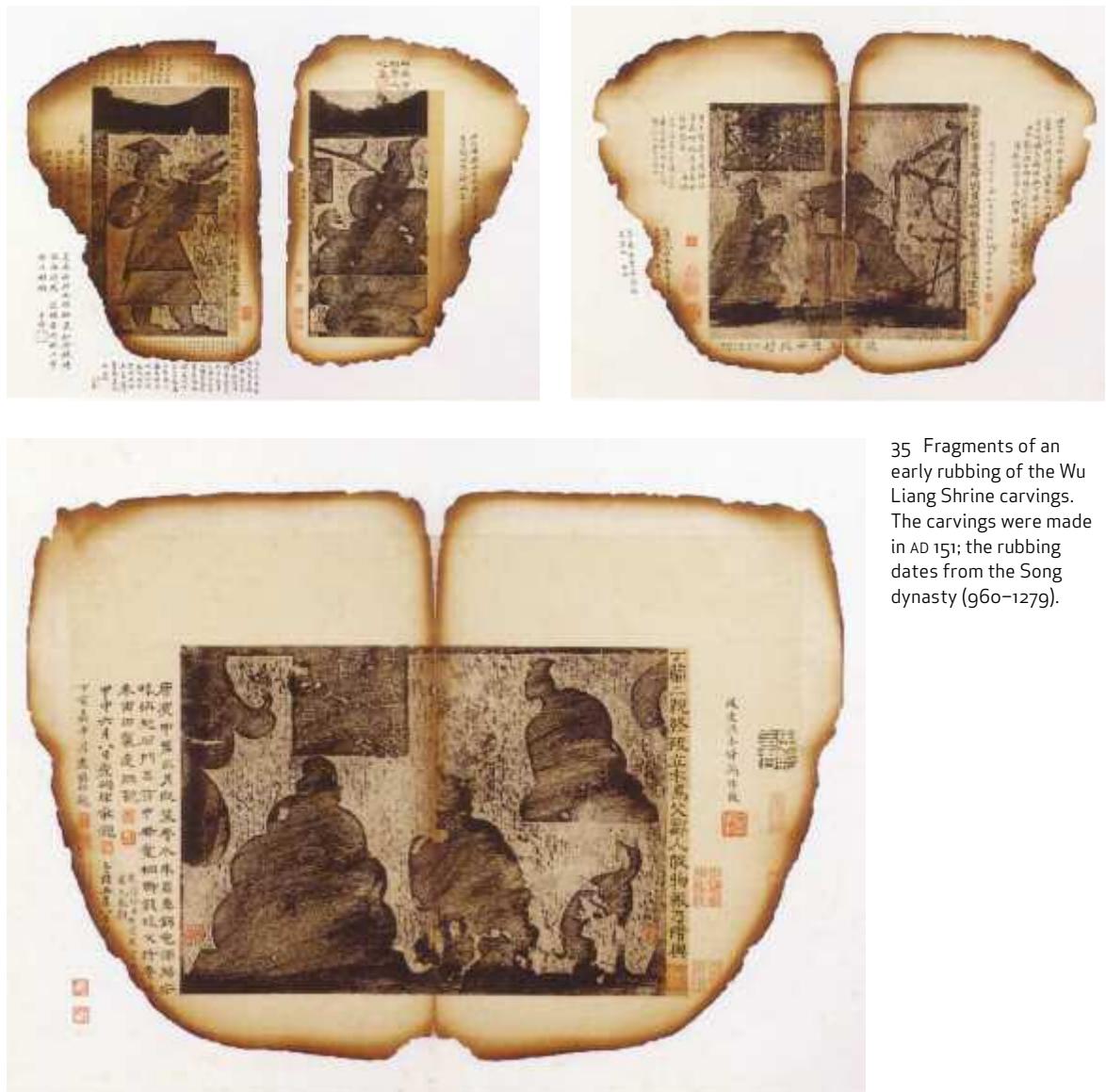
Li starts this piece of writing from recalling the joy she shared with her husband when they began to collect rubbings of ancient inscriptions and other texts. The joy of gathering soon gave way to the burden of *things* having been gathered, however. The collection demanded great care; consequently ‘there was no longer the same ease and casualness as before’. Then the war between the Song and the Jin broke out. When Zhao Mingcheng heard it, ‘he was in a daze, realizing that all those full trunks and overflowing chests, which he regarded so lovingly and mournfully, would surely soon be his possessions no longer’. But he died before the collection had completely dispersed. Li Qingzhao was entrusted to watch over

the remaining items, which still included, among other things, 2,000 rubbings of bronze and stone inscriptions. Her effort to protect them was in vain: the bulk of the collection was reduced by burning, plundering and robbery, until all that remained were ‘a few volumes from three or so sets, none complete, and some very ordinary pieces of calligraphy’. These were indeed the ruins of a once great collection of historical data. And as ruins they invoked memory and melancholy, as Li Qingzhao wrote toward the end of her ‘Afterword’:

Nowadays, when I chance to look over these books, it’s like meeting old friends. And I recall when my husband was in the hall called ‘Calm Governance’ in Laizhou, . . . every day in the evening when the office clerks would go home, he would do editorial collations on two *juan* and write a colophon for one inscription. Of those two thousand items, colophons were written on five hundred and two. It is so sad – today the ink of his writing seems still fresh, yet the trees by his grave have grown to an armspan in girth.<sup>116</sup>

Not a single rubbing from Zhao’s collection still exists. The few surviving Song rubbings have become ruins of their former selves. By presenting both inscriptions and damages on paper, a rubbing does not restore the original stele, but intends to ‘freeze’ the stele from further effects of nature and time. This is an illusion, however, because the rubbing itself will inevitably age and with time become a ruin of another sort. Hence lies the third significance of a rubbing as a ‘remnant object’. The burned pieces that form what is left of the only Song rubbing of the famous Wu Liang Shrine carvings (illus. 35) register multiple layers of history – the image created in the Han, the imprint made in the Song, burning in the late Qing, and numerous colophons written before and after the fire.<sup>117</sup> Today, this rubbing is ranked as a national treasure, although even in its undamaged state it only represented a very small portion of the Wu Liang Shrine images, and even though this small portion has been severely damaged.

Made of thin and fragile paper, a rubbing could be easily destroyed or ruined – torn, scratched, mildewed, burned or eaten by insects. The materiality of a rubbing thus enables it to display most sensitively the vulnerability of a manufactured object to natural or human destruction: in a ‘ruined’ rubbing, an eroded monument is damaged for a second time.



35 Fragments of an early rubbing of the Wu Liang Shrine carvings. The carvings were made in AD 151; the rubbing dates from the Song dynasty (960–1279).

## Ji: Traces in Landscape

Famous steles or any noted old structures *in situ* are called by the Chinese *gu ji*, ancient sites of historical interest. The original meaning of *ji* was ‘footprints’, and from here it gained the expanded meaning of ‘trace’. The memory of *ji* as concrete footprints was still very much alive during the Zhou: a temple hymn begins by recalling the earliest trace in Chinese dynastic history: ‘Wide and long

Yu left his footprints (*ji*), / When he laid out the Nine Provinces / And through them opened up the nine-fold route.<sup>118</sup> These lines refer to the pacification of a devastating flood and the subsequent establishment of the first dynasty Xia (c. twenty-first to sixteenth centuries bc). The legend goes that when the deluge came, Yu's father Gun was assigned to tame the raging water. He built earthen dykes everywhere in the hope of containing the flood. But these man-made structures easily collapsed and more people were killed. Taking over his father's position while adopting a new strategy, Yu dredged river channels to provide outlets for the torrential waters, and after thirteen years finally restored order and became king. People imagined that he travelled all over the country during these years and left his footprints in various places. Later on, the term *Yu ji* – Yu's footprints – also came to refer to any mark he left on the land, not only with his feet but also with his giant spade and axe. This connection with Yu's legend also helps us discern a subtle difference between *ji*'s two written forms (跡, 迹), one furnished with the 'foot' radical (足) to signify a tangible sign (illus. 36), the other with the 'walking' radical (辵) to emphasize the sense of movement. Whereas these two meanings have always adhered to *ji*, the character is also used in literary Chinese as a transitive verb, meaning 'to trace' or 'to search for' tangible clues of a past person or event.<sup>119</sup> This usage adds another layer of subtlety to the character: when someone is searching for traces of the past, he also leaves his own footprints along the way.

The concepts of *ji* and *xu* thus define a site of memory from opposite directions: *xu* emphasizes the erasure of human traces; *ji* stresses survival and display. A *xu* in a strict sense can only be mentally envisaged because it shows no external signs of ruins; but a *ji*, being itself an external sign of ruins, always encourages visualization and representation. The idea of *xu* implies the subjective interaction with a site; but the notion of *ji* embodies the dialectic of nature and artifice. *Xu* lacks physical framing; but *ji* must signal a process through which a specific place or sign is transformed into a trace of the past that expresses its own process of decay. Imagination related to *xu* is by definition temporal and mythical, while *ji* always translates poetic temporality into a spatial and material existence. A *ji* is a paradox in itself, however. On the one hand, it is an integral element of a timeless landscape – an inscription on a sheer cliff, a pictorial carving inside a deep valley, an ancient tumulus in an open field, or a Buddhist grotto on a sacred mountain. On the other, because it acquires its identity as a trace from a documented association with a particular historical or mythological figure or event, it is always a *fragment* (or a collection of fragments) of the past that can be isolated as such. A *ji* by definition is subject to an irresistible process of decay and

destruction, but any representation of a *ji* ‘restrains’ this process by providing the *ji* with an idealized form. In various ways, therefore, a *ji* transforms nature into a human work and vice versa. For the same reason, an inscription, a carving or a building stops being a *ji* when it is removed from its original setting; although still signifying the past, it has become a disembodied fragment severed from nature.

One finds numerous *ji* in famous scenic spots and historical sites, sometimes so crowded together that they cover the surface of a mountain and compete for the visitor’s attention (illus. 37). Some *ji* are more famous than others and have consequently triggered a chain of representation and duplication. Other *ji* are more private, meaningful only to a smaller circle of like-minded people. Their images and significance are often not immediately recognizable, but demand inside knowledge or historical research. This section discusses four types of *ji*: ‘divine traces’ (*shen ji*) as ambiguous signs of supernatural power; ‘historical traces’ (*gu ji* in a narrow sense) as subjects of antiquarian interest; ‘remnant traces’ (*yí ji*) as loci of political memory and expression; and ‘famous historical sites’ (*shèng ji*) as meeting places of elite and popular culture. Imbued with different temporalities and connected with different activities, these historical sites nevertheless coexist and can shift from one to the other. Perceived as general signs of the past, however, any of these traces can stimulate the *huaignu* sentiment explored in the last section.

### *Shen ji (Divine Trace)*

Two distinct ‘divine traces’ at Mt Hua (also known as Lotus Mountain) in present-day central Shanxi provide an exemplary case for thinking about a type of topographical mark whose origin is attributed to supernatural or semi-divine powers. Li Daoyuan (*d. 527*) first recorded them in his *Annotated Classic of Waterways* (*Shuijing zhu*) in the early sixth century:

*Dialogues from the Feudal States* by Zuo Qiuming says: ‘Lotus Mountain, the sacred [Western] Marchmount, was originally a single mountain blocking the Yellow River, so the water wound about it as it flowed past. The god of the river, Divine Giant, pounding with his hands and stomping with his feet, broke it apart into two, and to this day traces [*ji*] of his hands and feet remain.’ . . . This is what ‘Divine Giant, with his mammoth power, bore as a crown the sacred mountain’ means. Often enthusiasts climb Lotus Mountain to observe his imprints [*ji*] there.<sup>120</sup>

36 Wang Lü, ‘The Footprint of the Divine Giant’, from *Mount Hua Album*, c. 1381, ink and colours on paper.

37 Inscriptions on Mount Tai.



Two striking similarities relate this myth to Yu's legend. Like Yu, the anonymous Divine Giant split a mountain to let water go through; also like Yu, he left his imprints there as proof of his heroic deeds (see illus. 36). In fact, the same book credits Yu in similar narratives as the creator of the Dragon Gate on the Yellow River and the Three Gorges on the Yangzi River, and says that people can still see the 'traces of Yu's axe' on the cliffs near the Dragon Gate.<sup>121</sup> My interest here, however, is not to prove the historical relationship between the two legends, but to explore the kind of *ji* that the two stories together typify. Basically, differing from antiquarian 'historical traces' that I will discuss later, a divine trace is characterized by certain inherent ambiguities in origin and representation. Because of their extraordinary physique and supernatural strength, the creators of such traces are not ordinary human beings; but nor are they invincible gods who need no hard labour to realize their mighty wills. Half divine and half human, such demigods are found in any mythology. Emerging in the twilight zone between the celestial and human worlds, they began to shape the earth for the benefit of mankind.<sup>122</sup> Consequently the traces they left are often half natural and half artificial. While they are distinguished by special shapes and colours from the surrounding environment, they also constitute part of the natural landscape.

Such ambiguity gave rise to different representations of the divine traces on Mt Hua. One tendency is to amplify the supernatural origin of the signs. In a woodblock print designed by the Ming painter Ding Yunpeng (1547–c. 1621), the hand- and footprints of the Divine Giant are rendered in a graphic manner on two separate mountain peaks (illus. 38). Perfectly isolated and discernible, these images are based on literary accounts, not on empirical observation. They have little to do with what one would actually see, but reinforce the mystery surrounding the sacred marchmount. In this way, the picture can be connected to the tradition of 'miraculous images' in Chinese religious art.<sup>123</sup>

Then there is an almost opposite tendency, in which the 'immortal palm' – the handprint of the Divine Giant – is represented as an integral feature of the landscape. The image is no longer defined by a coherent outline, and the five fingers, though still vaguely discernible, merge into the folds of mountain rocks. We find the earliest example of

38 Ding Yunpeng,  
'Mount Hua the Western  
Marchmount', from Cheng  
Dayue (1541–c. 1616), *Mr  
Cheng's Ink Garden*,  
woodblock print.



this representational mode in an album by the early Ming artist Wang Lü (*b. c. 1332*), which records the painter's journey to Mt Hua in 1381 (illus. 39). Three centuries later, a panoramic map of Mt Hua further developed this tendency by obliterating the 'immortal palm' almost completely (illus. 40). It is significant that Wang Lü, who was a famous physician in his day, provided a detailed scientific account of the formation of the 'immortal palm' in the colophon attached to the album leaf. Rejecting the legend of the Divine Giant, he explains that the five fingers were actually formed by the grease flowing down the cliff from separate cracks, which soaked the rock surface with pale yellowish-brown and off-white pigment. When the streams of grease joined together, they constituted a flat shape vaguely resembling a 'palm'.<sup>124</sup>

Although admirable in scientific spirit, Wang's explanation failed to discourage people's fascination with strange natural images. Not only did the 'immortal palm' retain its popularity in later Chinese travel painting, but the concept of *shen ji* routinely inspired artists to create landscape images that transcend the boundary between natural and supernatural. In an anonymous sixteenth-century handscroll now housed in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for example, some crags of the Yellow Mountain are shaped as shadowy stone giants (illus. 41). Standing in the foreground or emerging from gorges, these eerie figures animate the mountain and bestow it with a magical, primordial power. The concept of *shen ji* also underlies another celebrated Yellow Mountain representation, an



39 Wang Lü, 'The Immortal's Palm', from *Mount Hua Album*, c. 1381, ink and colours on paper.



40 Anonymous,  
*Panoramic Map of  
Mount Hua*, hanging  
scroll, 1700, ink rubbing  
from a stone stele.



41 Anonymous, *Peaks of Mount Huang*, detail of handscroll, c. 1500–50, ink and light colours on silk.

album that Shitao painted to record one of his journeys there.<sup>125</sup> Each of the eight pictures in the album shows the artist travelling through the mountain's famous scenic spots while discovering its secrets. The final leaf represents his ascent of the mountain's central peak, called Tiandu Feng or Heavenly Capital Peak (illus. 42). Near the centre of the composition, rock boulders configure a stone giant. Shitao wrote an inscription next to it: 'Ice his heart and jade his bones, stone and iron makes this man. He is the master of the Yellow Mountain and the minister to Xuanyuan.' Here Xuanyuan refers to the Yellow Emperor, China's mythical founder, who had gone to the Yellow Mountain thousands of years before to collect herbs for an elixir of immortality. In the picture, the stone giant's head and shoulders are covered with vegetation; cracks and erosion on his rock body further betray the endless years that have passed: this is indeed a 'ruin' left from the remote past. Interestingly, Shitao also portrayed himself as a traveller below the stone giant in the same pose, thus making himself an incarnation of the master of the immortal mountain.

This picture is related to two other Yellow Mountain images by Shitao, which seem at first glance different from all other ruin representations from premodern China. In the introduction to this book I mentioned that my search for 'ruin' pictures in traditional Chinese painting – that is, pictures that represent not ancient but ruined buildings – had yielded fewer than five examples. Quite amazingly, the two most convincing examples in this group come from Shitao's depictions of the Yellow Mountain (illus. 43, 44). One showing a ruined stone archway and the other a stone pagoda, both pictures belong to an album depicting views of the Yellow Mountain.<sup>126</sup> To modern people exposed to various kinds of ruin images on a daily basis, these pictures may seem nothing special – they simply represent two decaying structures Shitao found on his trips to the famous mountain. But I believe that to a seventeenth-century Chinese viewer they must have evoked the quality of *qi* – strange and extraordinary. This is not only because the two images were virtually unique in traditional Chinese painting,



but also because Shitao's purpose in creating the album *was* to transcend the ordinary: mingled with these two seemingly realistic pictures are images of strange peaks, rocks and trees, as well as legends of immortals (illus. 45a–d). A careful viewer may also notice a round 'window' opened onto the pagoda, allowing him to look into a mysterious world beyond the ruined structure (see illus. 44). Taken together, these images depict the Yellow Mountains as a realm of marvels, in which nature and culture, past and present, human and divine no longer follow any conventional definitions.

### *Gu ji (Historical Trace in a Narrow Sense)*

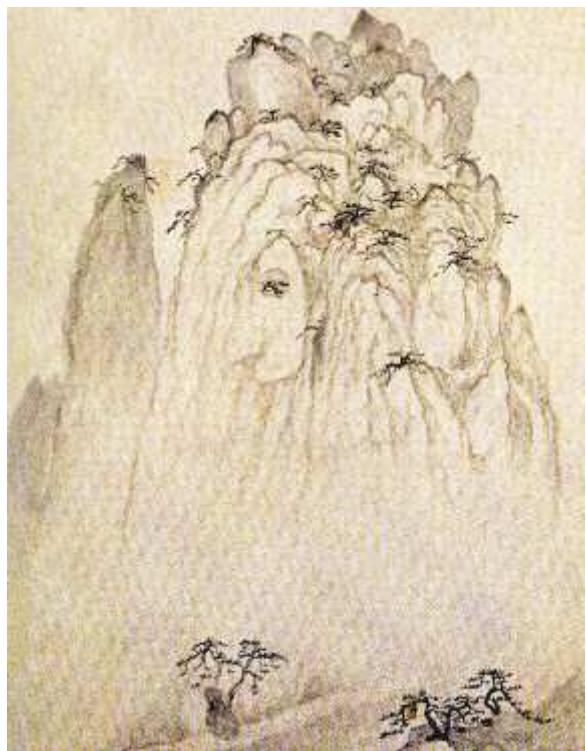
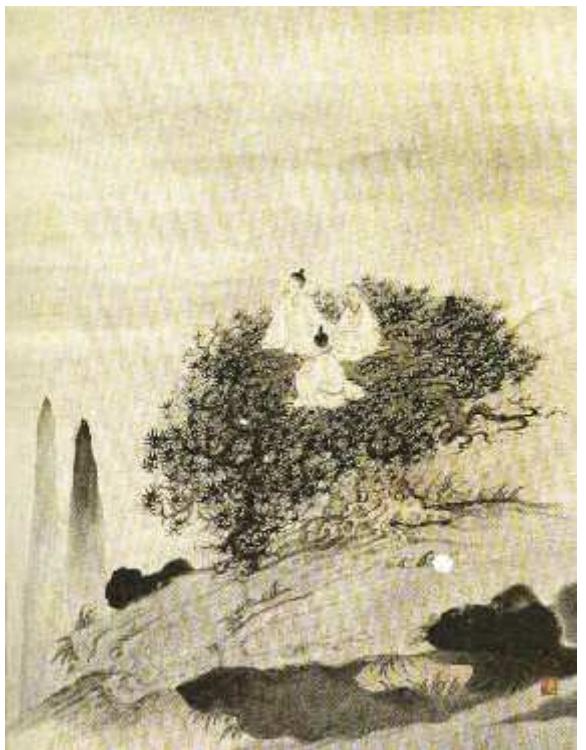
At the juncture of a 'divine trace' and a 'historical trace' is a strange inscription called the King Yu Stele (Yu wang bei), also known as the Goulou Stele (Goulou bei) because of its original location on Goulou Peak at Mt Heng in Hunan. (Here 'stele' refers to an inscription carved on a natural cliff.) Stories about it already

42 Shitao, 'Heavenly Capital Peak', from *Eight Scenic Spots in Huangshan*, album of 8 leaves, c. 1640(?), ink and colour on paper.

43 Shitao, 'Stone Gate at the Yellow Mountains', Leaf 1 from *Huangshan Album*, 1669(?), ink or ink and colour on paper.







circulated between the first and fourth century.<sup>127</sup> One of these tales, now preserved in *Annals of the Wu and Yue Kingdoms* (*Wu Yue chunqiu*), relates that after taking over his father's position to pacify the flood, Yu travelled to Mt Heng – the sacred Southern Marchmount – to seek instructions from Heaven.<sup>128</sup> There a divine messenger dressed in an embroidered red robe visited his dream and taught him where to discover a secret text in the mountain.<sup>129</sup> During the Tang, possibly related to a movement to regain literature's classical roots, there appeared a heightened interest in this mysterious text. Han Yu (768–824), the leader of the movement, actually went to the mountain to search for it. Returning empty-handed, his failure nevertheless inspired a poem imbued with deep fascination and disappointment:

On the summit of Goulou Mountain  
is the stele of the divine Yu,  
emerald characters in red marble,  
marvelously shaped:  
tadpoles bending their bodies,  
leeks spread upside down,  
simurghs soaring, phoenixes resting,  
tigers and dragons contending.

So grave was its text, so hidden its form,  
even the spirits espied it not;  
yet once a man of the Way ascended alone  
and saw it by chance.  
I came sighing in admiration  
tears swelling into ripples,  
looking, searching, seeking everywhere  
for the place it might be –  
in thick forests of green trees  
gibbons wail.<sup>130</sup>

Following Han Yu's steps, prominent Song scholars such as Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Zhang Shi (1132–1180) also tried – but again failed – to find the inscription. The two scholars likely conducted their search in the winter of 1167. Some 50 years later, however, the inscription was finally spotted and reproduced, as we read in Wang Xiangzhi's (1163–1230) geographical work *Records of Famous Places* (*Yudi jisheng*), which he completed in 1227:

*Previous:*  
(left): 44 Shitao, 'A Ruined Pagoda at the Yellow Mountains', Leaf 4 from *Huangshan Album*, 1669(?), ink or ink and colour on paper.

(right): 45 Shitao, 'Views of the Yellow Mountains', from *Huangshan Album*: (a) Leaf 6, (b) Leaf 12, (c) Leaf 15, (d) Leaf 19 (all 1669(?), ink or ink and colour on paper).

The Yu Stele is located on Goulou Peak. Alternatively, it is said that it is on Mi Peak in Hengshan county. A woodcutter once saw it in the past; but afterward no one was able to find it again. During the Jiading era of the Song (1208–1224), however, a gentleman from Sichuan reached the place with the help of a woodcutter. He made an ink rubbing of the inscription's seventy-two characters on a piece of paper, and engraved the inscription in a Taoist temple at Kuimen.<sup>131</sup>

Compared with Han Yu's poem, Wang's record projects no fantasy aroused by a mysterious object. In fact, his plain narrative completely strips the inscription of its aura as a divine trace, and redefines it as an ancient stone carving vulnerable to natural destruction and subject to human reproduction. The *Records of Famous Places*, as well as his earlier *Steles in Various Places* (*Yudi beimu*; preface 1221), records many such ancient cultural relics scattered in different locations in Southern Song China. The duplicated King Yu Stele, now housed in a small shrine at

46 Duplicate King Yu Stele at Mt Yueli near Changsha, Hunan.



Mt Yueli near Changsha, Hunan (illus. 46), became the source of further duplications: at least seven 'third-generation' King Yu Steles were established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Yunnan, Zhejiang, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Henan, Shaanxi and Hubei. The content, script, dating and authenticity of the original inscription also became the subject of intense scholarly debates. Diverse opinions include, in addition to the traditional claim for Yu's authorship, that the text's 'tadpole script' (*kuedou wen*) is actually a type of Taoist writing invented much later, that the script preserves an ancient writing system even older than the Shang oracle bone inscriptions, that the stele is a forgery, probably made by the Ming scholar Yang Shen (1488–1559) who purportedly rediscovered it in the sixteenth century, that the inscription was created in 611 BC to praise a military victory of King Zhuang of the Chu (reg 613–591 BC); and that it was fashioned by Prince Zhugou of the Yue in 456 BC during a sacrifice to Mt Heng. None of these opinions are conclusive; but all have helped transform the inscription from a mystical phenomenon into a subject of antiquarian interest and historical inquiry.

The beginning of this transformation coincided with the emergence of antiquarianism, a type of empirical study of ancient objects and texts that played an important role in transforming many similar ‘divine traces’ into ‘historical traces’. Although interest in the past had always existed in Chinese culture, only from the mid-eleventh century on did antiquarianism become a scholarly movement in its own right. As mentioned earlier, a major motivation behind this movement was to preserve texts engraved on old monuments that might be destroyed by the elements, by vandalism or by war. Hong Gua (1117–1184), the author of two comprehensive catalogues of stone carvings, observed in commenting on the Han dynasty steles that Li Daoyuan had recorded in the *Annotated Classic of Waterways*: ‘But mountains are levelled and valleys filled, and the elements wreak their destruction. By the Zhenghe and Xuanhe periods (1111–25), eight-tenths of those ancient objects had been lost.’<sup>132</sup> To Hong and his colleagues, the preservation of the inscriptions was a serious scholarly imperative, because these documents constituted authentic historical data that could be used to complement and even to correct transmitted texts. This approach was clearly articulated by Zhao Mingcheng:

When archaeological materials are used to examine things such as chronology, geography, official titles and genealogy, three- or four-tenths of these data are in conflict [with textual materials]. That is because historical writings are produced by latter-day writers and cannot fail to contain errors, but inscriptions on stone and bronze are made at the time the events took place and can be trusted without reservation: thus discrepancies may be discovered.<sup>133</sup>

This and many similar statements demonstrate that Song antiquarians viewed themselves primarily as historians who treated stone carvings as sources of textual information. This orientation both encouraged and restricted an emerging culture of ‘historical traces’. It encouraged this culture because, through their writings, Song antiquarians articulated a general historical framework for ancient monuments and other cultural relics. This historicizing tendency already characterized the first major catalogue of stone inscriptions by Ouyang Xiu. After completing it in 1062, Ouyang wrote a preface for it, in which he defined the book’s chronological scope as extending ‘from King Mu of the Zhou down to the Qin, Han, Sui, Tang and the Five Dynasties’.<sup>134</sup> It is significant that he omitted the Xia, the Shang, the early Zhou and all legendary rulers recorded in transmitted texts, not because he considered them unimportant but because no corresponding

inscriptional evidence had been found. Other Song antiquarian writers shared this historiographical approach and conventionally organized their materials into a dynastic sequence. Consequently, although the fascination with divine traces never disappeared from popular religion and the poetic imagination, an old monument became a ‘historical trace’ once it was brought into a dynastic framework.

However, because of their primary identity as textual historians, Song antiquarians typically based their research on ink rubbings of inscriptions, which they passionately collected from all available sources. For this reason, as I mentioned earlier, these scholars rarely visited ancient monuments *in situ*. While their comments in the catalogues made frequent references to the sources of the rubbings, such writing contributed little to the study of the original monuments as cultural and material constructs. This situation changed dramatically in the eighteenth century, when antiquarian studies reached a new height. Prompted by the ‘evidential scholarship’ (*kaozheng xue*) movement,<sup>135</sup> ‘visiting steles’ (*fangbei*) became a shared passion among antiquarians, and many catalogues of ancient inscriptions were structured according to the provenance of the source materials. Qing antiquarians often described their visits to ancient monuments in writing; some of them even helped preserve ruined stone carvings in local places. They frequently exchanged research materials and commented on each other’s work. The old pictorial motif of ‘reading the stele’ was also reinvented to convey real travel experience (illus. 47).<sup>136</sup> Through these activities, Qing antiquarians played a much more active role than their Song predecessors in forging a culture of ‘historical traces’. A key person in this process was Huang Yi (1744–1802), a late eighteenth-century calligrapher, seal carver, painter and collector of rubbings.

Several recent studies on Huang’s engagement in antiquarian scholarship and his travel paintings have provided valuable information about his relationship with ancient ruins.<sup>137</sup> This relationship reflects both intellectual currents and personal initiative, and can be approached from several angles, including the fusion of studies of ancient inscriptions and cultural geography, the preservation of architectural ruins in local settings, dissemination of research data collected from field trips, and ‘travel painting’ as a means of scholarly communication. Crucial to this study, these interventions initiated an important transformation of a historical site, which gradually attracted public attention and finally became a certified site of national cultural heritage.

In contrast to the limited interest of early antiquarians in visiting ancient ruins, from at least the sixth century on another group of scholars considered such trips a professional necessity. We may call these men early ‘cultural geographers’, whose first representative, Li Daoyuan, examined many ancient shrines, steles,



47 Huang Yi, 'Songyang shuyuan', album leaf, from *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles*, 1792–3, ink and light colours on paper.

tombs and the remains of old cities, and recorded his observations in the *Annotated Classic of Waterways*. During the Song, this tradition was continued by scholars like Wang Xiangzhi, whose description of the King Yu Stele was cited above. The development of local gazetteers (*difang zhi*) and travel literature (*you ji*) further encouraged the survey and recording of local *guji*, a subject indispensable to these two types of writing. During the Qing, these separate interests in ancient ruins – as historical signposts, as local landmarks and as targets of individual exploration – became intertwined, stimulating people like Huang Yi to take many *fang gu* ('searching for ancient sites') journeys.

Huang recorded such journeys in both pictures and words. The former include a number of album paintings, each consisting of multiple images and post-scripts;<sup>138</sup> the latter is exemplified by a diary he wrote when he travelled to the antique-rich area around Luoyang in 1796.<sup>139</sup> Following the conventions of travel literature, these works present his search for ancient ruins as personal explorations highlighted by exciting findings. He frequently specifies the sources of his information about the locations of the ruins: sometimes he relied on a social network of antiquarians; other times he found clues in historical records, including geographic writings. A postscript to his *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles* (*Debei shier tu*), for example, tells how he was guided by a local gazetteer to discover the famous Wu Family carvings in Shandong (illus. 48):

In the autumn of the year *bingwu*, during Emperor Qianlong's reign [1786], I read a passage in the gazetteer of Jiaxiang County, which records some ruined stone chambers and an ancient stele with a hole [on top] at

Purple Cloud Mountain [near the county seat]. Having ordered ink rubbings made [from these structures] and examined them, I determined that the stele was dedicated to Wu Ban, a Han dynasty chief clerk, and that the pictorial images are from the Wu Liang Shrine. Together with Liu Tieqiao of Jining, Li Meicun of Hongdong [and] Gao [Zhengyan] of Nanming, I then went to the site to conduct an investigation. One by one we found [remains of] three stone chambers, which I named the Front, Rear and Left Shrines, as well as carvings of auspicious omens, the stone pillar gate of the Wu family [cemetery], and a pictorial carving representing Confucius' meeting with Laozi. On no other occasion had I ever obtained so many ancient carvings [in a single exploration]. It was indeed the most satisfactory event in my life! I then collaborated with antique-loving gentlemen within the four seas to erect a shrine for the Wu family, storing the stone carvings we had found in this building. We also moved the 'Confucius meeting Laozi' slab into the Minglun Hall in the academy of Jining Prefecture, preserving it there forever.<sup>140</sup>

In a previous study I proposed that Huang Yi's finding and preservation of the Wu family carvings are among the most important events in Chinese archaeology, because they represented the beginning of planned excavations and public archaeological museums in China.<sup>141</sup> The 'Wu Family Shrine' (Wushi citing) that Huang and his colleagues built served the double functions of a preservation hall and an exhibition gallery. Huang Yi describes these two roles in an essay that was engraved inside the hall:

We have erected this Wu Family Shrine to protect the carvings. People will find it easier to make rubbings from these carvings, and the reproductions will spread far and wide. People will recognize the importance of taking good care of these objects, and the carvings will exist forever.



48 Huang Yi, 'Searching for Steles at Mount Ziyun', album leaf, from *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles*, 1792–3, ink and light colours on paper.

Would not this be more important than if only two or three antiquarians could enjoy them!<sup>142</sup>

For similar purposes, on several other occasions he had endangered steles moved to nearby temples and academies, but never to his home.<sup>143</sup> What he brought back from field trips were ink rubbings, which he shared with other antiquarians, often famous scholars with deeper epigraphic learning. He also showed his painting albums to these men and invited them to comment on them. Lillian Tseng has reconstructed a series of such situations surrounding Huang's album *Visiting Steles in the Song-Luo Region*, which records a trip he took in 1796 to the Luoyang area.<sup>144</sup> Based on his memory and a detailed diary, Huang composed 24 pictures for this album, each representing his *fang gu* activities at a specific place; the name of the place is inscribed on each album leaf as its title. A long postscript after each picture supplies further information about the ancient monument, especially about the engraved text and its date. The entire album is therefore anchored in specific geographic locations, which are individualized by the datable historical ruins found there.

Soon after Huang Yi completed the album in 1797 he presented it to Weng Fanggang (1733–1818), a senior official and a prominent antiquarian at the time.<sup>145</sup> Weng not only wrote comments after each picture/postscript, but also displayed the album at a literati gathering. In the same year Huang also showed the album to Sun Xingyan (1753–1818), another important antiquarian who was then collecting materials for his *Records of Visiting Steles around the World* (*Huanyu fangbei lu*; published in 1802). Two years earlier, Huang Yi had guided Sun to visit three Han dynasty sites in Shandong. This time, Sun examined the album carefully and inscribed the title page. From 1799 to 1800 Huang Yi showed the album to more scholars and celebrities, including Liang Tongshu (1723–1815), Xi Gang (1746–1804), Song Baochun (1748–1818), Wang Niansun (1744–1832) and Li Rui (1769–1817).

There is no question that Huang, a low-ranking official and semi-professional artist, engineered these occasions to promote himself and his art. But through these activities he also effectively disseminated knowledge about ancient ruins. His audience described their experience in viewing the album as a 'dream journey' to the various sites; some expressed their desire to see the ruins in person. Throughout the nineteenth century, the fame of these places as important sites of Han stone carvings continued to grow. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the first groups of European and Japanese archaeologists, including Edouard Chavannes, Sekino Tei and Omura Seigai, began to survey

China's historical monuments, they naturally started from these places.<sup>146</sup> Today, almost all of the ancient ruins depicted in Huang Yi's albums are registered 'heritage sites' under the administration of the Chinese government departments of cultural relics.

### *Yi ji (Remnant Site)*

Huang Yi lived at a time when the Qing imperial power had reached its zenith. 'The persistence, sophistication, and extravagance with which the Qianlong court pursued its role as universal cultural patron', the historian Pamela K. Crossley writes, 'produced the indelible image of the period as the height of the power of the Qing – indeed, it could be and has been argued, as the period unrivalled by any in Chinese imperial history for sheer magnificence.'<sup>147</sup> Under imperial patronage, studies of antiquities acquired a highly sophisticated, scholarly style, characterized by meticulous attention to evidence and nearly complete detachment from politics. Antiquarian writings from this period betray little sentimentiality. Confronted with an inscription written 1,000–2,000 years earlier, the initial impulse was always to identify the characters, to read the passages, to date the text according to its content and calligraphy, and to relate it to other textual evidence. It was a meticulous, rational process based on empirical observation and historical scholarship.

In this way, the eighteenth-century antiquarians differed markedly from their seventeenth-century predecessors, whose attitude towards historical ruins was strongly influenced by the fall of the Ming in 1644. Many of these scholars were Ming loyalists, called *yi min* or 'remnant subjects' from the fallen dynasty. Far from idle objects of impassionate historical examination, ruins to them embodied rich symbolism and evoked a strong emotional response. In an excellent study of these people's relationship with the stele, Qianshen Bai has identified the image of a 'broken stele' (*can bei*) as a poetic metaphor for the former dynasty.<sup>148</sup> One piece of his evidence is a poem written by the famous scholar and Ming loyalist Gu Yanwu (1613–1682). Commemorating a trip he took with his student Hu Ting (active 1640–1670) to visit an ancient stele in 1674, the poem ends with these two lines: 'Reading this broken stele with my friend, we mourn the past and the present with sorrowful hearts.'<sup>149</sup> As Bai has noted, this and similar expressions in the early Qing deliberately echoed an historical episode in the thirteenth century: three years after the Mongol army captured the Southern Song capital at present-day Hangzhou, the poet Zhang Yan (1248–1320) visited the famous West Lake in the city. Facing an abandoned stele he wrote: 'So much misfortune



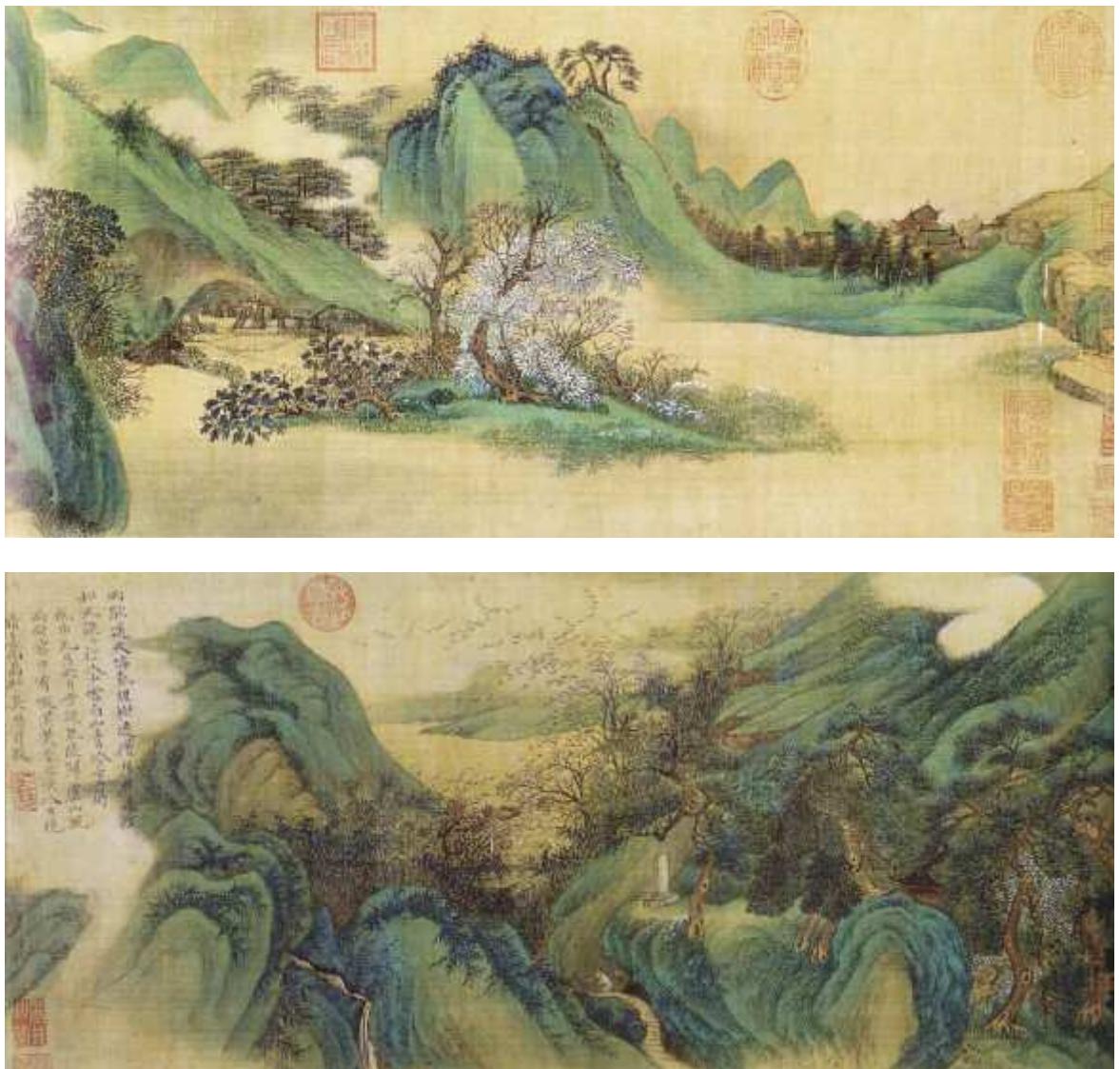
had befallen my former country. / Touching this broken stele, / My heart is stricken for the present.<sup>150</sup>

To my knowledge, no seventeenth-century *yi min* artists depicted the image of a broken stele.<sup>151</sup> But enough evidence demonstrates that in their paintings an intact stele conveys the meaning of a broken stele, as we have found in Gu Yanwu's poem. One of these works was made by Zhang Feng (*d.* 1662), a 'wild gentleman' (*kuangshi*) who once travelled to the north to pay respect to the Ming imperial tombs after the Manchu takeover.<sup>152</sup> Dated to 1659, this small painting on a folding fan depicts a man in Ming attire standing before an enormous stele (illus. 49). Given the artist's political attitude, the painting seems to carry an autobiographical significance, while the stele's extraordinary size seems to allude to something weighty and grand in the past. The contrast between the stele's monumentality and the desolate environment is highlighted in the poem that Zhang inscribed above the picture:

Chilly mists, withered grass;  
Old trees, remote mountains.  
An imposing stele stands  
In a place devoid of human traces  
– Seeing this I feel [I face] the past and the present.<sup>153</sup>

Whereas this fan painting is personal and intimate, Wu Li's (1632–1718) *Clouds White, Mountains Blue* (*Yunbai shanqing*), a 117.2-cm-long handscroll now

49 Zhang Feng, *Reading a Stele*, folding fan mounted as an album leaf, 1659, ink and colour on paper.



50 Wu Li, *Clouds White, Mountains Blue*, handscroll, 1668, ink and colour on silk.

housed in Taipei's National Palace Museum, is a serious and thoughtful work charged with suppressed emotion (illus. 50). Commonly considered a major master of early Qing painting, Wu studied literature, philosophy and music from famous *yi min* scholars in his youth and became a committed Ming loyalist himself when he grew up.<sup>154</sup> In an undated poem, he compares himself with a 'sick horse' loyal to its deceased master: 'My energy becomes exhausted with unlimited remorse over the past. / My voice gets hoarse as my years are getting short. / When I think of the boundless graces of my Lord, / My tears of blood wet the sparkling grains of sand.'<sup>155</sup> As Laurence Tam has commented,

This is the cry of an old soldier lamenting his incapability of going to the battlefield and to die for his own master. The thought of the master brought tears to his eyes. The ‘master of the sick horse’ could never be interpreted as the Qing emperor but the dead Ming emperor, Sizong [the Chongzhen Emperor, reg 1627–44].<sup>156</sup>

Created in 1668, the handscroll painting conveys the same feeling of tragedy and helplessness, but in a much subtler manner. It has been suggested that the painting’s ‘green-blue’ (*qing lü*) style is traditionally associated with isles of immortals or Tao Qian’s ‘Peach Blossom Spring’.<sup>157</sup> This connection is substantiated by the painting’s composition: opening the scroll, we find a group of flowering trees half blocking a mountain cave. Similar images are frequently seen in Ming-Qing representations of Peach Blossom Spring and immortal mountains. A seventeenth-century viewer would readily take the cave in Wu Li’s scroll as the entrance to a mythical oasis free from human strife and warfare. The story of ‘Peach Blossom Spring’ relates that once a fisherman passed through a cave and emerged

into the open light of day. He faced a spread of level land. Imposing buildings stood among rich fields and pleasant ponds all set with mulberry and willow, linking paths led everywhere, and the fowls and dogs of one farm could be heard from the next. People were coming and going and working in the fields . . . White-haired elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented.<sup>158</sup>

Long before Wu Li, this story had become the most famous Chinese fable of an ideal, utopian society.

‘Peach Blossom Spring’ was a favourite narrative subject for painting at the end of the Ming and the early Qing. Wu Li himself did several versions; some of them are lost, others have survived. According to Lin Xiaoping, these paintings ‘can be regarded as the pictorial presence of Ming loyalists’ fantasy for the untouched land of their dream’.<sup>159</sup> The 1668 *Clouds White, Mountains Blue*, however, turns the fable into a nightmare.<sup>160</sup> As just mentioned, the painting’s first half adapts a traditional pictorial formula, in which a cave invites the viewer into a utopian world hidden on the other side of the mountain. Unrolling the scroll, however, the viewer is stunned by what he finds in the second half of the painting. There are no happy farmers or fairies. Instead, a memorial stele, made of pure, white stone, stands silently beneath an old tree. There is no spring and no flowers. The trees are leafless; hundreds of crows hover over a wintry landscape and block

the sun – a terrifying scene described in Wu Li’s poem at the end of the scroll: ‘The rain is over, the skies are distant, the ocean smells of blood . . .’.<sup>161</sup>

We do not know the exact significance of Wu Li’s stele: his poem does not mention it but only describes a chilly, silent landscape. Understood in the contemporary political and intellectual context, however, the stele unmistakably symbolizes the perished Ming. By substituting a symbol of death for the utopian dreamland of ‘Peach Blossom Spring’, Wu Li announces a painful realization that any hope to resurrect the former dynasty had ended. A significant feature of the painting is that it does not represent a visitor in front of the stele and seems to violate the standard ‘reading the stele’ format. I would argue, however, that the *gaze* inherent in the painting’s handscroll format substitutes for the image of a visitor.<sup>162</sup> As one gradually unrolls the scroll, the shifting images from the mountain cave to the wintry landscape generate a strong sense of moving forward to ‘meet’ the stele. The climax of viewing the handscroll is the viewer’s encounter with the stele, the symbol of a recent but irretrievable past.

Here we arrive at an important factor that separates ‘remnant traces’ from ‘divine traces’ and ‘historical traces’. In terms of temporality, a divine trace purports to register a supernatural event beyond human history, while a historical trace pinpoints a specific moment in dynastic chronology. A remnant trace, on the other hand, stands for the recent dead; the response it seeks is neither religious wonderment nor scholarly devotion, but continuous loyalty in the form of prolonged mourning. Indeed, various kinds of ‘remnant traces’ in the seventeenth century all pertained to dynastic death. In addition to the stele, Jonathan Hay has convincingly demonstrated that the palace and tomb of the first Ming emperor Taizu (*reg* 1368–99) constituted a ‘symbolic geography of dynastic memory’ in post-conquest Nanjing.<sup>163</sup> The two structures both fell to ruin soon after the Qing takeover. A report written in 1684 notes that ‘Where palace gates once stood so imposingly, there were instead ruined walls. Where once the Jade Rivers had curved around, there were instead dried-up channels with collapsed banks.’<sup>164</sup> The Xiaoling Mausoleum suffered less destruction, but when Gu Yanwu visited it in 1653 he already saw ‘ruins of the old ritual buildings and shrines’.<sup>165</sup> To a Ming loyalist, these ruins bespoke the tragic fate of both the former dynasty and themselves (illus. 51). But for the Qing ruler, these ruins provided evidence of military victory, dynastic transition and the changing mandate of Heaven. When Emperor Kangxi (*reg* 1661–1722) paid a visit to the Xiaoling Mausoleum in 1684, for example, he lectured on the reasons for the Ming’s fall and the lessons the Qing could learn from them: ‘If one fearfully studies the remains bearing witness to the rise and fall of earlier dynasties, and becomes daily more wary and prudent, then

one may succeed.<sup>166</sup> What was a ‘remnant trace’ to the loyal subjects of a former dynasty was thus a vehicle of legitimation to the conqueror.

### *Sheng ji (Renowned Place)*

A *sheng ji* is not a single trace, but a timeless place that has attracted generations of people to visit and leave their marks there, and which has become a persistent subject of literary and artistic commemoration and representation. Unlike other traces that imply various kinds of retrospective gazes, a *sheng ji* as a whole belongs to a perpetual present. This is because a ‘famous historical site’ – as the term *sheng ji* is translated in dictionaries – cancels the historical specificity of individual traces by incorporating them into a whole. People may go there to study ancient inscriptions, to commemorate past figures or events, or just to have a delightful outing. Earlier I quoted these lines that Meng Haoran wrote on Mt Xian: ‘In human affairs there is succession and loss; / Men come and go, forming present and past. / Rivers and hills keep traces of their glory [*sheng ji*], / And our generation too climbs here for the view.’<sup>167</sup> The poet knew clearly that other people had been there before him and would come after him. A *sheng ji* is thus not an individual expression but comprises countless layers of human experience.

We can use Mt Tai, the sacred East Marchmount in Shandong, to illustrate this concept.<sup>168</sup> A modern visitor to this mountain finds himself starting from the Dai Temple inside the city of Taian (illus. 52). Huge commemorative tablets supported by stone turtles – tributes to the sacred mountain by various emperors since the Tang dynasty – stand in the yard. Other stone carvings, some dating from the Qin and Han, form a long row along the corridors. Everything here is evaluated and appreciated with reference to its age: five enormous juniper trees, said to have been planted by Emperor Wu of the Han (187–156 BC), are treasured as ancient monuments. The temple was famous for its collection of antique *bonsai*. The oldest one, called the ‘Petite Pine from the Six Dynasties’ (*Xiao Liuchao song*), has spent more than 500 years achieving its current height of three feet.



51 Gong Xian,  
*Landscape*, hanging  
scroll, 1689,  
ink on silk. The  
building in the  
centre has been  
identified as the  
Xiaoling Mausoleum.

A broad avenue, the Road to Heaven (Tongtian Jie), extends the temple's axis northward and leads the visitor to Daizong Fang, a gate that marks the boundary of the sacred mountain. The road continues. Rather than a winding mountain path, it is a grand highway that runs almost vertically to the summit; its verticality reinforces the mountain's monumentality (illus. 53). Writings engraved on cliffs begin to appear along the road. Attracted by familiar names and striking calligraphy, a visitor like myself stops here and there to identify the writers, to place them in a chronology, and to read their writings (see illus. 37). He finds that the inscriptions at the mountain's foot are relatively recent; the closer to the top, the older they become. Gradually, he feels that he is travelling into the past. When he climbs onto the mountain top and encounters the 'Wordless Stele' (Wuzi Bei; illus. 54), he seems to have reached the silent bottom of history.

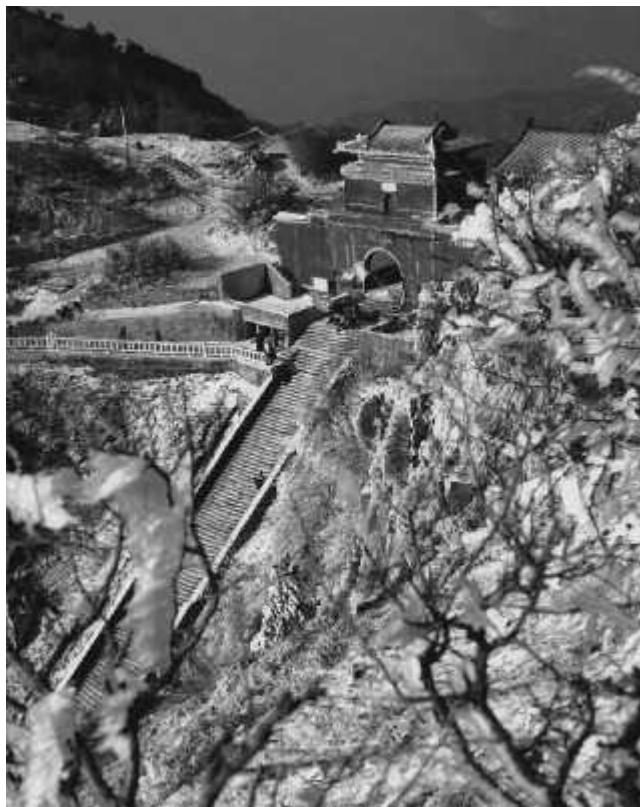
This journey is punctuated by repeated gates and *pailou*-arches – the First Heavenly Gate (Yitian Fang), the Middle Heavenly Gate (Zhongtian Men) and the South Heavenly Gate (Nantian Men), as well as by numerous landmarks – the 'Place of Confucius' Ascent' (Kongzi Denglin Chu), the 'Five Gentlemen Pines' (Wu Daifu Song, which sheltered the First Qin Emperor [reg 221–209 BC] during a sudden storm), and the 'Ground of the Imperial Canopy' (Yuzhang Ping, where Emperor Zhenzong of the Song [reg 997–1022] stopped to enjoy the scenery). Although these landmarks were often constructed far later than the events they commemorate, they still revive the memories of an earlier history. Indeed, Mt Tai as a *sheng ji* typifies a particular kind of 'memory site': instead of being dedicated to a single person and for a definite cause, it commemorates numerous historical personages and events, and conveys the voices of different ages. Unlike an architectural or sculptured monument built at a definable historical moment, the mountain achieves its monumentality over the course of time. Its elaboration, though having continued for centuries, can never be finished. It

has thus become a supreme metaphor of history itself.

Visual forms representing a complex *sheng ji* like Mt Tai include topographical paintings, travel albums and tourist maps, which depict or index famous sites and scenery spots in multiple or single compositions (see illus. 38–40, 42). Another kind of *sheng ji* painting focuses on the historical event that made a place famous and thus has strong narrative component. One such place

52 Stone arch in front of the Temple of Mt Tai, Taian, Shandong province.





is Red Cliff on the Yangzi River, whose recorded history started in AD 208, when the flaming ships of Wu destroyed Cao Cao's galleys moored by the cliff and ended Cao's hope of conquering the South. Some 870 years later, in 1082, the Northern Song poet Su Shi wrote his famous 'First Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff' ('Qian Chibi fu'), describing a small literary gathering riding a boat under the cliff. The core of the text is a conversation between Su and one of his guests, who unexpectedly played a melancholy tone on the flute and saddened the party. The mood of the music reflected his 'meditation on the past' stimulated by the place. As the guest recalls, there:

The prows and sterns of Cao Cao's galleys once stretched a thousand leagues, his flags and banners blotted out the very sky; he poured himself some wine and stood over the river, hefted his spear and composed a poem – he was indeed the boldest spirit of that whole age, and yet where is he now? Consider you and I by comparison, . . . we go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise goblets of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between Heaven and Earth, single grains adrift,

53 The Path to the Southern Heavenly Gate at Mt Tai, Shandong province.

54 'Wordless Stele' on Mt Tai, Shandong province.

far out on the dark blue sea. We grieve that our lives last only a moment,  
and we covet the endlessness of the great river.<sup>169</sup>

Su Shi's piece, as well as a sister composition by him called 'The Second Poetic Exposition on Red Cliff ('Hou Chibi fu'), inspired a whole tradition of Red Cliff painting, partly because of their *huagu* sentiment so strongly felt in the passage cited above. This sub-genre of Chinese landscape/narrative painting has been studied by a number of modern scholars.<sup>170</sup> Generally, it consists of two types of composition: a multi-framed handscroll that renders Su's text as a pictorial narrative, and a single-framed picture that focuses on the moment when Su's boat is carried beneath Red Cliff. Paintings of the second type can refer to both 'Expositions' and thus possess an emblematic significance.<sup>171</sup> Starting from Wu Yuanzhi (twelfth–thirteenth centuries), this type of painting always juxtaposes Su Shi's party with Red Cliff (illus. 55). The physical appearance of the Cliff, which plays no role in the 'First Exposition' and is only briefly described in the 'Second Exposition', becomes the focus of the pictorial representation. Often shown as a giant stone boulder hanging above the river, its grandeur is reinforced by the tiny boat below. The contrast between these two images seems to echo the voice of Su's guest: 'we go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise goblets of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between Heaven and Earth, single grains adrift, far out on the dark blue sea.' Interestingly, although in the text this *huagu* pessimism is eventually overridden by Su Shi's philosophical argument, it remains the central theme of the painting, in which the Cliff stands for both nature and history. Although its size and strength easily overpowers a mortal man, its ragged surface nevertheless suggests erosion through the ages.

55 Wu Yuanzhi, *The Red Cliff*, handscroll, late 12th century, ink on paper.





Wu Yuanzhi's composition was continued and revised by numerous later artists (illus. 56). This pictorial composition was also adapted to enrich autobiographical representations. In such cases, Su Shi is replaced by the artist's self-image, and Red Cliff as a famous historical site conveys three layers of memory: while the place is still associated with the 'Battle at Red Cliff' in the third century and Su Shi's outing in the twelfth century, the painting also commemorates the later visitor's own journey to the place. Not every painter who made such pictures had actually gone to Red Cliff, however. The making of such a work thus amounts to a symbolic pilgrimage to the site through an artistic performance. Commenting on the fictionality in these paintings, the Ming artist Chen Chun (1483–1544) wrote a playful colophon on his 1537 Red Cliff painting :

A visitor brought a calligraphic copy of the 'First Exposition on Red Cliff' to my cottage. I did not remember when I had written it. He asked me to add a picture to it. But I had never seen Red Cliff; how could I portray it? The visitor insisted and insisted; and reluctantly I picked up my brush. Looking at the picture I have just completed: the Cliff seems no more than a piece of fragmented rock in the river; and who can tell that the figures in the boat are Su Shi and his guests? This is like telling about a dream in a dream; isn't it ridiculous?<sup>172</sup>

In a broad sense, Chen Chun's self-parody suggests the inevitable dead end of any 'picture of a famous site' (*sheng ji tu*) as a *huaigu* expression. In his case, the sense of 'lamenting the past' had completely disappeared from the painting; what



56 Qiu Ying, *Red Cliff*, handscroll, c. 1500–50, ink and colour on paper.

is left is merely a standard pictorial formula that satisfied a consumer's demand for a tourist picture. This formula could be revitalized, however, when it was reinvested with fresh and personal experience – when a landscape image regained its significance as a 'trace' to bear real memories of the past. Thus, whereas the 'Red Cliff painting' itself became hopelessly stereotyped, its basic pictorial composition still inspired genuine *huaigu* works, including the last leaf in Shitao's *Reminiscences of Qinhuai*, which again shows a man in a boat contemplating a cliff (see illus. 16).



TWO  
THE BIRTH  
OF RUINS:

Inventing a Modern Visual  
Culture in China

Based on a survey of traditional architecture and painting, I argued in chapter One that in premodern Chinese art the sense of decay, death and rebirth is conveyed by metaphors and experienced on a psychological level; pictorial representations of architectural ruins and actual ‘ruin architecture’ virtually did not exist. There was indeed an unspoken taboo against preserving and portraying architectural ruins: although abandoned cities or fallen palaces were lamented in words, their images, if actually painted, would imply inauspiciousness and danger.

The lore of ‘Chinese ruins’ told by eighteenth-century European travellers and architects was thus largely their own creation. What they described and praised was instead a contemporary European artistic convention in representing and appreciating ancient ruins. In visual representation, early and mid-eighteenth century depictions of ‘Chinese ruins’ – tightly knit vignettes incorporating stereotypical Oriental figures and dilapidated buildings – were largely fictional. As found in Chinoiserie prints and decoration, a scene of this kind is typically comprised of a cluster of distorted ornamental rocks, a broken bridge or pavilion, and a few undernourished willow trees (see illus. 6, 7). In comparison, literary expression allowed greater scope for the European imagination of Chinese ruins. William Chambers, for example, claimed that scenes in a Chinese garden fell into three categories: the pleasing, the terrible and the surprising;<sup>1</sup> ruins were indispensable to generating the sense of the terrible. Echoing Edmund Burke’s (1729–1797) notion of the sublime, landscape elements in this category would include ‘a veritable nightmare of dark caverns, deep valleys, impending rocks, ruined buildings, distorted trees that suggest the effects of lightning, tempest or fire; bats, owls and birds of prey; wolves, tigers and howling jackals; gibbets, crosses, wheels and the whole apparatus of torture; foundries and lime kilns belching flame and smoke from the mountain tops like volcanoes; and other images of privation, pain, danger and destruction.’<sup>2</sup> Anyone familiar with traditional Chinese gardens would dismiss such an account as pure fantasy.

This situation changed fundamentally toward the end of the eighteenth century. Coinciding with the first direct diplomatic contact between Great Britain and China, ‘realistic’ representations of Chinese ruins were created by a member of the Macartney mission to the Qing court and presented to the European public in abundant reproductions. What followed was the rapid proliferation of such images during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Facilitated by new forms of visual representation and communication such as photography, lithography and illustrated mass publications, and stimulated by intensified globalization through international commerce, warfare and colonization, ruin images travelled across national borders and acquired a universal significance as tokens

of a transnational modernity. It was only at this juncture that the ‘absence’ of architectural ruins in Chinese art became recognizable as a specific cultural and historical phenomenon. In other words, the very notion of this absence resulted from the changing definition of Chinese art, which ceased to be a self-contained cultural system and was brought into a global circulation of images, mediums and visual technology. It was this recontextualization of Chinese art that inspired me to ask at the beginning of chapter One: where are the ruins in traditional Chinese art? The same recontextualization provides a historical setting for my investigation of ‘the birth of ruins’ in this chapter.

## Circulating Picturesque Ruins

### *Depicting Chinese Ruins*

The Macartney Embassy from 1792 to 1794 has been the subject of numerous studies in the West.<sup>3</sup> The mission was a failure from the British point of view, as the Qing Emperor Qianlong rejected King George III’s request to establish commercial and diplomatic ties, reportedly due to a controversy over the humiliating *kowtow* ceremony. A traditional opinion, mainly based on the documents produced by the embassy itself, considers this failure a consequence of cultural clash, or a conflict between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ civilizations at the dawn of modernity.<sup>4</sup> But newer research by James L. Hevia and Benjamin A. Elman, among others, has interpreted the diplomatic encounter through alternative frameworks such as empire building, history of science and ritual and representation.<sup>5</sup> The present section focuses on a single product of this encounter – realistic images of Chinese ruins produced by William Alexander. To be sure, several influential sets of ‘China images’ had existed in Europe before 1792.<sup>6</sup> But none of them depicted architectural ruins. It is therefore interesting to think about why such images appeared at this particular historical moment and also about the nature of their relationship with the mission in general.

First, apart from its diplomatic and commercial aims, the Macartney embassy was charged with the objective of exploring the ‘real’ China, including its land, people and natural resources. Before the embassy set off, for example, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who had accompanied Captain Cook to the South Seas and was at the time establishing the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, gave full instructions to Macartney on what specimens to collect.<sup>7</sup> The embassy ships that set sail from Spithead on 26 September 1792 carried not only diplomats and sailors, but also scholars, botanists and scientists. It is thus not surprising that the accounts

written and published by members of the mission detailed not only diplomatic affairs but everything they observed on their long journey across the vast country. The account written by John Barrow (1764–1848), Macartney's personal secretary, bears a title that best reveals the work's documentary intent: *Travels in China, Containing Descriptions, Observation, and Comparison, Made and Collected in the Course of a Short Residence at the Imperial Palace of Yuen-Min-Yuen and on a Subsequent Journey Through Pekin to Canton.*<sup>8</sup> Other publications, though lacking such descriptive headings, are no less thorough in their content; detailed observation and description constitutes the most important feature of these compilations, no matter whether these are semi-official accounts by Barrow and George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801), or populist reports by Macartney's valet Aeneas Anderson and the soldier Samuel Holmes.<sup>9</sup> The same trait is also evident in Alexander's numerous drawings, which depict China's landscape, towns and buildings, cultural activities, and people of different ranks and professions in a documentary style. In his memoir, John Barrow recalled that 'Mr Alexander drew beautifully and faithfully in watercolours, and omitted nothing that was Chinese, from the human face and figure, down to the humblest plant, and so sure were his delineations, that nothing before or since could be compared with them.'<sup>10</sup> The documentary quality of Alexander's China images was also praised by Staunton, who testified that every illustration by the artist included in his *Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* is 'a faithful copy after nature'.<sup>11</sup>

Second, as direct eyewitness accounts, these writings seriously dispelled the romantic notions the West had of China. Before the Macartney mission, Europeans had learned about China mainly through the writings of Catholic missionaries. With the notable exception of Montesquieu, eighteenth-century European philosophers had an idealized impression of the Chinese political system, which to them exemplified a high degree of rationality and beneficence. A taste for exotic Chinese art also permeated the eighteenth-century European aristocracy, who decorated their estates with abundant quantities of Chinoiserie. Launched at the very end of the century, however, the Macartney embassy was a product of a different era, when England was eagerly developing a worldwide trading system during its rapid industrialization. As heirs of Galileo, Newton and Locke, Macartney and his fellow travellers regarded themselves as representatives of a scientific, rational world. Their experience in China only confirmed their notion of the Orient as a backward, pre-industrial world. In their journals they portrayed the legendary Central Kingdom as a place that, though not without charm, was ruled by a 'tyranny of a handful of Tartars over more than three hundred millions of

Chinese'. Compared with civilized Europeans this population were barbarians, and China as a whole was like 'an old, crazy, first-rate man-of-war' that overawed its neighbours because of its size but would easily flounder under the command of a weak leader. Barrow summarizes this new attitude toward China at the beginning of his book: his account would divest the imperial court of 'the tinsel and the tawdry varnish' with which the Jesuits had 'found it expedient to cover in their writings'.<sup>12</sup>

William Alexander was only 25 years old when he joined the Macartney embassy in 1792. Although he held the low-ranking position of a draughtsman, his extraordinary energy and productivity – today nearly 1,000 of his drawings and paintings exist (870 of them in the British Library alone<sup>13</sup>) – eventually made him *the* visual reporter of the expedition. His professional diligence formed a sharp contrast with Thomas Hickey (1741–1824), the higher ranking Portrait Painter on the diplomatic mission, who painted little, if at all, during the three-year expedition.<sup>14</sup> After returning to London, Alexander turned his sketches into polished watercolour paintings, to be reproduced as book illustrations and to be exhibited and sold as works of art. Between 1795 and 1804, he had sixteen paintings shown at the Royal Academy, the first thirteen of which were devoted to Chinese subjects.<sup>15</sup> But the real impact of his work was realized through printed reproductions. Three years after the expedition, in 1797, a set of his images was published together with the first systematic account of the embassy by Staunton,<sup>16</sup> and was subsequently duplicated with Staunton's book in France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and America within the next three years.<sup>17</sup> These and additional images were then used to illustrate many other publications about the Macartney expedition. In 1797 he also began to publish his own pictorial account of the expedition, first in small groups of four images at three-month intervals. These images were finally compiled into a single volume entitled *The Costume of China* in 1805.<sup>18</sup> Two other books were also published under his name: *Views of Headlands, Islands etc., taken during a Voyage to China* (1798) and *Picturesque Representations of the Dress and Manners of the Chinese* (1814).<sup>19</sup> The former consists mainly of technical drawings, while the latter was perhaps not from his hand.<sup>20</sup> In comparison, the 48 colour engravings in *The Costume of China* all bear his signature and are accompanied by explanations he wrote. This book can therefore be considered the most representative of his China images.

In terms of subject-matter, these illustrations generally followed earlier European travellers' visual documentation of China, especially the set of images produced by Johannes Nieuhof (1618–1672) after travelling as a member of the first embassy of the Dutch East India Company to Beijing from 1655 to 1657.<sup>21</sup> Like Nieuhof,

Alexander often painted cities and landscapes from the ship on which he travelled, producing images that typically present distant views of townships and crowds. He also adopted three other pictorial modes initiated by Nieuhof, one on individual buildings, one on groups of people engaged in specific activities, and one on types of figures dressed in special costumes. However, having apprenticed to Julius Caesar Ibbetson (1759–1817), a British painter known for his Picturesque images of rustic figures, animals and landscape, and having studied at London’s Royal Academy for four years between 1784 and 1792, Alexander saw himself as a gentleman artist rather than a plain-clothes draughtsman, and he most clearly expressed this self-identity in his artistic style.<sup>22</sup>

After returning from China, he joined Thomas Girtin’s Sketching Club, a club of refined artists founded in 1799, and became an art collector himself. His finished watercolour drawings from this period, while serving some initial documentary purposes, reflect the prevailing artistic taste for the Picturesque. Indeed, not only does the word ‘Picturesque’ head one of his illustrated books, but his journal frequently uses ‘romantic’ to describe his response to China’s landscape.<sup>23</sup> Thus while in content Alexander’s China images show continuity with earlier examples of the genre, they also differ radically in style and mood from those of Nieuhof, Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and especially Bernard Picart (1673–1733), whose fanciful depictions of strange deities and exotic rites exhibit a penchant for theatricality.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, Alexander’s sober, gentle images reflect the clear influence of representative eighteenth-century British Picturesque artists, such as Richard Wilson (1714–1782), Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), William Gilpin (1724–1804), Michael Angelo Rooker (1746–1801) and Ibbetson. Especially when he turned his pencil sketches into watercolour paintings, what had begun as a means of topographical and ethnographical recording developed into a medium for expressing emotional responses to natural scenery. These paintings are restrained in temperament, harmonizing unfamiliar foreign images with balanced, pleasant views of landscape. Dictated by the general spirit of the Picturesque, their basic artistic tenet is to fuse the beautiful and the Sublime into a spontaneous representation of nature.<sup>25</sup>

We can thus understand another important difference between his works and previous China images: for the first time, a European artist painted ‘Chinese ruins’



57 Johannes Nieuhof, engraving of a pagoda from *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperour of China...* (London, 1669).

in a realistic manner. Nieuhof illustrated many Chinese buildings, among which the pagoda appears in more than half of his 113 plates (illus. 57). But none of his pagodas show damage: they all look like perfect architectural specimens unconditioned by time and the elements. Alexander inherited the European fascination with the pagoda, but his pagodas, whether in the background or as the focal image of a painting, are often in ruins, with the top broken and vegetation growing over the worn walls (illus. 58). This again reflects the influence of Picturesque aesthetics popular in late eighteenth-century England, in which ruins evoke 'pleasing melancholy' at a return to the state of nature.<sup>26</sup> *View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds on the Borders of the Lake See-Hoo, taken from the Vale of Tombs* is one of Alexander's most popular images and exists in both watercolour and

58 William Alexander,  
*South Gate of the City of Ting-Hai*, 1798, engraving.



engraved versions (illus. 59).<sup>27</sup> Supposedly depicting a famous view in the scenic city of Hangzhou, the picture features large pagodas and smaller stupas on hilltops and along the road, with the damaged but still imposing Thunder Peak Pagoda (Leifeng ta) at a commanding height. (The name of the pagoda is mistranslated in the picture's title as Tower of the Thundering Winds, because 'peak' and 'wind' are homonyms and both pronounced 'feng'.) At least three other drawings by Alexander also portray this ruined building, but in these works the pagoda appears as the sole subject of depiction. On the reverse of one drawing, the artist inscribed the following words, expressing his fascination with the building's remote age:

This antique building stands on an Eminence jutting into the Lake Si-hou [Xihu] near Hang-tcheou [Hangzhou] in the province of Che-kiang [Zhejiang] – and is said to have been built before the time of Confucius – so that it is now more than 2,000 years old – and prior to the famous Great Wall. It is built of fine cut stone and is as near I could judge 200 feet high.<sup>28</sup>

As one of the Ten Famous Views of West Lake (Xihu shijing), the iconic image of the ruined Leifeng Pagoda sometimes appears in Ming and Qing wood-block prints. But as Eugene Wang has demonstrated, these Chinese illustrations follow a pattern of minimizing the structure's ruined appearance, even restoring it to its imagined original state of completion.<sup>29</sup> Alexander's picture, however, not only gives this ruin a predominant status but also integrates it into a typical European mode of the Picturesque. A comparison between this picture and a watercolour painting that he made in England betrays many similarities in composition and mood (illus. 60). The focal image in this second painting is also a ruined site: Conway Castle on the North Wales coast not far from Beaumaris, Anglesey, the native town of Alexander's mother. Both pictures consist of layered spaces in a smooth transition. The nearby hills and trees are placed in shadow. A serpentine path leads the viewer's gaze from the foreground to the middle distance. The lively brushwork and the changing light and shadow generate a sense of fragmentation and instability, bestowing the landscape with an atmospheric, rugged surface. We can further compare this *Conway Castle* with J.M.W. Turner's 1799 *Caernarvon Castle*, a work that art historians have frequently used to demonstrate a new taste for the Picturesque in British art at the end of the eighteenth century (illus. 61). Created around the same time, both paintings employ a tripartite structure consisting of a darkened foreground, a lit mid-ground, and an



59 William Alexander,  
*View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds on the Borders of the Lake See-Hoo*, early 19th century, watercolour.

60 William Alexander,  
*Conway Castle*, early 19th century, pencil and watercolour.

atmospheric far distance.<sup>30</sup> According to Patrick Connor and Susan L. Sloman, this style, championed by a group of younger artists including J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) and John Constable (1776–1837), represented a departure from the Claudeian ideal of generalist landscape toward a more sensitive and spontaneous depiction of nature.<sup>31</sup>

As a system of representation, the Picturesque determined not only what to depict but also the manner of depiction. It was within this system that Alexander painted the Chinese ruins of Thunder Peak Pagoda and the British ruins of Conway Castle in identical compositions and with similar brushwork. In this process of artistic assimilation, Thunder Peak Pagoda was brought into a non-Chinese frame of perception and representation – this indigenous monument was rediscovered, reinterpreted and reframed for a global viewing public. In other words,

although the ruined pagoda did exist in a Chinese province and although the Chinese people had been aware of its ruinous existence for centuries, its status as a prominent ‘Chinese ruin’ became global knowledge at this particular historical moment through a foreign system of representation. Founded on the principle of verisimilitude, this system provided a new platform for the global transfer of visual information. The rediscovery and reframing of Chinese architectural ruins was part of this transfer in the wake of the Enlightenment, and was necessarily associated with the general process of globalization. The globalized images of Chinese ruins were then transferred back to China and helped redefine Chinese art: as will be discussed later, such images would eventually become integral elements of modern Chinese art, produced by Westernized Chinese artists as indigenous responses to history and reality. Through this process of ‘reclamation’, the European imagery of architectural ruins finally transcended its original cultural referent to become ‘a hetero-cultural signifying chain that crisscrosses the semantic fields of two or more languages simultaneously’.<sup>32</sup>

Like many works that Alexander finished in London, *View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds* likely combines a number of sketches into a panoramic view.<sup>33</sup> He apparently used the same sketches to create other compositions of varying scope and with different thematic interest. In particular, we find that a detail of this picture – a square tomb stupa in the foreground at the lower right corner – is transformed into the principal image in a 1798 illustration (illus. 62).<sup>34</sup> In this second picture, the structure stands amid smaller funerary structures and a coffin. Grass grows on the roof and half covers the coffin lying in front of it (an unlikely situation in eighteenth-century China); special attention is paid to the stupa's broken tiles and cracked walls. Apparently, the upkeep of this group of funerary monuments has been neglected and the buildings have suffered from the elements. The text accompanying this image, subtitled 'View of a Burying-Place', explains Chinese burial practices but does not mention anything about the site. The choice of depicting an architectural ruin was thus again based on the conventions of the Picturesque. Differing from the panoramic *View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds*, however, this close-up view of an abandoned tomb may also carry an additional significance to symbolize the oldness and weakness of China as a country and civilization, a meaning that becomes explicit in a related later work by the same artist.

61 J.M.W. Turner,  
*Caernarvon Castle*, 1799,  
oil on canvas.



62 William Alexander,  
*View of a Burying-Place*,  
1798, engraving.



Dating from 1805, this third picture was created as the title page of *The Costume of China* published that year (illus. 63). Instead of illustrating any specific location or topic, it offers an emblematic image of China: a decaying temple or tomb amid a random collection of fragmentary objects. The building is once again in a ruinous state. There are signs of damage all over it: the walls bear cracks, and one of the decorative dragons on the roof has lost its head. The building's lower half is turned into a stone stele, on which Alexander has inscribed these words:

THE COSTUME OF CHINA

Inscribed to the

EARL OF MACARTNEY. K. B.

Embafsdador from the

KING OF GREAT BRITAIN

to the

EMPEROR OF CHINA.

A.D. M. DCC.XC. I I.

By W. Alexander F. S. A.  
Draftsman to the Embassy

Some fifteen objects surround the bottom of the building. Most of these are weapons used in the Qing army: an old-fashioned bow-and-arrow container, a large knife, a gun barrel and a rifle. Other items include a gong, a trumpet, a flag, a Qing soldier's hat and a large incense burner. Randomly gathered under the inscription that Alexander has chiselled on the ruined building, these objects generate a strong impression of being war trophies – an impression most clearly conveyed by the fallen flag and the abandoned hat of a Chinese soldier. Selected by Alexander for the title page of his book, the crumbling building possesses a two-fold significance: on one level it embodies Macartney's perception of China as 'an old, crazy,



63 William Alexander,  
title page of *The Costume  
of China*, 1805, engraving.

first rate man-of-war' that would easily flounder. On another level it reveals the self-imagination of the Macartney mission as modern conquerors of a crumbling old empire. Created 35 years before the First Opium War and 55 years before the Second Opium War, this image prophesied these later events, through which European powers actually conquered China with their military might.

### *East–West Circulations*

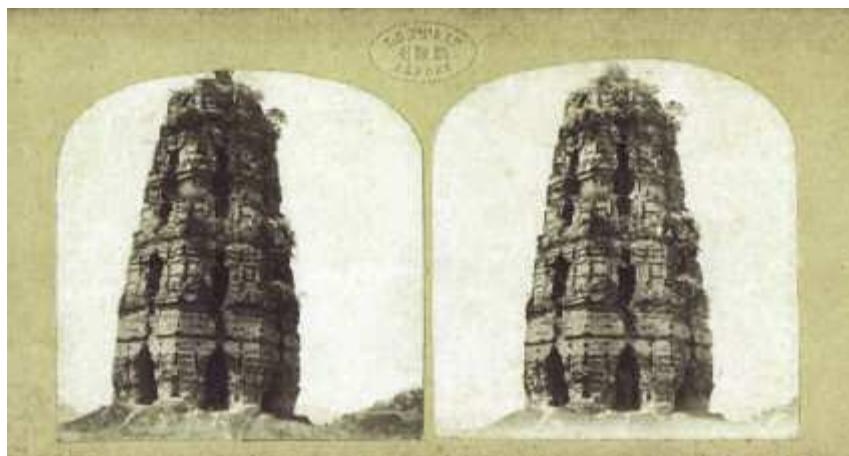
A cultural dialogue dominated by Western taste, the circulation of 'Picturesque' images of Chinese ruins started with the fashion for Chinoiserie in eighteenth-century European decorative art and ended with depictions of Picturesque ruins by some young, modernist Chinese artists in the early twentieth century. A crucial link between these two historical episodes was the spread of photography, a newly invented visual technique that finally established the experiential credibility of 'Chinese ruins'.

After William Alexander, the next significant group of romantic images of Chinese ruins was created by European photographers, who arrived in China from 1842 onward.<sup>35</sup> Like Alexander, these men had formed their artistic tastes

before going to China, and the photographs they took in China frequently presented ruined pagodas and dilapidated gardens – two quintessential features of the Chinese built environment in the European imagination. One of the earliest surviving pagoda images, dating from 1857, was made by the amateur photographer Robert G. Sillar (1827–1902), an English businessman interested in books, art and science (illus. 64).<sup>36</sup> Another was taken between 1857 and 1859 by the French commercial photographer Louis Legrand (b. c. 1820). This second double picture is from a set of approximately 80 stereoviews representing the region around Shanghai (illus. 65).<sup>37</sup> When the set was reviewed in the 24 March 1860 issue of the French photographic periodical *La Lumière*, the reviewer Ernest Lacan particularly remarked on Legrand's penchant for the Picturesque, since many pictures in the set focused on rural landscapes and garden scenes. The pagoda photograph bears the title 'Tour en ruines de Lué-Fonta' – the legendary Thunder Peak Pagoda that had fascinated Alexander (see illus. 59). Unlike other stereoviews in the set, which often show expansive space from a high angle, this double picture is filled

64 Robert G. Sillar, *Old Pagoda at Hills, Shanghae*, 1857.





65 Louis Legrand, *Tour en ruines de Lué-Fonta*, c. 1859, from a stereoscopic photograph.



66 Robert G. Sillar, *Garden in Shanghai*, c. 1858.



67 Louis Legrand, *Rivière et rochers dans le jardin du grand Tha-ou-Tha, gouverneur de la cité de Shang-Hai*, c. 1859, from a stereoscopic photograph.



68 Felice Beato and James Robertson,  
*Obelisks in the Hippodrome, 1857.*

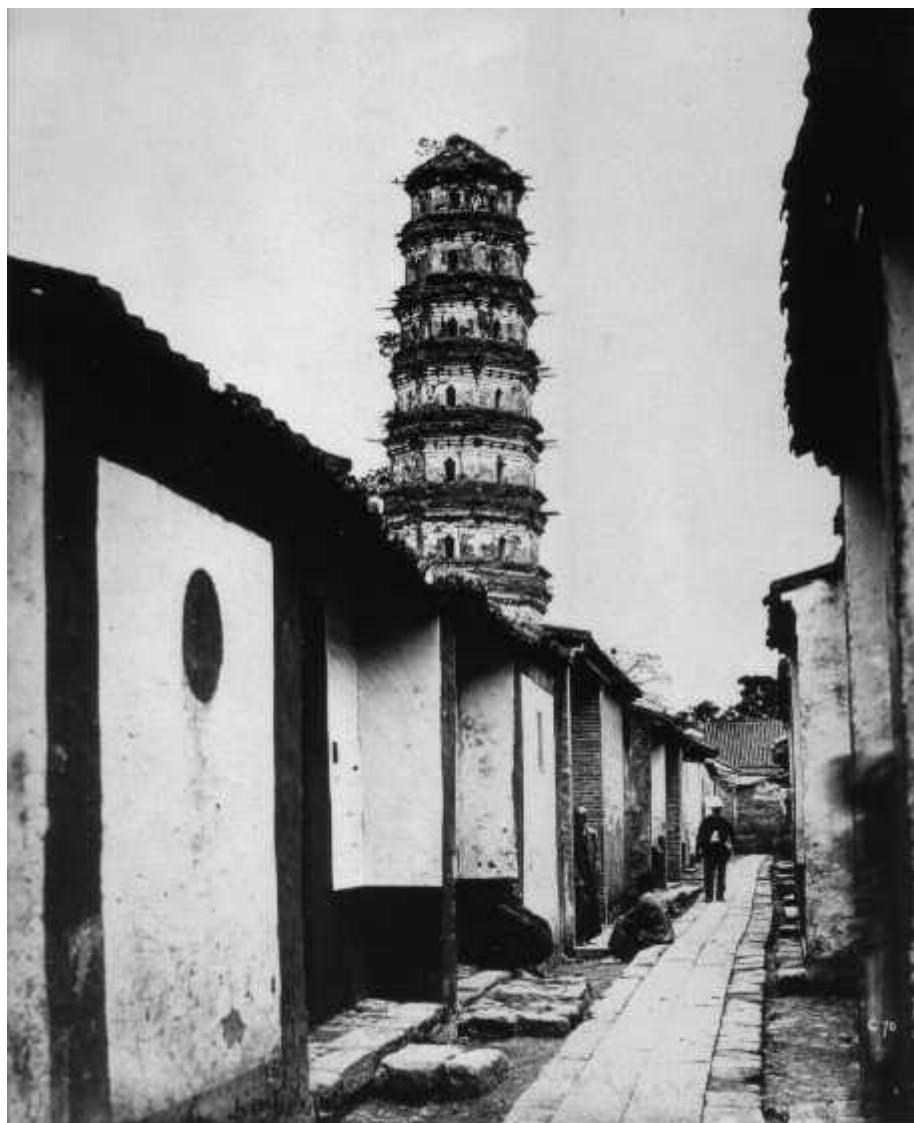
with the pagoda's iconic image, whose imposing monumentality sharply contrasts with its severe deterioration. Both Sillar and Legrand also took pictures of Chinese gardens (illus. 66, 67); their favoured images – clusters of ornamental rocks and a few bony trees over a stone bridge – echo Chinoiserie vignettes (see illus. 6 and 7) and remind us of William Chambers's account of an imaginative Chinese garden with 'impending rocks, ruined buildings, [and] distorted trees'.

For photographers like Felice Beato (1832–1909) and John Thomson (1837–1921), more evidence for their activities survives and demonstrates that their photographs considerably expanded the previous image repertoire of Chinese ruins. Before arriving in

Hong Kong in 1860, Beato had travelled to Constantinople, Greece, Jerusalem and India during the previous decade. A major category of photographs he made in these places consists of ruined monuments (illus. 68),<sup>38</sup> which continued to be a major theme of his China images. Like earlier European travellers such as Nieuhof and Alexander, his eyes were immediately captured by architectural forms analogous to classical or medieval European monuments. A ruined nine-storey pagoda frequently appears in the pictures he took in Guangzhou, either as the focal image (illus. 69) or as a background element, in ways strikingly similar to Alexander's drawings of ruined pagodas (see illus. 58 and 59). In Beijing he photographed a large number of imperial buildings, documenting not only their grandeur but also their neglect.

Similarly, Thomson had become a well-known recorder of ancient monuments before photographing Chinese ruins. After assuming membership of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts in 1861, he travelled to the Far East and joined his older brother William in Singapore. There, inspired by Henri Mouhot's account of the ancient cities of Angkor Wat in the Cambodian jungle, he embarked on what would become the first of his major photographic expeditions. Angkor Wat attracted him partly because of its resemblance to Greek and Roman ruins. As he wrote:

Walled cities of vast extent; exquisitely built stone bridges, spanning with a multitude of arches the streams of the interiors; temples more curious and extensive than those of Central America, and approaching in their classical appearance the works of the ancient Greeks or Romans.<sup>39</sup>



69 Felice Beato,  
*Nine-Storeyed Pagoda  
and Tartar Street,*  
Canton, 1860.

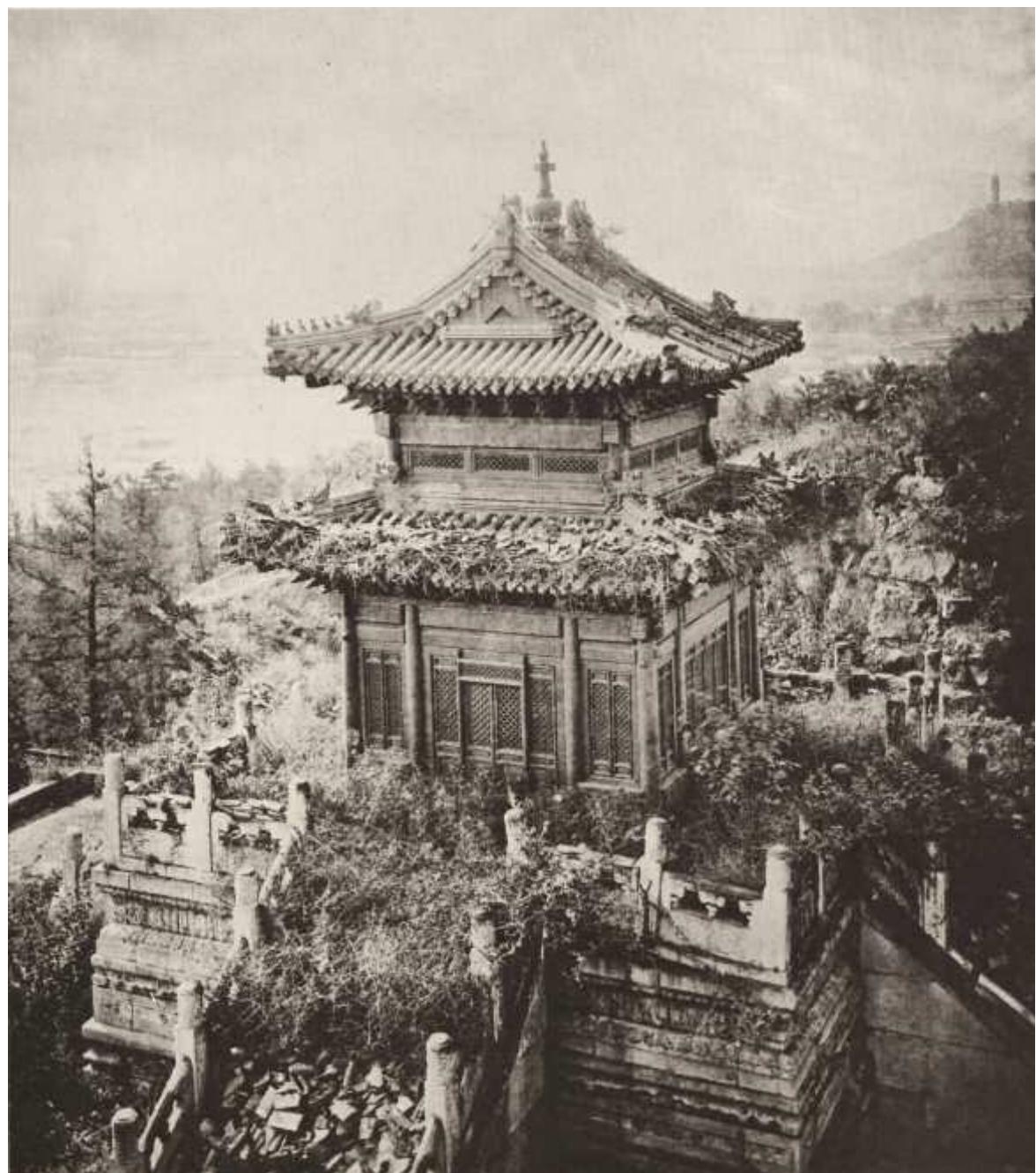
Eventually published in a book entitled *The Antiquities of Cambodia*, the photographs he took on the trip allowed the European public to see the mysterious ruins of Angkor Wat with their own eyes, and earned him membership of the Royal Ethnological Society and the Royal Geographic Society in 1866. After establishing a studio in Hong Kong in 1868, he travelled throughout China, from Hong Kong and Canton to Shanghai and Beijing. Never before had a foreign artist penetrated so deeply into China's interior: he visited great monuments such as the Great Wall and also ventured into less known territories. From 1870 to 1871 he visited the Fuzhou (Foochow) region, travelling up the Min River by boat. He



70 John Thomson,  
*Pagoda Island near  
Foochow, 1868.*

then spent three months journeying 3,000 miles up the Yangzi River, reaching Sichuan in the river's upper reaches. Whereas his subjects had expanded significantly to include portraits, landscapes and ethnographic documentation, his passion for capturing the eternal images of ancient ruins never diminished. In his 1868 *Pagoda Island near Foochow*, for example, an old monastery stands on a crumbling foundation above a lake; its still, timeless image is reflected in the mirror-like water (illus. 70). His photograph of the Precious Cloud Pavilion in Beijing's Summer Palace captures the image of a famous building made of bronze and marble (illus. 71). Instead of emphasizing the pavilion's durability, however, Thomson contrasts its precise contours with the wild brambles and climbers that half bury it.

Like Beato, Thomson frequently photographed the nine-storeyed pagoda in Guangzhou's Liurong Monastery (called Hua Ta or Flower Pagoda by local Chinese). Describing one of his photographs published in the *Illustrations of China and Its People* (1873/4), he made a special point of identifying the origin of the ruined structure. As he explains, the building in the centre of the picture 'is



known to the Chinese as the “Flower ornate” Pagoda. It is one of the oldest in the south of China, and is said to have been erected during the reign of Wu-Ti, AD 537.<sup>40</sup> This and other examples reveal two tendencies in early Western accounts of Chinese ruins. The first is a willing emphasis, even exaggeration, of the ruins’ age. Earlier I cited William Alexander’s note on Thunder Peak Pagoda: ‘[The structure] is said to have been built before the time of Confucius – so that it is now more than 2,000 years old – and prior to the famous Great Wall.’ But it was commonly known that the monument was constructed in AD 975 by Qian Shu, the ruler of the Wuyue Kingdom. Thomson’s account of the Flower Pagoda’s age is likewise inaccurate: the ruin he photographed was actually from the late eleventh century; the original pagoda had earlier been destroyed by fire.

The second tendency is a purposeful selection of building types. Early photographs of China by Westerners belong to three clearly demarcated categories with distinct visual conventions: people, places and social events.<sup>41</sup> For the category of ‘places’, advertisements by nineteenth-century photo studios often list three kinds of offerings – images of buildings, landscapes and panoramas. Differing from the immense scale of a panorama and the heightened naturalness of landscape scenes, photographs of ‘buildings’ focus on individual architectural structures. The assumed customer of this type of image, like that of other early photographs of China, was a Westerner, whose fascination with exotic oriental architecture had inspired many illustrations and imitations in Europe since the eighteenth century (see illus. 5 and 9). It is therefore not surprising to find so many garden scenes and ruined pagodas among these photographic representations. Moreover, because early photo studios were mainly located in treaty ports, especially in Hong Kong and Shanghai, pagodas near these two cities, including Thunder Peak Pagoda and the Flower Pagoda, were the most frequently photographed. (As Thomson’s photographs show, the Flower Pagoda could actually be seen from the yard of the British Consulate in Guangzhou.) The global distribution of these images reinforced the received Western notion of the pagoda’s central position in traditional Chinese architecture.

The situation was somewhat different in Beijing, the capital of the Qing Empire, with its abundant ancient palaces and temples.<sup>42</sup> No commercial photography studios were established there during the 1860s and ’70s. Instead, a group of ‘serious’ amateur photographers serving in the Maritime Customs made a large number of architectural photographs in and around this old city.<sup>43</sup> Among them, the Englishman Thomas Child (1841–1898), the German Ernst Ohlmer (1847–1927) and the Frenchman Théophile Piry (1851–1918) all photographed the ruined Yuanming Yuan Garden west of Beijing (see illus. 117 and 118; the

71 John Thomson,  
*Precious Cloud Pavilion*  
in Beijing’s Summer  
Palace, Beijing, c. 1868.

story of Yuanming Yuan is the subject of a later section in this book).<sup>44</sup> Child sold his architectural photographs through *The Far East* magazine, published in Shanghai. An advertisement he placed in the July 1877 issue of the journal listed 192 pictures, including a dozen pagoda images and views of tombs, as well as 'Bridge and Ruins' and 'Remains of Ancient Yan Walls'.

Finally, it is important to note a close affinity between the penchant for architectural ruins among early Western photographers and their ethnographic interests in 'old China'.<sup>45</sup> This connection becomes explicit in a prevailing practice where Chinese people were included in ruin images. Examples are abundant: Thomson posed a half-naked Chinese labourer in front of a stone camel at the Ming tomb; the French archaeologist Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918) photographed a Han dynasty stone pillar in Shandong together with a local farmer. An anonymous picture of an abandoned temple is especially noteworthy for two reasons (illus. 72): first, instead of recording a famous monument as many contemporary photographs do, the site in the photograph is unidentified; the image's appeal lies in invoking the general aesthetics of the Picturesque. Second, the Chinese people amid the ruins are not ordinary labourers or local residents as frequently seen in similar photographs, but a group of intellectuals dressed in long robes. Unengaged in any specific activities, they seem to be immersed in the scattered stones and to be contemplating the ancient remains. The photograph's desolate mood is akin to that of *huagu* poetry – the genre for lamenting and meditating on the past. One can also easily relate the image to a traditional *huagu* picture such as *Reading the Stele* (see illus. 17). The difference, however, is that if the past is symbolized by the immaculate stele in the traditional painting, it is now represented literally by architectural ruins in the photograph.



72 Anonymous, scholars at an abandoned temple near Suzhou, c. 1865.

Historically speaking, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs of Chinese ruins by Western photographers belonged to a system of representation that was alien to premodern Chinese visual culture but familiar to their expected Western audience. But as photography rapidly spread across China through multiple channels during this period, this modern technology gradually transformed the visual mode of *huagu* from a psychological and metaphorical one to a physical and representational one.<sup>46</sup> Picturesque ruins became stock images



73 An illustration in  
*Dianshizhai huabao*  
(*Dianshizhai Illustrated  
News*) (1886).

for tourist photographs from the late nineteenth century onward, produced not only by European travellers but also by Chinese photographers and local studios. Inspired by Western magazines such as the *Illustrated London News* in England, *Le Monde illustré* in France and *Harper's* in America, newly established Chinese-language pictorials frequently featured images of architectural ruins, signifying a sweeping change in popular visual culture (illus. 73).<sup>47</sup> Following the introduction of art history as a modern discipline, a full range of historical examples of Western art was reproduced in prints and influenced a generation of art students. Many such prints feature ruin images, from ancient Greek temples to Romantic paintings.

The changing mode in ruin representation was also related to the new artistic ideal of realism. When Western-style art schools emerged in China in the early twentieth century, one of their new agendas was to teach how 'to paint from the observed world' (*xie sheng*).<sup>48</sup> The art of painting was redefined: Chen Shuren (1883–1948), a crucial theorist in an ongoing Western Painting Movement (Yanghua

Yuandong), wrote in the influential journal *True Image Pictorial* (*Zhenxiang huabao*) in 1912: 'What is painting? . . . It is we as human beings using certain mediums to imitate natural forms on a two-dimensional surface.'<sup>49</sup> Although he was merely reiterating a commonplace idea in Western art, to Chinese literati painters accustomed to expressing themselves through reinterpreting ancient masterpieces, these words were nothing but revolutionary. One consequence of the new artistic ideal was a redefinition of *huaiyu*: the notion of the past could no longer be expressed in painting purely as a subjective reflex, but had to be conveyed by an external referent in the observed world. A 1918 snapshot captures this transformation: students of the newly established Shanghai School of Fine Arts have left the classroom to seek their painting subject in the rural countryside (illus. 74). We do not know what they are depicting, but the photographer purposefully photographed them in front of an ancient pagoda.

As the stronghold of the Western Painting Movement, the Shanghai School of Fine Arts and similar institutions in China derived their philosophy and

pedagogy from the West. Their teachers and students willingly adopted European art styles as models for their works, even travelling to Europe to study painting first hand. In Europe they saw abundant ruin images, in museums and at famous historical sites. Both occasions inspired them to create Picturesque ruin images, as records of their pilgrimages to ancient monuments and as a tribute to a foreign artistic tradition that they now embraced as their own. Yan Wenliang (1893–1999) and Pan Yuliang (1895–1977) are two representatives of this trend.

Yan Wenliang started to experiment with oil painting when he was a teenager; his ‘teachers’ were magazines of Western art that he found in a bookstore in his hometown of Suzhou.<sup>50</sup> He started teaching art in an elementary school in 1913 when he was twenty-one, and gradually moved on to teach in high school and college. A photo taken in 1918 shows him holding a large palette for oil painting, clearly demonstrating his self-identity as a Western-style artist.<sup>51</sup> Seeing China’s need for specialized art schools, he was inspired to develop higher art education and finally founded the Suzhou Academy of Art in 1922, while continuing to study Western techniques of watercolour, chalk and oils from reproductions. One of his watercolours from 1917, now lost, depicts a wooded park behind a paved area. Several people have just arrived and are about to enter the woods; a meandering path leads the viewer’s gaze to the remaining columns of a ruined structure (illus. 75). The work has a highly polished style; its subject-matter, smooth surface and rigid brushwork betray clear influences from photographs or reproductions. The same style also characterizes his portrayals of famous Chinese scenic spots.<sup>52</sup>

74 Anonymous, students of the Shanghai School of Fine Arts taking an outdoor painting lesson, 1918.

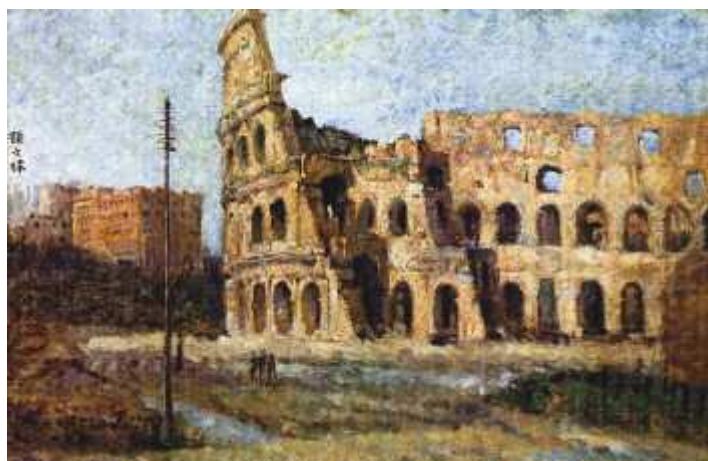


75 Yan Wenliang, *Early Summer*, 1917, water-colour.



To acquire first-hand knowledge of European art and art education, Yan travelled to Europe in 1928 with money saved from his salary. He stayed three years in Paris, studying at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and spending much time copying masterpieces in the Louvre. Later, he appraised French art in an essay published in 1934, in which he claimed that the apex of French art was its nineteenth-century painting, as seen in works by Ingres (1780–1867), Delacroix (1798–1863), Corot (1796–1875), Millet (1814–1875) and Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891). He was not impressed by more recent modern art movements such as Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Expressionism and Dadaism, which he considered signs of confusion and decline.<sup>53</sup> His conservative taste was welcomed by French academic art circles: three of his paintings, including one titled *The Auspicious Light Pagoda in Suzhou*, debuted at the Spring Salon of 1929.

In 1929 and 1930, Yan travelled to Brussels, Ghent, London, Rome, Venice, Florence and Milan to visit museums and monuments. Along the way, he painted famous historical buildings, including London's Houses of Parliament and Venice's Basilica of San Marco. Rome especially attracted him with its abundant ruins, which he depicted in three emotionally charged paintings (illus. 76–8). Markedly different from the rigid landscape images he had made earlier in China, these works are characterized by a distinct painterly quality. His brush now moves freely in responding to the scene in front of him; his rich palette betrays influences from



76 Yan Wenliang, *The Remnant Traces of Rome*, 1930, oil on canvas.

77 Yan Wenliang, *The Colosseum*, 1930, oil on canvas.

78 Yan Wenliang, *The Historical Traces of Rome*, 1930, oil on canvas.



79 Yan Wenliang and Liu Haisu in Italy, 1930.

the Barbizon school as well as Impressionism.<sup>54</sup> In a study of these three paintings, Stephanie Su suggests that Yan's trip to Italy possessed significance as the artist's 'personal Grand Tour', allowing him to encounter the origin of Western art in person.<sup>55</sup> Liu Haisu (1896–1994), a famous promoter of the Western art movement who accompanied Yan to Italy (illus. 2.28), explained the motivation of the trip: 'To put it briefly, modern Western art originated from the Renaissance. Because

of that, I've been longing to visit Italy, which is my most important wish of all. I believe that every artist would think so.'<sup>56</sup> Possibly influenced by Corot's *View of the Colosseum from the Farnese Gardens* (illus. 80), Yan's painting then became a model for other Chinese artists to emulate (illus. 81).<sup>57</sup> Architectural images remained the dominant subject in his later paintings, among which a ruined city gate (illus. 82) reminds us of Meissonier's *Ruins of the Tuileries Palace* (illus. 83), both showing layered entrances penetrating a ruined site.

A similar case of artistic circulation is also seen in Pan Yuliang's work. Like Yan Wenliang, Pan actively participated in the Western Painting Movement in early twentieth-century China. She entered the Shanghai School of Fine Arts in 1918, and went on to study at the Sino-French Institute, the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Lyons, and the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, from 1921 to 1925. In 1925, she moved to Italy and enrolled at the National Arts Institute in Rome; the works she created there included a painting entitled *Roman Ruins* (now lost). She returned to China in 1928 to chair the oil painting department at the Shanghai School of Fine Arts, and helped found a series of modern art organizations, including the Yiyuan Painting Research Institute, the Association of Chinese Art, and the Research Association of Chinese Art. A painting Pan made in 1932 depicts the famous Tiger Hill Pagoda in Suzhou (illus. 84). At the time, she joined other prominent Chinese artists in embarking on an artistic initiative to infuse the Western art form of oil painting with Chinese traits. The painting that resulted from this effort thus revealed a new significance for a pagoda image: although this image had been favoured by European artists and photographers as a major symbol of China since the seventeenth century (see illus. 9, 57, 64–5, 69, 98), it was now employed by a Westernized Chinese artist to re-embrace her own cultural heritage. Having travelled from China to Europe and back again, it was now a global image, conveying not only a Western sentiment toward a timeless Chinese architectural tradition, but also signifying modern Chinese artists' longing for a vanished past. We can therefore borrow Lydia Liu's notion



*opposite:*  
80 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *View of the Colosseum from the Farnese Gardens*, 1826, oil on paper.

81 Zhao Shaoang, *Ruins*, 1954, ink and colour on paper.



82 Yan Wenliang, *City Gate*, 1964, oil on paper.

83 Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, *Ruins of the Tuileries Palace*, 1877, oil on canvas.





84 Pan Yuliang, *Pagoda at Tiger Hill*, 1932, oil on canvas.

to call this image a *super-sign*: ‘a linguistic monstrosity that thrives on the excess of its presumed meanings by virtue of being exposed to, or thrown together with, foreign etymologies and foreign languages’.<sup>58</sup> Traversing multiple, heterosystems of representation, the image of the pagoda had now come to signify different subjectivities while generating meaning across cultural boundaries through repeated acts of translation and enunciation.

## War Ruins: Conquering and Survival

### Celebrating Atrocity

The Picturesque ruins depicted by Yan Wenliang and Pan Yuliang constituted a historical paradox. On the one hand, their appearance announced the birth of ruin images in Chinese art; on the other, these mildly sentimental pictures echoed a jaded European tradition and never gained real life in China. What became influential and finally developed into a broad visual culture in twentieth-century China was a different kind of ruin and ruin image. Instead of inspiring melancholy and poetic lamentation, they evoke pain and terror. These negative, catastrophic images range from war scenes that stimulated the desire for national survival and visual memories of violence during the Cultural Revolution, to avant-garde representations of urban demolition in contemporary China. If there is a single factor that unifies these images, it would be that they all register, record or simulate destruction that left a person, a city or a nation with a wounded body and psyche. It is as if, in such images, the Chinese finally faced what they had been avoiding for centuries: whereas they had rejected the preservation and representation of ruined buildings because of their inherent sense of danger, the same implication legitimated architectural ruins in the modern period.

Like photographs of Picturesque ruins, the earliest representations of war ruins in China were made by European photographers. The most representative among these was Felice Beato, who travelled north from Hong Kong with the British army in 1860 during the Second Opium War, and witnessed the siege of Tianjin and the burning of Beijing. Also known as the Arrow War, the Second Opium War enabled the British to pursue several major objectives in their long-term plan to colonize China, including legalizing the opium trade, expanding the coolie trade, opening all of China to British merchants and exempting foreign imports from internal transit duties. When Emperor Xianfeng (*reg* 1851–61) rejected these demands, the British, joined by the French, found excuses to ‘teach China a lesson’.<sup>59</sup> The allies began military operations in late 1857 and forced the Qing court to sign the Treaty of Tianjin the following year, which promised to open several new ports to Western trade and residence, and to give foreigners, including Christian missionaries, the right to explore China’s vast interior. Negotiations in Shanghai in late 1858 further legalized the importation of opium. But the war resumed in 1859 when the Qing court decided to reinforce the Dagu Fort in Tianjin to prevent the encroachment of Western powers. After fierce battles, the Anglo-French force captured the fort on 21 August 1860; their concentrated

firepower completely annihilated the Chinese defences. After entering Beijing on 6 October, the invaders looted and burned the Summer Palace, also known as the Garden of Perfect Brightness (Yuanming Yuan).<sup>60</sup> On the same day as the garden's destruction (18 October 1860), the Qing court signed the Convention of Beijing, ratifying the Treaty of Tianjin and ending the Second Opium War.

Beato's involvement in this colonization project was not an accident:<sup>61</sup> by 1860, he had made a name for himself as one of the first war photographers, a profession that emerged together with the expansion of British imperialism. Before photographing the Second Opium War, he had twice demonstrated his interest in recording scenes of human slaughter. In 1855, he and his partner James Robertson (1813–1888) photographed the Crimean War fought between Russia and an alliance of Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire; their photographs of the destroyed Barrack Battery after the fall of Sebastopol (illus. 85) anticipated the more graphic representations of human carnage that Beato made in China and Korea.<sup>62</sup> In 1858, Beato travelled throughout northern India to document the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny (the First War of Indian Independence). Many photographs he took at Lucknow display chilling scenes of war ruins: the pictures are dominated by half destroyed buildings, the fresh bullet holes in their walls registering the violent fighting that had taken place just a few weeks earlier.<sup>63</sup> One of his photographs displays human skeletal remains in front of a ruined Western-style building (illus. 86). On the back Beato wrote this detailed, narrative caption:



85 Felice Beato and James Robertson,  
*Interior of Russian  
Battery after the Fall  
of Sebastopol, 1855*

86 Felice Beato, *Interior of the Secundrabagh, 1858.*



Interior of the Secundrabagh, 2000 Sepoys were slain here chiefly by the 93rd Highlanders. Col. Ewart was twice wounded here and captured a colour. Sir W. Peel and the Shannon Brigade distinguished themselves greatly. Bodies of Sepoys still lying about. The building has now been destroyed.<sup>64</sup>

Sir George Campbell, who was then serving in the British army as an officer, stated in his memoirs that Beato had the bones uncovered to be photographed.<sup>65</sup>

Another of Beato's Lucknow images (illus. 87) bears a caption that can be read together with the one cited above: 'The Secundrabagh. The hole on the right was made by Peel of the Shannon guns to enable the Highlanders to rush in and attack the 2000 Sepoys, every one of whom was killed.'<sup>66</sup> As David Harris has noted, these captions and corresponding images reveal Beato's working method 'of revisiting key sites to reconstruct images, which, when sequenced and captioned, would recall the leading events of 1857 and 1858 as they had been experienced and understood by the British'.<sup>67</sup> Three years later, Beato employed the same method in recording the Second Opium War in China. But this time, because he was following the British army and enjoyed the status of

an intimate insider,<sup>68</sup> he had immediate access to occupied sites and was in a more advantageous position to capture the rawness of war ruins, including fresh human corpses.

The conquest of the Dagu Fort outside Tianjin provided Beato with a rare opportunity to fulfil this mission. After the Allied Force stormed the inner North Fort around 9:00 am on 21 August 1860, he rushed to the site and photographed it thoroughly before the bodies of the dead Chinese soldiers were removed (illus. 88).<sup>69</sup> His swift action and excitement was witnessed by David F. Rennie, a doctor in the expeditionary army:

I passed into the fort and a distressing scene of carnage disclosed itself; frightful mutilations and groups of dead and dying meeting the eye in every direction. I walked around the ramparts on the west side. They were thickly strewed with death – in the north-west angle thirteen were lying in one group around a gun. Signor Beato was here in great excitement, characterizing the group as ‘beautiful’, and begging that it might not be interfered with until perpetuated by his photographic apparatus, which was done a few minutes afterwards.<sup>70</sup>



87 Felice Beato, *The Secundrabagh*, 1858.

It is important to realize that, in photographing the soldiers' corpses, Beato violated a previous photojournalistic protocol – photographs taken during the Crimean War had scrupulously avoided showing wounded or dead bodies. This taboo was officially broken during the Second Opium War, as Beato's photographs of the 'vanquished Chinese' were accepted by the British authorities and public – a fact confirmed by their sale among members of the expeditionary army and in London's art market, by their appearance in mainstream journals such as the *Illustrated London News*, and by the frequent contemporary references to them.<sup>71</sup> The reason is not difficult to grasp: presented as an eyewitness account by a British subject, these images most convincingly celebrated the triumph of a brilliant military operation through which the Anglo-French force defeated China in a decisive battle. The imperialist sentiment associated with this battle was well expressed by Robert Swinhoe, who accompanied the expedition as an interpreter: '[In] the battle of Takoo [Dagu], where Britain's noble sons, supported by their gallant allies, subdued their insolent and overbearing enemy, so overwhelming in numbers, and bravely redeemed their country's glory . . .'.<sup>72</sup>

88 Felice Beato,  
*Interior of the Dagu  
 Fort, 1860.*



In Beato's photographs of the conquered Dagu Fort, one finds that human and architectural ruins are figured nearly identically. The romantic *topos* is entirely absent; the permeability of the flesh is identified with that of brick and stone. Such representations of war destruction, however, are not antithetical to images of Picturesque ruins: whereas the Dagu Fort pictures parade the victory of the Anglo-French army through displaying Chinese carnage, Beato's photographs of Beijing's Summer Palace serve the same purpose by showing the mutilated landscape and architecture. Given the technical limitations of photography at the time, including the cumbersome nature of photographic equipment and the slow procedure of picture-taking, he could not possibly capture the actual actions of looting and destruction. But ironically, his austere landscape and architectural images of the Summer Palace evoke a deeper sense of trauma. Two of these photographs, which he took in early and late October 1860, bear his hand-written descriptions on the back. One inscription reads: 'The Great Imperial Palace, Yuen Ming Yuen, before the burning, Pekin' (illus. 89). The other reads: 'View of the Imperial Summer Palace, Yuen Ming Yuen, after the burning, Taken from the Lake, Pekin' (illus. 90). The first picture is a close-up view of the principal structure in the Summer Palace, the grand Pavilion of Buddhist Fragrance on the Hill of Ten-Thousand Ages. The second picture offers a panoramic view of the hill, in



8g Felice Beato, *The Great Imperial Palace, Yuen Ming Yuen, before the Burning, Pekin, 1860.*

go Felice Beato, *View of the Imperial Summer Palace, Yuen Ming Yuen, after the Burning, 1860.*

front of which an enormous platform is now empty – the Pavilion of Buddhist Fragrance is completely gone. The photograph does not present any trace of violence: there are no dead soldiers or abandoned cannon; instead, the picture is permeated by a jolting stillness – a stubborn austerity with which the image maps a wounded locality. The photograph is again a ‘lesson’: in the dead silence of the imperial park one understands the doomed attempt to resist the foreign forces. By erasing one of the greatest Chinese architectural treasures in a before-and-after sequence, the two photographs deliver the pedagogical instruction that the colonial powers had designed for the Chinese.<sup>73</sup>

After 1860, the next international frenzy of photographing China coincided, not surprisingly, with another major foreign assault.<sup>74</sup> Responding to the Boxer Uprising in 1900, an Eight-Nation Alliance – of Austria-Hungary, France, German, Italy, Japan, Russia, Britain and America – was quickly assembled, bringing nearly 50,000 troops to conduct a campaign of indiscriminate retaliation for the Boxers’ anti-Western riot. As with the Second Opium War, after the Allied Force occupied Beijing on 14 August that year, it engaged in organized looting and destruction. German cavalrymen, in particular, plundered the imperial gardens west of Beijing.<sup>75</sup> Also as in 1860, such vandalism was carried out under the rationale of teaching the Chinese a lesson; Kaiser Wilhelm II had given this order on 27 July: ‘Make the name Germany remembered in China for a thousand years so that no Chinaman will ever again dare to even squint at a German!’<sup>76</sup>

One of the differences that separated the two historical moments, however, was the much more developed media coverage at the beginning of the twentieth century. In James L. Hevia’s words:

By 1900, wholly new mechanisms of information processing were in place to exploit the story [of the war] on a scale that had been unimaginable in 1860. Vastly expanded transportation and communication systems linked the east coast of China into a global steamship and railroad network capable of rushing reporters to the scene in two to three weeks. Submarine cables across the Pacific and through the Indian Ocean made it possible for newsmen to communicate by telegraph with Europe and North America at high speed. New printing technologies, particularly ones able to accommodate illustrations, packaged and delivered the sensational developments in China at a velocity and in a form that made information itself a spectacle, allowing for a vast expansion of vicarious audience participation in events.<sup>77</sup>



91 Anonymous,  
'Destruction of the  
Tianjin City Wall',  
*Illustrated London News*,  
6 April 1901.

92 Anonymous, interior  
of a destroyed building,  
1900.

93 Anonymous, *Beijing*,  
1900.

It was in this new environment that the 1900 war unfolded before a global audience. In the United States and England, major public media like *Leslie's Weekly* and the *Illustrated London News* provided detailed coverage of the China war; the report was often accompanied by vivid images including scenes of execution and destruction (illus. 91). Postcards showing destroyed cities and residences, as well as brutal torture and decapitation, were sent from Beijing to Europe, America and Japan by the foreign troops, creating a sensation around the world. A chilling photograph captures the moment when the allied forces advanced into Beijing (illus. 93). The vast field of ruins that the horsemen were entering lay in the centre of the Chinese capital – beyond it one sees the imperial palaces of the

94 Anonymous, a destroyed Western church, 1900.

95 Anonymous, a destroyed Chinese temple, 1900.



Forbidden City. Another postcard shows the interior of a destroyed church; the floor is carpeted with what look like disintegrating human skeletons and skulls (illus. 92). It has been noted that while the Boxers attacked Western churches during the riot, major targets of destruction by the Eight-Nation Army were Chinese temples, which were believed to be the physical sites of Boxer superstition and organization (illus. 94 and 95).<sup>78</sup> Both types of ruins were subject to photo coverage, representing a symbolic warfare from the invaders' point of view:

**PUNJAB, AMRITSUR (Fourth Series).—NINETEEN PLATES.**

- U Panorama of the City of Amritsur, with View of the Sacred Tank and Temple of the Sikhs. (*In three pieces.*)  
 1 The Akal Bhouri.—The Sacred Temple—North View.  
 2 Baba Atal's Temple.—The Sacred Temple—East View.  
 3 Sacred Temple—North-east View.  
 4 Minarets of the Cunningham Gurdars.—Sacred Temple—South View.  
 5 Sacred Temple—West View.  
 6 Golden Gate, and Entrance to the Temple.  
 7 Golden Gate of Entrance—Near View.  
 8 Interior.—The Sikh Temple—Machla Moosa.  
 9 The Akal Bhouri—Holy Temple.  
 10 Street.—Inside Sacred Tank Area.  
 11 Baba Atal's Temple.  
 12 Baba Atal's Temple.  
 13 View through the Piazza (market), with Golden Lamps leading to the Sikh Temple.  
 14 Abnormal Kotsa Street in Muree.  
 15 A Temple in Muree.  
 16 Gateway of the Jain Bagh.—The Orcherry inside.

96 Henry Hering's subscription list of Felice Beato's China photographs, 1862.

**CHINA.****FROM HONG-KONG TO PEKIN (First Series).—FIFTY-FOUR VIEWS.**

- A Panorama of Hong Kong, showing the Fleet for N. China Expedition, 1st March, 1860. (*In five pieces.*)  
 B Panorama of Hong Kong, taken from Happy Valley. (*In five pieces.*)  
 C Panorama.—First Arrival of Chinese Expeditionary Force—Examination, Kowloon, Hong Kong, March, 1860. (*In six pieces.*)  
 D Panorama.—Olive Bay, June 21st, 1860. (*In four pieces.*)  
 E Panorama.—Tallion Wharf Bay, July 21st, 1860. (*In two pieces.*)  
 F Panorama.—View of Pekin, August 1st, 1860. (*In two pieces.*)  
 3 Peking Fort, August 1st, 1860.  
 4 Head-quarter Staff Peking Fort, August 1st, 1860.  
 5 Tower of Peking Fort, showing the Magazine and Wooden Gun, August 1st, 1860.  
 6 Interior of the Pekin Fort, showing Pimlyk's House and Camp, 1st August, 1860. (*In two pieces.*)  
 7 Head-quarters House, 1st December—Peking, China.  
 8 Taku Fort after its Capture, showing the French and English Entrances, August 10th, 1860. (*In two pieces.*)  
 9 Exterior of North Fort on Peiho River, showing the English and French Entrances, August 1st, 1860.  
 10 Exterior of North Fort, showing the English Entrances, August 21st, 1860.  
 11 Exterior of North Fort, at which the French entered, Aug. 21, 1860.  
 12 Angle of North Fort, at which the French entered, Aug. 21, 1860.  
 13 Interior of the Angle of North Fort, immediately after its Capture, August 21st, 1860.  
 14 Interior of the English Entrances to North Fort on 21st August, 1860.  
 15 Interior of the Angle of North Fort on 21st August, 1860.  
 16 Rear of the North Fort after its Capture, showing the Retreat of the Chinese Army, 21st August, 1860.  
 17 Panorama.—Interior of the North Fort after its Capture, August 21st, 1860. (*In four pieces.*)  
 18 Interior of the second North Fort after its Surrender on 21st August, 1860, when 2000 prisoners were taken. (*In two pieces.*)  
 19 Interior of North Fort, showing the Chinese Encampment, August 21st, 1860.  
 20 Panorama.—Interior of South Taku Fort, and showing the place of Landing, 22nd August, 1860. (*In three pieces.*)

**FROM PEKIN TO CANTON (Second Series).—SIXTY-NINE VIEWS.**

- 21 Taku Gates Pagoda, 23rd September, 1860.  
 22 Anting Gate of Pekin after the Surrender, 13th October, 1860.—English and French Troops taking possession.  
 23 Top of the Wall from Anting Gate, Pekin.—Possession taken by English and French Troops, October 21st, 1860.  
 24 North and East Corner of the Wall of Pekin. (*In two pieces.*)  
 25 First View seen in Pekin, taken from Anting Gate.  
 26 Top of the Wall of Pekin taken possession of on 14th October, 1860, showing the Chinese Guns directed against our Batteries.  
 27 Position taken up by the English and French within the Encampment. The top of the Earthy rampart is to be seen after an Attack on 16th October, 1860; also Wall of Pekin and Anting Gate (Gate of Peace), surrendered to the Allies on the same date. (*In two pieces.*)  
 28 Panorama of Pekin, taken from the South Gate leading into the Chinese City, October, 1860. (*In six pieces.*)  
 29 Entrance to Winter Palace in Pekin, 20th October, 1860.  
 30 Imperial Winter Palace, Pekin, 20th October, 1860.  
 31 The Great Imperial Palace, Pekin, 20th October, 1860.  
 32 View of the Gardens and Buddhist Temple of Pekin, 20th October, 1860.  
 33 View of the Imperial Winter Palace, Pekin, showing the Arched Hall of the Throne, 20th October, 1860. (*In two pieces.*)  
 34 The Great Pagoda in the Imperial Winter Palace, Pekin, October, 1860.  
 35 Temple of Confucius, Pekin, October, 1860.  
 36 Street and Stupa in the Tatar City of Pekin, October, 1860.  
 37 Interior and Acre of the Temple of Heaven, where the Emperor sacrifices once a year in the Chinese City, Pekin, 1860.  
 38 Sacred Temple of Heaven, where the Emperor sacrifices once a year in the Chinese City, Pekin, October, 1860.  
 39 Temple of Heaven, from the place where the Priests are buried, in the Chinese City of Pekin, October, 1860.  
 40 Thibetan Monument is the Lamas' Temple, Pekin, October, 1860.  
 41 Mosque, now burnt, occupied by the Commander-in-Chief and General-in-Chief, October, 1860.  
 42 Shung-chien—Chinese City of Pekin, October, 1860.  
 43 View of the Summer Palace, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, showing the Pagoda before the Burning, October, 1860.  
 44 The Great Imperial Palace, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, before the Burning, Pekin, October 18th, 1860.  
 45 The Great Imperial Porcelain Palace, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, Pekin, October 18th, 1860.  
 46 Imperial Summer Palace before the Burning, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, Pekin, October 18th, 1860.  
 47 View of the Imperial Summer Palace, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, after the Burning, taken from the Lake, Pekin, October 18th, 1860.  
 48 Pagoda up in the Hill—Summer Palace, Yuen-Ming-Yuen, Pekin, October 18th, 1860.  
 49 Carved Tomb at the Depth near Pekin, the place where the guns and ammunition were left when the Army marched to Pekin, Oct. October.  
 50 Interior of the Tomb at the Depth near Pekin, October, 1860.  
 51 & 52 Exterior of the Tomb Depth near Pekin, October, 1860.  
 53 Temple of the Five Elements, the scene of the commencement of the Attack on 23rd September, 1860, near Pekin.  
 54 Shrine of Wu-la-chai, the "Temple of the First" with Imperial Chinese Emperors, October 18th, 1860.  
 55 Architectural View of the Lung Temple near Pekin, October, 1860.  
 56 Arch in the Lung Temple near Pekin, October, 1860.  
 57 Part of the Entrance to the Lung Temple near Pekin, in October, 1860.  
 58 Entrance to Treasury, Canton, April 10th, 1860.  
 59 Temple of the Tatar Quarter, Canton, April 10th, 1860.  
 60 Temple of the Five Elements, Canton, April, 1860.  
 61 Five Great Temples, from the house Ho Tu Kung, Canton, April 10th, 1860.  
 62 Chinese Theatre, Canton, April, 1860.  
 63 Nian-shieh Pagoda and Taku Street, Canton, April, 1860.  
 64 Temple of Confucius, Canton, April, 1860.  
 65 Confucius, Canton, April, 1860.  
 66 Name Hui Luk Kung, Canton, April, 1860.  
 67 Mazery Street, Canton, April, 1860.  
 68 Temple in North Street, Canton, April, 1860.  
 69 East Street, from the Taku Street, Canton, April, 1860.  
 70 The Great Granite Temple, Canton, April, 1860.  
 71 Chinese Merchant's House, Canton, April, 1860.  
 72 Shau-sit Koon, North Street, Canton, April, 1860.  
 73 Temple in the Tatar Quarter, Canton, April, 1860.  
 74 Confucius Yamen, Canton, April, 1860.  
 75 Arch in Confucius Temple, Canton, April, 1860.  
 76 Nien Hui Kung Temple, Canton, April, 1860.  
 77 Temple in Yuen Quarter, Canton, April, 1860.  
 78 Mahometan Mosque, Canton, April, 1860.  
 79 Mahometan Temple, Canton, April, 1860.  
 80 Five-storied Pagoda, Canton, April, 1860.  
 81 Patron of General Sir Hope Grant, G.C.B.; Lord Elgin, Ambassador and Ambassador; Prince Kung, Brother of the Emperor of China, who signed the Treaty, 1858.

whereas the ruined churches legitimized the invasion, the destroyed temples demonstrated righteous retaliation against the Boxers' barbaric vandalism.

A question arises: what then is the relationship between the images of war destruction and Picturesque ruins authored by Western photographers, both



97 Felice Beato, *First Arrival of Chinese Expeditionary Force, Kowloon, 1860.*

sometimes produced by a single person? Examining Beato's works, we find that these two kinds of images already constituted a visual typology inherent to a large collection of 'China pictures'. The best evidence for this typology is an 1862 inventory of Beato's photographs, prepared by the London dealer Henry Hering for potential customers (illus. 96). The section entitled 'China' includes two series. The first series consists of 54 photographs that Beato took when he followed the British troops from Hong Kong to Tianjin on the war expedition. The second series features 69 pictures, representing mainly traditional Chinese architecture in scattered locations such as Beijing, Tongzhou and Guangzhou. Photographs in these two groups differ in many ways, not only in subject and purpose but also in organization and style. The first series is narrative in essence and follows the conventions of a travelogue: the photographs are organized in a chronological sequence, with some tightly constructed clusters of images recording key events such as the conquest of the Dagu Fort. Combining panoramic and close-up views of specific sites, the series is centred on a number of locations along the victorious journey of the expedition army. There are no individual buildings or figures dominating the compositions. The expansive, bare views of land and water strike the viewer with a feeling of nakedness. The pictures seem waiting for someone to recount the journey with them as a visual aid (illus. 97).

The second series in the inventory starts from a large pagoda at Tongzhou, a town located midway between Tianjin and Beijing (illus. 98). It is then followed by an image of Beijing's Pacifying and Consolidating Gate (Anding Men), through which the Anglo-French army entered China's capital. The sequence thus still follows the footsteps of the invading army, but the pictures themselves shift from recording a historical event to representing classical monuments. The implication is subtle but unmistakable: as landmarks of a conquered territory, these monuments can now be appreciated by the British conquerors with a mixed feeling of awe and self-congratulation. It is in this context that the 'before and after burning' pictures of the Summer Palace are presented (see illus. 89 and 90). It is also in this context that the language of the Picturesque takes over to become the dominant photographic style. There are seemingly endless ancient pagodas, old

temples and decayed palatial buildings. Their precise locations and geographical relationship become less important. Instead, their iconic and sometimes melancholy images stimulate poetic contemplation. The military conquest, now successfully executed, seems to have led the photographer to revisit an archaic world laden with renewed symbolic meaning: belonging to a culture of the distant past, these monuments and ruins symbolized China's failure to become a modern nation, thereby legitimating the foreign invasion as a necessary step to bring the ancient country into modern history. And yet 'the photographs retain a sense of nostalgia, as if imbued with a longing to return to a time before the ruins'.<sup>79</sup> Renato Rosaldo has characterized similar phenomena as 'imperialist nostalgia', which 'uses a pose of innocent yearning both to capture people's imagination and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination'.<sup>80</sup> Close to the end of Beato's series we see the nine-storeyed pagoda in Guangzhou (see illus. 69), a photograph he took in April 1860 after he had just joined the English and French forces and was about to start the northern expedition. Concluding the series and the whole set, this and other 'Canton pictures' play a structural role to stage a flashback: having shown the destruction of the Chinese army and the conquest of China's capital, the photographer returns to where he first started.

In a more general sense, photographs of war ruins and Picturesque ruins made by Western photographers in China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries both belonged to the domain of colonialist photography, serving the project of Western imperialism to map a hierarchical global structure of race and place.<sup>81</sup> Within this structure, China was no longer perceived as a space outside history, but was given 'a fixed reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible'.<sup>82</sup> The newly invented photographic medium provided a suitable means to stage such visibility; but at the same time it also internalized aesthetic ideals and artistic conventions developed previously in European art and visual culture. As we have seen, the language of the Picturesque was not gone, but was brought into dialogue with images of destruction and given new significance. A ruined Chinese temple or pagoda photographed by a nineteenth-century Western photographer is deliberately tranquil, mysterious and iconic;



98 Felice Beato, *Tung Chow Pagoda, Tongzhou*, 1860.

its centrality implies a contemplating Western gaze (illus. 64, 66, 69–70, 98). The war images from 1860 and 1900, on the other hand, register absence. Either a field of destroyed houses or an empty room covered with human remains (illus. 88, 92–5), these scenes erase the visual focus or imply a missing one.

What is also rejected in the images of war ruins is the sense of the passage of time – the gap between the past and present that underlies poetic representations of classical ruins. As examples of early photojournalism, pictures of war ruins frame themselves as *contemporary* scenes: the devastating destruction has just taken place; the ruined buildings are still raw, not yet having sunk into the depths of historical memory. We may thus call this kind of contemporary ruins ‘ashes’ to distinguish them from those artistic and aestheticized ruin images. A poetic ruin, though damaged, attracts the spectator with its physical presence and aesthetic integrity; but war ruins, as ‘ashes’, shock the viewer with a sense of holocaust and total abandonment. A Picturesque ruin, as Paul Ricoeur has noted, is ‘ahistorical’ because it has survived history to become part of the present.<sup>83</sup> I would propose that images of ‘ashes’ are always ‘historical’ because they refer to destructions as particular, contemporary events. As proof, war pictures made by Beato are dated precisely with the month and day, while his photographs of classical monuments and ruins – ‘timeless’ images by definition – do not demand such ‘historical’ attention and tend to be more vaguely dated. In this way, images of Picturesque ruins and war ruins became complementary, because their different temporalities correspond to different political concerns and aesthetic sensibilities of both the photographers and their projected viewing audience.

### *Jianzheng: ‘Witnessing and Proving’ War Crimes*

Beato’s brutal pictures of the Second Opium War were not circulated among the Chinese at the time, and the war postcards produced by the Eight-Power Allies during the 1900 invasion were likewise aimed at a foreign audience. Nevertheless, toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the Chinese public was increasingly exposed to images of war and war destruction. A new type of mass media – the illustrated paper – significantly facilitated such acquaintance.<sup>84</sup>

Not only did these battles take place on Chinese soil, but China also failed miserably in almost all these engagements, signing one ‘unequal treaty’ after another with the victorious invaders. Then there was also violent and sometimes catastrophic civil unrest throughout the century, among which the Taiping Rebellion, from 1852 to 1864, exacted casualties in the vicinity of tens of millions.

Until the late nineteenth century, however, information on wars and other political events was communicated to officials and intellectuals only through the written word; the channels included both governmental and commercial papers. The more traditional *Capital Gazette* (*Jing bao*) mainly reported court activities and published officials' memorials and imperial edicts. Toward the later part of the century, Western-style newspapers such as *The Globe* (*Wanguo gongbao*, 1874–1907) appeared and focused on international events.<sup>85</sup> The year 1884 was an important one in the history of Chinese news reporting, when the first major illustrated paper, the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* (*Dianshizhai huabao*), was published in Shanghai.<sup>86</sup> Ernest Major (1841–1908), the paper's British founder and owner, opened his preface for the inaugural issue with these words:

Illustrated papers enjoy great popularity in the West. They generally select the unusual items from various papers. Whenever a new object is invented, or a thing is seen for the first time, it is pictured in the illustrated papers with an explanation attached, in order to generate greater believability in the reader. Nothing like this has been heard in China, however.<sup>87</sup>



99 Wu Youru, 'French troops attacking the city of Bac Ninh', lithograph from the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News*, 1884.

Framed by this rationale, the establishment of the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* was meant to fill the lacuna for both commercial and educational purposes. Published three times a week, it often derived its topics from regular newspapers, mainly *Shenbao (Declaration)*, which was also owned by Major. But as Rudolf Wagner has noted, the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* transformed regular news into picture stories combining dramatic scenes and story-like texts.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, targeting a local reading/viewing public, the publisher/editor carefully selected those events that were closely relevant to the intended reader, and employed skilled Chinese painters to illustrate these events with the traditional ink brush. All these features and considerations are demonstrated in the paper's inaugural issue, which featured an ongoing war between China and France in present-day northern Vietnam and the South Seas as its headline news. According to Major's preface for the issue, he selected this subject because of its political relevance at the time: the Qing court's decision to defend the region aroused strong patriotic sentiment; people depicted the victories of the Chinese army, displaying and selling such pictures in the market place. 'From this we realize', Major wrote, 'that [illustrated news] is a general trend [in the world]; and we can infer that there is desire [among the Chinese public] for not only written news but also for a paper with illustrations.'<sup>89</sup>

Major devoted the two initial illustrations in the issue to the war, with the first one showing French troops attacking the city of Bac Ninh (now Beining; illus. 99). An inscription at the picture's upper left corner provides a vivid textual counterpart to the painted scene:

In this battle, the French troops advanced from three directions simultaneously. Afraid of an ambush deep in the mountains or in the valleys, they formed a broad front to surround the town. Once the encirclement had been closed, they vigorously stormed the town from all sides. At once billowing smoke darkened the sky, the thunderous noise from all sides was beyond measure, the earth's very axis was shaking, and even the hundred streams were running astray – but the Chinese army had already left a day before to secure a strategic position.<sup>90</sup>

The composition could not have been based on a photograph (as many engravings in Western illustrated papers were), because it was still beyond the camera's technical capability at the time to capture such battle scenes. The close correspondence between the image and the inscription implies that the painter Wu Youru (also known as Wu Jiayou, 1839–1893) imagined the battle from a

prior verbal construct. His picture visualizes how French troops ‘formed a broad front to surround the town’ and ‘stormed the town from all sides’, and how houses were set on fire while ‘billowing smoke darkened the sky’. In this way, although this image of an ongoing war marked the beginning of illustrated news reporting in China, it also continued two age-old traditions in Chinese pictorial art: woodblock illustrations of novels and plays, and battle paintings commissioned by political authorities to commemorate important wars.<sup>91</sup>

The technique used to produce the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* is lithography, which Walter Benjamin considered a watershed in reproductive technology because it enabled the high-speed multiplication of images at low cost.<sup>92</sup> In the Chinese context, this technique had the additional benefit of making near-replicas of linear ink drawings, a major style of traditional Chinese painting and illustration. It was especially suitable for reproducing compositions combining images and words, again a major feature of traditional Chinese pictorial art. With the lithograph, therefore, images in the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* were able to stay within the confines of the established taste and preferences of traditional Chinese art. For the same reason, these illustrations also differ radically from photography: while photography, as Benjamin argues, ‘freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction’, the lithographic images in the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* faithfully duplicated the artist’s hand in multiple copies.<sup>93</sup>

This then explains an essential difference between photographic and lithographic reproductions of war images. Even though Wu Youru painstakingly painted the destruction during the Sino-French war, and even though some contemporary lithographic illustrations depicted massacres in a graphic manner (illus. 100), these images do not ‘touch’ a live nerve in the viewer as a war photograph does. What is absent here is a feeling of immediacy: whereas the spectator of Beato’s photographs feels that he or she is witnessing the brutality of the war itself (see illus. 88), viewers of the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* are offered the artist’s interpretations of news reports and could never escape the sense of a particular artistic taste manifested through ink drawing and calligraphy. These pictures do not deliver visual shock, but only present the painter/calligrapher’s erudition and historical knowledge. Consequently, the viewer can never experience a direct emotional and psychological impact from these drawings – the *punctum* in Roland Barthes’s words, which ‘cries out in silence’<sup>94</sup> and brings the dead back to life. To acquire such power, illustrated news of war destructions had to transform the spectator into a self-involved witness of disasters. In modern Chinese history,



100 Anonymous,  
'Yangzhou Massacre',  
lithograph from *Luchen congshu*, 1903.

this particular mode of spectatorship was achieved through a new type of war photography associated with a national awakening movement.

This type of photography – a branch of photojournalism that flourished in the early twentieth century – inherited the pictorial language of earlier war photographs by foreign reporters but imbued it with a new subjectivity. My earlier discussion has made it clear that the introduction of photojournalism to China in the second half of the nineteenth century was closely associated with the expansion of Western imperialism. The war pictures taken by European photographers are quintessentially colonialist because these images as a whole reflect the mentality of a victorious conqueror behind the camera. It was not just the images that facilitated colonization, however; the camera itself also induced terror. We read in an eyewitness report that after China lost the Second Opium War and was forced to sign a treaty with Britain and France, ‘The indefatigable Signor Beato . . . directed the large lens of the camera full against the breast of the unhappy Prince Gong [who represented the Qing court to sign the treaty]. The royal brother looked up in a state of terror, pale as death.’<sup>95</sup> In Beato’s photograph, the prince looks into the camera with a mixed expression of devastation, shame and hatred (illus. 101). To its intended Western audience, the image is a supreme representation of a defeated enemy. But to a Chinese subject who might have a chance to see it, he must have felt that the image ‘cries out in silence’ because it mirrors his own fear and shame, and reveals the state of his own existence.

A few decades later European dominance in China was challenged by a broad nationalist campaign. This was a crucial moment in China’s modern history. The founding of the Republic in 1911 did not bring peace, order or unity to China. Instead, the early republican years were plagued by monarchist attempts, warlordism and intensified foreign imperialism. Committed to reviving their strife-ridden country, a new generation of intellectuals launched a series of campaigns to transform China into an independent modern nation. While accepting Western science, political systems and culture as the foundation of a new social order, they were also fiercely patriotic. This dual identity was best expressed in a famous public demonstration on 4 May 1919, triggered by the verdict of the Versailles Peace Conference after the First World War concerning Shandong.<sup>96</sup> Although China contributed to the Allies’ victory, the Western nations that controlled the conference handed over Germany’s rights in this Chinese province to Japan. Enraged by what they saw as a Western betrayal, some 5,000 students from Peking University and other schools in Beijing went to Tiananmen Square to protest against foreign imperialism and to demand justice. Endorsed by people throughout

the nation, their action pressured the Chinese delegation at Versailles to reject the peace treaty.

In a more general sense, this demonstration marked the beginning of a new era in Chinese political history, in which public opinion emerged as a powerful force in influencing national and international politics. The event also marked the appearance of a new kind of public domain in China. Encompassing mass movements and print culture, this domain would acquire overwhelming importance in shaping public opinion and fuelling political sentiment in the following years.



101 Felice Beato, *Prince Gong*, 1860.

In the early twentieth century, the top agenda in this domain was to transform China into a modern nation state, defined by Prasenjit Duara as a ‘newly realized sovereign subject of History embodying a moral and political force’ and ‘a collective historical subject poised to realize its destiny in a modern future’.<sup>97</sup> Photojournalism in general and images of war ruins specifically played an important role in facilitating this nationalist campaign.

This change in the function of photojournalism is easy to understand: once reframed into a nationalist discourse and scrutinized from a nationalist gaze, images of wars and other disasters provided the most concrete and direct proofs of foreign invasion and most effectively accelerated nationalist sentiment. Because of its inherent empirical ‘truth value’, the photograph could play this role much better than any traditional art form such as painting or sculpture, especially when half-tone technique allowed news photos to become a regular feature of papers and magazines, which had an enormous impact on the shaping of a nationalist ideology as well as a modern visual culture.<sup>98</sup> *The World (Shijie)*, the first photography magazine in China, published photos of a 1905 patriotic demonstration, showing Shanghai residents burning the British vice consulate’s motorcycle.<sup>99</sup> When half-tone images first appeared in Chinese newspapers in 1906, a photograph in *Jinghua Daily (Jinghua ribao)* featured the corpse of Jiang Shaotang, a Chinese magistrate allegedly murdered by French missionaries in Nancheng, Hunan.<sup>100</sup> In the following year, Qiu Jin (1875–1907), a famous revolutionary and feminist writer, was executed by the Qing government after a failed uprising. Guangzhou’s *National Affairs Newspaper (Guoshi bao)* published a group of photos documenting the event.<sup>101</sup> After the 1911 revolution, the infant Republican government made a strong effort to spread the news of the revolution through several special publications of news photos. Among them, the first volume of *Photographs of the Great Revolution (Da geming xiezhenhua)* came out in October 1911, the month of the revolution. The serial continued to the next year, containing altogether more than 600 photos in fourteen volumes to record people and events associated with the founding of the Republic.<sup>102</sup> More than 300 ‘Postcards Commemorating the Revolution’ (‘Geming jinian mingxinbian’) were issued around the same time for the same cause.

From the beginning, photojournalism in China developed a strong emphasis on war images. The Russian-Japanese War in 1904 was the first political event thoroughly covered by an illustrated Shanghai bi-weekly. After 1909, major Chinese newspapers, as well as magazines and photo albums, all featured sensational news photos, delivering tangible and often disturbing images of wars, riots, massacres, assassinations and other kinds of violence to an anxious audience. The

demand for such images sharply increased around some major political events, among which were the Republic Revolution in 1911, the First World War from 1914 to 1918, and most of all the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. *Photographs of the Great Revolution* and 'Postcards Commemorating the Revolution' – two early series of news photos mentioned above – already contained many battle scenes; several of the pictures captured the moment when Wuchang was bombed and set on fire. During the First World War, photographs of the European battle-fields were sent home by Chinese journalists and amateurs alike;<sup>103</sup> a bi-weekly magazine was established to exclusively cover the war;<sup>104</sup> and two extensive photo albums, *Images of the European War* (*Ouzhou zhanying*, 1914, containing 348 photographs) and *Photographs of Battles in Europe* (*Ouzhan xiezhanhua*, 1915, containing 123 photographs), were published by the two largest Chinese publishers, the China Book Company (Zhonghua shuju) and the Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshuguan).

But it was during the Sino-Japanese War, from 1931 to 1945,<sup>105</sup> that war photography finally became an indispensable component of popular visual culture, providing much needed stimuli to a nationwide resistance movement. We can call this visual culture a 'wound culture', because torn bodies of both buildings and human torsos now finally came to dominate the field of visual representation. Instead of signifying collective fascination with shock and trauma, as scholars have observed in postmodern popular American culture,<sup>106</sup> however, ruin images in war-time China facilitated the creation of a national allegory with the twin theme of suffering and survival. On the one hand, the years of the Sino-Japanese War were experienced by millions of Chinese as nothing less than a holocaust, in which death, destruction, privation and persecution were daily occurrences.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, suffering became a main subject of representation because its representation provided ideological and political support to the resistance movement. Thus as a figure of defeat, ruin images in wartime China were also used to legitimate the country's autonomy as a nation. In this way, images of war ruins best encapsulated the pain and ecstasy, labour and struggle associated with China's rebirth.

In September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. In January 1932, Japan attacked Shanghai. Facing the fierce defence of the Chinese Nineteenth Route Army, Japan sent 70,000 troops to the battle and forced the Republican government to demilitarize this largest Chinese city. The following year, Japan attacked the Great Wall region, forcing the Republican government to sign the Tanggu Truce, giving Japan control of Rehe province. On 7 July 1937, the Japanese army attacked Chinese troops at the Marco

Polo Bridge outside Beijing and soon after seized Beijing and Tianjin. This was immediately followed by a major August military operation in Shanghai. Mobilizing more than 200,000 troops and numerous naval vessels and aircraft, Japan finally captured the city after three months of intense fighting. Nanjing, the capital of China, fell by the end of the year; up to 300,000 ordinary Chinese were murdered in the so-called Rape of Nanking. That year the Republican government retreated to Chongqing in the southwest to set up a provisional capital. By 1941, Japan had occupied most of east China, while launching constant air raids on Chongqing and other unoccupied cities, leaving millions dead, injured and homeless. China was on the verge of becoming a vast Japanese colony.

The relentless thrust of the Japanese war machine was met with a fierce resistance movement. From the beginning, the loss of Manchuria and the battle in Shanghai released a passionate outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm. The deafening call for ‘national salvation’ was heard everywhere across the country. To rally people together against the Japanese aggression, left-wing intellectuals and artists established a nationwide network of communication and created new channels for the dissemination of information; their goal was to mobilize every citizen and utilize every resource in the country for the cause of resistance.<sup>108</sup> Several culture forms – spoken drama, cartoons and newspapers – proved most effective for this purpose; the role of the newspaper as a propaganda and educational tool in the War of Resistance especially inspired the rapid development of photojournalism. It was during this time, as Chang-tai Hung has observed, that the first generation of war correspondents (*zhandi jizhe*) emerged.<sup>109</sup> Unlike spoken drama and political cartoons, the basic function of the newspaper was to provide war news, and photographic images best satisfied people’s voracious appetite for such information. A direct consequence was the emergence of many societies and agencies dedicated to photojournalism, as summarized by the authors of *A History of Chinese Photography 1840–1937 (Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937)*:

After the 18 September Incident [in 1931], the country’s entire northeast region fell under Japanese occupation, whereas the areas within the Great Wall faced increasing threat. At this crucial moment of national survival, people became extremely concerned with state affairs, hoping to see a reversal in the political situation. Newspapers, pictorials and journals all increased their proportion of news reporting. Following this trend, people with some knowledge of photography eagerly started photography societies, which had already numbered in the several dozens at the beginning of the decade and were scattered throughout the country.



102 Anonymous,  
watching destroyed  
houses in a Chinese city,  
1930s.

These included, for example, the Northeastern News Photography Society (Dongbei Xinwen Yingpian She), the China New Photography Society (Zhongguo Xinying She), the News Photography Society (Xinwen Sheying), the China News Photography Society (Zhongguo Xinwen Sheying She, also known as Zhongguo She), the North News Society (Beiyang Xinwen She), the New Voice Society (Xinsheng Sheying She), the Huanzhang News Society (Huanzhang Xinwen She), the People's Awakening Society (Minjue She), the International Society (Guojin She), the East Asian International Photojournalism Society (Dongya Sheying Tongxun She), the Jiangxi Society (Jiangxi She), the East China Society (Huadong She), the North China News Photography Society (Huabei Xinwen Sheying She), the Citizen Society (Guomin She), the Wuhan Society (Wuhan She), the Yangzi River Photography Society (Changjiang She), the East River Society (Jindong She), the People's Voice Photographic Communication Society (Minsheng Sheying Tongxun She), South China News Society (Nan Zhongguo Xinwen She) . . . and many others.<sup>110</sup>

These photo societies played different roles in disseminating information about the ongoing war. Some were news agencies that supplied war photographs to papers and magazines; others also published and distributed such images. Some of them were small, organized by schools or like-minded individuals; others grew into large, international news organizations. Consistent with the basic orientation of

wartime newspapers, the main themes of the news photos included the brutality of the Japanese invaders, the heroism of Chinese troops, the suffering of refugees and the grass-roots resistance movement.<sup>111</sup> Ruin images most frequently appeared in photographs that documented Japanese war crimes. A particularly influential format was a photo essay consisting of multiple images to generate an acute, ‘on the spot’ effect. Soon after the 18 September Incident, for example, Beijing’s *Global Pictorial* (*Shijie huabao*) published a spread of six photographs on the front page under the title ‘Please See How Japanese Soldiers Kill Our Countrymen’ (*Qing kan Ri bing tusha wo tongbao*). In a graphic manner these pictures show how Japanese soldiers captured Chinese citizens on the street, tied them up, and shot them in broad daylight.<sup>112</sup> Another popular format for wartime photos was as a ‘supplement’ (*fu kan*) in newspapers and magazines, which provided more extensive space for detailed reporting. During the battle of Shanghai in 1932, for example, the *Illustrated Times* (*Tuhua shibao*) covered the war in such a form, setting an early example for this type of media coverage.<sup>113</sup>

Photographic representations of Japanese atrocities and war destruction in papers and magazines were often labelled as *jianzheng* – ‘witness and proof’ – of war crimes. This compound word thus indicates the photograph’s legal power (*zheng*, meaning evidence) and the presence of a testifying gaze (*jian*, meaning eyewitness). This dual connotation is exemplified by the two images on this page and the previous. Both pictures juxtapose war ruins with images of the living. The street onlooker in the first picture, no longer a foreign traveller but a native



103 Wang Xiaoting, orphaned baby crying in the Shanghai South Railroad Station during a Japanese bombing raid, 28 August 1937, film still.

Chinese, embodies the role of an eyewitness – his gaze directs the spectator to see the destroyed city surrounding him. The crying child in the second picture assumes an alternative role as victim *and* survivor. This second picture was taken by Wang Xiaoting (1900–1983), arguably the most famous Chinese photojournalist at the time, during the Japanese bombing of the Shanghai South Railroad Station in 1937.<sup>114</sup> As early as 1926, Wang had followed the crusade of the National Revolutionary Army to the warlord-occupied north. In 1929, he covered the war between Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and Feng Yuxiang in Henan, and compiled the photo album *True Images of the Battles in the Northwest* (*Xibei zhanshi zhenxiang*).<sup>115</sup> In 1930, he became a *Shenbao* correspondent and helped create the *Illustrated Weekly* (*Tuhua zhoushan*) for this influential paper. After the Japanese seized Manchuria in 1931, he travelled to the frontier to collect first-hand information. During the Sino-Japanese War, he worked for the Hearst News Service and MGM. According to his memoir, he captured the image of the crying child on 28 August 1937:

Dead and wounded people lay everywhere in the railroad station, on the platform and the rails. Dismembered limbs filled the eye. I could ignore these only because I was concentrating on my work. When I stopped to load film in my camera, I found my shoes covered with blood. I crossed the rails, shooting the whole scene in front of the raised footbridge. At this moment I saw a man pick up a baby from the rails and place him on the platform. He then returned to the rails to save another seriously wounded boy, whose mother had died and lay on the rails. As I was photographing this heart-wrenching scene, I heard that a Japanese bomber was approaching. Quickly finishing the remaining film, I was about to rush to the baby to take him to a safe place. But at this moment his father returned.<sup>116</sup>

Five weeks later, on 4 October, this image – a still from Wang's film reel – appeared in *Life* magazine and was then reprinted on numerous posters and postcards around the world. It is estimated that 1.36 billion people saw the picture, making it the image with the most exposure from wartime China.<sup>117</sup>

As demonstrated by these two images, human figures amid war ruins provide a crucial mechanism in a process that I call the ‘internalization of war ruins’. During this process the focus of representation shifts from documentation to experience and from the physical to the psychological. Once the viewer identifies him/herself with the victim/survivor/eyewitness in a picture, a scene of war

ruins, in Mark Seltzer's words, 'bends event-reference to self-reference, transferring interest from event to the subject's self-representation'.<sup>118</sup> The essence of this self-representation in wartime China is that China as a nation was in a state of profound danger and pain, and that China's future depended on whether it could survive this state of calamity.<sup>119</sup> Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and especially during the Sino-Japanese War, a repeated question raised by Chinese nationalists concerned *cun wang*: Would China survive or die? A movie song written during the Sino-Japanese war cries out: 'Rise, those who do not want to be slaves. Use our flesh and blood to build a new Great Wall. The Chinese nation has reached the fatal moment of life or death . . .'. This song later became the national anthem of the People's Republic of China.

As self-representations of a wounded nation, images of war ruins by Chinese photographers differed fundamentally from an earlier generation of war photography by Felice Beato and his followers in both purpose and function. Both groups of images should be considered as markers of truth-value and symbolic significance. But the earlier group, as discussed in the preceding section, implies a victorious gaze behind the camera. Mainly produced for a foreign audience physically detached from the war, it 'frames and re-presents its subjects in order to create a distance between beholders and the events to which the photographs bear witness' – a distance crucial to the photographs' role as a means of surveillance and domination.<sup>120</sup> This kind of colonialist/imperialist photography was continuously produced by the Japanese propaganda machine during the Sino-Japanese War for similar political purposes. Nationalist war photography, however, aimed at erasing the distance between its subject and viewership completely, because only through such erasure could the audience identify themselves with the victims portrayed in the photographs and internalize their experiences. The main technology behind such instant identification is 'shock', which, according to Walter Benjamin, connects a particular event/experience with the general condition of everyday life.<sup>121</sup> To Benjamin, reality can be grasped only in its disappearance, and the shift from a momentary visual impression to an eternal image is best realized by photography: 'A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were.'<sup>122</sup> It is exactly this double significance of particularity and universality that makes images like Wang Xiaoting's *Orphaned Chinese Baby Crying in the South Station in Shanghai, China, 28 August 1937* (see illus. 103) so powerful: whereas the photograph captures a particular tragic moment, it also encapsulates the general catastrophic and dislocating impact of the war.

War ruins also appeared in other art mediums to fuel patriotic sentiment.<sup>123</sup> Many powerful woodcut prints forced onlookers to face the issue of national survival. Japanese atrocities and war destruction became constant themes of wartime cartoons, an art form that assumed tremendous influence during this period.<sup>124</sup> Cartoon artists developed different styles. The activist painter Zhao Wangyun (1906–1977), for example, favoured a documentary style clearly influenced by photojournalism. During the war he founded the *Resistance War Pictorial* (*Kangzhan huakan*) and made many cartoons for it, recording his journeys though devastated villages and fields in north China.<sup>125</sup> Feng Zikai (1898–1975), ‘China’s foremost philosophical cartoonist of his time’,<sup>126</sup> painted similar subjects but in a succinct, poetic mode (illus. 104). Although Feng was well known for his literary work, he considered the political cartoon a more effective means to influence reality: ‘In comparison with literature, which uses abstract language to express ideas, the propaganda effect of the cartoon is definitely faster and more powerful.’<sup>127</sup> It is obvious that by the 1930s and ’40s, images of architectural ruins, in particular war ruins, had become an essential component of Chinese popular art and visual culture.

The resistance movement also brought about a radical departure in painting. ‘The war’, one artist proclaimed at the time, ‘is a turning point in the history of Chinese painting . . . [The new art] reminds us of the urgency of national survival, registers protest, and insists on [the necessity of patriotic] education.’<sup>128</sup> Not only did this rarified art form join newspapers and cartoons in representing bombed cities and homeless refugees, but it also acquired heightened visual immediacy, a



104 Feng Zikai, 'After a Battle' (left), 1933; 'The Swallow has Returned, but Not the Human Resident' (right), 1940, ink on paper.



105 Wu Zuoren,  
*Bombing of Chongqing*,  
1941, oil painting.

106 Wu Zuoren, *Life  
Cannot be Destroyed*,  
1941, oil painting.

quality that can be clearly traced to photojournalism. In oil painting, Wu Zuoren (1909–1989) made a powerful trilogy entitled the *Bombing of Chongqing* (*Chongqing da hongzha*; illus. 105), *Mother during an Air Raid* (*Kongxi xia de muqin*) and *Life Cannot Be Destroyed* (*Buke huimie de shengming*; illus. 106). After studying in Paris from 1930 to 1935, Wu returned to China on the eve of the Japanese invasion of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. His life during the war was strewn with tragic events and intertwined with the theme of survival: his wife Li Na, a Belgian national, died while giving birth amid a Japanese air raid in 1939; his apartment in Chongqing was destroyed by Japanese bombs in June 1940, and many of his paintings were burnt in the ensuing fire. Fuelled with anger, he made sketches of what he saw in bombed Chongqing and created the trilogy in 1941.

In ink painting, Jiang Zhaohe (1904–1986) made his *Refugees* (*Liumin tu*), a monumental work (27 m long and 2 m high) that has been compared with Picasso's *Guernica*. It portrays more than 100 refugees who have lost their homes during the war (illus. 107). Employing a heightened realistic style, he vividly captures the likenesses of the figures; the strong shading on their bodies and faces is

contrasted with a summary rendering of clothes and the environment, highlighting the figures' physical hardship and psychological trauma. Portrayed in life-size, these figures sprawl in front of a broken wall or hold a dead baby, confronting the viewer with a kind of visual immediacy never seen in traditional Chinese painting. Once again, we find an undeniable relationship between such visual quality and photojournalism. Interestingly, this painting became known during the war mainly through photographic reproductions: facing political uncertainty and heavy censorship, Jiang photographed the work and produced 50 high-quality albums for distribution. This precaution proved to be wise: the authorities almost immediately shut down the painting's first exhibition in Beijing; its second showing in Shanghai ended prematurely with the work's disappearance.<sup>129</sup>



In watercolour drawing, Wang Shaoling (1909–1989) made *Ruins of the Commercial Press after the Battle of Shanghai* (*Lu zhan hao de Shangwu Yinshuguan yiji*; illus. 108). Founded in 1897, the Commercial Press had grown into the largest academic publisher in China by 1914. Its numerous publications, including annotated classics, textbooks, dictionaries, scholarly journals and translations, constituted a major source for learning and research in the country. Scholars and students also routinely used its Oriental Library, which contained many rare editions, Western language books and journals, and a comprehensive collection of reference works. The press was bombed three times by Japanese warplanes on 29 January 1932; the library and several other buildings were completely destroyed. To Chinese intellectuals, the destruction of the Commercial Press most acutely revealed the barbarism of the Japanese invaders in destroying China's cultural legacy. The photographs of the ruined library appeared in many newspapers and magazines. Perceived as reality itself, these photos constructed an observed world in print for paintings to represent. Comparing the photographic records with Wang Shaoling's watercolour drawing, we find that the artist deliberately enhanced the ruins' monumentality. Depicted from a low angle, the library's remaining facade fills the entire picture frame. The picture thus not only documents and condemns the war crime, but also alludes to the dignity and heroism of the victim.

Whereas similar examples abound, it is the career of the Guangdong artist Gao Jianfu (Gao Lun, 1879–1951) that best demonstrates the intimate relationship between paintings of war ruins, photojournalism and contemporary politics in the first half of the twentieth century. A major figure in modern Chinese art history, Gao was also a famous political activist who joined Sun Yat-sen's (1866–1925) nationalist revolution when he was still a young man studying art in Japan. In 1907, he returned to China to assume leadership of Sun's Alliance Society in

107 Jiang Zhaohe, detail of *The Refugees*, 1942–3, ink and colour on paper.

108 Wang Shaoling, *Ruins of the Commercial Press after the Battle of Shanghai*, 1932, watercolour.

109 Gao Qifeng, cover of *Truth Illustrated* (1912).



Canton. To overthrow Qing rule, he and some comrades founded the 'China Assassination Group' (Zhina Anshatuan) in 1910 to assassinate senior Qing officials. When the revolution took place in 1911, he commanded the Eastern New Army (Dongxinjun) in its takeover of Canton.<sup>130</sup> After the establishment of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen entrusted Gao with spreading information about the revolution through photography.<sup>131</sup> In response, he organized the China Photographic Team (Zhonghua Xiezhen Dui; also known as Zhonghua Zhandi Xiezhen Dui – China Battleground Photographic Team), whose mandate included reporting the ongoing revolutionary war and activities of the newly founded Republic. Photographs made by the team regularly appeared in *Truth Illustrated* (*Zhenxiang huabao*), a journal founded in 1912 by Gao Qifeng (1888–1933), Gao Jianfu's younger brother as well as a major Canton School artist. The journal's self-professed duties were 'supervising the Republican government, investigating the state of people's lives, promoting social justice, and introducing knowledge about the world'. On the cover of the journal's second issue is a painting by Gao Qifeng (illus. 109). Showing a young man aiming his camera at a dark wood, this image provides a visual counterpart to the journal's title by equating photography with truth seeking.

Disillusioned with the power struggles after the revolution, Gao Jianfu resigned from his political duties and rejected the post of governor of Canton. His mission now was to mobilize an artistic revolution by establishing a school of 'New National Painting' (Xin guohua). Inspired by the 'Japanese style painting' (Nihong ga) that he encountered in Japan, his 'New National Painting' would stylistically combine traditional Chinese brush techniques with Western pictorial realism.<sup>132</sup> In terms of subject-matter and function, he wanted to embrace contemporary themes and communicate with the common people. To realize this goal, he and Gao Qifeng established an art school and a publishing house, organized an art society and

curated public exhibitions. In 1923, Gao Jianfu founded the Spring Awakening Art Academy (*Chunshui huayuan*) in Canton. Among the academy's many activities was an exhibition held in 1939 in Macao and Hong Kong in response to the Sino-Japanese War in the north. The critic Chen Jinyun (*Chun Kum-wen*) begins her report of the show with this observation:

That art has been mobilized as a cultural weapon in China's war of resistance against Japanese aggression is familiar and known to all. For two years now, Chinese cartoonists and woodcut artists have been putting up cartoons and posters calling the nation to arms and to carry on the war of resistance to final victory. In a country with a high rate of illiteracy, the importance of cartoons and posters as instruments to stir up mass feelings cannot be over-estimated. But while the cartoonists and woodcut artists are contributing their share splendidly, the question might be raised as to what those artists, who still cling to the traditional style of Chinese painting, are doing? What can painters of Chinese landscapes and flowers do for the cause of resistance? Will they give up their traditional landscapes and flower paintings to the portrayal of war? Can Chinese painting be adaptable to war needs? These questions have been asked time and again, but not until the exhibition of paintings by members of the Ch'un Shui School of Art did we have a concrete case before us illustrating the fact that Chinese painting too can go to war without losing its aesthetic value.<sup>133</sup>

This is a strong statement, but it accords well with the works in the show. The pieces on display demonstrated the artists' mastery of the skills of traditional painting. Instead of depicting rarefied landscapes or flowers and birds, however, they focused on war calamities, especially the suffering of ordinary people undergoing Japanese air raids. Situ Qi's (1907–1997) two works, *Destitute and Homeless* and *Even Innocents Suffer*, both juxtapose victims with architectural ruins, recalling news photos by Wang Xiaoting (see illus. 103). Guan Shanyue's (1912–2000) *Japanese Bombing of Chinese Fishing Junks*, on the other hand, derived its composition from battle paintings typically found in pictorials and folk art. The most powerful work in the exhibition is without question Gao Jianfu's *A Chinese City in Ruins*,<sup>134</sup> which translates photojournalism into a symbolic representation of the war of resistance (illus. 110).

The painting's composition is dominated by two groups of ruined architectural forms. The group in the foreground, delineated in dark, harsh ink brushwork,



110 Gao Jianfu, *A Chinese City in Ruins*, 1939, ink and colour on paper.

consists of a broken wall amid scattered bricks and fragments of a telegraph pole. Next to the wall is an arched window or door frame, indicating the former existence of a Western-style structure. White smoke rises behind this cluster of debris, separating it diagonally from the second group of ruins in the mid-ground. This is the focal image of the whole painting: although a tall building is almost completely destroyed, its broken walls still soar into the sky. More ruins appear in the background, and a whole city still seems to be burning: although we cannot see the source of the fire, orange flames and thick smoke block the sky.

More than any other ruin image in modern Chinese art, this painting represents the conjunction of an individual artist's persistent interest in depicting architectural ruins and the changing symbolism of such images in contemporary visual culture. Checking Gao Jianfu's works, we find that he experimented with at least three modes of ruin image. The first and earliest is that of Picturesque ruins. This experiment seems to have been directly linked to his idea of New National Painting: hoping to infuse Western realism into traditional Chinese painting, he depicted Picturesque ruins on several occasions, mostly before the Sino-Japanese War. His 1926 *Five-Storey Pavilion* (*Wucenglou*) bears a typical *huaigu* poem lamenting the passing of time. His 1934 *Old Pagoda at Sunset* (*Xieyang guta*; illus. 111) closely resembles oil paintings on similar themes by Yan Wenliang and Pan Yuliang (see illus. 76–8, 84). After he travelled to India and Southeast Asia in 1930 and 1931, he painted *An Ancient Building in South India* (*Nan Yindu gusha*, early 1930s), *Buddhist Pagodas in Burma* (*Miandian fota*, 1934), and an old stupa in Tibet.

The second mode started with the war, when the theme of destruction took over to become the subject of representation. But the pictorial language remained largely symbolic, employing conventional historical or religious symbols and allusions. This mode can be traced to an undated early painting depicting the burning of the Afang Palace of the First Qin Emperor, a famous episode in Chinese history (illus. 112). Although this work is based on a painting of the same title by the Japanese artist Kimura Buzan (1876–1942), it nevertheless reveals Gao Jianfu's



111 Gao Jianfu, *Old Pagoda at Sunset*, 1934, ink and colour on paper.

112 Gao Jianfu, *Burning the Afang Palace*, c. 1920s, ink and colour on silk.



nascent interest in representing destruction and calamity. After Japan invaded north China, he painted *Even White Skulls Mourn the Nation's Disaster* (*Baigu youshen guonan bei*), in 1938. His *Civilization Destroyed* (*Wenming de huimie*) was likely a lament for the fall of France: in the painting, a huge cross is broken by a whirlwind in the middle (illus. 113).

Examined in this context, *A Chinese City in Ruins* represents a third mode as well as the culmination of Gao Jianfu's ruin images. It incorporates many elements from news photos, but its meaning is more symbolic than journalistic. Instead of providing a factual record of a particular city or bombing, the painted ruins refer to all Chinese cities threatened by the Japanese invasion. Like Wang



Shaoling's *Ruins of the Commercial Press after the Battle of Shanghai*, it bestows the ruin with a distinct monumentality. In fact, the soaring skeleton of the ruinous building in the mid-ground seems to deliberately evoke a lofty mountain in a Song dynasty 'monumental landscape' (illus. 114). Long considered an emblem of Chinese civilization, this 'mountain' threatens to fall in Gao's rendering. But it still stands. Instead of representing defeat and evoking sympathy, it calls for heroism and self-sacrifice. In a more general sense, such symbolism justifies the painting's creation, as well as the making of all pictorial images of ruins during the war. Although as paintings and drawings these pictures could never compete with photographs in documentary value or direct emotional impact, they could articulate

113 Gao Jianfu,  
*Civilization Destroyed*,  
early 1940s, ink and  
colour on paper.

114 Li Cheng, *Solitary  
Temple Amid Clearing  
Peaks*, 10th century, ink  
and light colour on silk.

the national allegory of suffering and survival on a more abstract, conceptual level. Understood as symbolic statements rather than factual records, they demonstrate the artists' commitment to the resistance movement and exhort their audience to rise against the Japanese aggression at all cost.

## The Destruction, Ruination and Resurrection of the Garden of Perfect Brightness (Yuanming Yuan)

The history of the destroyed Garden of Perfect Brightness best testifies to the changing role of ruins in modern China, and brings the story I have been telling in this chapter into sharper focus.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the garden serves as a kind of degree zero for the reconceptualization of ruins in twentieth-century China, when the country became a modern nation state. But as I discuss below, its significance as a major political symbol also transcends this particular transformation, and has been evoked at almost every important turn in modern Chinese history.

Known in Chinese as Yuanming Yuan, this famous royal park, located in the western suburbs of Beijing, grew into 'The Crown of Chinese Gardens' in the eighteenth century under the patronage of three Qing emperors: Kangxi (*reg* 1662–1723), Yongzheng (*reg* 1723–36) and Qianlong (*reg* 1736–95). Rather than a single garden, it was a conglomeration of large and small gardens on nearly 800 acres of land. After each of Qianlong's journeys to south China between 1751 and 1784, for example, he had the most beautiful scenic spots in the south copied here. Even imaginary places in Chinese mythology and Buddhist legends were realized in architectural form. Beyond its practical role as a place for imperial relaxation, therefore, Yuanming Yuan was conceptualized as a symbolic space that assembled various places in the universe, a utopia that realized its significance through connecting itself with different parts of the world.<sup>136</sup>

This symbolism also provided the *raison d'être* for constructing a group of Rococo-style buildings in Yuanming Yuan. Situated along the garden's northeast border and known collectively as Xiyang Lou, or the European Palaces, they showed remarkable differences from the rest of the garden. While most buildings in Yuanming Yuan – halls, pavilions and corridors – were constructed in the traditional Chinese manner with timber structures, tiled roofs and painted decoration, the European Palaces alone were made of white marble and adorned with statues and reliefs. Perceived as 'marvellous views from overseas' (*hai wai qi guan*), they also harnessed Western science to impress their royal patrons: a fountain located in front of the Hall of the Calm Sea (Haiyan Tang) – the largest and most elaborate

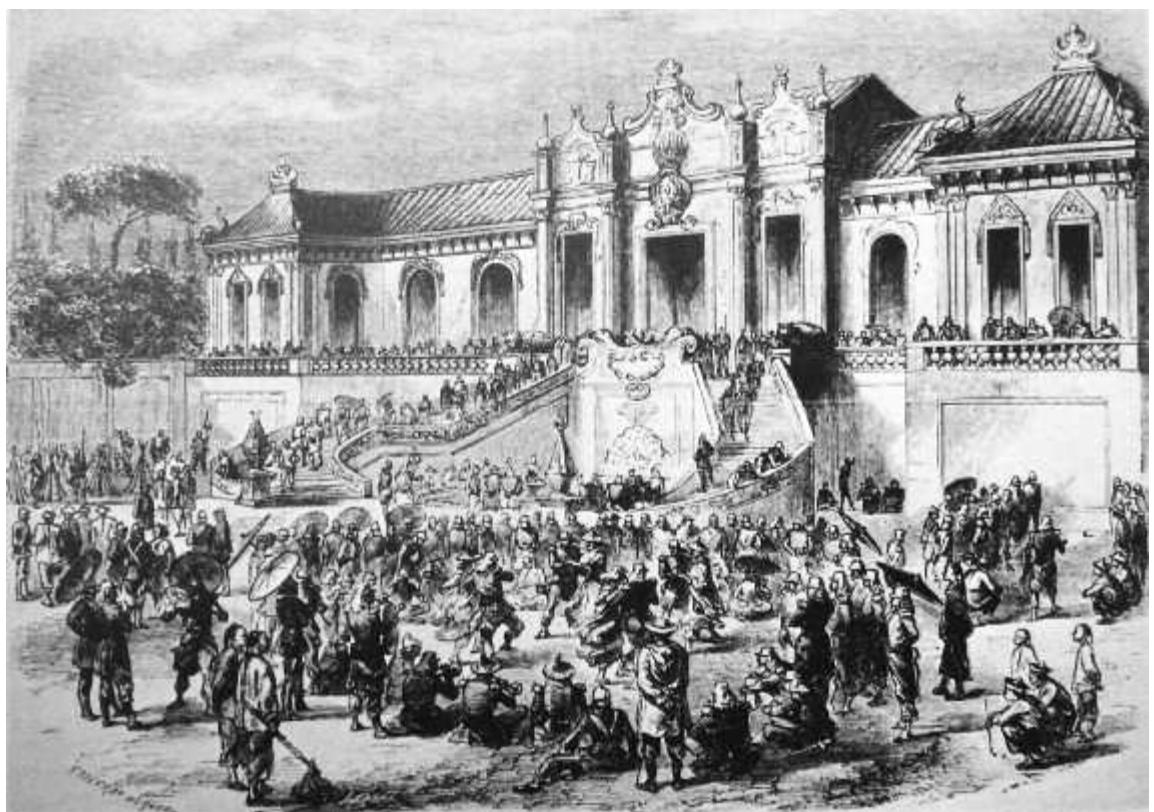
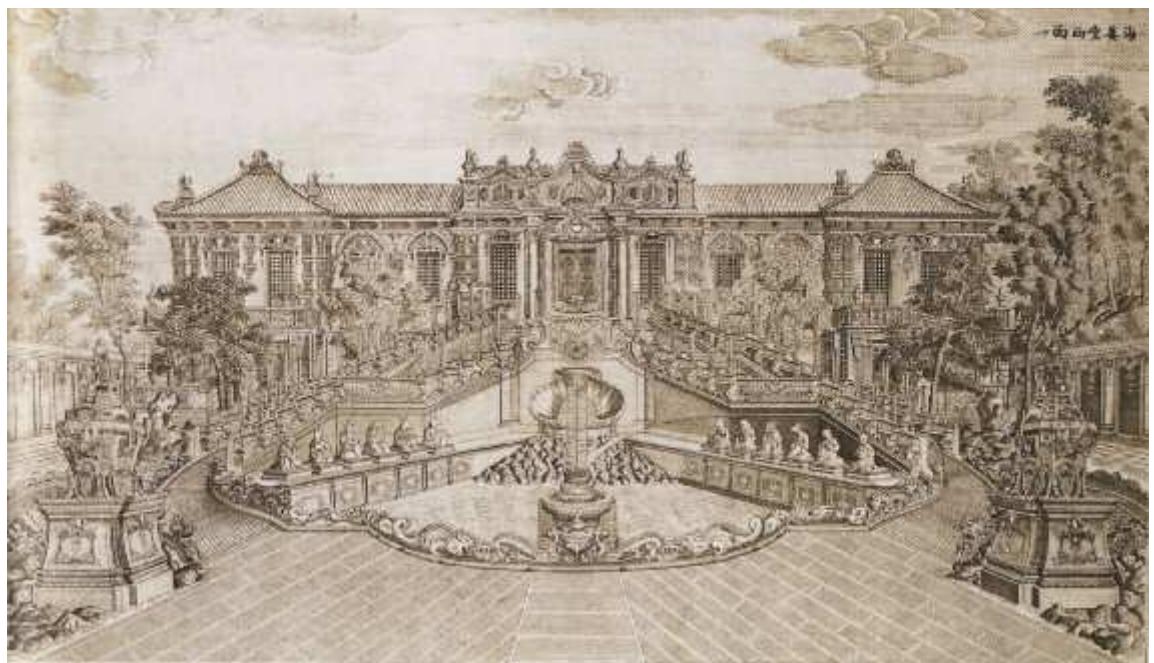
building among the European Palaces – was operated by hydraulic pumps (illus. 115). Designed by the French Jesuit Michel Benoist (1715–1774), the pumps were connected to twelve fantastic bronze figures half-encircling a reservoir. Rendered in human clothing but with different animal heads, they stood for the twelve Chinese signs of the zodiac. Each in turn spouted a jet of water from its mouth at an interval of every two hours, so the whole fountain could function as a giant clock. Exemplified by this fountain, the main aspects of the European Palaces – their material, designers, technology and overall architectural form and decoration – manifested the concept of *yi* (alien, foreign, the West) and *qi* (unusual, strange, marvellous). Consequently, the inclusion of the palaces in Yuanming Yuan helped realize Qianlong's ambition to bring all under heaven into the imperial domain.

This imperial dream finally reached its end in 1860. That year, after occupying Beijing during the Second Opium War, the Anglo-French troops sacked Yuanming Yuan to demonstrate their military might. The royal treasures were looted; the buildings were set on fire. The twelve bronze figures in front of the Hall of the Calm Sea were decapitated (illus. 116); their heads were taken back to Europe as war trophies. Among the Europeans who were enraged by the behaviour of their countrymen abroad was Victor Hugo, who wrote in an open letter: 'We call ourselves civilized and them barbarian; here is what Civilization has done to Barbarity!'<sup>137</sup>

The destruction of the European Palaces by the Europeans themselves was not a mere coincidence, however, but signalled a historical shift in the European attitude toward China. Reflecting on the buildings' original symbolism, we realize that, in addition to satisfying the Chinese emperor's fancy for Western art and technology, these structures were also the result of an earlier European project. Through cultivating the favour and support of Chinese emperors, Christian missionaries hoped to spread Western religion and culture more effectively throughout China. In fact, a closer examination of the buildings reveals that these so-called European Palaces actually combined many Chinese elements, and can thus be considered 'a reverse reflection of the Chinoiseries'<sup>138</sup> growing out of the European imagination. Most characteristically, several structures in the group had Chinese-style roofs, and the twelve bronze statues adorning the fountain in front of the Hall of the Calm Sea, though rendered in a distinctly European sculptural style, were all dressed in Chinese garb. Whereas to their Chinese audience these palaces showcased an alien architectural tradition, to Father Benoist and his fellow missionaries working in the Qing court, they embodied a cultural synthesis of East and West. Viewed in this light, the destruction of the European Palaces not

115 Hall of the Calm Sea (Haiyan Tang), one of the European Palaces at Yuanming Yuan, engraving on paper, after drawing by Yi Lantai (fl. c. 1738–86).

116 Godefroy Durand, 'Pillage of the Yuanming Yuan in 1860', in *L'Illustration*, 22 December 1860.



only destroyed Emperor Qianlong's dream of a fictional world empire, but also shattered the missionaries' dream of a universal Christian kingdom on earth. From either perspective, the ruins of the palaces stood for a bygone romance between East and West, as well as demonstrating a new power relationship characterized by political dominance and submission.

After the Second Opium War, the Qing court made some pitiful efforts to restore the garden, but the work eventually stopped because of the court's shrinking financial resources and the country's unstable political condition. A few repaired structures were destroyed by a second burning during the 1900 invasion of the Eight-Power Alliance. Many domestic sackings also took place, as the guards and eunuchs stationed there could hardly protect the vast and dilapidated royal park. Eventually anything movable was taken away; only the marble remains of the former European Palaces were left in the brambles. The garden's fate after its destruction thus followed a time-honoured logic in traditional China: having once missed its chance to be restored, it was doomed to disappear forever.

Ironically, it was again Europeans who gave the garden a second life. Starting from the mid-1860s, a slew of Westerners returned to the European Palaces, not as destroyers and looters but as explorers and tourists.<sup>139</sup> The earliest of them was probably Algernon Freeman-Mitford (1837–1916), then a young attaché in the British Consulate, who visited Yuanming Yuan with his friends on a pleasant summer day in August 1865:

We were ushered through a number of courtyards, where there was nothing to be seen but ruined and charred walls, and the ghosts of departed pine trees, and along a pretty covered walk to a pavilion by the lake where we were to breakfast. It was a lovely spot. The lake was a mass of lotus plants now in full bloom. There are quantities of little islands covered with trees and buildings. A number of boats with naked fishermen in them gave a touch of wildness and barbarity to the scene, and further added to our amusement; . . .

There is nothing like a Chinese servant for a picnic or expedition of any kind, under whatever difficulties he may be placed. Shao-To never lets us lack for anything. Even Dan, the pointer puppy, had his usual mess of rice and broth, as if he had been at home. When we had breakfasted, with an admiring crowd around us, we went to explore the ruins. It is difficult to form any idea of what the palace must have been like, so complete has the work of destruction been. We scrambled up and down steep steps (that must have been hard work for the poor little cramped

feet that trod them) and along terraces where the wild vines and creepers, and sweet-scented weeds, now grow in tangled masses; there is not a stone that has not been split by the action of the fire. Two colossal marble kylins, of rare workmanship, are seared with cracks, and have almost fallen away in flakes. Of the great octagonal three-storeyed palace, not one stone lies on another, and a white marble balustrade alone shows where it stood.<sup>140</sup>

Written immediately after the excursion, this personal communication vividly documents the circumstance in which the ruins of Yuanming Yuan were rediscovered: although the fatal destruction had taken place merely five years earlier, the site had already become a perfect place for a pleasurable day-trip combined with a picnic amid the ruins. More Europeans visited the site for the same purpose in the 1870s. Many of them worked for the Custom Service in Beijing, an organization set up in 1854 to facilitate international trade. In their leisure time, they journeyed around this ancient city to explore its secrets. They found the remains of the destroyed European Palaces in deep weeds and brambles. Their reactions to the place followed the ruin sentiment typical of the European romantic tradition: astonished by the site's melancholy beauty, they reflected on the human tragedy that had caused its destruction and decay. Ernst Ohlmer (1847–1927), a young German in the group, later recalled: 'Although laid to waste and overgrown by vegetation, these buildings still had an enchanting effect in the mid-seventies . . . The observer . . . [could] not suppress a sense of deep melancholy reflecting that in this enlightened age it had still been possible to pointlessly destroy that splendour.'<sup>141</sup>

These men took upon themselves the task of photographing the place. Régine Thiriez has done a remarkable job collecting information about them.<sup>142</sup> Although none of these men seems to have been of any historical importance, the pictures they took provide the most reliable evidence for the ruined European Palaces in the late nineteenth century (illus. 117). Among them, Thomas Child had some success as a semi-professional photographer. The others, including Ernst Ohlmer and A. Theophile Piry (1851–1918), were obscure amateurs. None of them left writings to document the circumstances under which they photographed the ruins, but the images they produced explain plenty about their motivation: these Western-looking ruins seem to have been transported directly from the photographers' own cultural past, and offered them peace and respite in an alien and often hostile environment. For the same reason, the ruined European Palaces continuously provided them and their families and friends with an ideal place for going on an outing and picnicking: a lighthearted photo by Piry shows a group of

Westerners dining in front of the ruined Hall of the Calm Sea (illus. 118). As in the case of Freeman-Mitford's trip, the picnic table and long *bandeng*-chairs must have been provided by a Chinese caretaker, who stands a few steps away, silently looking at the cheerful gathering of a group of foreign expats.

Piry organized this picnic around 1912, the year after the Chinese Republic Revolution. But his photograph betrays no sign of the surrounding political turmoil. Indeed, to him and other European photographers of the ruined palaces, the site's attraction lay in its fictional tranquility and timelessness, not in its political significance and historicity. But for Chinese visitors to the place – who went there in increasing numbers from the early twentieth century onward – the destroyed Yuanming Yuan garden always evoked a collective memory of national humiliation; the very sight of the ruins was painful. Among such visitors were Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Li Dazhao (1889–1927), two of the most important political figures in modern Chinese history. Kang, the leader of the failed Hundred Day Reform in 1898, visited Yuanming Yuan around the mid-1890s. The traces of destruction he saw there must have strengthened his determination to transform China into a modern nation. We know this because when he proposed his reform plans to Emperor Guangxu (*reg* 1874–1908), the lesson of Yuanming Yuan was a central theme in the first of a series of memorials:

As for the imperial parks and the Three Hills [in Beijing's western suburbs], including the summer palaces of Yuanming Yuan, these were all built by Your Majesty's sagely ancestors. Having been burned down and destroyed



117 Ernst Ohlmer, *Clock Gate Near Xieqiqu*, c. 1875.

118 A. T. Piry, *Picnic in Front of the Ruined Hall of the Calm Sea, c. 1912.*



by the barbarous British, their tiles are gone and foundations broken; the whole complex has turned into rubble. When Your Majesty visits the site and sees the ruins, I wonder whether the sight moves your heart, making you full of anger and inspiring you to take a great revenge.<sup>143</sup>

Likewise, Li Dazhao, one of the advocates of the May Fourth Movement and a founder of the Chinese Communist Party, wrote these words when he visited Yuanming Yuan in 1913: ‘Looking at the former site of the Garden of Perfect Brightness, what remain are only a few broken walls and some scattered architectural fragments, half covered by mist and wild grass. Offering a libation with tears in my eyes, I made a poem to voice my feelings of indignation.’<sup>144</sup>

Six years later, the May Fourth Movement erupted; and teachers and students from the neighbouring Peking University and Tsing-hua University began to frequent the ruins. It is not difficult to imagine their reactions – these two universities were hotbeds of nationalist movement, and their faculty and students frequently organized anti-West demonstrations. The site attracted even wider attention during the 1930s, when China was threatened by growing Japanese

aggression. An exhibition of Yuanming Yuan's relics and documents was organized in 1931 in Beijing, just before Japan invaded Manchuria; the occasion was the seventieth anniversary of the garden's destruction. Co-sponsored by the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture (Zhongguo Yingzao Xueshe) and the Beijing Library, this was the first public event in Chinese history to commemorate a destroyed architectural structure. Held in Sun Yat-sen Park next to the Forbidden City, the exhibition contained architectural models, early illustrations, textual records of the imperial garden and material remains gathered from the site. In conjunction with the show, the historian Xiang Da published the first historical study of Yuanming Yuan, tracing its construction process and tragic destruction. The exhibition received more than 10,000 visitors in two days.<sup>145</sup>

This event, however, also introduced a perpetual irony in the modern Chinese perception of Yuanming Yuan. On the one hand, the exhibition and catalogue of 1931, as well as many later events and publication in the same vein, served a clearly articulated nationalist, anti-colonial political agenda. On the other hand, they tended to ignore the Chinese buildings in the garden while constantly putting the destroyed European Palaces in the spotlight, eventually turning the latter into a stand-in for the entire royal park. One reason for this preference is technical: being masonry constructions, these foreign-looking buildings left an imposing cluster of ruins at the site, whereas most Chinese timber structures left no traces. Another reason is intellectual: the organizers of the 1931 exhibition were Westernized historians, who were fascinated by these sinicized European structures and devoted much research to tracking down their designers and construction process. This special historical interest gained additional momentum when Teng Gu (1901–1941), while pursuing a doctorate in art history at Berlin University, discovered a set of early photographs of the ruined European Palaces, which he subsequently published in Shanghai in 1933 (illus. 119). He identified the photographer as Ernst Ohlmer and concluded his introduction to the album with this lament:

Seventy-two years have passed since the burning of Yuanming Yuan. Subject to the impact of natural elements and robbery by the powerful, the remains of the garden have become increasingly scarce. When we write about the garden, it is as if we are describing and imagining a thousand-year old antiquity. It makes one sigh. I read in last year's March 13th issue of *Dagong Bao* (Ta Kung Pao) that the Society for the Study of Chinese Architecture and the Beijing Library jointly organized an exhibition showing documents and relics of Yuanming Yuan. It is a pity that I found these



119 Teng Gu, cover of *Remains of the European-style Palaces in Yuanming Yuan* (1932).

photographs too late and could not display them in the exhibition, offering concerned people an early view of the site. How I deeply regret this.<sup>146</sup>

The ‘concerned people’ (*you xin ren*) mentioned here did not just mean scholars interested in Yuanming Yuan’s history and architecture, but also referred to the mass audience of the 1931 exhibition, who visited the show as a patriotic act. Published after the fall of Manchuria and the battle of Shanghai, the photo album reminded people of the historical tragedy China had suffered from a previous foreign invasion. The album

was enthusiastically collected by people of different classes and occupations; some of them inscribed their copies with anti-Japanese poems.

From this time on, the ruins of Yuanming Yuan began to acquire a broader symbolism: it stopped standing for a particular historical incident, but gradually became a general nationalist monument to anti-foreign aggression. After the founding of the People’s Republic, the ruins came to symbolize a dark, colonial past in official propaganda. This past officially ended in 1997 when China finally resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong. To mark this historical occasion, a monumental bronze *ding* vessel – an ancient symbol for political unity – was added to the site to signify the country’s reunification.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, the ruins of Yuanming Yuan were also associated with an ‘unofficial’ position: avant-garde artists and writers gravitated to the ruins as a ‘wounded’ space. They held poetry readings there and wrapped themselves and the ruined stones with white and black funerary cloths (see illus. 142). The clash of various ideologies around the site leads us to examine the role of ruins in the newest chapter in China’s long history, from the post-war period to the present time.



THREE  
BETWEEN PAST  
AND FUTURE:

Transience as a Contemporary  
Aesthetic of Ruins

## Signifiers of Despair and Hope

Following a huge sacrifice including 17.5 million civilian casualties, China finally won the Sino-Japanese War on 9 September 1945. But the country's suffering was far from over: post-war China inherited a split political system, a paralysed economic infrastructure, widespread urban unrest, and deepening corruption among GMD (Guomindang or Chinese Nationalist Party) officials. Natural disasters and governmental mismanagement further caused recurring famine in agricultural areas and soaring inflation in the city. The number of homeless people even surpassed the wartime record. More and more intellectuals lost faith in the Republican regime and placed their hopes in a radical, Communist revolution.

Four months after the Japanese surrender, the artist Situ Qiao (1902–1958) embarked on a long journey to survey the embattled countryside in south China. As recounted later by his wife, the writer Feng Yimei (1908–1976), who accompanied Situ on the journey, the couple went through five provinces, including Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Hubei and Henan:

Everywhere we went, the place was filled with hungry, sick and dying people. The rich and powerful made little effort to heal the wounds of the war, but were busily grabbing the fruits of victory, inflicting new misery on the population. Indignant at what he saw, Situ Qiao made eighty paintings to record the hellish scenes that he witnessed in these places, now under GMD jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup>

The paintings were shown in July 1946 in Nanjing and Shanghai, where they aroused strong reactions from the audience.<sup>2</sup>

Among the works Situ Qiao created on the trip, the most bitter is a small drawing entitled *Shadows of Ghosts in an Empty Room* (*Kongshi guijing tu*; illus. 120). Executed solely in ink, the image mixes reality with the artist's hallucination. Inside a deserted house with broken walls, the only furniture left is a small chair for a child. The child, however, is dead, lying in the arms of a large skeleton, which must represent his deceased mother because of the figure's long hair and caring gesture. Holding the child's unnaturally swollen stomach with both arms, the skeleton looks longingly at the child's face. Behind them, faint shadows of ghostly figures emerge on the ruined back wall; some of them seem to be weeping. Situ Qiao inscribed this explanation next to the dead child:



120 Situ Qiao, *Shadows of Ghosts in an Empty Room*, 1946, ink on paper.

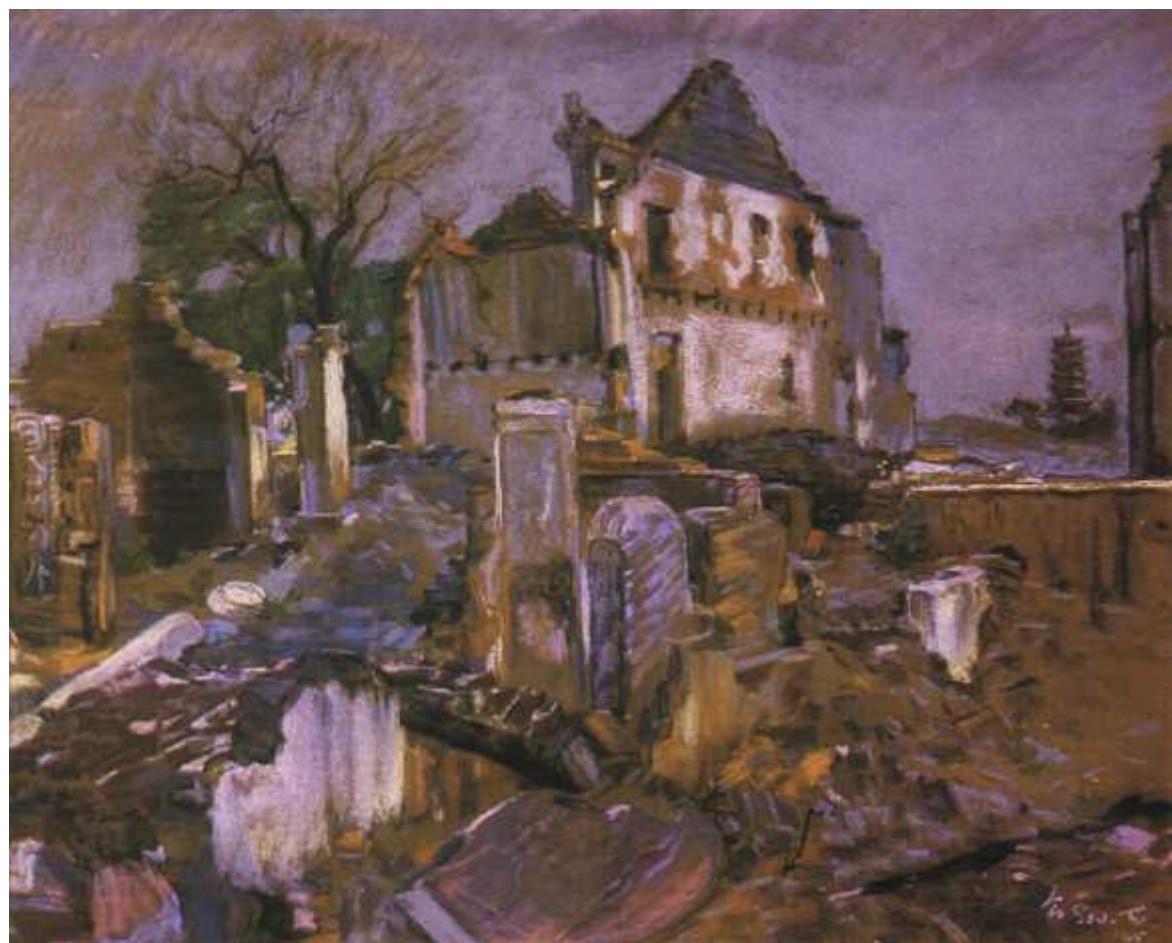
*Shadows of Ghosts in an Empty Room.* The areas surrounding Hengyang had experienced repeated looting and massacres by the Japanese troops for thirteen months. Even after the victory, nine of ten houses now remain empty. Just this month, sixty-nine people in a village in Zhihe County, including all nine members of Lü Yupu's family, died of hunger. When I went to Lü's house, the body of his youngest son was still lying next to the kitchen stove, with a stomach as large as a gourd: to allay hunger he had eaten a large quantity of husks and died from indigestion. Brushing away my tears, I, Situ Qiao, made this painting in April, 1946.

In the history of twentieth-century Chinese art, this work is assigned to the 'critical realist' school, whose main goal was to expose social injustice and to incite people to pursue a better life. Situ Qiao had been affiliated with this school since his youth. From his student days in Beijing in the 1920s, he had mainly painted, as Lu Xun (1881–1936) recounted in an admiring essay, 'broken huts, impoverished people and street beggars'.<sup>3</sup> In 1925, he depicted five policemen beating a

poor, pregnant woman, a scene he had witnessed on the street. After he travelled to America in 1930, he worked in a Chinese restaurant and was arrested as an illegal immigrant. After his release from jail he drew an image of the Statue of Liberty, inscribing it with the words: 'Painting the Goddess of Freedom in a place of no freedom.' At the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War all his works were destroyed during a Japanese bombing. He fled to Southeast Asia and created a famous anti-war painting, *Put Down Your Whip* (*Fangxia ni de bianzi*), in Singapore. Viewed in this context, *Shadows of Ghosts in an Empty Room* and many other works he created on the 1946 expedition continued to manifest a left-wing, critical stance. This aspect of his art has been strongly emphasized in the People's Republic of China since the 1950s to cast Situ Qiao as a pioneering 'proletarian artist' of early twentieth-century China.<sup>4</sup>

Social critique, however, is not the sole content of Situ Qiao's 1946 paintings. If we examine these works closely, we find a second theme, which, instead of

121 Situ Qiao,  
*The Bombed Stone  
Drum Academy*, 1946,  
oil on canvas.



attacking social evils, offers the hope of a better tomorrow. Although this theme has never been addressed in previous discussions of Situ Qiao's art, the artist expresses it unambiguously in some of the paintings, including a painting that bears an inscription he wrote on the back:

This is the Stone Drum Academy [Shigu Shuyuan] destroyed in a Japanese bombing. In front of its [remaining] gate, the branches of a tree have produced new sprouts. The grass and little flowers on the ground are greeting the first spring since the victory. I, Situ Qiao, painted this in Hengyang, in the spring of 1946.

The painting is filled with architectural ruins (illus. 121). Broken walls and columns in the foreground allude to a non-existent house. A damaged building farther away still vaguely retains its original shape, with a pointed gable soaring into the sky. The composition reminds us of Gao Jianfu's *A Chinese City in Ruins* (see illus. 110), although the differences between the two works are also unmistakable. Most clearly, while Gao depicted an ongoing bombing that threatened to wipe out an entire city, the ruins in Situ's picture have survived destruction and exist as evidence for a past tragedy. There is no fire or smoke. The ruins stand in silence; their surfaces glisten against a purplish sky. Guided by the artist's inscription, we notice a tall tree next to the main building: although it is still quite bare, fresh green has appeared on its branches. The same colour has also been applied to the ground and walls, indicating spring's arrival. Behind the tree, patches of darker green depict evergreen trees that have survived the harshest time of the year.

This painting gains a more specific meaning when the viewer realizes the actual history of the ruins: the Stone Drum Academy was one of the earliest institutions of higher education in China. Built in the early Tang and heading the four most prestigious academies during the Song, it produced many top scholars over the 1,200 years from the seventh century to the nineteenth. Numerous calligraphic carvings on its walls attested to its long, glorious history. But in 1946, as Feng Yimei later remembered, 'what we saw were only broken walls and a field of rubble. Except for one inscription by Han Yu (768–824), none of the others could be read any longer.'<sup>5</sup> One purpose of the painting is therefore to expose Japanese war crimes, as we found in Wang Shaoling's drawing of the bombed Commercial Press in Shanghai (see illus. 108). But as Situ indicates clearly in his inscription, this work conveys a second significance: the war has now ended and life has started again. There is a chance for the country to write her history anew.

overleaf:  
122 Huang Xinbo, *Seeds*,  
1947, oil on canvas.

Significantly, when Situ Qiao ended his journey and showed this group of paintings at the Shanghai Youth League in 1947, this twofold significance was exactly what the audience responded to. Many visitors wrote down their reactions to the works. There was much sympathy toward the devastated farmers and much anger toward GMD officials, but other comments expressed hope. One visitor praised Situ Qiao as a 'great artist loyal to the people', who not only depicted 'a corner of hell' but also predicted 'China's bright future'.<sup>6</sup> More than forty reviews appeared in Shanghai newspapers and magazines. One essay by the famous left-wing writer and activist Guo Moruo (1892–1978) is titled 'Rising Like a Giant from Disaster', in which he writes: 'One should be able to hear a strong voice [in these paintings]: Let us rise firmly and with determination like a giant from disaster, and organize ourselves to overcome all obstacles!'<sup>7</sup>

In a broader sense, this twofold significance offers a key to understanding a larger group of ruin images created during the post-war period.<sup>8</sup> Among these works is a powerful oil painting by Huang Xinbo (1915–1980) entitled *Seeds* (*Zhongzi*; illus. 122). Here, a pile of broken bricks defines the foreground, and a few charcoaled trees punctuate a bare horizon. The earth is black. Ominous clouds cover most of the sky. This ruined land, however, no longer dominates the painted scene, whose most striking images instead promise hope. These images include two enormous hands emerging from the broken bricks like newly germinated plants. Another image is a giant young woman: hovering over the desolate field, her silhouette fills the entire sky. With long, flowing hair, this young woman stretches out her hands to embrace something before her. Opening her mouth, she seems to be shouting, calling people to follow her to pursue what lies in the future.

Like Situ Qiao, Huang Xinbo was a committed left-wing artist and a loyal follower of Lu Xun. In 1933, he joined the Left-Wing Artists' Union (Zuoyi Meishujia Lianmeng) in Shanghai and, with Liu Xian (b. 1915), organized the No Name Woodblock Society (Weiming Muke She) in 1933. He was one of the organizers of the All-China Association of Anti-Enemy Woodblock Cutters (Zhonghua Quanguo Mukejie Kangdi Xiehui) during the war and served as the organization's director after 1939. When Wuhan was attacked by the Japanese army, he moved with the association's headquarters to Guangxi and then to Yunnan. After the war he resettled in Hong Kong, where he created some twenty large oil paintings, including *Seeds*. As the critic Chen Ji has commented, these works reveal two thematic directions, one exploring the traumatized state of the Chinese people after the war, the other voicing the artist's longing for a better society.<sup>9</sup> This second direction became predominant after 1947, when Mao Zedong announced that the Chinese revolution had reached a critical point: 'This is the historic epoch





in which world capitalism and imperialism are going down to their doom and world socialism and people's democracy are marching to victory. The dawn is ahead, we must exert ourselves.'<sup>10</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, Mao's lecture containing this prediction was reprinted in the Hong Kong newspaper for which Huang Xinbo worked as a journalist. This historical context leads us to discover yet another significant feature in the painting, in which light, faint but unmistakable, emerges on the dark horizon. This is indeed the glimmering dawn after a long night. Guided by the light, the young giant – a metaphor for the Chinese people – is rushing to embrace the rising sun. Thus, although this painting is entitled *Seeds*, it can also be called, quite fittingly, 'Rising Like a Giant from Disaster' – the phrase Guo Moruo had coined to describe Situ Qiao's post-war exhibition earlier that year.

Both Situ Qiao's *The Bombed Stone Drum Academy* and Huang Xinbo's *Seeds* exemplify a new type of ruin image created after the war, which rewrote the wartime national allegory in accordance with the changing political situation. Unlike the representations of bombed cities and the massacred populace during the war, the new ruin images were no longer intended to incite nationalist sentiment against the foreign invasion; instead they opened up a didactic space between past and future.<sup>11</sup> This space is distinguished by a commingled sense of ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy – the kind of 'liminality' that anthropologists consider crucial for any transition between two disjunctive phases in human experience. Many of these images still include architectural ruins to signify unhealed wounds, and thus share the traumatic signification of the war ruin images discussed in chapter Two. But such representations no longer refer to contemporaneous events; instead they symbolize historical conditions for a departure toward the future. More broadly, these images differ from both picturesque ruins and war ruins, which either romanticize the past or document the present. One may in fact consider them future-orientated. But they are not 'futuristic' because their depiction of architectural ruins reveals a firm attachment to historical reality. Nor, conversely, are they 'realist' because the ruins are largely 'memory images' of past events and experience. What these works capture is a suspended temporality that brings past, present and future into a complex interplay.

This new temporality of ruin images is the subject of the current chapter. As I will show, such images are not limited to the period immediately following the Sino-Japanese War, but were also created after another disaster in modern Chinese history, namely the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976. A similarly suspended temporality also characterizes many works in contemporary Chinese art that respond to the large-scale destruction of traditional

residences during the sweeping urbanization campaign since the 1990s. Before discussing these later episodes, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at the post-war representations and aesthetics of ruins, whose most poignant embodiment is neither Situ Qiao's nor Huang Xinbo's paintings, but Fei Mu's film *Spring in a Small Town* (*Xiaocheng zhi chun*).

### *Spring in a Small Town*

Born in Shanghai, Fei Mu (1906–1951) made his directorial debut, *Night in the City* (*Chengshi zhi guang*), in 1933. Over the next four years this was followed by a string of eight films, whose speedy production and fresh experimentation made him a rising star in the industry.<sup>12</sup> *Spring in a Small Town* is his last completed film (illus. 123). Although it eventually won fame as his most inspired work and has even been hailed as the best Chinese film ever produced, it disappeared from view soon after its release in 1948. It was resurrected in the early 1980s and immediately caught critics' attention. The Fifth Generation director Tian Zhuangzhuang refashioned it into a lavish melodrama in 2002. In 2005, the Hong Kong Film Awards Association named it 'the greatest Chinese film ever made'. Today, it is recognized as the pinnacle of Fei Mu's career, establishing his legacy as one of China's greatest film directors.

Taking the form of a small domestic drama, the film features only five characters, all related to a single household in an unnamed southern town. These are Zhou Yuwen, a young housewife caught in a dysfunctional marriage; her chronically sick husband Dai Liyan, who has been ill for six of the eight years of their marriage;

the idealistic, upbeat doctor Zhang Zhichen, who was Yuwen's first love as well as Liyan's old schoolmate; Liyan's sixteen-year-old sister Dai Xiu, a fun-loving girl who dreams of studying in a big city like Shanghai; and Old Huang, a long-time family servant who watched over Liyan growing up. The film's plot follows a standard love triangle: the routine, estranged life of Yuwen and Liyan is interrupted by the arrival of Zhichen. Liyan welcomes his old friend with rare smiles and subjects himself to Zhichen's medical care, whereas Yuwen's feeling toward Zhichen is rekindled. She pursues him boldly, but at the same time is frightened by her own passion. Meanwhile, young Dai Xiu is also enchanted by Zhichen's presence: to her he represents all things absent from her own morbid household. The impact of Zhichen is so strong on everyone that it momentarily transforms the whole family. In one instance,

123 Poster for the film *Spring in a Small Town*, directed by Fei Mu in 1948.



even Liyan joins the others for an outing, walking and boating in broad sunlight. But this joyful moment soon passes when the group returns to the dilapidated family compound. Liyan retreats to his private space, Dai Xiu stops singing, and Yuwen is once again entangled in her hopeless emotional pursuit: although Zhichen is attracted to her, his loyalty toward Liyan prevents him from reciprocating her love. Deciding to sacrifice himself for the lovers' happiness, Liyan attempts to commit suicide but fails. Shocked by this event, Zhichen finally determines to leave for good. The film ends with Yuwen and Liyan standing on the town wall to watch him departing, seemingly reunited by a renewed sense of hope for a bright future.

In analysing this film, most critics consider Fei Mu's most remarkable achievement to be his unusually sensitive psychological exploration of the female protagonist Yuwen.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, of the five characters, she is the only one who speaks her inner thoughts in voice-over, and hence assumes the role of narrator in addition to being a main character. The slow pace of the camera movement, the prolonged silences, the fragmented dialogue, and the many long and medium shots all contribute to an intense, melancholy ambience, which internalizes Yuwen's feeling toward the household. This scholarly approach is typified by Yingjin Zhang's reading of the film:

The slow rhythm created by panning, tilting and tracking shots . . . captures the nuances of the characters' gestures, eye contacts, facial expressions and bodily movements. The silent scenes in the film are often the most effective and create an unbearable sense of tension. Fei Mu's alternation of narrative points of view between the third person and Zhou's voice-over commentary proceeds seamlessly and adds extra layers of meaning to the evolving psychological drama.<sup>14</sup>

An equally meaningful but less studied aspect of the film is its original use of architecture, which provides the narrative with dramatic settings and also resonates with the character's inward psychology. In a short but perceptive discussion, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar make an acute observation: 'Architectural ruins dominate *Spring in a Small Town*'.<sup>15</sup> These two authors correctly recognize that the film merges the characters' inner world with their everyday world, represented primarily by the dilapidated town wall and the bombed ruins of the Dai family house. They also rightly suggest that this physical/psychological immersion should be understood in the context of China's social transformation at the time.<sup>16</sup> Because of the briefness of the discussion, however, they venture little beyond

these two basic claims; a questionable interpretation of the town wall as a symbol of ‘the end of the scholar gentry and the end of an era’<sup>17</sup> further casts doubt on the claims themselves. In the following discussion, I try to substantiate Berry and Farquhar’s initial proposals by analysing the roles of the wall and the house in the film’s storytelling and characterization. It will be suggested that far from providing mere physical environment, the two architectural features actively interact with each other to generate a subtle negotiation between past, present and future. At the same time they also constantly interact with the characters to enhance their mood and thoughts. Moreover, although the wall and the house possess distinct symbolic significances, their meanings are not fixed, but shift delicately as the story gradually unfolds. Such use of architectural ruins is unique in Chinese cinema, and makes *Spring in a Small Town* an indispensable subject for a study of ruin representations in Chinese art and visual culture.<sup>18</sup>

### *The House*

As one of the two main locations of the story, the Dai family compound is introduced at the beginning of the film, when Yuwen is returning from her daily trip to buy groceries and Liyan’s medicine. Following the camera’s movement, her voice-over explains the changing scenes from her point of view:<sup>19</sup>

Home – it is in a narrow lane. Crossing a little bridge, here is the back door of our house. Now we have only one servant in the household. Old Huang always dumps the residue from the medicine in front of the back door. This is his superstition.

The voiceover continues as Old Huang closes the door and returns inside. Whereas our eyes now follow the elderly servant to survey the house’s interior, our comprehension of the space is still guided by Yuwen’s narration:

More than half of this Dai family house of ours was destroyed by gunfire. The principal hall is no longer habitable. Liyan and I live instead in the side chambers next to the entrance, each using a separate room. He and I rarely see or speak to each other in a given day. I go out to buy groceries every morning. He rushes to the garden as soon as he gets up. He can hide somewhere so no one can find him. He says that he has tuberculosis. I think that he suffers from mental problems. I’m not courageous enough to die. He seems to have lost the nerve to keep on living.

While listening to these words, we see Old Huang crossing a yard surrounded by damaged walls; mounds of dirt and broken tiles are piled along a narrow path (illus. 3.5). He then walks toward what must be the formal quarter of the house, as indicated by its deep porch and an inscribed *bian*-board above the entrance. Instead of entering the central hall, he turns right to look for the ‘young master’ in a side chamber. Liyan is not here. What we see in the room are thread-bound books on traditional-style bookcases and antique vases on tall stands – typical fixtures of an old-fashioned gentleman’s study. Murmuring how early the young master has gone out, Old Huang closes the door and walks straight to the back of the house. There, a tall white wall stands behind brambles and abandoned Taihu rocks. A gaping hole in the wall allows us to look inside: under the exposed beams and rafters, Liyan sits motionlessly amid the debris of the destroyed principal hall in his ancestral home (illus. 125).

To the Chinese audience who saw the film in 1948, this sequence of images, filmed at Sonjiang near Shanghai, must have been uncannily familiar. According to Yinxing Liu,

Songjiang was the origin of the textile industry in China, a symbol of Southern Chinese civilization and classic intellectual culture. In 1948 Song - jiang was left with ancient city walls, dilapidated and rampant with wild weeds, old houses scattered here and there, partly destroyed by the recent cannon fire of the war.<sup>20</sup>

Many intellectuals and artists who saw *Spring in a Small Town* in 1948 had just returned to the Jiangnan area in the lower Yangzi River region, where they found their old homes reduced to debris from the war. Among them was the writer and

124 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Old Huang crossing the damaged courtyard.

125 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Dai Liyan sitting amid the debris of the family’s destroyed principal hall.



painter Feng Zikai, a native of Shimenwan in Zhejiang. When the invading Japanese army launched an air-raid campaign in November 1937, Zikai, then 39 years old, was forced to flee for his life. A frequent subject of his writing, Shimenwan was a small town with a history that could be traced to the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BC), when a stone sentinel was erected to mark the border between the states of Wu and Yue. Adjacent to the Grand Canal that linked Jiangnan to the capital in the north, the place enjoyed considerable prosperity in the Ming and Qing; even Qing emperors stopped there on their grand tours to the South. The Feng family was not particularly rich or powerful, but it had produced many men of letters in the past and was proud of its literary legacy. The young Zikai was tutored by his father, and became a well-known writer and educator before the age of 30.<sup>21</sup> Four years before the Japanese army invaded Jiangnan, he designed and built his own house at Shimenwan, next to his ancestral home. Naming it Yuanyuan Hall (Yuanyuan Tang), he described it in several literary works in an intimate manner as if speaking to a dear friend:

Because you were to be situated in an ancient township it was only natural that I did not want to dress you up in Western garb; I chose instead the most suitable Chinese attire, so that you could live in harmony with your surroundings. That's also the reason why I didn't fill you with modern furniture. I drew up the designs myself and had carpenters make everything so that you would be in accord, both inside and out.<sup>22</sup>

Fleeing from home in 1937, Zikai became a refugee on the road, travelling across the five provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Hunan, Guangxi and Guizhou, before reaching Chongqing in 1942. When the war ended, he could finally return to Shimenwan. But Yuanyuan Hall was no longer there: his beloved house and the adjacent ancestral home had been destroyed soon after he fled the place. Zikai and his family returned to the east coast in August 1946 and made a trip to Shimenwan that autumn. An account he wrote afterwards records his encounter with the place:

After our little boat moored at the wharf next to Nangao Bridge, I looked around and wondered whether we had somehow come to the wrong place. This was not the Shimenwan I knew; surely it was another town entirely. Although the bend in the Grand Canal was the same as before, absolutely nothing else was familiar. But this was indeed the place where I had been born and raised. Strangely, I felt no more at home here than

I did when I first returned to Shanghai. For the past decade my memories of the old Shimenwan had sustained my wanderer's dreams, but the town I now encountered had nothing to do with the homeland I once held so dear.<sup>23</sup>

The same trip also inspired him to make an ink drawing in which a man is standing silently before a ruined house (illus. 126). The roof of the house is entirely gone with only some broken walls remaining. He wrote on the drawing: 'Where once we shared happy meals, a tall tree now grows.'

We find striking similarities between Feng Zikai and the fictional Dai Liyan in *Spring in a Small Town*. Like Zikai, Liyan was descended from an old Jiangnan family; his classical education is alluded to by the books and antiques in his study. Later on in the film, Liyan tells Zhichen that he had fled the Japanese invasion, and found his home destroyed upon his return. This is of course not to say that Liyan's character is based on Feng Zikai. Rather, their commonality arises from the shared experience of many Chinese intellectuals at the time. One may also find a resemblance between Feng Zikai's drawing and repeated scenes in *Spring in a Small Town*, in which Liyan silently contemplates the bombed principal hall in his ancestral home (see illus. 125). But unlike Feng Zikai, who finally left Shimenwan with a renewed sense of engagement in artistic and literary creation, Liyan was paralysed by the tragedy. He probably made some futile attempt to restore the house – an effort symbolically suggested by his piling up some loose bricks onto a broken wall (illus. 127). But the daunting challenge must have overwhelmed him, as he sinks deeper and deeper into despair, suffocated by a profound sense of failure and guilt. He confesses to Yuwen: 'I'm a good-for-nothing. All the properties left by my ancestors have been destroyed under my watch.' As a result he merges with the destroyed house. His body becomes his own ruins, just like the house attests to the family's irretrievable misfortune.

Spring's arrival seems only to heighten Liyan's inward darkness: the awakening of the world around him makes his failure even more unbearable. Indeed this psychological effect of spring, best captured by the Southern Song poet Li Qingzhao (1084–1155) in a famous song lyric, is a persistent theme in classical Chinese poetry:

126 Feng Zikai, *Where Once We Shared Happy Meals, a Tall Tree Now Grows*, 1946, ink on paper.



127 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Dai Liyan trying to repair a damaged wall.



So dim, so dark,  
So dense, so dull,  
So damp, so dank!  
The weather, just turning warm but still cold,  
Makes it harder than ever to bear!<sup>24</sup>

Li's sentiment is echoed in *Spring in a Small Town*. When Old Huang finds Liyan meditating amid the house's debris, he hands his young master a scarf and engages him in conversation:

Huang: You came to this garden so early again. You also forgot your scarf. Don't you feel cold?

Liyang: Spring is here now.

Huang: But it is still quite cold in the morning.

Liyan: I'm not cold.

Huang: Spring has arrived. Your health should also improve a bit.

Liyan: I'm afraid that my body is like this house: it is so damaged that it is beyond repair.

Because he identifies himself with the ruined house, Liyan takes the destroyed principal hall as his own secret territory, forbidding other people to enter. When his younger sister Dai Xiu tries to bring him a newly planted bonsai tree through the hole in the wall, he shouts at her in a harsh voice: 'Don't come down here!' Like the entrance to a cave dwelling in a traditional painting, the hole frames a place of a different spatial/temporal order. This is also why other members of the family associate themselves with different spaces in the house. From Yuwen's voice-over we know that Dai Xiu 'lives at an opposite corner of the garden. One can hardly believe that she and Liyan are from the same mother. She has her own small world.' As for herself, although she has her own bedroom, she prefers to spend daytime in Dai Xiu's room embroidering: 'Sitting on my bed I don't know how to carry on with my life.' But in Dai Xiu's room, even 'the sunlight seems brighter'.

Thus even within the single bombed house, different characters are matched with different places. Whereas the abandoned garden and adjacent principal hall are exclusively identified with Liyan, Yuwen intuitively clings to places where life seems still hopeful. She keeps contemplating the difference between Dai Xiu and Liyan in her mind: 'Her brother cannot forget the past glory. But his sister feels nothing about it. Now the Dai family has declined. To Liyan this is the source of his agony and despair. But his sister is not at all discouraged.' After Zhichen arrives, he is installed in Liyan's old study, in a separate wing. Like the heroine Cui Yingying in the famous romance *The Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*), Yuwen finds herself fatally attracted to this place, wherein lies her lost love and possibly her uncertain future.

### *The Wall*

The relationship between Liyan and Yuwen is echoed by the relationship between the house and the town wall. Like the characters themselves, each structure also has a layered history and subtly changes meaning with the unfolding of the story.

From ancient times, the Chinese built walls to encircle villages and towns; the earliest archaeological examples date back to the prehistoric period in the third millennium BC. Even during this early period, a simple but effective 'tamped-earth' (*hang tu*) technique was developed: the builders used wooden planks to define the two sides of a wall, and tightly pounded the earth between them with a heavy pounder. They gradually moved the planks higher and higher as the wall grew taller and taller, until it reached the desired height. The result was a solid earthen structure that could survive for a long period; its considerable width

allowed teams of soldiers to patrol on top. This construction method continued to be efficacious throughout Chinese dynastic history, although later walls also acquired brick surfaces to reinforce their strength and durability. Many Chinese cities and towns still possessed such enclosures in the early twentieth century, even if the walls' role as the chief means of fortification had greatly diminished due to the rapid development of modern weaponry. Many old walls were worn down by the years and went unrepaired. Whereas these structures still marked seats of local governments and communities, they gradually merged into the natural landscape and became part of everyday life. Their bulky contours were blurred by vegetation; their flat top was used as a raised walkway; and they provided local construction projects with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of earth and bricks.

One such run-down, demilitarized wall is used by Fei Mu as a principal site in *Spring in a Small Town*. The film begins with a sustained view of the wall's dark silhouette; its uneven upper edge suggests ruined parapets (illus. 128a). The camera then zooms in and swings horizontally. Following its movement we see dense woods surrounding the town, a moat at the foot of the wall, and finally the wall's brick embankment, which has fallen into ruins (illus. 128b). As the embankment comes into focus, the movie title also appears, overlapping with the embankment to produce an emblematic image of the title: the wall offers a visual translation of *cheng* – a Chinese word that means both town and town wall; the lush vegetation and bright sunlight allude to spring (illus. 128c). The wall is in bad disrepair, but it does not show traces of violent destruction from bombing or gunfire. Unlike the Dai family house, which was destroyed during the recent war, the wall's ruination results from gradual decay over centuries. One even senses a certain natural harmony in its dilapidated state: standing above the moat and covered with wild grass and vines, it seems to have become part of the surrounding landscape. 'It is one thing to aestheticize the gradual decay of monumental buildings,' writes Michael S. Roth, 'another to aestheticize the effect of disaster.'<sup>25</sup> The wall and the house in *Spring in a Small Town* thus index two kinds of past, which mingled at this particular historical moment in post-war China. The feeling of timelessness and naturalness conveyed by the wall is echoed by the first sentences in Yuwen's voice-over, which we hear as she appears on the screen and walks slowly on the wall (illus. 129):

Living in a small town, each day is like another. After a morning shopping trip, I always enjoy taking a walk on the town wall. This has become a habit of mine. Walking on the wall I feel that I have left this world. My eyes behold nothing, and my mind is empty. If I were not holding the

shopping basket and my husband's medicine, I might never return home.

The wall thus contrasts with the house in another important way: it is not only timeless and natural, but also offers a sense of relaxation and freedom. This significance of the wall – Yuwen's first pronouncement in the film – is reinforced by her subsequent description of the house as the source of her depression. This significance of the wall then develops into a sustained theme throughout the film, as it constantly offers a refuge and a place to escape to. The second day after Zhichen's arrival, a different, excited mood envelops the household. The flurry of events starts from early morning: Dai Xiu brings Zhichen a bonsai she has just made; Liyan moves his couch outside to sit in the sun; Zhichen checks Liyan's heart and encourages him to leave his room more often; Dai Xiu then proposes a pleasure outing. She asks Yuwen to join her and Zhichen. Zhichen also tells Liyan that it will do him good if he gets some fresh air. The next moment, the four people are walking on the wall. Yuwen's voice-over embodies a detached vision, as if she were looking at the group from outside: 'The four of us wander purposelessly. We climb onto the wall. I fall behind. He – they stop and wait for me.' (When she joins the others, she and Zhichen briefly hold hands.) The four people then go boating in the moat, and Dai Xiu starts to sing: 'In a distance space, there is a wonderful girl. Whenever people walk by her, they always turn around and look, reluctant to leave . . . .

The next day, Yuwen and Zhichen meet on the wall after breakfast. Leaning against the ruined parapet Yuwen seems to merge into the wall, while her voice emerges from the void (illus. 130): 'Helpless and reluctant, on this empty, rundown wall . . . . Zhichen approaches her. The two begin to walk and then fall silent. Yuwen again leans against the parapet. Zhichen asks her: 'How long do you want to stay here on this wall?' Yuwen answers: 'I can stay here like this for a whole day.' We have heard these words before, but only from Yuwen's voice, which discloses her inner thoughts. Now she delivers this line to a person to whom she can open her heart. Her response leads to a tantalizing conversation between the lovers:



128a–c Scenes at the beginning of *Spring in a Small Town*, showing the town wall and its environment.

129 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Zhou Yuwen walking on the town wall for the first time in the film.



Zhichen: Can we go to another place to take a walk?

Yuwen: Up to you.

Zhichen: How come you never have your own opinions?

Yuwen: You are the one who asked me to come out. I'll go wherever you ask me to go.

Zhichen: Your personality is different from before.

Yuwen: Have I changed?

Zhichen: No, you haven't. Before the war I asked you to follow me, and you said that it was up to me. I then asked you not to follow me, and you also said that it was up to me.

Yuwen: Didn't we just talk about this? I didn't wait for you. I didn't just leave it up to you.

Zhichen: If I now ask you to go with me, will you again say that it is up to me?

Yuwen: Do you really mean it?

No answer follows her question, but her face brightens up and she smiles. It seems that she knows that Zhichen's question is real, but that his sense of duty will never allow him to take a decisive step. In frustration, Zhichen picks up a

broken brick and throws it over the wall. Eventually they join together and link arms, resuming their silent walk on the endless wall.

The meaning of the wall is thus problematized: while offering freedom, it also poses limitations on further movement. Although offering a seemingly infinite space, its circling path does not lead to any destination. This paradox of the wall is blurred out by Dai Xiu, when she goes to the wall with Zhichen the next Sunday. She dances along the ruined embankment (illus. 131). When she stops, Zhichen asks her: ‘It seems that you all like to come here. Why is this?’ Dai Xiu gives a long, passionate answer, describing the wall’s meaning from her point of view:

This is the only interesting place around here. Walking along this circular wall, you feel that there is an endless journey to go on. Looking out over the edge, gazing as far and hard as you can, you realize that the world is not that small. Brother Zhang; staying in this small town of ours – especially in a family like ours – you will be suffocated to death. My sister-in-law comes here each day to take a walk after shopping for groceries. I think that this may help her relax a little bit. It’s just this little bit of relaxation that gives her courage to keep on living.

We can summarize three symbolic connotations of the wall. First, as the physical barrier of the small town, it separates the place from the outside and contributes to the sense of isolation so strongly felt by Dai Xiu and Yuwen. Second, being close to nature and exposed to the outside world, the wall also offers a place of escape and a sense of freedom. But the wall does not just distinguish inner and outer spaces – it also constitutes its own space. Herein lies the third significance of the wall: unlike an ordinary wall, a town wall is a free-standing structure with a broad, road-like top. But it is not a real road because it does not lead anywhere. Fei Mu clearly realized the symbolic potential of this unique architectural form and capitalizes on it to great effect. In retrospect, we realize that only in one shot – when Zhichen arrives – do we have a glimpse of the gate on the wall. At all other times, the wall is portrayed as an independent structure and space, but it also generates different responses at different moments.

Zhichen’s association with the town gate is not an accident, but signals his role as a trespasser, crossing the big and small barriers that separate fixed spaces. After entering the town for the first time, he finds the Dai family house and rings the bell. Finding no answer, he jumps over a broken wall to enter the backyard. This action is repeated several times in the film, intensifying his image as an intruder into an insulated domain (illus. 133). In contrast, we routinely see Liyan



130 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Zhou Yuwen on the wall for the second time.

131 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Dai Xiu dancing on the town wall while Zhang Zhichen watches.

framed by the gaping hole in a wall next to the abandoned garden, which as an open wound also evokes the feeling of passivity and submission (see illus. 125). When he finds Yuwen and Zhichen together and decides to kill himself, his image overlaps with the hole and seems to be disappearing into it (illus. 134). Yuwen's relationship with the town wall is most complex: while finding solace on the wall, she also never attempts to go beyond it as Dai Xiu does. Only toward the end of the film does she direct her gaze toward the outside world. Accompanied by stormy music, the change in her gesture discloses a radical mental shift: she is ready to leave home to embrace a new life.

These observations lead us to discover another use of the wall in the film: it provides Fei Mu with a structural device to enhance the film's narrative in two ways. The first method is to punctuate the story with regular interludes, in which the site shifts from the house to the wall. There are altogether five such interludes, which keep readjusting the characters' relationship and reorientating the story's development. The second method is to provide the story with an overall frame. As mentioned

above, *Spring in a Small Town* opens with the wall's silhouette (see illus. 128a). Yuwen then appears on the wall while silently reflecting on her life of solitude (see illus. 129). This scene is both echoed and contrasted in the film's final shot. Liyan's attempted suicide has renewed Yuwen's feelings toward him. After Zhichen has left town, she again climbs onto the wall, but this time is joined by Liyan a few seconds later. Although still weak and holding a cane, he is no longer in a critical condition and has decided to go on living. It is a new dawn. Shining clouds brighten the sky. Standing on the ruined wall, Yuwen points to the rising sun in the distance (illus. 132).<sup>26</sup> This concluding image reminds us of Huang Xinbo's painting *Seeds* (see illus. 122). In both cases, the composition is framed by ruins left from the past, but the figures reach out to embrace the coming future.



132 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Zhou Yuwen and Dai Liyan standing on the town wall at the end of the film.



133 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Zhang Zhichen jumping over a wall to enter the Dai family compound.



134 A scene from *Spring in a Small Town*, showing Dai Liyan standing before a ruined wall in the family compound.

### 'Apologia – To a Ruin'

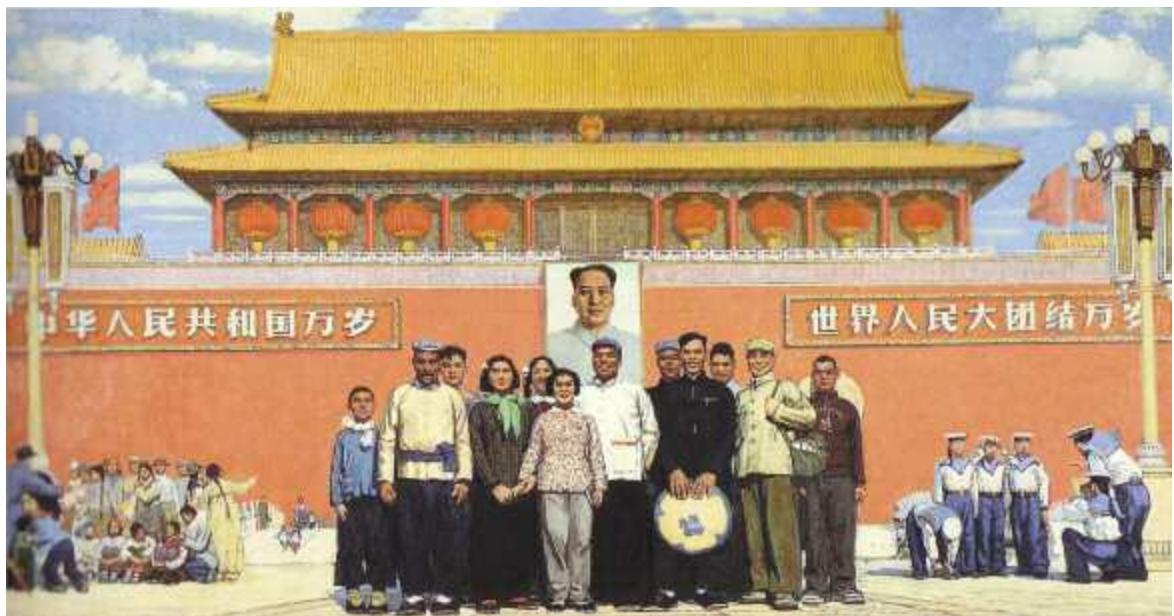
*Spring in a Small Town* received some positive responses after its release in 1948. But the Communist revolution the next year halted its circulation prematurely. Condemned by official critics for its 'bourgeois sentimentality' and lack of revolutionary ideology, it was banished to an archive and unseen even by film specialists for the next thirty years. In a broad sense, the fate of this film was shared by all sorts of artistic representations of ruins, which largely disappeared from the 1950s onward. Because the re-emergence of such representations in the late 1970s – the main subject of this section – must be understood against their previous

absence, we need to briefly review the Chinese art world from the 1950s to the 1970s, which came under the rigid dominance of a government-sponsored socialist realist art. This review, on the other hand, also raises an independent question: why did representations of ruins find no place within socialist realist art?

During this period, the theoretical basis of mainstream Chinese art was Mao Zedong's 1943 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art', which provided the unchallenged guiding principles for all matters related to artistic creation, exhibition and publication in the country.<sup>27</sup> Based on the Marxist tenet that all art in a given society is subordinate to politics, Mao argued that artistic expression must reflect a definite political view determined by the artist's class stand. Under this belief, he dictated a twofold duty for a 'revolutionary artist': on the one hand, a revolutionary artist should be a social educator, as his work should help inject revolutionary consciousness into the minds of the masses. On the other, because most artists came from middle-class families and had received a bourgeois education, they had to subject themselves to revolutionary re-education. Thus, artists who had previously viewed themselves as prophets and saviours of the world had to be first saved and purified.

Going one step further, Mao relentlessly destroyed the ideal of an objective realism. He claimed that there is never complete objectivity in artistic representation, and that revolutionary art ought to be a weapon of the Party: its task was to criticize class enemies and praise progressives. Any self-indulgence by artists under the name of objective realism or self-expression could only harm

135 Sun Zixi, *In Front of Tiananmen*, 1964, oil on canvas.



the revolutionary movement. During the Sino-Japanese War and Civil War of the 1940s, these ideas of Mao's produced some positive results. In particular, they encouraged artists to focus on social issues such as public education, free marriage, women's status and equality in land ownership. But when the Communist Party later took over China and came to power, this positive side soon disappeared. Without foreign invaders and the GMD government to fight against, the main target of political persecution became the middle class, including many intellectuals and artists.

Under state patronage, a huge official network of artists' associations and art academies emerged in the 1950s, installing artists in a strict hierarchical structure parallel to the administrative system of the state. Very little room was left for independent creativity. The old class of literati painters virtually vanished, and the idea of 'art for art's sake' was severely criticized. In principle, all artists in this system were government employees, and in this sense they were all 'professionals' working for a political patron. But now the patron was no longer the emperor, but the Party and the state. Since the Party routinely adjusted its agendas and policies in reaction to changes in the political situation, its artistic vision also shifted from time to time. During the period from 1949 to 1957, China's model was the Soviet Union in all aspects of social life. In art, Russian professors were invited to Chinese art schools to teach, and talented young Chinese painters were sent to Moscow to receive advanced art education. A whole generation of painters was then trained along the lines of Russian socialist realism to depict current events with unquestioned enthusiasm towards the Party's policy. In terms of style, a kind of superficial idealism prevailed, in which everyone was happy, every colour bright and everything arranged perfectly (illus. 135). Any kind of 'critical realism' was firmly rejected, even though it had been a hallmark of left-wing art in the Republican period. Instead, the goal of new Chinese art was to infuse socialist reality with communist utopianism by combining 'revolutionary realism' (*geming xianshi zhuyi*) and 'revolutionary romanticism' (*geming langman zhuyi*). Ruins had no place in this penchant for revolutionary immortality.

This officially sanctioned art reached an extreme during the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966 to 1976. At the height of the political campaign, over 90 per cent of artists were sent to the countryside or reform through labour camps. Most art works presented to the public simply portrayed Mao and his poems; the traditional black ink landscape painting was replaced by red landscape painting; and grand pictorial narratives revised history to the leaders' liking. At this stage, a socialist realist art finally evolved into a socialist symbolic art, in which every colour or shape conveyed explicit political meaning. As embodiments of

revolutionary ideology, such visual elements had to be pure and perfect; a distorted shape or sober palette could only reflect a dubious attitude toward the revolution. This political environment repudiated any depiction of ruins as a subject of aesthetic appreciation or social critique.<sup>28</sup> When ruin images finally resurfaced in 1979, three years after the Cultural Revolution, their rebirth signalled profound changes not only in art, but also in Chinese society at large.

On 27 September 1979, three days before the thirtieth anniversary of the People's Republic, Beijing's residents found an unusual art exhibition in an unlikely place. Twenty-three young artists had hung their works – 150 paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints – on the iron fence surrounding the National Art Gallery, thereby proclaiming their self-identity as 'outsiders' to official art (illus. 136). Among these works, two oil paintings by Huang Rui portray the ruins of the Yuanming Yuan Garden.<sup>29</sup> The first, titled *The Last Testament of Yuanming Yuan* (*Yuanming Yuan: Yizhu*), depicts the stone relics of the destroyed garden as white skeletons; the dark background is tinted with red, the colour of smouldering charcoal (illus. 137). This painting was paired with *The Rebirth of Yuanming Yuan* (*Yuanming Yuan: Xinsheng*). Here, bathed in sunlight and standing erect in front of white clouds, the ruins of Yuanming Yuan have transformed themselves into giant figures of young men and women (illus. 138). Still retaining a rough brown surface, a stone column to the right appears as a proud female, raising her head



136 The first Stars exhibition in front of the National Art Gallery, Beijing, 1979.



high to gaze into the distance. The stone in the middle resembles a powerful male, stretching his arms out to hold the shoulders of fellow companions. Hung next to each other in the exhibition, the two works delivered an unmistakable message: having suffered another near-death disaster in its long, tortured history, the Chinese nation had arisen again from ruins. The crowd who attended the exhibition immediately grasped this message. One of the visitors, who signed his name as ‘An Elder’ (*laozhe*), left these passionate words for the artist: ‘[Here I find] fresh and robust strength emerging from ruins amidst rotten grass. Young blood, bright colours, vibrant brushwork – Ah! Your art enlivens the heart of this old person.’<sup>30</sup>

Known as the first *Stars* (*Xingxing*) exhibition, this show announced the emergence of an avant-garde art movement in post-Cultural Revolution China.<sup>31</sup> Like Huang Rui, who was 27 years old at the time, most artists in the exhibition had been high school students when the Cultural Revolution started and spent the next ten years working in factories or the countryside. Most of them had never received formal art training and were not affiliated with any art institution. The group declared their independence not only by staging their exhibition on the street but also through their works, which differed markedly from official and academic products. The audience, for example, was shocked by Wang Keping’s portrayal of Mao Zedong, which satirized the Father of Red China as an unfeeling religious idol. Another of Wang’s sculptures – a man with his mouth blocked and one eye blinded – symbolized the condition of the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. Whereas these two sculptures have been discussed in every book on contemporary Chinese art because of their political radicalism, Huang Rui’s Yuanming Yuan paintings have received very limited attention, perhaps due to their seemingly ‘old-fashioned’ romantic and symbolic overtone.<sup>32</sup> It is important to realize, however, that Wang Keping’s bold political works were virtually unique in the late 1970s and early 1980s, whereas Huang Rui’s paintings reflected a much wider sentiment among this generation of avant-garde artists and writers, who viewed themselves both as survivors of a national calamity and as pioneers of a new cultural movement. Once again, ruins provided them with a fitting metaphor to capture the sense of death and rebirth, the memory of yesterday and the hope for tomorrow.

<sup>137</sup> Huang Rui, *The Last Testament of Yuanming Yuan*, 1979, oil on canvas.

<sup>138</sup> Huang Rui, *The Rebirth of Yuanming Yuan*, 1979, oil on canvas.

Besides Huang Rui, other members of the ‘Stars’ group, such as Mao Lizi, Yin Guangzhong and Boyun (Li Yongcun), also created ruin-related images. Boyun and Yin Guangzhong both depicted the Great Wall. As the art critic Huo Shaoxia has noted, instead of portraying this national symbol as a heroic monument – a standard image in official propaganda – these two artists perceived the Great Wall

as a symbol of a repressive, bygone era.<sup>33</sup> A painting by Yin Guangzhong places the Wall atop a mountain of human skulls (illus. 139). A young couple kneels on this mound of death. Although they are still shackled by the chain-like Wall around their waists, their larger-than-life image and resolute expression betray strength and determination to break their bondage. It is possible that the painting was inspired by the folktale of Woman Mengjiang (Mengjiang nü), whose husband was sent to build the Great Wall by the First Emperor of China in the third century BC. In winter, worrying about his welfare, she set out to take him warm clothes, only to learn after her long journey that he had perished and been buried beneath the wall. Overcome, Mengjiang knelt down and wept. Her grief miraculously caused the wall to break open and reveal her husband's bones. Instead of lamenting death, however, Yin Guangzhong's picture offers hope: the young couple seems to have been resurrected from death, and they are ready to free themselves from the Wall's murderous fetters.

'Hope' becomes an even stronger theme in another of Yin Guangzhong's paintings (illus. 140). Titled *Spring Is Always Spring* (*Chuntian haishi chuntian*), the artist himself explained in a published interview:

In this painting, the sky is dark; an old tree stump is left amidst a field of bare rocks. The tree has been cut down, but a new branch has emerged from the stump. The tree symbolizes China's traditional culture, which the Gang of Four tried to destroy during the Cultural Revolution. The shoot symbolizes the arrival of a new spring in Chinese culture, that an era of openness and reform has finally arrived.<sup>34</sup>

Here and in other places the word 'spring' (*chuntian*) had a specific meaning in post-Cultural Revolution China. The downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 introduced a brief period of political liberalization, dubbed the Beijing Spring (Beijing zhi chun) to echo the Prague Spring in 1968's Czechoslovakia. Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997), who had been banished during the Cultural Revolution, returned to power in June 1977 in the Third Plenary Session of the Tenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In this and a follow-up meeting in December 1978, the new leadership reversed the direction of the Cultural Revolution to steer the country back to a more practical path: the doctrine of 'class struggle' was abandoned and the idea of 'democratic centralism' (*minzhu jizhongzhi*) was re-embraced; Mao's words no longer provided absolute truth; numerous intellectuals, artists and cadres who had been persecuted since the 1950s were rehabilitated; 'democratization' (*minzhu hua*) and 'legalization'

<sup>139</sup> Yin Guangzhong, *The Great Wall*, 1980, oil on canvas.



(*fazhi hua*) became new catchwords. Encouraged by this turn of events, young activists voiced their demand for even broader liberalization, and a grassroots democracy movement rapidly developed.<sup>35</sup> Democracy Wall (*Minzhu qiang*) in Beijing's Xidan district became a symbol of the movement and the forum for all kinds of reform-minded activists. Hundreds of non-official journals appeared. Humble and homemade, these little pamphlets sent the message of reform throughout the country. Among these publications was a literary magazine called *Today* (*Jintian*, founded on 23 December 1978).<sup>36</sup> Like the *Stars* exhibition that marked the beginning of avant-garde art in China, *Today* took Chinese literature into a new era.<sup>37</sup> Not coincidentally, it provided a place for the rebirth of ruins in literary expression.

In scholarship, *Stars* and *Today* have often been discussed in two separate fields of post-Cultural Revolution art and literature. But they were both rooted in the Beijing Spring movement and intimately connected. Huang Rui, a main organizer of the first *Stars* exhibition in 1979, had been one of the seven founders of *Today*. Other key members of the 'Stars' group, such as Ma Desheng, Qu Leilei and Wang Keping, were also associated with the literary magazine. When these artists formed their own collective in 1979 around the *Stars* exhibition, this move introduced a new, collaborative relationship between the two avant-garde groups, one focusing on visual art and the other on literature. *Today*'s writers wrote poems



140 Yin Guangzhong,  
*Spring Is Always Spring*,  
1980, oil on canvas.

to accompany works in the first and second *Stars* exhibitions,<sup>38</sup> and the ‘Stars’ artists designed *Today*’s covers and made illustrations.<sup>39</sup> When the authorities cancelled the first *Stars* exhibition, members of *Today* and several other non-official journals took to the street, joining the artists to stage a public demonstration. In general, avant-garde art and literature emerged in tandem at this historical moment and should be considered integral components of the same movement. Activists belonged to the same circle of young and rebellious self-made writers and artists. They shared the same experience during the Cultural Revolution and were motivated by the same aspirations and dreams. They were all attracted by ruins – a figure for both destruction and longing – and held frequent gatherings amid the ruins of Yuanming Yuan. There they chanted poems denouncing the Cultural Revolution, but also sang and danced to celebrate China’s rebirth. Climbing onto abandoned stone columns, they seemed to merge into the ruined landscape while bestowing it with a new life (illus. 141).

It is therefore not surprising to find that, just as in the *Stars* exhibition, ‘ruin’ was also a recurrent theme in *Today*. The magazine’s inaugural issue included a short story entitled ‘On Ruins’ (*Zai feixu shang*)<sup>40</sup> written by Bei Dao (using the pseudonym Shi Mo), who would soon become the magazine’s chief editor and one of the most celebrated poets in post-Cultural Revolution China.<sup>41</sup> The same issue also featured a translation of Heinrich Böll’s ‘In Defence of “Rubble Literature”’.<sup>42</sup> Based on this and other evidence, the critic Yang Siping has characterized Bei Dao’s writing during this period as a brand of ‘ruin literature’ (*feixu wenzue*):

From this perspective, it becomes easy to understand why in Bei Dao’s ‘Notes from the City of the Sun’ (*Taiyang Cheng zhaji*), freedom is likened to ‘fragments of torn paper’, love to an ‘abandoned virgin land’, and peace to ‘a cripple’s crutch’; and why at the beginning of his ‘Red Sail’ (*Hong fanchuan*), the landscape is described as an ‘infinite view of rubble in a broken city’. His ‘An End or a Beginning – Dedicated to Yu Luoke’ (*Jieju huo kaishi – xiangei Yu Luoke*) is filled with images like ‘patched, scattered roofs’, ‘ash-like crowds’, ‘distressed cigarette butts’, ‘weary hands’, ‘desolate fog’, and ‘a growing forest of tombstones’. In ‘The Boundary’ (*Jiexian*), the narrator stands on the shore, watching his shadow, which looks like a ‘charcoaled tree destroyed by lightning’.<sup>43</sup>

Bei Dao’s short story ‘On Ruins’, which heads the inaugural issue of *Today*, has only one character: a Peking University professor named Li Qi who has just



141 Climbing onto ruined columns in Yuanming Yuan during a gathering, 1980.

been accused of being a 'British spy and counter-revolutionary academic authority'. Denounced by everyone, including his own daughter, he feels no desire to go on living. The place in which he chooses to end his life is none other than the ruined Yuanming Yuan Garden, which lies a short distance from the university's campus:

He walks toward the ruins.

The sun, no longer spreading heat, has reached the zig-zagging edge of the remote mountain. In no time it will disappear entirely, to continue the second half of its journey. The stone Italianate arch of the ruins casts a long shadow on the ground, as if dragging the hem of a long skirt behind it. Withered grass rustles; the feeling of desolation is unspeakable.<sup>44</sup>

Providing a physical setting and generating such a desolate atmosphere, the ruined garden also dominates Li Qi's thinking at this last moment in his life:

Standing in front of him is China's history, a history which goes back for centuries, even millennia. There has been so much arrogance and defiance, dissolution and disloyalty. Rivers of blood; mountains of white skeletons;

extravagant but deserted cities, palaces and mausoleums; hordes of infantry and cavalry marching under the vast sky; a blood-stained axe hanging above the guillotine; shadow travelling on the smooth surfaces of a marble sundial; thread-bound manuscripts piled in a gloomy and dusty hidden chamber; the sound of bells punctuating the boundless night . . . All of these – and every one of these – have constituted this abandoned ruin. But history will not stop here. No, it won't, but will depart from here to venture into the broader world.

He strokes a stone column that is growing colder and colder. This is the end, he contemplates. This once splendid palace had fallen to the ground and smashed into countless pieces. He is just one small piece among them. There is nothing to be remorseful about, because in a nation's unfathomable agony, an individual is always a trivial matter.<sup>45</sup>

Anticipating similar writings by other *Today* authors, here Bei Dao articulates Yuanming Yuan's symbolism on two different but interconnected levels. As a whole, the ruined garden embodies China's history, especially its most recent tragedy during the Cultural Revolution. But it also represents the self, as its fragmented form and torturous state of being acutely resonates with the psychology of the author as an individual. These two meanings of the ruins are inseparable, because as a Chinese, neither the author nor his character could distinguish his own experience from that of the nation. For the same reason they were also agonized by a cruel truth, that the nation, even when it is mutilated and bleeding, still demands sacrifices from its people. At the end of the story, Li Qi finally defies the temptation of death and reembraces life. No clear reason is offered to explain his change of heart. Bei Dao's vision of a possible future is still inspired by Yuanming Yuan as a collective symbol: history will not stop at this field of rubble, but will venture into a new world.

We find this simultaneously macroscopic and microscopic view of ruins in other works in *Today*, but their authors often demonstrated a more active attitude than Bei Dao's character, conceiving themselves as pioneers of the new era. Thus, although these authors also 'stood on the ruins of the Cultural Revolution',<sup>46</sup> they frequently bestowed Yuanming Yuan, as well as other political symbols such as the Monument of the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, with two disparate images associated with past and future.<sup>47</sup> No clear transition between the two images was articulated. Rather, the abrupt transformation of the ruins, which is graphically represented by Huang Rui's two paintings in the first *Stars* exhibition (see illus. 137 and 138), proclaims an avant-garde faith in the authority of the

future. In the exhibition, Huang Rui's works were collectively accompanied by a poem written by the *Today* poet Jiang Hu (Yu Yongze), which reads:

The wind flays,  
The rain beats down,  
Faint images appear on the wall  
– Showing broken arms, hands and faces.

The whip lashes,  
The darkness bites,  
Ancestors and brothers worked with bare hands and heavy hearts,  
To instill their silence into this wall.

Once again I come here,  
But to rebel against a slave's fate.  
Another furious death will shake down the dust on the wall,  
Letting the silent dead rise again and shout.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly inspired by Huang Rui's paintings, here Jiang Hu perceives Yuanming Yuan not only as a symbol of slavery and massacre, but also as a site of rebellion and rebirth.

The best poetic representation of this avant-garde attitude, however, is Yang Lian's 'Apologia – To a Ruin' ('Zibai – gei yizuo feixu'). Written in 1977, it refers to a place with which the poet has had an intimate relationship since childhood:

The word 'ruin' [in the poem's title] is both specific and symbolic. It is specific because it refers to the Yuanming Yuan Garden near Beijing. It seems fated that I had lived there – a Qing imperial palace thoroughly looted and destroyed by the Eight-Power Allied Force – since I was two years old. Its symbolic significance, however, came from the Cultural Revolution: when the political campaign finally ended and the whole country woke up, people found that several decades of revolution had actually turned a nation and a culture into the darkest version of its history. I remember this clearly: when I wandered amidst Yuanming Yuan's disarrayed stones, withered grass, and leftover snow, 'death' was everywhere in sight . . .<sup>49</sup>

This autobiographical account echoes Bei Dao's character in 'On Ruins'. Indeed, Yang Lian starts 'Apologia – To a Ruin' from the moment the poet arrives in the world. The newborn had already lost innocence, because his birth was shadowed by Yuanming Yuan's ominous ruins, whose decapitated pillars and arches spread dark memories of death:

Let this field of mute stones  
 Attest to my birth  
 Let this song  
 Resound  
 In the troubled mist  
 Searching for my eyes

Here in the grey shattered sunlight  
 Arches, stone pillars cast shadows,  
 Cast memories blacker than scorched earth  
 Motionless as the death agony of a hanged man  
 Arms convulsed toward the sky  
 Life a final  
 Testament to time  
 Once a testament  
 Now a curse muttered at my birth

To break the bond between death and birth, the ruin must be redefined as a source of life. Thus, instead of submitting to the agonizing silence, the poet is compelled to uncover the faintest traces of a new dawn. The final section of the poem is orientated entirely toward the future: without a clear vision of the world ahead, the poet nevertheless finds secret paths in the ruins that will lead to a luminous horizon. But it is a 'broken sundial buried in the earth' that points to the new dawn.

I come to this ruin  
 Seeking the only hope that has illumined me  
 Faint star out of its time  
 Destiny, blind cloud  
 Pitiless chiaroscuro of my soul  
 No, I have not come to lament death! It is not death  
 Has drawn me to this desolate world

I defy all waste and degradation  
– These swaddling clothes  
Are a sun that will not be contained in the grave

In my premature solitude  
Who can tell me  
The destination of this road singing into the night  
To what shore its flickering ghostfires lead?  
A secret horizon  
Ripples, trawls distant dreams to the surface  
Distant, almost boundless.  
Only the wind rousing a song  
In place of the broken sundial buried in the earth  
Points to my dawn.<sup>50</sup>

It is at this point that Yang Lian joined not only Huang Rui and Jiang Hu, but also Situ Qiao, Huang Xinbo and Fei Mu. Although these two groups of artists and writers lived in two separate periods in mid- and late twentieth-century China, they both represented ruins as an embodiment of despair and hope. Their effort in developing this type of ruin representation was to be joined by a new generation of artists, but in yet another radically different cultural and political environment.

## Representing Contemporary Ruins

The story of Yuanming Yuan did not end in the 1970s. As I will suggest toward the end of this book, with the growing tide of economic reform and commercialization, in the 1980s and '90s the site was popularized and assimilated into everyday life. In this process it was also transformed into a conventional *sheng ji* – a ‘famous historical site’ that incorporates heterogeneous voices into a perpetual present.

But one voice, that of avant-garde artists, seems to have disappeared from Yuanming Yuan during this transformation. Although these artists had embraced the place in the 1970s and viewed the ruins as their spiritual alter ego, they were alienated by its domestication in the following decades.<sup>51</sup> The last large-scale avant-garde project took place there in 1988, when a group of artists wrapped themselves and the ruined stones in white and black funerary cloths (illus. 142).

It is no coincidence that the same year also saw the opening of the newly finished Yuanming Yuan Ruins Park. In a sense, from the point of view of avant-garde artists, this performance can be thought of as a funeral for another 'death' of the garden: having suffered foreign invasions and the Cultural Revolution, the ruins were doomed for a third time when they were transformed into a tool of official propaganda and a mindless entertainment ground. When these artists once again cast their eyes on ruins in the 1990s, what aroused their interest were no longer ruins handed down from the past, but those produced by their own contemporary society.

This renewed interest in ruins among individual artists surfaced around the mid-1990s, when China's economic development had reached a new stage. Again, a discussion of this new phase of interest in ruins demands a brief introduction to the development of contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s and '90s. Five years after the first *Stars* exhibition in 1979, an avant-garde movement swept the country. Known as the '85 Art New Wave (85 Meishu Xinchao), it witnessed the spontaneous emergence of more than 80 unofficial art groups from 1984 to 1986. No coherent artistic ideals or theoretical approaches united these groups,

142 A performance in the ruins of Yuanming Yuan during the art project Concept 21, 1988.



and their members favoured diverse art mediums and styles. But, generally speaking, these groups were all influenced by an information explosion: since the early 1980s, all manner of ‘decadent’ Western art forbidden during the Cultural Revolution was introduced to China through reproductions and exhibitions; hundreds of theoretical works were translated and published in a short span of time. It was as if a century-long history of modern Western art was simultaneously restaged in China through translations and artistic adaptations. The chronology and original historical logic of this Western tradition became less important; what counted most was its diverse content as visual and intellectual stimuli for a hungry audience.

This ‘catching up’ phase soon led to original art projects, which began to appear in abundance from 1986 onward. Utilizing new concepts and forms of contemporary art, artists addressed issues of history, memory and reality in unprecedented ways. These works then opened paths to a ‘domestic turn’ in contemporary Chinese art around the mid-1990s. By this time, the country’s economic reforms had begun to produce full-blown consequences. Major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai were being completely reshaped. Numerous private and joint-venture businesses, including commercial art galleries, had emerged. Foreign goods and domestic copies flooded the market. Educated young men and women moved from job to job in pursuit of personal well-being, and a large, floating population entered metropolitan centres from the countryside to look for work and better living conditions.

A survey of contemporary Chinese art from the 1980s to the ’90s reveals several modes connected with the notion of ruins and, more generally, with the ideas of destruction and fragmentation. First, related to the *Stars* group’s historical rumination, a trend known as ‘scar art’ (*shanghen meishi*) prevailed in the early 1980s.<sup>52</sup> Often authored by academic artists in a realistic style, paintings in this vein depicted tragedies wrought by the Cultural Revolution, often the meaningless sacrifices of human lives. The reflections on ruins and destruction were further deepened during the ’85 Art New Wave in the following years, when a new generation of avant-garde artists used installations and performances to ‘restage’ their experiences during the Cultural Revolution. Typical examples of such works included Wu Shanzhuan’s *Red Humour* (1986; illus. 143), Huang Yong Ping’s *The History of Chinese Art and A Concise History of Modern Art after Two Minutes in the Washing Machine* (1987; illus. 144), and a performance held by members of Xiamen Dada after their first group exhibition in 1986, during which they burned their own works. Architectural ruins never figured large in these projects, however. As its name suggests, the Cultural Revolution started in the cultural, ideological

and political spheres. The targets of the ‘revolutionary’ destruction were not cities and villages, but old ideas and culture. Consequently, works by Wu Shanzhuan and Huang Yong Ping evoked the artists’ memories of the burning of books during the Cultural Revolution and the chaotic environment typical of the period – tattered papers and broken objects, and peeling big-character posters and propaganda painting.

The re-emergence of architectural ruins in the 1990s then marked a new phase in contemporary Chinese art. This phenomenon constituted an important component of the ‘domestic turn’ in contemporary Chinese art and was related, in one way or another, to the transformation of the city during China’s drastic modernization and commercialization. A major visual drama in Beijing during the 1990s was the never-ending destruction and construction. Although large-scale demolition is a regular feature of any metropolis, the enormity and duration of the demolition in Beijing was unusual in world history. Following China’s ‘economic miracle’, investment poured into the country from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West. Thousands of old houses were destroyed to make room for glittering hotels, shopping malls and business centres. Everywhere the eye could see were cranes and scaffolding, broken walls and mountains of waste. To some residents, demolition meant forced relocation; to others, it promised a larger apartment, albeit in a more remote suburban area. In theory, demolition and relocation were conditions for the capital’s modernization. In actuality, these conditions brought about a growing alienation between the city and its residents: they no longer belonged to one another. These conditions implied changing conceptions of temporality and spatiality, and supplied both the context and the content of the works discussed in this section. Among the four artists I will focus on, Yin Xiuzhen meditated on her own existence in a ruined city; Rong Rong searched for abandoned images in half-destroyed residential houses; Zhan Wang pursued an aesthetic of absence in the debris; and Zhang Dali, fascinated by demolition sites, initiated a dialogue with the city through graffiti and photography. Taken together, these artists responded to a contemporaneous phenomenon in different ways, and in so doing experimented with various art forms and concepts to voice their concerns with cultural heritage, urban development and the individual in a rapidly changing environment.

### *Ruins as Autobiography*

overleaf:

143 Wu Shanzhuan,  
*Red Humour*, 1986,  
installation.

Born in 1963 in Beijing, Yin Xiuzhen is one of the few genuine ‘Beijingers’ (*Beijing ren*) among the thousands of contemporary artists in the city, most of







144 Huang Yong Ping,  
*The History of Chinese  
 Art and A Concise  
 History of Modern Art  
 after Two Minutes in the  
 Washing Machine*, 1987,  
 installation.

whom have come from the provinces. In an interview, she said that her interest in art started from playing with mud in the neighbourhood.<sup>53</sup> Later, she entered the construction company where her father worked as a house painter. Mixing paint during the day, she studied art in the evening to prepare for the college entry exam. In 1985, she entered Capital Normal University to study oil painting (where she met her husband Song Dong, now also a leading contemporary artist), and then taught in a professional art school after graduation in 1989. She abandoned painting in 1994 in favour of installation, performance and photography – a change that owed much to her interest in urban ruins.

For two years from 1997 to 1998, Yin Xiuzhen and Song Dong were collecting traces of a vanishing present along the construction site of the Grand Avenue of Peace and Well-being (Ping'an Dadao), an enormous architectural project with a total budget of two billion RMB (about \$350 million in 1998) funded collectively by the Chinese government and individual investors. Envisioned as the second widest east–west road across central Beijing, the avenue was to cover a broad strip of land, some 30 m wide and 7,000 m long, in the most populated section of an overcrowded city. The ‘relocation’ phase of the project was swiftly completed, and within several months in 1997–8 the site was emptied and the

old houses destroyed. No published statistics are available to tell us how many households and families were relocated. They seem to have just suddenly disappeared; their streets and lanes simply vanished from the city map.

Song Dong saved 'door plates' (*men pai*) from demolished houses (illus. 145). Issued by the government over the preceding decades, these small metal plates are all identically shaped and coloured bright red but bear different addresses. Until 1997, each of these plates had pertained to a group or several groups of people, their homes and their lives. Now they meant nothing. Yin Xiuzhen collected roof tiles left on the demolition site. Made of grey clay and often irregular in shape, these tiles originally belonged to individual houses built over the past several hundred years in this ancient city (illus. 146). But when the houses were gone, the tiles showed little difference in age; instead they reminded people of the abrupt loss of the houses they had once been attached to.

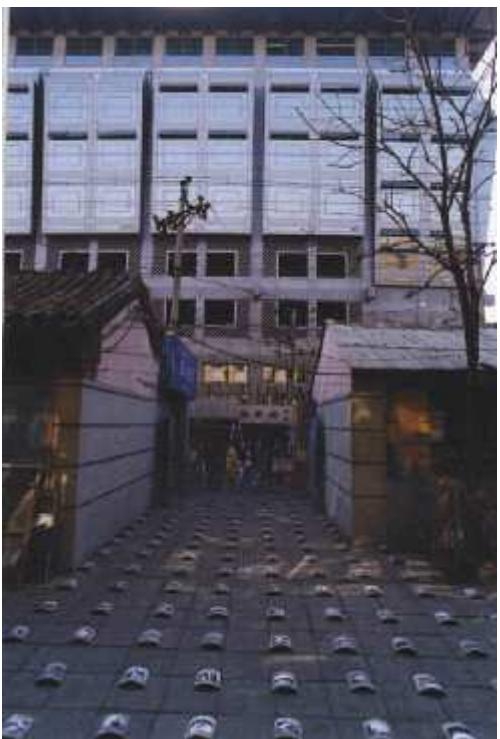
Both Song Dong and Yin Xiuzhen collected these materials to make installations. Yin Xiuzhen exhibited her installation *Transformation* (*Bianhua*) in 1997, soon after the Ping'an Avenue project began (illus. 147). She laid the roof tiles in rows in a courtyard not far from the construction site (the exhibition could be

seen from the street). To the tiles she attached black-and-white photos of the demolished houses from where the tiles came (see illus. 146). Song Dong continued to collect the door plates and planned to use them eventually in an installation, with a map on the background wall to indicate the plates' no longer existing addresses (illus. 148). His plan showed parallels with Yin Xiuzhen's installation in general layout, and both in turn bore an uncanny resemblance to a graveyard, in which rows of gravestones identify deceased individuals. In fact, we may think of both installations as a mass grave, because here the 'dead' were also victims of a single holocaust. The two installations differ from a graveyard, however, in the identity of the 'dead' and the means of commemoration: both works commemorate the death of places, not those who lived there, and both works feature relics from these places, not human remains.

145 Abandoned door plates of demolished houses collected by Song Dong in 1997.







Yin Xiuzhen's 1997 *Transformation* was a sequel to an earlier installation that she had showed the previous year. Called *Ruined City*, this earlier work filled a 300-square-m exhibition hall with a collection of fragments gathered from various parts of Beijing (illus. 149). These included found objects – used furniture and 1,400 roof tiles – as well as items from her own family and neighbourhood. (A set of four chairs in the installation, for example, was among the first family possessions she and Song Dong owed.) These anonymous and personal objects were unified by the omnipresence of dry cement. Despite the gallery director's protest, she managed to dump four tons of cement powder into the exhibition hall and spread it over the furniture and tiles. To Yin Xiuzhen, cement powder best conveys the feeling of fineness and softness of dust – the dust everywhere on Beijing's streets, dust falling from the sky and delicately covering the city's exterior and interior. Dust thus conveys a sense of intimacy and is emotional, too. 'I like to watch how dry cement changes', she once said, 'if you leave it there without doing anything, it absorbs moisture in the air, and gradually covers itself with a hardened surface.'<sup>54</sup>

The purpose of Yin Xiuzhen's *Ruined City* and *Transformation* is not commemoration: neither project leads to a mental reconstruction of Beijing's past image. Rather, each installation is about loss and survival; their common subject is the fragmentation of the artist's physical world and the insistence on her memory of this world. No matter how enormous the installation or how many different materials and images it incorporates, it remains on the level of fragments and pertains to a current condition of incompleteness. This world of fragments is comprised by *yi wu* – the Chinese term for 'leftover things' that often refers to possessions left behind by the dead. The ancient Chinese imagined that a *yi wu* retained the 'moisture' of its former owner: a 'leftover' cup retained moisture from the mouth of the dead and

a personal letter retained moisture from the hand of the dead.<sup>55</sup> From this we can understand the meaning of those ‘used’ and ‘found’ objects in Yin Xiuzhen’s installations: these are all *yi wu* conveying feeling and emotion; even the cement dust gains life from absorbing moisture in the air.

Neither do Yin Xiuzhen’s installations chronicle a history of Beijing’s changing environment and architecture; rather, they record the artist’s continuous engagement with her city. This engagement, both contemporaneous and personal, becomes the content of her *memory* of Beijing. I have cited the following sentences by Pierre Nora in relation to the image of withered trees in traditional Chinese painting, but would like to cite them again because of their pertinence to Yin’s contemporary work:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived . . . Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus

*previous left:*  
146 a & b Tiles of demolished houses collected by Yin Xiuzhen in 1997, with photographs of the houses attached to them

*previous right:*  
147 Yin Xiuzhen,  
*Transformation*, 1997,  
installation.

148 Song Dong, an  
unrealized plan for  
an installation, 1997.

149 Yin Xiuzhen, *Ruined City*, 1996, installation.



or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection.<sup>56</sup>

Nora's conceptualization of memory throws much light on the fragmentary and contemporaneous nature of Yin Xiuzhen's *Ruined City* and *Transformation*. It also leads us to her *Suitcase*, a performance and installation work she did twice, in 1995 and 1999 (illus. 150): although much smaller, this installation belongs to the same system of representation. In fact, it *completes* this system of representation because it defines the vantage point from where the memory of the 'ruined city' is recollected and preserved.

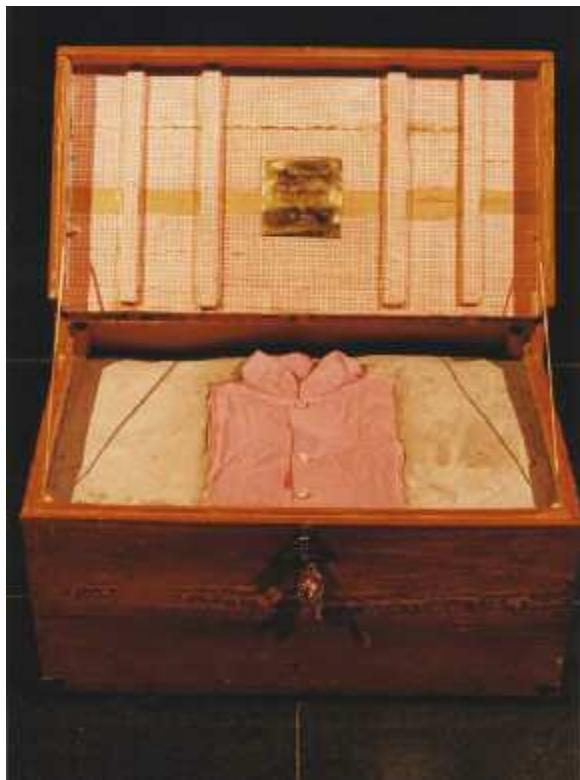
There are two different approaches in remembering and describing a ruined city. In one approach, the city is an externalized aesthetic object for contemplation and longing; in the other the viewer stays inside the city and constantly experiences its decay. The first approach juxtaposes a present gaze with a past city and evokes lamentation; the second approach rejects a 'past–present' dichotomy and frames the viewer within a city that continues its ruination. The first

approach characterizes the poetic genre *huagu*, but works embodying the second approach escape this genre because the artist is part of the ruined city. Her insider's position can only be revealed by her constant negotiation with her environment, often through a series of works that disclose the various moments and experiences in this negotiation.

Yin Xiuzhen used a metaphor to describe her relationship with Beijing:

My feeling is like that of a small seedling that has sprouted but has not yet emerged above the ground. I imagine that when the seedling grows it must press the earth surrounding it and that the earth must also press the seedling back. I feel that this is just like my relationship with my surroundings – a relationship of squeezing and pressing.<sup>57</sup>

150 Yin Xiuzhen,  
*Suitcase*, installation,  
1995/99.



In reality, she was surrounded by the city of Beijing with its vanishing enclosures, half-demolished residences that exposed their interiors to street onlookers, her rambling neighbourhood of low, decaying houses, her own tiny room inside a multi-family compound, and personal belongings from different periods in her life. She represented her engagement with this layered environment through installations of changing frames. While the frame of both her *Ruined City* and *Transformation* is the city at large, other works focus on her neighbourhood or her own home (illus. 151). With the gradual narrowing of the frame, the artist herself increasingly becomes the focus of representation and finally becomes the content of a single work: *Suitcase* (see illus. 150).

*Suitcase* is the product of a performance. The action starts as Yin Xiuzhen unpacks her old clothes, including some she wore when she was a young girl. She folds the clothes into flat rectangles and lays them on the ground in rows. She then begins to painstakingly pack these folded clothes into an old suitcase of her own, making sure there is not the slightest disarray. When all the clothes are packed, she seals them inside the suitcase with mortar cement.

Here, Yin Xiuzhen again employs cement and worn objects as the basic materials of the installation. Lying in straight rows on the ground, the old clothes remind us of the roof tiles in her *Ruined City* and *Transformation* (see illus. 149, 147). It seems that here she is again arranging a grave or conducting a funeral, but a funeral of her own because all the ‘leftover things’ on the ritual display are from her own past. In other words, these things have her own ‘moisture’ and are imbued with her own memory, which is encoffined when the clothes are put into the suitcase and sealed with cement. This symbolic burial can signify both the artist’s self-denial and her yearning for survival. It seems that when the whole world is falling into pieces, the only way to keep oneself intact is to gather one’s own ‘fragments’ together and to secure them as tightly as possible. Yin Xiuzhen’s *Suitcase* thus defines the centre of her ‘ruined city’, where her memories of her city and herself are both buried and preserved for eternity.

### *Images in Ruins*

More than any other contemporary Chinese photographer in the 1990s, Rong Rong’s pictures of demolished houses in Beijing captured the anxiety and silence adrift in these modern ruins. The three photos on the following two pages were taken in 1996. The scenes are terrifying: hundreds of houses were turned into rubble, and a whole area in Beijing’s inner city suddenly became a no-man’s-land. What has happened? Where are the residents? The pictures offer few clues

151 Yin Xiuzheng, *Airing Tiles*, site-specific installation, 1998.



to answer these questions. What they offer, at the centre of one image (illus. 152; see also illus. 156), is an abandoned illusion: a pin-up nestled inside a wooden niche that has somehow survived the destruction. The picture is torn; but the woman keeps her composure, staring sweetly at the surrounding bricks and dirt with an unchanging expression.

Rong Rong was one of the young experimental artists who emerged in the mid-1990s. To this generation of artists, the 1960s and '70s had become the remote past, and their works often responded to China's current transformation, not to history. This is especially true of Rong Rong, a farm boy turned avant-garde artist. Growing up in the Fujian countryside, he was skilled in farmwork but failed almost every course in elementary and junior high schools except for studio art. This was followed by three failed attempts to enter a local art school. By chance, he discovered photography and developed a passion for it. First, he rented cameras to take portraits and landscape shots. He then bought his own camera after working for three years in his father's grocery store. Equipped with this camera and what little remained of his savings, he went to Beijing, where he took photography classes, while making friends with independent artists and musicians. When his savings were gone, he tried his hand at various odd jobs, including taking passport and wedding pictures in a photo studio. He moved from place to place, often guided by whatever housing was cheapest. In 1993, he moved into a tumbledown village on the city's eastern fringe. Later known as the East Village (Dong cun; illus. 155), this artistic community produced some of



154 Rong Rong, *Untitled No. 2a*, 1996, black-and-white photograph.



152 Rong Rong, *Untitled No. 1a*, 1996, black-and-white photograph.

153 Rong Rong, *Untitled No. 3a*, 1996, black-and-white photograph.

the most daring works of contemporary Chinese art – mainly performance art and photography – before it was closed down by the police in June 1994.<sup>58</sup>

Coming from a remote southern province, Rong Rong was both amazed and disgusted by Beijing: ‘It is merely a fifteen-minute bicycle ride from the centre of the city to my place – from the light-illuminated Great Wall Hotel to the pitch-black East Village: the experience is like travelling from heaven to hell.’<sup>59</sup> But he soon found out that places even darker and more desolate were everywhere in Beijing, often next to those glimmering hotels and shopping malls. These were the places called ‘demolition sites’ (*chaiqian gongdi*): empty lots occupied by half-destroyed residential houses with garbage scattered among the rubble. Nothing remotely valuable could be expected to have remained there; the only things left by the former residents were torn pictures – mostly portraits of famous movie stars and fashion models – covering the broken walls. With their mixture



155 Rong Rong, East Village No. 1, 1994, black-and-white photograph.

of beauty and vulnerability, these ruined pictures captured Rong Rong's eye and were superimposed upon another image in his memory:

I remember I was in love with a picture in a calendar. That was a portrait of the Taiwan popular singer Deng Lijun [Teresa Tang, 1953–1995]. I was small, not yet ten years old. Her songs were forbidden at that time [because of their 'bourgeois' flavour]. People told me that her songs were obscene [*huangse*]. This calendar was given to my father by one of his friends from the South. It was hung upstairs, in my bedroom. As a boy I was rather timid and was often scared when sleeping alone. But I felt safe when I saw the portrait. Everyone said she's beautiful and I also thought so. Her eyes followed me around and to me she was actually living. I often wondered why her songs were forbidden. Later, such feelings came back to me when I saw the torn pictures on those broken walls.<sup>60</sup>

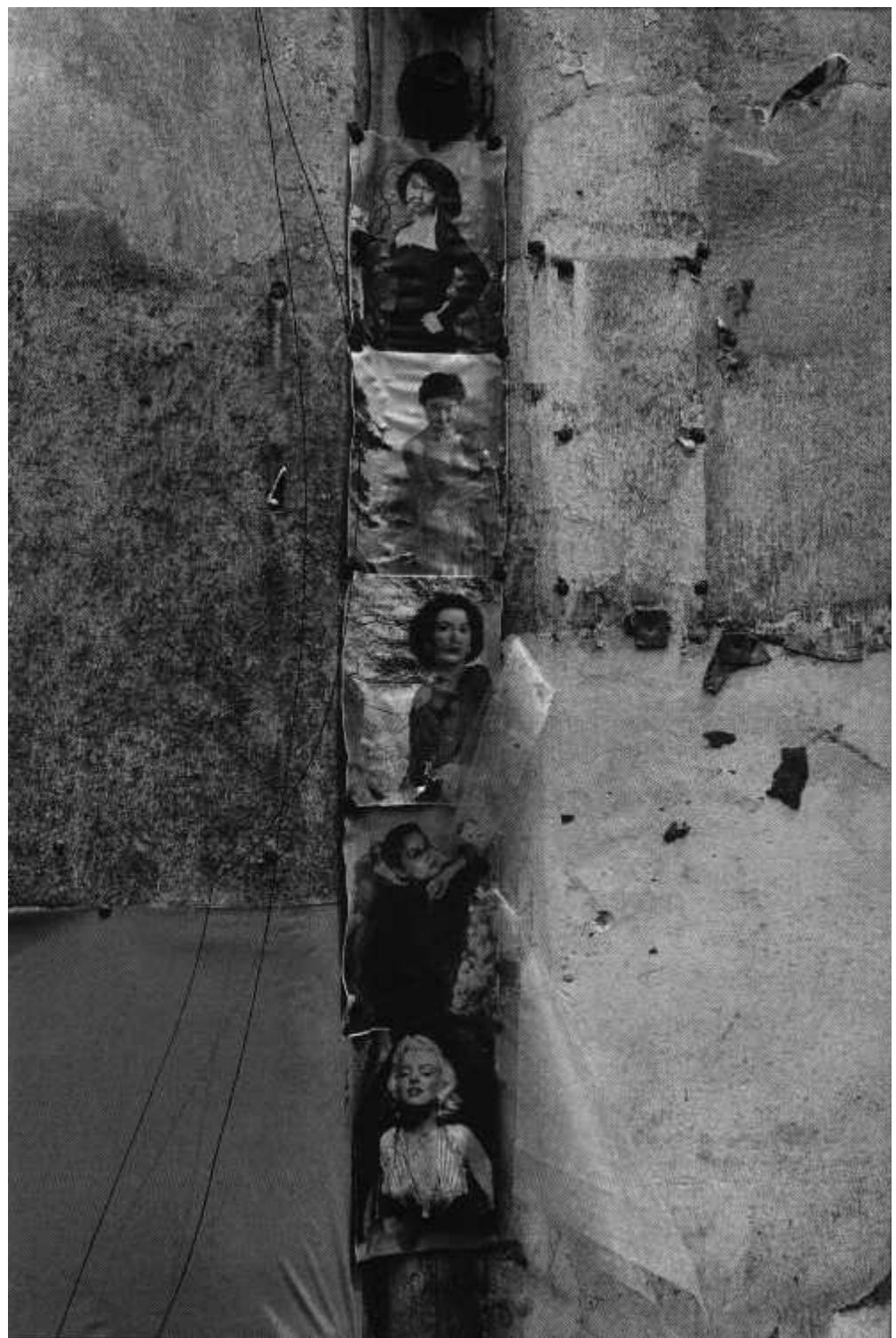
This personal experience helps explain an intrinsic contradiction in Rong Rong's ruin pictures: on the one hand, they record a brutal invasion of a private place; on the other, they convey little feeling of calamity or tragedy. A dispassionate viewer might even claim that the scenes are actually quite peaceful: the sun is bright; a man strolls at ease among the ruins; and the pin-up continues to smile at us (see illus. 152). Like any representation of ruins, the subject of these photographs is the absence or disappearance of the subject. But Rong Rong

fills the vacancy with *images*. Torn and even missing a large portion of the composition, these images still exercise their alluring power over the spectator – not only with their seductive figures but also with their seductive spatial illusionism. With an enhanced three-dimensionality and abundant mirrors and painting-within-paintings, they transform a plain wall into a space of fantasy, even though this wall is all that is left of a house (see illus. 153).

To Rong Rong, these images are imbued with his own memory; he thus substitutes himself for their original owner in his imagination. But to us, these photographs continue to pose questions about the missing subjects of the ruined houses. The place shown in the picture could be any demolished site in Beijing, and the pin-up pictures are too superficial to allow us to recognize any individuality (and this is probably exactly why they were left behind). In other words, the ruin and the ruined posters do not register a specific past, nor are they associated with the present or future in a conventional sense. What they help construct in these photographs is a breakdown between private and public spaces. The house has been turned inside out, and its interior decoration has become part of the city's exterior spectacle. Ruins like these were places in Beijing that belonged to everyone and to no one. They belonged to no one because the breakdown between private and public space had not generated a new kind of space. Such half-destroyed houses formed 'blind spots' in an overly crowded city. People walked by them in their neighbourhood without looking at them, as if they were simply 'not there'. These urban ruins were therefore 'non spaces'.

Rong Rong's ruin pictures include a number of mini-series, each consisting of two photos of the same scene but taken from different distances. In one series, one of the two photographs shows a surviving wall of a ruined house, whose exposed wooden skeleton (curiously resembling a Christian cross) is accentuated by peeling paper and dilapidated pictures (see illus. 154). The other photo is a close-up of the dilapidated pictures on the post (illus. 156). We can now differentiate Marilyn Monroe from Chinese fashion stars. We also recognize the various degrees of damage the images have suffered, as well as traces of absence: the thumbtacks on the bare wall indicate the former existence of other images, which are now gone.

In another case, the close-up (illus. 157) again focuses on a ruined pin-up image in a larger view (see illus. 152), and it again turns our attention from panorama to detail: the fake frame of the image, the slashes on the woman's face and the dirt pouring out from behind the broken poster. The perceptual change produced by each of these two photo series, therefore, is a shift from ruins to ruined pictures, from architecture to image, and from context to content. A panoramic view includes



157 Rong Rong, *Untitled No. 1b*, 1996, black-and-white photograph.



a ruined picture as an integral element, but the ruined picture becomes the sole content of the close-up photograph. Each series, therefore, produces a shift in the viewer's perception from a 'photo' to a 'photo-within-photo'. This shift is realized by redefining the relationship between a photograph and its subject-matter. By filling the second photograph with a printed image, Rong Rong identifies this photo as a 'meta-picture' that, in W.J.T. Mitchell's words, 'explain[s] what pictures are – to stage, as it were, the "self-knowledge" of pictures'.<sup>61</sup>

'To explain what pictures are' is also the purpose of two other of Rong Rong's photographic projects. One project studies the 'mortality' of photographs in Beijing. Pictures in this group document the fate of commercial or propaganda photos displayed in various public spaces – on the street, in public parks and in exhibition windows (illus. 158). Faded and discoloured, these are indeed 'ruins' of the photographs' former self. The other project also focuses on the death of photographs, but a death caused by a violent destruction, not by passage of time. In 1998, on a photographic trip into a half-demolished house, Rong Rong found a discoloured envelope partly buried among broken bricks and tiles. Inside the envelope were film negatives cut into tiny pieces. The owner of the house had apparently destroyed the negatives before leaving. Judging from the deterioration of the film, the envelope must have been there for months or even years. The surviving fragments, as Rong Rong found out later, show portions of a young woman posing nude in a poorly decorated room – probably the very room where the negatives were destroyed and found.

156 Rong Rong, *Untitled No. 2b*, 1996, black-and-white photograph.



It was not until two years later that Rong Rong made prints from these cut-up negatives (illus. 159). During those years, he was haunted by the seemingly dismembered female body preserved in the envelope. He also debated with himself whether he should make prints from these found negatives and treat them as his own work. But as time passed and the negatives stayed longer in his possession, a kind of intimacy grew between him and the anonymous girl: having rescued her from total destruction, he felt that he was entitled to bring her back to life again – even though just in bits and pieces – through artistic circulation. ‘Photos are such vulnerable things’, he says.<sup>62</sup> It is unclear whether he is commenting on the photos or on the ruined images in them.

158 Rong Rong, *Ruined Photo*, 1997, black-and-white photograph.

### *Demolition Project*

Zhan Wang links his *Temptation* (1994), a group of bodiless figures frozen in dramatic poses (illus. 160), to the cicada sloughing its skin. Climbing slowly out of the earth, emerging painfully from its former body, shedding an empty shell and flying into the sky, the cicada became the most celebrated metaphor for transformation in ancient China. In old tombs, miniature cicada carvings made

of stone and jade symbolized the most desirable consequence of any transformation – the state of immortality wherein a body transcended its former being and became eternal. But what inspired Zhan Wang to create *Temptation* was not the outcome of the winged insect's transcendence, but the translucent skin left behind. As evidence for the cicada's metamorphosis, this skin can never guarantee the result of the metamorphosis.<sup>63</sup> What the skin registers instead is the pain of rebirth and what it offers is an elusive hope. To Zhan Wang, this combination of hope and pain makes the cicada skin a perfect signifier for *desire*: 'It has no life, but it gives the hope of a better life – from here comes seduction or temptation.'<sup>64</sup>

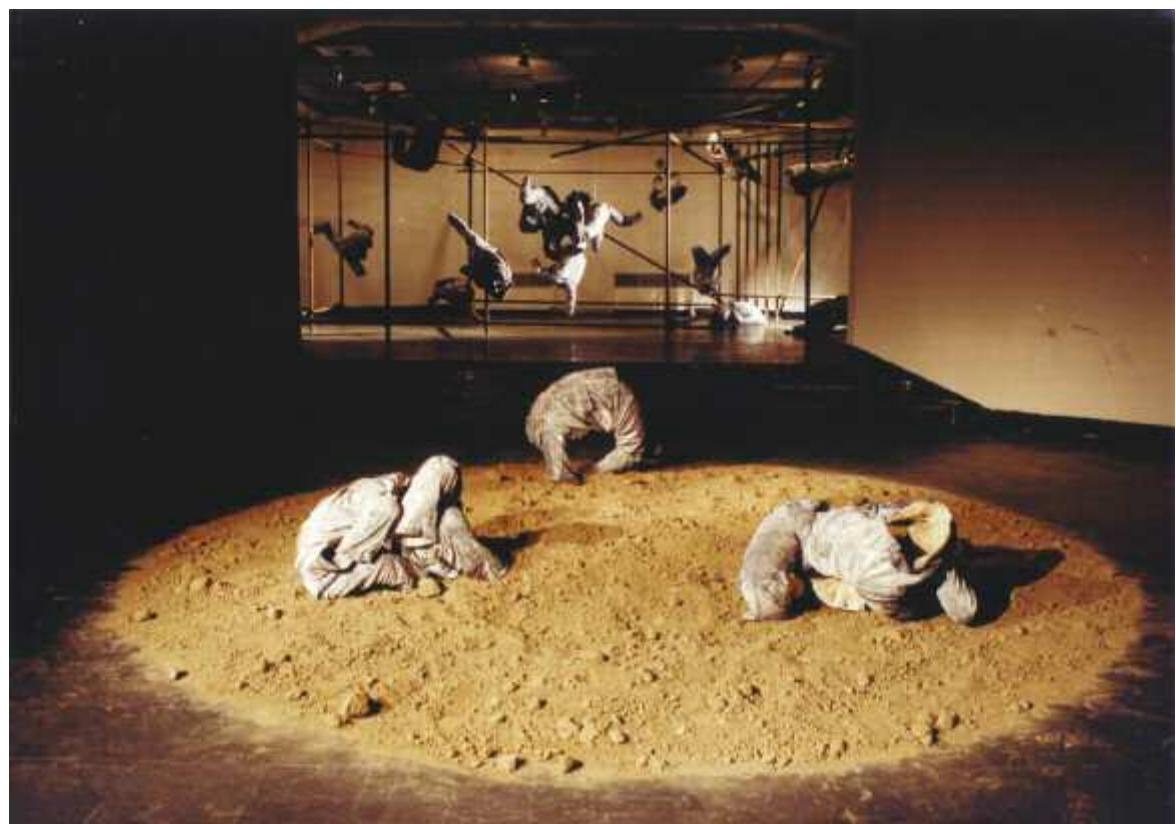


159 Rong Rong,  
*Fragments*, 1998,  
hand-coloured black-  
and-white photograph.

Zhan Wang was also struck by the emptiness and immateriality of the cicada skin: 'It is hard to believe that a thing with so many grave implications to the Chinese can be so weightless!'<sup>65</sup> His *Temptation*, actually a group of 'human shells' made of clothes and glue, tries to capture the same contrast: he moulded a 'Mao suit' – once the uniform of every Chinese – to a human form and then removed the inner mould. The result is not only a sculpture without substance but also a bodiless torso. The extremely contorted gesture of each torso gives the impression of passion, pain, torture, and a life-and-death struggle. But there is neither the subject nor an object to struggle against. 'Contorted clothing writhing in empty agony', Karen Smith remarked on these figures when they were first shown in an exhibition called *Kong Ling Kong* in Beijing. 'Kong, meaning emptiness, refers not only to the surrounding space of the gallery but the space within the hollow sets of clothing.'<sup>66</sup>

Empty and suspended, these human forms were created not as self-contained sculptures, but as individual 'signs' (*fu hao* in Zhan Wang's terminology) of desire and loss that have the infinite potential to be installed in different combinations and in various environments. A specific installation in a specific place provides

160 Zhan Wang,  
*Temptation*, 1994, mixed-media installation.



their general signification of desire and loss with a specific content.<sup>67</sup> Suspended on scaffolding, these forms gain a heightened instability and anxiety. Placed on brown dirt, they seem to form an immediate relationship with the dirt, a relationship that reminds Zhan Wang that a person's body is returned to the earth after death. But the most dramatic installation is placing these human shells amid a half-demolished building in central Beijing (illus. 161). Suddenly, the ruin and the shells become one and together emphasize a profound absence of the human subject. They also testify to the same fascination with torn and broken forms and a shared attraction to destruction and injury, although it is by no means clear what is actually wounded other than the buildings and the empty shells themselves.

Zhan Wang staged this last installation in 1994. Its ambiguity about the 'missing subject' was partially clarified by the artist himself the following year, when he and the two other members of the Three Men United Studio (Sanren Lianhe Gongzuoshi) organized their first project, *Property Development* (*Kaifa jihua*), in 'the debris of the former Central Academy of Fine Arts'. The Three Men United Studio was established in August 1995 by Sui Jianguo, Yu Fan and Zhan Wang, three young faculty members at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, with a manifesto that contains these sentences: 'We regard the whole society as our experiment room and give quick response to the public-concerned problems through our own experience. We insist on public demonstration and try to experiment with different artistic languages in communication with society.'<sup>68</sup> These ideas underlay the Studio's first two projects: *Property Development* and *Women·Here* (*Nüren·xianchang*).<sup>69</sup> The three artists contributed independent works to each project. Zhan Wang's installation in *Property Development* was a simulated ruin whose 'missing subject' was himself.

The Central Academy of Fine Arts, the country's number one art school, where the three artists held teaching positions, used to be located near Wangfujing, the most famous commercial district in Beijing. In 1994 the school was informed that it had to move to a new location within the next few months because its campus had been sold (or 'leased') by the municipal government to real estate developers and would soon be demolished. Mainly funded by the Hong Kong magnate Li Jiacheng (Li Ka-shing), this multi-million-dollar project would incorporate the land of the former Academy into a 'City of Commerce' (*Shang cheng*).<sup>70</sup> This plan led to an outcry not only from the school's teachers and students but also from Beijing's many artists and intellectuals, to whom the forthcoming demolition of the Academy would symbolize the complete defeat of art and education under the invasion of a market economy. Organized protest

was attempted by members of the Academy, and some famous painters appealed to the central government to intervene. But before long the school's northern section, where the Department of Sculpture had its classrooms, was demolished.

The second day after the Academy was forced to move out, Zhan Wang, Sui Jianguo and Yu Fan held their exhibition in the old classrooms of the Department of Sculpture, where they had studied and taught. Zhan Wang's installation included a mass of rubble and dirt pouring into his former classroom through a broken window (illus. 162). On top of the rubble lay small clay figures – classroom exercises left by students. Through the window one could see the rising buildings of the future City of Commerce. Combining abandoned human figures with an architectural ruin, this installation recalls the *Temptation* figures displayed in a half-destroyed house (see illus. 161). But here the 'missing subject' is clearly identified as the teachers and students in the classroom. The same message became even more explicit in Sui Jianguo's installation for the same group project: he cleared and paved the ground of a non-existent classroom, then arranged rows of chairs, a desk and two bookcases filled with broken bricks (illus. 163).

The forced relocation and demolition of the Central Academy of Fine Arts was one of thousands of similar cases in Beijing and other Chinese cities around the mid-1990s. As explained earlier, by this time such demolition projects had become part of the city's normal life. This situation inspired many works in contemporary Chinese art, including Zhan Wang's *Temptation* and *Property Development*. As a result, these works exemplify a sensibility towards a particular kind of modern ruin that I have termed 'demolition'. Unlike images of war ruins (see illus. 92–5), artistic representations of demolition by Zhan Wang, Yin Xiuzhen and other artists do not focus on human tragedies and the irreversible loss of property. Instead they respond to a dramatic change in the environment caused by an ongoing process of destruction/construction. Although in theory demolition promises renewal, numerous 'demolition sites' in Beijing were left there for several years. These places lay outside normal life not only spatially but also in a temporal sense: 'time' simply vanished in these black holes. The past of these places had been destroyed and no one knew their future. Inspired by this situation, 'demolition' images in contemporaneous avant-garde art attested to a distinct sense of contemporaneity – a 'suspended' present resulting from the breakdown of a conventional spatial-temporal scheme.

To capture this sense of instability most directly, in 1994 Zhan Wang designed a performance called *Ruin Cleaning Project* (*Feixu qingxi jihua*), in which he made his art itself the subject of demolition. He chose a section in a half-demolished building for 'restoration'. He washed it carefully and then painted windowsills



161 Zhan Wang,  
*Temptation: An Outdoor Experiment 2*, site-specific installation, 1994.

162 Zhan Wang,  
*Classroom Exercise*, part of the *Property Development* project by the Three Men United Studio, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, 1995.

*overleaf:*  
163 Sui Jianguo, *Ruins*, part of the *Property Development* project by the Three Men United Studio, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, 1995.



and filled chinks with fresh mortar (illus. 164). But scarcely had he finished, when the building was razed to the ground by the authorities (illus. 165).<sup>71</sup>

### *Dialogue with the City*

A public controversy surfaced in Beijing's newspapers in early 1998 (illus. 166). At its centre was an image that had become familiar to the city's many urban residents: a spray-painted profile of a large bald head, sometimes 2 m tall. The graffiti head seemed to have been duplicating itself, and its appearances gradually spread from the inner city to beyond the Third Ring Road. Alone or in groups, the head was found within the confines of small neighbourhoods and along major avenues. Who was the person behind these images? What did he want to say or do? Should he be punished when identified? What kind of penalty should he receive? Was the image a sort of public art and therefore legitimate? What was public art anyway?







To a city of ten million that had not been exposed to the graffiti art of the West, these questions were new. None of them had straightforward answers.

Neither did Zhang Dali, who created these images. Shortly after the debate started, he came forward as the anonymous painter; by March 1998 he began to give interviews to reporters and art critics. It turned out that, far from a ‘punk’ or ‘gang member’, as some local people had guessed, he was a professional artist trained in Beijing’s prestigious Central Academy of Art and Design. Moreover, he was not a typical Chinese artist because he had emigrated to Italy in 1989 and first forged the graffiti image of the bald head in Bologna, where he had lived for six years.<sup>72</sup> He continued to paint the same head after returning to China in 1995, and by 1998 he had sprayed more than 2,000 such images throughout Beijing. It also turned out that he had developed a theory to rationalize his seemingly mindless act. In published interviews, Zhang explained that the image was a self-portrait through which he hoped to engage the city in a ‘dialogue’ with himself:

This image is a condensation of my own likeness as an individual. It stands in my place to communicate with this city. I want to know everything about this city – its state of being, its transformation, its structure. I call this project *Dialogue* (*Duihua*). Of course there are many ways for an artist to communicate with a city. I use this method because, for one thing, it allows me to place my work at every corner of this city in a short period.<sup>73</sup>

Instructive as it is, this account left out two crucial facts at the heart of the project. First, the majority of his graffiti self-portraits appeared on half-demolished residential houses. The artist thus ‘reclaimed’ these abandoned places, however temporarily. Second, through selecting specific locations for making graffiti and

164, 165 Zhan Wang,  
*Ruin Cleaning*  
Project, performance,  
Beijing, 1994.



166 Beijing newspapers featuring debates about Zhang Dali's graffiti work, 1998.

by photographing the images from specific angles, Zhang Dali was able to articulate three kinds of dialogue internal to the city's built environment. The whole project thus couples the artist's dialogue with the city with another dialogue between the city's various dimensions and temporalities.

One of the three dialogues – and by far the most dominant one in his photographs – is realized by contrasting destruction with construction. In a picture he took in 1998, standing in the mid-ground amid scattered garbage are the remaining walls of a demolished traditional house, on which Zhang has sprayed a row of his famous heads (illus. 167). Two huge modern buildings rise behind this wasteland. Still surrounded by scaffolding, one of them already advertises itself as the future 'Prime Tower' and offers the telephone number of its sales department. This and many other photographs made by Zhang during this period serve a double purpose (illus. 168). On the one hand, they record site-specific art projects that have been carried out by the artist. On the other, these projects were designed largely to be photographed, resulting in two-dimensional images as independent works of art. Consequently, the role of Zhang's graffiti

self-portrait also changed: no longer stimulating interactions on the street, it became a pictorial sign that heightened an urban visual drama.

The second dialogue in Zhang's photographs takes place between demolished old houses and preserved ancient monuments; their sharply contrasting images allude to two different attitudes toward tradition. What is arguably his best-known photograph (illus. 169) typifies this representational mode. The picture plane is filled with the remaining wall of a destroyed house, on which Zhang has sprayed the bald head and hollowed it out with a hammer and chisel. The rough opening in the wall is analogous to a fresh wound, through which one sees in the distance a glorious, mirage-like image: the golden roof of one of the four corner pavilions of the Forbidden City. In a succinct but literal manner, this picture relates a twofold process of destruction and preservation that Beijing has been enduring throughout the modern period. Built during the Ming and the Qing dynasties, traditional Beijing consisted of a number of nested sub-cities: the Outer City, the Inner City, the Imperial City and the Forbidden City (illus. 170). A series of magnificent tower gates punctuated the north-south axis to link these broken spaces into a rhythmic continuum. Until the early twentieth century, Beijing was, in the eyes of the noted architectural historian Liang Sicheng (1901–1972), incomparable for its supreme architectural precision and harmony.<sup>74</sup>

By the 1990s, this city had been thoroughly destroyed. Its destruction can be summarized by reference to three historical moments. The Imperial City first

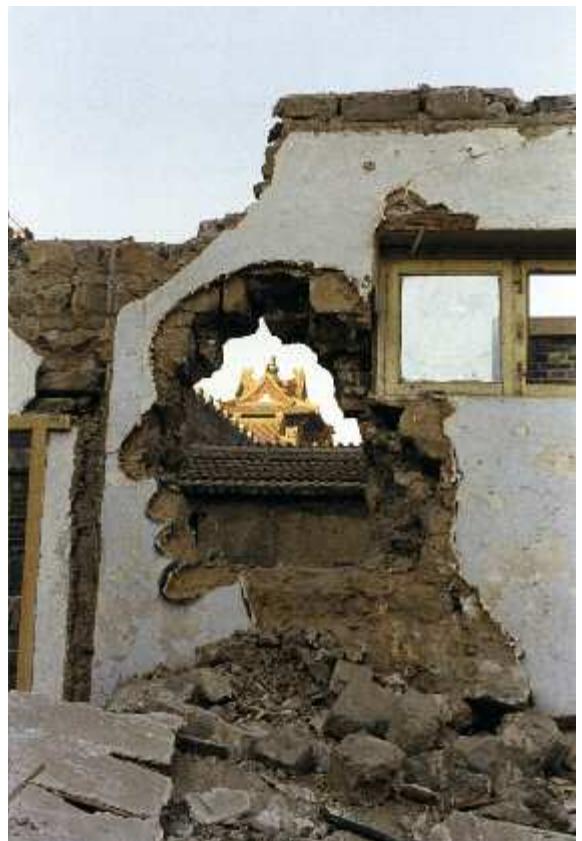


167 Zhang Dali, *Dialogue*, Beijing, performance, Beijing, 1998.



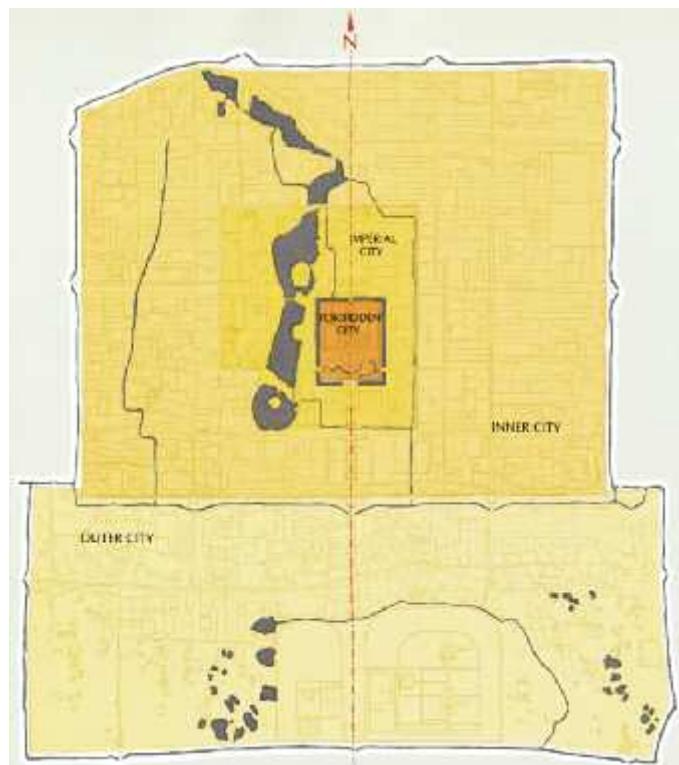
168 Zhang Dali,  
*Demolition Pudong*,  
performance,  
Shanghai, 1999.

169 Zhang Dali,  
*Demolition – Forbidden*  
*City*, performance, 1998.



vanished in the first half of the twentieth century, when major modern avenues were constructed running east–west, burying the old north–south Imperial Way underneath. The walls of the Inner and Outer Cities were then destroyed in the 1950s and 1960s through a Herculean effort mobilized by the state; also gone were most of the tower gates and all the archways and brick landmarks across the city's traditional streets. Finally, the construction fervour in the 1980s and 1990s ruined a large number of traditional courtyard houses; a few protected neighbourhoods were threatened by aggressive business development.

From this giant obliteration emerged modern Beijing, with just a tiny portion of old Beijing being ‘protected’ as a prized collection of architectural fragments, mainly famous gardens, temples, theatres and, especially, the isolated rectangle of the Forbidden City. These fragments are praised as masterpieces of Chinese architecture; the attention they receive contrasts alarmingly with the brutality that has been imposed on ‘other’ traditional structures of the vernacular kind. Such brutality was most acutely felt during the demolition campaign, when numerous private houses were reduced to rubble. As Zhang Dali’s photograph shows,



a house could be turned inside out without hesitation; any attempt at intimacy was silenced by an organized violence of forced demolition and relocation.

Zhang's decision to gouge out his graffiti image – to tear the wall open for a second time – can be understood as a response to this organized violence. The method was to amplify this violence through an art project. As he said in an interview:

Many things are happening in this city: demolition, construction, car accidents, sex, drunkenness, and violence infiltrates every hole . . . I chose these walls because these are screens onto which the show of the city is projected. [The project took] only one and a half hours, during which one heard only the sound of hammer and chisels. Bricks fell, stirring up clouds of dust.<sup>75</sup>

This simulated violence is given a visual expression in the photograph: Zhang Dali's image on a destroyed ordinary house frames one of the nation's most admired architectural jewels.

Finally, some photographs by Zhang Dali reflect on the position of avant-garde art in China. The image on this page resembles the one on the next, but the

170 Map of traditional Beijing, showing the Outer City, the Inner City, the Imperial City and the Forbidden City.



171 Zhang Dali, *Dialogue*,  
National Art Gallery,  
graffiti, 1999.

message of the two pictures is quite different. Here, a dilapidated wall bearing Zhang's graffiti is again juxtaposed with a palace-style building in the background. But no Chinese artist in the 1990s would miss the charged political meaning of the image, because the building in the distance, rather than an ancient structure, was immediately recognizable as the National Art Gallery, the headquarters of official art. It was the place where every state-sponsored National Art Exhibition was held, and it also housed the all-powerful Association of Chinese Artists, through whose vast network the government controlled the Chinese art world. In short, the building defined the centre in the official map of Chinese art. For the same reason, it was also a heavily contested space; its authority had been challenged by an emerging unofficial art since the late 1970s.

The two most important events in the short history of this unofficial art took place at the National Art Gallery. The first, the *Stars* exhibition in 1979, marked the emergence of unofficial art after the Cultural Revolution. As described above, members of the group staged their show on the street outside the National Art Gallery (see illus. 136), but as soon as a large crowd gathered, the police interfered and cancelled the exhibition. The second event,



172 *China/Avant-Garde*  
exhibition, National Art  
Gallery, Beijing, 1989.

the much larger *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, took place ten years later. This time, unofficial artists occupied the National Art Gallery and turned it into a solemn site that resembled a tomb: long black carpets, extending from the street to the exhibition hall, bore the emblem of the show: a 'No U-turn' traffic sign signalling 'There is no turning back' (illus. 172). The show itself was a rebellion against the established order in Chinese art. Three months later, many organizers and artists in this exhibition participated in the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989.

This history explains Zhang's photograph (see illus. 171): the struggle had continued, as here was another artist who was taking a position 'outside' the National Art Gallery. But what is the relationship between this position and those he took in making the other two types of photograph? In retrospect, we realize that although the content of the photographs changes, the photographer always identifies himself with an outlying region circling a conventional centre of gravity, be it a commercial high-rise, a protected ancient monument or an official institution. Such self-positioning defined a space around which Zhang Dali formed his self-identity as an individual artist opposed to any kind of hegemony. By inscribing his self-image on ruined walls, however, he also problematized his 'avant-garde' identity because this image was meant to be destroyed with the walls, not to be expanded into a new territory. As Zhang once said: 'Walking alone inside a destroyed house I hear tiles breaking under my feet. The sound seems to come from inside of me. I am part of this vanishing scene.'<sup>76</sup> There is no desire to cross

this wasteland; instead, he viewed himself from a future-past perspective as a memory in the making: ‘With the development of Beijing, my graffiti images will eventually disappear on their own. But they will leave a trace of memory – a dialogue between an artist and this city.’<sup>77</sup>



# CODA: STATE LEGACY

Neither large-scale demolition in an old city nor artistic responses to such undertakings are unique to Beijing. Scholars have demonstrated that the eighteenth-century European fascination with ruins was not only aroused by remains of ancient monuments, but also fuelled by contemporaneous catastrophes including fire, earthquake, volcanic eruption and urban destruction. The successful Parisian painter Hubert Robert (1733–1808), for example, illustrated the ‘terrifying spectacle’ of the 1781 fire at the Paris Opéra and the charred ruins of the hospital at the Hôtel-Dieu, as well as the demolition of old buildings such as the church of Saint-Jean-en-Grève.<sup>1</sup> In his depiction of the destruction of this church, as the art historian Nina Dubin describes, ‘onlookers marvel at the spectacular explosion of the decaying, fourteenth-century monument’.<sup>2</sup> Dubin connects the popularity of this kind of picture with an ‘economy of chance’ essential to a contemporary building mania and real estate bubble: ‘Visions of ruins, no less than anxiety over credit, reflected a new relationship to the future generated by the eighteenth-century financial revolution.’<sup>3</sup> Some 70 years later, Henry Le Secq (1818–1882) employed the newly invented photograph to record yet another wave of destruction and reconstruction in Paris, which would finally turn the City of Light into an ‘arena for modern traffic, mass immigration, department stores, train stations, and hot air balloons’.<sup>4</sup>

As discussed in the last chapter, interest in urban ruins in recent Chinese art likewise responded to a huge urban redevelopment project.<sup>5</sup> But if Hubert Robert embodied the spirit of the eighteenth-century financial revolution by elevating destruction to the Sublime, avant-garde Chinese artists have generally opposed the urban renewal projects carried out in Beijing and other Chinese cities. By casting the demolished residential houses as victims of the government-sponsored economic reforms, they articulated an alternative position through identifying themselves with an endangered local culture. We have noticed repeated personal, autobiographical associations with urban ruins in works by all the four artists discussed in the previous chapter: Yin Xiuzhen buried her own clothes amid a ruined city, Rong Rong connected damaged posters with his childhood fantasy, Zhan Wang (and the other members of the Three Men United Studio) commemorated their demolished classrooms with site-specific installations and performances, and Zhang Dali developed a persistent dialogue with the rapidly transforming environment. Such personal connections can be once again construed as a kind of internalization of ruins; that is, the artists/observers merge themselves with the objects of observation and representation. Their works signify a collapse of the distinction between self and urban space. The distance between architectural ruins and artistic constructs is reduced to a minimum, to

173 Zeng Li, *Shuicheng Steel and Iron Factory*, 2002, colour photograph.

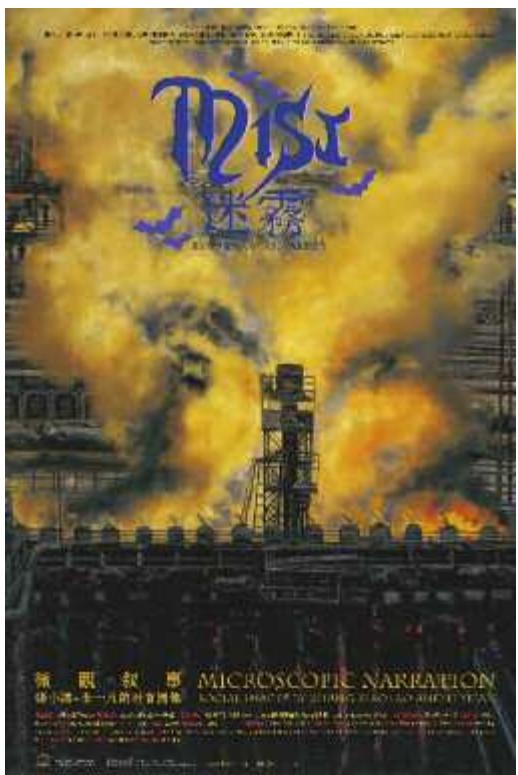


the extent that the artists conceived their works – and hence themselves – as objects of destruction.

This collapse between subject and object is absent in another type of ruin image in contemporary Chinese art and film, which gained momentum from 2000 onward. Typical examples of this sub-genre include Zeng Li's and Chen Jiagang's architectural photographs (2001–05; illus. 173), Wang Bing's documentary film *West of the Tracks* (*Tiexi Qu*, 2003; illus. 174) and Zhang Xiaotao's animated film *Mist* (*Miwu*, 2008; illus. 175). The common subjects of these works are depopulated industrial zones from the socialist era. Some of these artists and filmmakers also represented urban ruins of demolished residential houses, but their portrayals of industrial ruins employ a radically different visual language, which in turn reveals a different relationship between ruins and artists. Most apparent, these works are all epic in proportion: *West of the Tracks* is nine hours long; Zeng Li's and Chen Jiagang's photographs are often enormous – even Zeng's catalogue is nearly half-a-metre wide.<sup>6</sup> The images are never intimate and personal. Instead, they overwhelm the audience with brooding views of forlorn wastelands of industrial monuments: silent, monstrous factory shops, towering but smokeless chimneys, shut-down blast furnaces, rusty cooling systems . . .

Moreover, when photographing or filming half-demolished residences, the artists always took their subjects from nearby neighbourhoods as part of everyday life. But to depict the desolate factories, artists often travelled to remote provinces where the heavy industrial bases lay. Thus Zhang Xiaotao found inspiration at the Chongqing Steel and Iron Factory; Zeng Li made many of his photographs at the Shuicheng Iron and Steel Works in Guizhou; and Tiexi Qu – the site of *West of*





175 Zhang Xiaotao, cover of the catalogue for *Mist* (2008).

*the Tracks* – is a district of Shenyang in the northeast province of Liaoniang, an area that was once a vibrant example of China's socialist economy.

Like urban ruins, industrial ruins are not a new subject in contemporary art. Around the world, the kind of labour-intensive, resource-depleting industrial system is facing extinction, leaving behind giant, dinosaur-like rusty skeletons on a scarred landscape. Many artists, especially documentary photographers such as the Germans Bernd and Hilla Becher (*b.* 1931 and 1934) and the American Robert Smithson (1938–1973), accumulated rich corpuses of such images. But if visual records of industrial ruins often display similar images in a dispassionate manner, their meanings differ radically depending on the local history of industrialization, as well as the artist's relationship with the ruins. In the Chinese case, all the works mentioned above embody a strong historical perspective as the artists' retrospective reflection on the country's socialist past. Stylistically, this perspective is externalized as a grand, macroscopic

view. The artist-observer never merges himself with the ruins (as he or she often does with urban residential ruins); the carefully maintained distance from the subject not only allows for an ultra-wide composition on a monumental scale, but also forces the spectator to reflect on the image as a whole. Confronting such images, a contemporary Chinese viewer inevitably reflects on questions concerning the legacy of the Chinese revolution: not long ago, these factories constituted the foundation of the socialist economy and were considered symbols of a bright, Communist future, but now they are lifeless and on the verge of disintegration. What does this change mean to China and the Chinese people? Does it prove the failure of the socialist system and the evaporation of the Communist vision? Have all the labour and passion dedicated to this vision gone to waste? What has the revolution bequeathed to this generation of Chinese? To the expected audience of these photographs and films, these questions are weighty and emotional, not only concerning the country's historical experience but also arousing personal memories.

There is another difference between monumental industrial ruins and intimate urban ruins: if the remaining days of half-demolished residential houses are numbered and their final removal is irreversible, industrial ruins resist easy demolition

174 Wang Bing, stills from *West of the Tracks* (2003).

and immediate disappearance. Although abandoned and damaged, their awe-inspiring volume and weight are still intimidating. Moreover, a depopulated industrial base is often still in partial use, even if the rest of the facility has gone to ruins. Thus the ‘death’ of a large industrial complex is never a sudden event, but is realized as a prolonged process. Nor is this process absolute because it can be reversed: an abandoned factory may be redeveloped for new purposes and brought back to life – a possibility that has increasingly been realized in recent years. This possibility explains Chinese artists’ different attitude toward two kinds of contemporary ruins: whereas their lamentation for the vanishing traces of traditional residences tends to be poetic and introverted, some of them have actively engaged in a struggle to rehabilitate industrial ruins by transforming them into new types of artistic spaces. In this effort, they do not treat such ruins merely as subjects of poetic lamentation or self-reflection, but instead assume the role of social reformers in order to transform the country.

The reason for such engagement is a historical one: as pioneers of a globalized contemporary art in China, these artists are the strongest advocates of new types of exhibition spaces, including public and private galleries and venues for experimental art projects. As early as the 1980s, they were already engaged in developing these spaces, hoping that in doing so they could bring contemporary art into the public sphere and realize the social potential of this art. They also envisioned that, through undermining the prohibitions traditionally imposed upon independent artists, these new channels would eventually constitute a social basis for the ‘legalization’ (*hefahua*) of contemporary art. This agenda was not concerned with art per se, but rather related to larger issues about the role of contemporary art in China as well as the relationship between contemporary artists and society at large.<sup>7</sup>

By 2000, many contemporary Chinese artists had become familiar with what they called *yishu qu*, or ‘artistic districts’, in New York or Paris; some of them had even lived there as ex-pats for years. They began to envision similar spaces in Chinese cities, and found exciting possibilities to realize this vision through redeveloping abandoned industrial structures in various cities. Indeed, an important aspect of major Chinese cities since 2002 has been the appearance of such districts. Often utilizing factories left from the socialist era, they combine artists’ studios, exhibition halls, commercial galleries, entertainment spaces, cafes, restaurants and trendy clubs. In turning industrial ruins into such functioning social spaces, artists have formed alliances with businessmen, celebrities and open-minded officials, and have developed elaborate strategies to strengthen such ties. Among

such newly emerging art districts,<sup>8</sup> Beijing 798 is the earliest and best encapsulates the many opportunities and dilemmas that artists have encountered in realizing their goal.<sup>9</sup>

Located at Dashanzi in east Beijing, 798 is the code name of one of several state-run factories in the area; the others include 797, 751, 706 and 707. These factories were subdivided in 1964 from an enormous industrial complex called Factory 718 (illus. 176), whose planning started in 1951 as a joint project between two socialist ‘brother countries’, China and East Germany. Between 1954 and 1957, 300 German technicians worked on the construction site (illus. 177). The Germans designed the factory shops in a typical Bauhaus style, with large skylights illuminating interconnected interior spaces in simple geometric shapes (illus. 178). It was something of a miracle that this modern architectural style, criticized at the time in the Soviet Union as ‘the matchbox-style of modernist construction’, was adopted in China on such a grand scale: when the factory was completed in 1957, it had a floor space of approximately 500,000 square metres.<sup>10</sup>

The factory complex grew further into a self-sufficient ‘industrial town’ of ‘revolutionary workers’ over the following years, with its own theatres and stadiums, elementary and high schools, libraries and swimming pools, various sport, drama and dance groups, and a contingent of workers’ militia. Such growth finally reached a critical point, however, when it had to be broken up for better management. Consequently, Factory 718 was divided in 1964 into six independent factories. This structure continued till 2001, when five of the six factories were reunited under the Seven Stars Electronic Group. By that time, however, most of these factories had gone into severe decline, and some had virtually ceased to function as industrial manufacturers.

176 Factory 718 at Dashanzi in east Beijing.



I first visited the place in January 2002, when Yukihito Tabata of the Tokyo Gallery invited me to see the future location of his new Beijing venue, called

the Beijing-Tokyo Art Project. I was impressed by the gallery’s open architecture, but was truly astonished by the whole area – a giant industrial plant from the Maoist era that had turned into gloomy ruins (illus. 179). Huang Rui, who had moved into the area earlier and found the location for the Tokyo Gallery, guided us through seemingly endless empty factory shops. I was in awe: the spaces, huge as indoor football grounds, were shadowy and echoing. Silent and lifeless, they nevertheless felt familiar and close to heart. Here and there were traces of ‘big character’ posters, painted revolutionary



slogans on peeling walls, and dilapidated meeting halls for political gatherings. For people of my generation, these words and images brought back rich memories.

In retrospect, what I saw on that trip was actually the beginning of a process that has transformed the place from a declining industrial base into one of the first urban art districts in China. The ultimate reason for this transformation must be found in China's socioeconomic reforms since the end of the Cultural Revolution. In addition to the huge urbanization project discussed in chapter Three, two specific consequences of the reforms in Beijing have been the drastic decline of state-owned heavy industry and the rapid rise of the commercial, tourist and entertainment sectors. As a result, most factories at Dashanzi reduced their productivity drastically, and a large number of factory workers left their jobs.<sup>11</sup> Struggling to survive, the factories rented out or sold their buildings to generate income.

Whereas the industrial complex declined, the Chaoyang district, where 798 and other associated factories were located, grew into the most cosmopolitan area in Beijing, largely due to its strategic position as the home of foreign embassies and many international companies (illus. 180). From the early 1990s, this district attracted an increasing number of independent artists with no direct institutional affiliation. Many of them came from the provinces. They found stimuli in a place

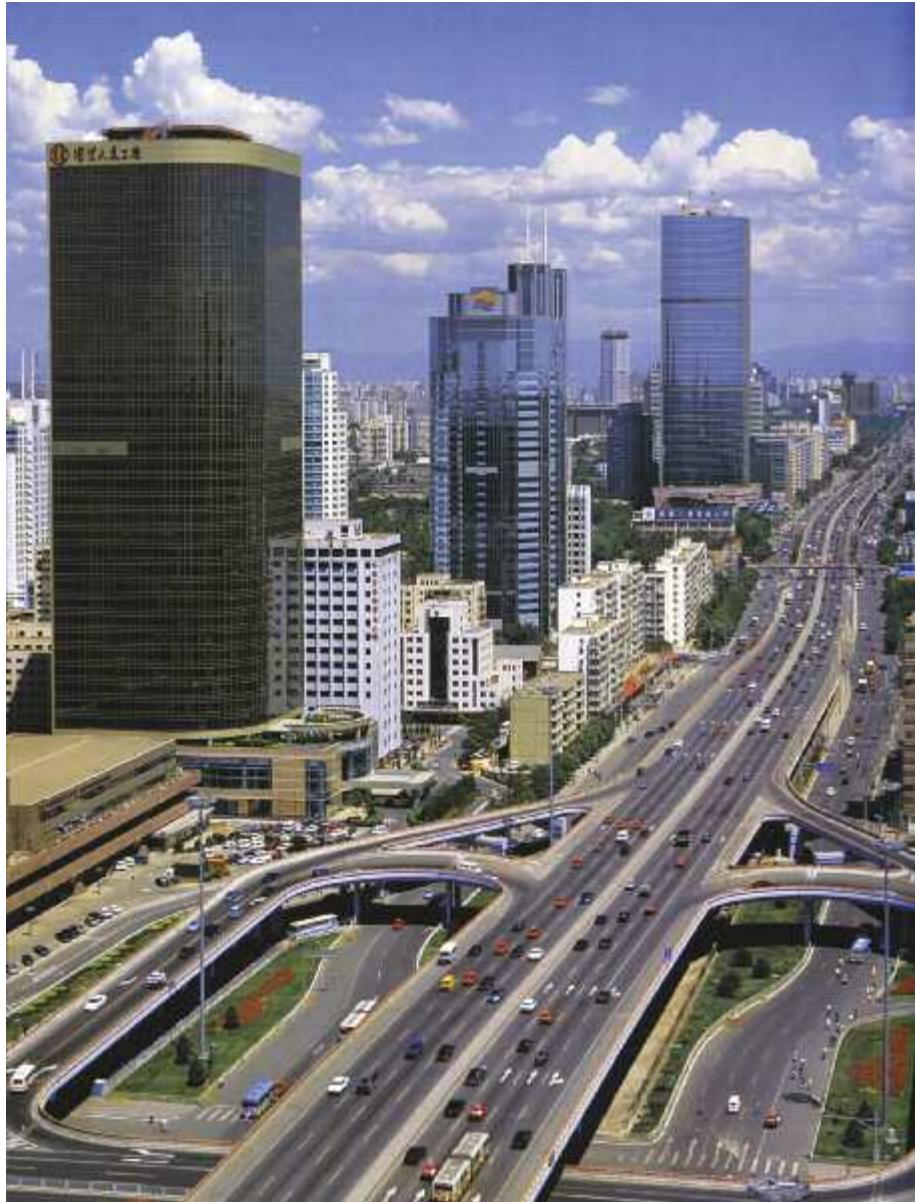


177 German technicians working on the construction site of Factory 718, 1956.

178 Bauhaus-style shops at Factory 718, 1957.

179 Ruined shops at Factory 798 with surviving revolutionary slogans, 2002.

180 A section of Chang'an Avenue in the Chaoyang district, early 2000s.



like Chaoyang, which was most sensitive to social change and also presented the best economic opportunities. Thus, although Beijing's earliest 'artist's village' was established near Yuanming Yuan in the western suburbs, the centre of gravity soon shifted to the east side of the city. The 'East Village' (Dongcun) community outside the East Third Ring Road emerged in the early to mid-1990s. Many Yuanming Yuan artists moved to Tongxian, east of Chaoyang; they were followed by other freelance artists looking for cheap studio space in an increasingly expensive city.

The relocation of the Central Academy of Fine Arts from the centre of the city to a factory near Dashanzi in 1995 also helped make this area Beijing's art centre.

The rebirth of the industrial ruins at Dashanzi as an art space owes something to all these conditions – Beijing's general globalization and de-industrialization, the cosmopolitan culture of the Chaoyang district, and the concentration of independent artists in east Beijing. Consequently, its development also reflects the complex negotiation between contemporary art and the city's urban renewal. We can roughly divide the factories' 'rebirth' into four stages. The first started from 2000, when an increasing number of independent artists set up their studios and/or living spaces there.<sup>12</sup> The idea of turning the factories into a Chinese SoHo began to emerge. The appearance of non-governmental, often foreign-funded enterprises marked the second stage. The American Robert Bernall turned Factory 798's original Muslim dining hall into an art publishing house in 2001. The place's reputation as a centre of alternative art publishing grew further when *New Wave* (*Xin chao*) magazine and the Chinese Interactive Media Group (Zhongguo hudong chuanmei jituan) moved into the area. For *New Wave*, the experimental architect Zhang Yonghe added several multi-coloured cubicles to its headquarters, originally the factory's indoor stadium. This avant-garde art journal went out of business after publishing only twelve issues. Before it disappeared, however, three trendy magazines – *Looking at the Global Metropolis*, *Youth Clan of Seventeen* and *Enjoyment: The World of Brand Names* – had become its neighbours.

Largely due to Huang Rui's persuasion, the Tokyo Gallery, a well-known Japanese contemporary art gallery, rented a 400-square-metre shop in 798 and remodelled it into the exhibition hall of the Beijing-Tokyo Art Project. For the first time, the factory's Bauhaus-style architecture was appreciated by gallery owners. The dilapidated slogan left from the Cultural Revolution was carefully preserved. The gallery opened in October with the exhibition *Beijing Afloat* (*Beijing Fushihui*). The establishment of the Beijing-Tokyo Art Project was a landmark in the district's history for two reasons: first, because of its location, the emerging art district became known as 798, although it includes spaces in other nearby factories as well. Second, following the example of the Beijing-Tokyo Art Project, close to 40 galleries, clubs, music bars and other art-related businesses and organizations established their operations here from late 2002 to 2003 (illus. 181, 182). The number of artists' studios also increased to more than 30.

The third stage started in 2003 with the project *Remaking 798* (*Zaizao 798*; illus. 183). Initiated by the artists Huang Rui and Xu Yong, its mission was to preserve the old factories in Dashanzi and transform them into a true *yishu qu* in contemporary Beijing. The two organizers declared in their manifesto: '[In



181 A popular cafe at Factory 798 in 2003.

182 Promotion of Sony products in a showroom at Dashanzi, 2003.

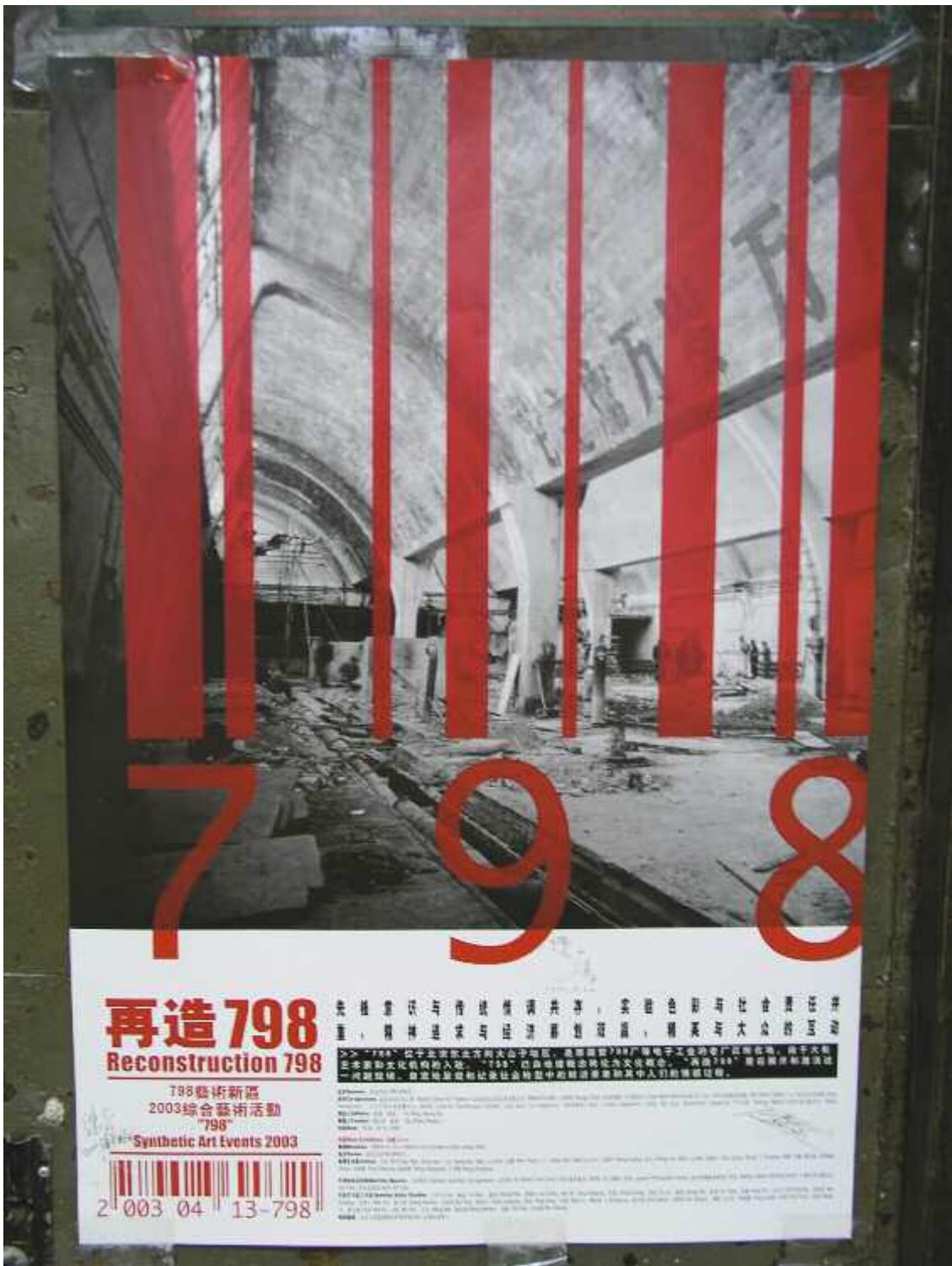


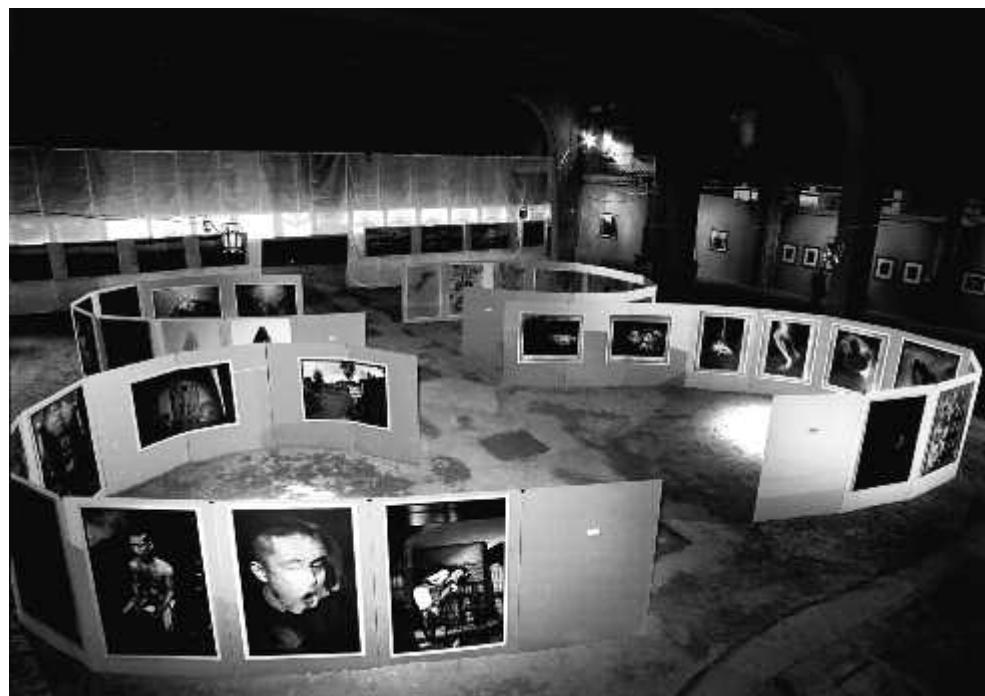
this district], the ideal of the avant-garde will coexist with the flavour of the past, the notion of experimentation will be emphasized together with social responsibility, and spiritual and financial pursuits will prevail simultaneously.<sup>13</sup> Rather than a practical plan, this utopian project reflected an artistic vision, in which the newborn art district would combine economic reality with avant-gardism, and the place's history would be preserved along with new features and functions. To the two organizers of the project, this vision must have seemed possible in 2003: the early tide of commercialization had not threatened serious artistic activities. The wave of art shows that year culminated in September, when twelve 'satellite exhibitions' took place during the official Beijing Biennale. Among these unofficial, alternative exhibitions, *Tui-Transfiguration* (illus. 184), which I curated, and *Left Hand and Right Hand* (*Zuoshou yu youshou*), curated by Feng Boyi (illus. 185), together turned the former Grand Kiln – the largest factory shop at 798 – into an art space.

Four years later the Grand Kiln became the site of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA). The first museum-size art institute at 798, the founding of Ullens Center also signalled the fourth and the most recent stage of 798's development, which has been characterized by rapid institutionalization and commercialization at the expense of individual artists. Baron Guy Ullens, the Belgian food tycoon and art collector who founded UCCA, hired the Parisian architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte to give the old factory shop a complete makeover: the rusty machines were removed; white walls and glass panels concealed the brick walls (illus. 186); and a spacious gift shop and coffee/restaurant took over nearly a quarter of the entire space. This expensive renovation project,<sup>14</sup> and its disinterest in historical preservation, sent out a number of powerful messages. Above all, it provided other real estate developers with badly needed insurance for the future of 798. Opening its doors less than a year before the 2008 Beijing Olympics, UCCA convincingly demonstrated the place's stability and, consequently, was followed by more galleries, fashion stores, gift shops and restaurants in the former industrial complex.

The radical makeover of the Grand Kiln also introduced a new architectural style, which was adopted by other cultural and commercial establishments. Often spacious and sleek, new structures at 798 showed less interest in the place's history than in its usefulness for contemporary cultural and commercial venues. Similar transformations have happened in other metropolises around the world; what is special about the Chinese case is that the whole cycle took only five years to complete. Finally, the establishment of UCCA concluded the legalization process of contemporary art in China, at least symbolically. It announced to the world that

<sup>183</sup> Poster for the project *Remaking 798*, 2003.







186 Exhibition hall of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art at 798, 2007.

creating, exhibiting and collecting contemporary art was no longer forbidden in this socialist state, and that this art had become an indispensable feature of the new Chinese city. Ironically, independent artists – the driving force of the legalization process since the 1980s – were simultaneously forced out of 798 by the rising rents and property values. Again, similar situations have happened in other places. But in China, the artists' withdrawal from the new art district indicated not only an economic reality but also a failed artistic vision, that rather than experiencing a spiritual rebirth as envisioned in the manifesto of *Remaking 798*, the ruins of old factories have simply been capitalized on for material gain. There are no *real* reasons for their preservation apart from their advertising value; there is little room or necessity for the legacy of the socialist past.

184 A view of the exhibition *Tui-Transfiguration* in the Grand Kiln at Factory 798, 2003.

185 A view of the exhibition *Left Hand and Right Hand* in the Grand Kiln at Factory 798, 2003.

The story of Factory 798 leads us to the current moment in China and Beijing, 2010 as of the completion of this book. Since this book has surveyed the ideas and images of ruins from antiquity to the present, it may be interesting to end it with an imaginary journey in and around China's capital, to see which of these ideas and images remain alive and operational, and how they are configured in the contemporary Chinese cultural landscape. We can conveniently start this journey from Factory 798. As testified by the Maoist slogans in the trendy cafes

and fashionable galleries, such historical traces have been preserved to register the country's socialist past. Whereas such preservation has been carried out mainly by the private sector for commercial or semi-commercial purposes, a new kind of 'ruins park' or 'relics park' has appeared in Beijing in recent years as collaborative undertakings between the municipal government and local residents. The best example of such a public space is the Ming Dynasty City Wall Ruins Park (Ming Chengqiang Yizhi Gongyuan), about a twenty-minute taxi ride from Factory 798 (illus. 187).<sup>15</sup>

The magnificent walls that originally surrounded Beijing's Outer, Inner and Imperial Cities were destroyed during the twentieth century. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the massive, fifteen-mile long wall of the Inner City disappeared almost entirely, eventually replaced by Beijing's first circular highway. By the new millennium, however, the removal of this wall – a Herculean effort fuelled by Maoist revolutionary zeal – had been recognized as a huge mistake, constantly cited by liberal intellectuals as a historical crime committed by the past leadership in destroying traditional Chinese culture. They used this example to warn the current leaders about similar disasters inflicted by the ongoing economic reforms, when numerous historical sites were erased to make room for modern buildings.

It is doubtful whether such warnings played any role in halting the breakneck speed of Beijing's urbanization. But it did help awaken people's consciousness of historical preservation. Thus when a surviving section of the Inner City wall was found near Dongbianmen gate tower at the city's southeast corner, it generated wide interest high and low. The municipal government finally developed a preservation plan in the early 2000s to turn the ruins into a public park. But in an effort to lengthen the dilapidated wall to 1.5 km and to bestow it with a more monumental image, the idea of renovation soon gave way to freewheeling reconstruction. A campaign was mobilized to collect displaced city wall bricks from any location in Beijing, not only around Dongbianmen but also from places as far as the Western Hills. A hotline was set up and many newspaper articles were published, encouraging Beijing residents to donate such bricks if they found them around their homes or work units. When local resources were exhausted, bricks of demolished city walls were sought in areas beyond Beijing, in Shanxi and Hebei provinces.

So, when the City Wall Ruins Park opened in 2002, the ruined wall at its centre

187 A view of the Ming Dynasty City Wall Ruins Park, Beijing.



was half real and half artificial, incorporating remains of other city walls that were no longer extant in Beijing and beyond. Instead of opposing this type of loose historical renovation/reconstruction, however, the public wholeheartedly entered into it, as people in Beijing together donated more than 400,000 bricks to facilitate the wall's reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> An old man named Wei Jinshan made finding old bricks the focus of his life, delivering a few every weekend to the site on his bicycle.<sup>17</sup> One may criticize the lack of historical authenticity of the project, but as the result of a collective effort of Beijingers, the reconstructed ruins convey their shared memory of the vanishing walls and symbolize their shared connection with their city's history. The project can even be taken as their collective mourning for the walls' destruction, a tragedy that had befallen Beijing nearly half a century before.

The mixture of renovation and restoration, seen here and at many other historical sites in China, can also be understood as an extension of the traditional approach toward architectural preservation, which aimed at restoring the original glory of a decayed structure. To this end, even the European Palaces at Yuanming Yuan in Beijing's west suburbs, arguably the most 'authentic' ruins in China, are no exception. But what has happened here since the 1980s reflects another significant tendency to befall a preserved historical ruin – a continuous popularization in an ever-changing social/cultural environment. Most important, during the past thirty years, with the growing tide of economic reform, commercialization and political stabilization, the site of the destroyed European Palaces has been assimilated into everyday life. After 1983, it was fenced off and incorporated into the newly established Yuanming Yuan Ruins Park (Yuanming Yuan Yizhi Gongyuan), a conglomerate of a history museum, a public park for recreation and relaxation and a Disneyesque entertainment space to form a 'patriotic educational base' (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*).<sup>18</sup> A heated debate unfolded throughout the 1980s and '90s on whether the vanished imperial garden should be rebuilt or left as it was.<sup>19</sup> For the supporters of various restoration plans, China's resurgence as a world power provided the incentive for a reversal of history. To them, only by recapturing the garden's lost glory could the country redeem itself from its historic humiliation. The anti-restorationists considered such ideas fantastical and ahistorical. Instead of parading shame and guilt, they argued, the public display of the ruins left intact would demonstrate China's strength to rise above defeat; the pain that the site evoked would continue to incite the patriotic sentiment necessary for China's current and future development.<sup>20</sup>

Neither side won the battle. Some parts of the European Palaces have indeed been rebuilt (illus. 188),<sup>21</sup> but the main section of the ruins remains in a dilapidated

condition (illus. 137). This is not to say that the broken stone columns and exposed foundations retain the same meaning. Rather, receiving hundreds of noisy visitors each day in a carefully landscaped environment, the site has taken on a distinctly artificial quality. In particular, it increasingly resembles a stage set prepared for ticket-paying tourists. Indeed, as at many other historic tourist sites, a makeshift photo studio is set up in front of the ruins, where visitors can dress up as Manchu princes or court ladies to have pictures taken. These routine, popular activities have been connected with and inspired by performances of a more serious nature: when *The Burning of Yuanming Yuan* (*Huoshao Yuanming Yuan*) – a blockbuster feature film jointly produced by China and Hong Kong – was shown in 1983, millions of mainland Chinese were mesmerized by the lavish historical drama that enabled them to witness the destruction of Yuanming Yuan before their eyes. Fourteen years later, when the Chinese government resumed sovereignty over Hong Kong, a different kind of performance took place in the park. To mark this historic occasion, a monumental bronze *ding* vessel – an ancient symbol for political unity – was added to the site to indicate the end of the country's colonial past (illus. 189).<sup>22</sup> Today's Yuanming Yuan Ruins Park holds numerous activities and performances on various occasions, including the anniversary of the garden's destruction, important national holidays and various folk festivals. These and other events, most of which involve no sober reflection on the historical tragedy that occurred there, have transformed the place into a conventional *sheng ji* – a 'famous historical site' where elite and popular cultures meet. As I discussed in chapter One, a *sheng ji* is comprised of layers of human experience and transcends the individual. Instead of indexing a single event in the past, it incorporates heterogeneous voices into a perpetual present.

There are many other *sheng ji* in Beijing, among which the most crucial group defines the city's traditional centre. The structures in this group, including the Forbidden City and the surrounding ritual buildings and royal parks, have been regularly repaired and repainted, at least in the sections accessible to the public. So a contemporary visitor can hardly find any neglected ruins amid wild grass as captured in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs. On the surface, a newly decorated palace appears artificial and even fake, as its fresh paint transports no sense of the passage of time. But we should realize that such resistance to ruination actually continues the traditional approach of keeping a functional building forever new, while the seemingly more realistic early photographs merely record the decline of this tradition, when the maintenance of imperial buildings terminated with the end of China's dynastic history. It is also important to realize that although this traditional approach makes no concession to preserving ruins, it does

188 A reconstructed section of the European Palaces at Yuanming Yuan.

189 A bronze *ding* vessel erected at the site of the destroyed European Palaces at Yuanming Yuan, 1997.



not reject preserving the past, only the past is not represented by decayed buildings or their images. In this way, this tradition has invented a ‘composite’ representation of different temporalities to negotiate with the past, present and future.

I remember that once I travelled to Mt Song, one of the five Sacred Marchmounts near the ancient capital Luoyang. I was received there by an old monk in the Song Yue Miao (Temple of the Sacred Middle Marchmount). He told me what

he knew about the place, concluding his narrative with an unforgettable remark:

To understand a temple you should pay attention to its buildings and trees. If the buildings are freshly painted and the golden statues shine in the darkness, you know that the temple is prosperous and kept in good order. If the trees in the courtyard are very old – it doesn't matter whether they are still living or dead – you know that this temple has an ancient, revered history.

His words betray an intrinsic view that perceives a historical site from within as a continuous growth from its ancient origin, rather than a relic with a fixed date in the past.<sup>23</sup> In this perception, a freshly painted building is not really ‘new’ historically or psychologically, and an old or even dead tree remains part of the evolving present. Although one remains new while the other decays naturally, both are rooted in the past, belong to the present and anticipate the future. It is the tension and interaction between them that constitutes the complex temporality of the place.

With this understanding, we can return to the Forbidden City, the former Ancestral Temple, Coal Hill and other historical sites at the centre of Beijing. Many ancient trees still stand there, their ageless torsos writhing next to freshly painted palace halls (illus. 190). The combination and juxtaposition of the halls and trees makes up a composite form of representation, which, as mentioned a moment ago, brings multiple temporalities into an interplay. Such interplay is not limited to architecture, but is found in a wide range of visual forms and mediums in Chinese art. In chapter One, I discussed two kinds of representations of the stele and their relationship, and argued that a painted stele always indexes a historical abstraction in an idealized integrity, while a rubbing always registers traces of decay and freezes a particular moment in history.

Shitao’s painting of the Qingliang Terrace offers another example (see illus. 1). The buildings in the painting show no trace of damage, but Shitao’s poem inscribed next to the image speaks about ‘broken roofs’ and a ‘ruined entrenchment’. The



190 An old tree in front of a newly painted palace hall, Imperial Garden, Forbidden City.

buildings are observed from a bird's-eye angle, under a tall mountain and next to a broad river. The poem betrays a much closer scrutiny of architectural details along with melancholy thoughts. The picture does not illustrate the poem nor does the poem describe the image. Rather, *because* the poem describes the ruinous state of the buildings in a *huaiyu* mode, the painting is freed from such a representational purpose and can be invested with other roles.

This traditional approach was violated by the introduction of European representational modes and visual technologies, first Picturesque images of architectural ruins and then photographic representations of war destruction. The imported styles and images were adopted for indigenous expressions: we have seen how architectural ruins became a routine subject of Chinese painters from the nineteenth century onward, how photography provided an indispensable means to incite nationalist sentiment through recording war calamities, how Yuanming Yuan became the first preserved ruin in China, and how contemporary artists have interacted with urban and industrial ruins in popular forms of international art. Whereas this study has traced these images and visual modes to various non-Chinese origins, it has also revealed the reasons for their incorporation into Chinese art and visual culture. To this end, our journey around Beijing has been most educational: from the old trees in the Forbidden City and ruined European Palaces at Yuanming Yuan to the reconstructed city wall near Dongbianmen and the Maoist slogans in the 798 art district, these places and images all simultaneously index specific historical moments and contribute to a general visual/architectural environment of Beijing. With their separate origins and shared context, they have become linked elements in two intertwining histories of global art and Chinese art.



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## 1 INTERNALIZING RUINS

### Premodern Sensibilities of Time Passed

- 1 Hans H. Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* (New Haven, CT, 1976), especially the chapter 'Contemplation of the Past', pp. 104–27; Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), pp. 16–32.
- 2 These include two leaves in an album by Shitao (1642–1707) in Beijing's Palace Museum, which depict the 'Gateway' and 'Moon Pagoda' at the Yellow Mountain, and Wu Hong's (1615–1680) fan painting *Reading in Autumn Grove* and perhaps also the handscroll *Grieve-Not Lake* in the same. A slightly ruined temple gate can be seen in a 1646 painting by Fan Qi (1616–1694), now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; for illustration, see Marilyn Fu and Shen Fu, *Studies in Connoisseurship: Chinese Paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections in New York, Princeton and Washington, DC* (Princeton, NJ, 1973), pl. xv, leaf H. Interestingly, Fan Qi's work is known for its 'Western influences'. In addition, as one of the Ten Famous Views of West Lake, the ruined Leifeng Pagoda in Hangzhou is sometimes depicted in Ming and Qing woodblock prints, such as the one in Yang Erzeng's *Strange Views of the World (Hainei qiguan)* of 1609. For a reproduction of the image, see *Zhongguo*

*gudai banhua congkan erbian* [A collection of ancient Chinese woodblock prints, 2nd series], vol. viii (Shanghai, 1994), p. 269.

- 3 Alois Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin' (1903), trans. K. W. Forster and D. Chirardo, in *Monument/Memory, Oppositions*, special issue 25, ed. W. W. Forster (1982), pp. 20–51 (pp. 31–4).
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- 7 Cited in Dawn Jacobson, *Chinoiserie* (London, 1993), p. 157.
- 8 For example, Joseph Addison (1672–1719) wrote: 'Writers who have given us an account of China, tell us the inhabitants of that country laugh at the plantations of Europeans, which are laid out by the rule of line; because, they say, anyone may place trees in equal rows and uniform figures.' Cited *ibid.*, p. 152.
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- 10 David Porter notes that 'Rome and Canton have always seemed unlikely bedfellows as sources of inspiration for an eighteenth-century Man of Taste.' *Ibid.*, p. 143. But he fails to mention that the former is closely related to the concept of ruins, while the latter is tied to the notion of exotica.
- 11 William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London, 1772). Chambers had expressed this idea much earlier, in his 1757 essay 'On the Art

- of Laying Out Gardens among the Chinese', which is accompanied by a series of designs of Chinese buildings, furnishings and costumes. As John D. Hunt has noted, 'Such completion of ruined spaces [promoted by William Shenstone], colonizing of their vacancies, becomes part of the absurd manipulation of visitors in William Chamber's Chinese projections: in his 1757 *Designs of Chinese Buildings* etc. ruined structures become simply one lament in a repertoire of Gothic chinoiserie'; *Gardens and the Picturesque* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 181. Also see John Hunt and Peter Willis, eds, *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820* (London, 1975).
- 12 Scholars have often questioned the accuracy of Chambers's accounts and drawings of Chinese building types. But, as John Harris said, 'since the original buildings are not available for comparison [at the time], it is as impossible to verify his designs today as it was in the eighteenth century'; *Sir William Chambers, Knight of the Polar Star* (London, 1970), pp. 146–7. See also A. Trystan Edwards, *Sir William Chambers* (London, 1924), pp. 20–22.
- 13 See Harris, *Sir William Chambers*, pp. 36–7.
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- 15 Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (New York, 1967), p. 3.
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- 17 See Owen, *Remembrances*, pp. 18–22.
- 18 See, for example, William Graham, Jr, 'The Lament for the South': Yü Hsin's 'Ai Chiang-nan Fu' (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 37–8.
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- 20 Owen, *Remembrances*, p. 2.
- 21 For a survey of the development of ruins in European painting, see Zucker, 'Ruins – An Aesthetic Hybrid'. Inger Sigrun Brodey, *Ruined by Design: Shaping Novels and Gardens in the Culture of Sensibility* (New York and London, 2008) is an excellent interdisciplinary study of the eighteenth-century British culture of 'sensibility', in which the ruin was a vital component.
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- 23 David Hawkes, trans., *The Songs of the South: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth, 1985), p. 165. The original translation of the seventh line in this stanza reads: 'To think that its palace walls should be mounds of rubble'. I changed 'palace walls' to 'tall palaces' because the character *xia* means 'large halls'.

- 24 Ibid., p. 162.
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- 39 See *Han dian* [An online dictionary of the Chinese language], at [www.zdic.net](http://www.zdic.net).
- 40 Zhang Lidong, 'Qiu and Xu: The Ruined City in Ancient City', unpublished manuscript (courtesy of the author), p. 21.
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- contains a scene that can also be identified as a *xu* image. For an illustration of this painting, see Stephanie Barron et al., *Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (New York, 2003), p. 66. Shitao's original name was Zhu Ruoji; he is also known as Daoji or Yuanji.
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- 44 Translation from ibid., p. 137.
- 45 This is the definition given in *Er ya*. See Xu Zhaohua, *Er ya jinzhu* [A modern annotated version of *Er ya*] (Tianjin, 1987), pp. 34, 48. Bernhard Karlgren dates *Er ya* to the third century BC in 'The Early History of the *Chou Li* and *Tso Chuan* Texts', *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, III (1931), pp. 1–59. The Han dictionary *Shuo wen* defines *xu* as 'a large mound' (*Da qiu*). See Duan Yucai, comp., *Shuo wen jie zi zhu* [Annotated interpretations of characters and words] (Shanghai, 1981), p. 386.
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- 61 Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady*, pp. 109–10. Translation slightly modified.
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- 64 See Peter Sturman, 'The Donkey Rider as Icon: Li Cheng and Early Chinese Landscape Painting', *Artibus Asiae*, LV/1–2 (1995), pp. 43–97 (especially pp. 83–8).
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- 66 Translation by Owen, *Remembrances*, p. 25. Different translations are found in Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady*, pp. 111–12; Kroll, *Meng Hao-jan*, p. 35.
- 67 Sturman, 'The Donkey Rider as Icon', pp. 86–7.
- 68 This conclusion should not be applied to all pictures in this subgenre. In a Ming reworking of *Reading the Stele* now housed in Taipei's National Palace Museum, for example, two gentlemen have replaced the donkey rider and are conversing in front of the stone tablet. The revision clearly aims to turn the composition into an illustration of the Cao Cao story. The original painting is thus revised to become a narrative picture, and the theme of 'encountering the past' becomes secondary. In chapter Two I will also discuss some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples, which reflect new trends in this subgenre in Qing painting.
- 69 Literary works on the 'Stele for Shedding Tears', including historical records and *huagu* poems,

- conventionally stress its lofty location on the top of Mt Xian, from where one could look down on the Han River and, as Meng Haoran wrote, could see Yunmeng Marsh on a clear day. But in the painting, the stele stands on a level plain that stretches into the distance.
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- 78 See Quan Hansheng, ‘Bei Song Bianliang de shuchu maoyi’ [Imports and exports in Bianliang during the Northern Song], *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*, VIII/2 (1939), pp. 189–301.
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- 80 For an up-to-date study of Ouyang Xiu’s collection, see Sena, ‘Pursuing Antiquity’, pp. 31–77.
- 81 Translation from Owen, *Remembrances*, p. 82. Owen’s chapter contains a complete translation and an excellent discussion of this important document. ‘The age of Getian’ refers to a mythical period in Chinese history.
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- he writes in discussing the painting entitled *Travellers in a Wintry Forest*: 'We witness, as Meng Haoran witnesses, an inexorable process of order, and we are humbled by its presence. Twisted bamboo, pitted rocks, trunks blasted and knotted . . . these things reveal the unrelenting passage of time, and the fragility of those who pass in the frozen stillness of a winter's day.' 'The Donkey Rider as Icon', p. 54. Martin Powers's essay 'When is a Landscape Like a Body?', in *Landscape, Culture, and Power*, ed. Yeh Xin Liu (Berkeley, ca, 1998), pp. 1–21, defines some essential concepts in early Chinese landscape painting such as 'movement' and 'character', and links images of pines and cypresses to scholar-painters' self-representation. Alfreda Murk's study of political implications of Song landscape art contains close readings of some tree images. See *The Subtle Art of Dissent: Poetry and Painting in Song China* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 117–20, 163–76.
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- 97 Marilyn Fu and Shen Fu, *Studies in Connoisseurship*, p. 299. Translation slightly modified.
- 98 See *ibid.*, p. 311.
- 99 As I have discussed elsewhere, the traditional term for rubbings, *bei tie*, signifies a twofold classification. *Bei* normally means a stone stele, but here it pertains to all sorts of rubbings made from pre-existing engravings. *Tie* has a more specific meaning and indicates rubbings made from blocks carved specifically for transmitting famous calligraphy. This section focuses on the first type because of its close relationship with ruins. See Wu Hung, 'On Rubbings – Their Materiality and Historicity', in *Writing and Materiality in China*, ed. Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 29–72 (especially pp. 30–45).
- 100 Zhao Ruzhen, *Guwan zhinan* [A guide to antiques] (Beijing, 1984), p. 6.
- 101 The most detailed introduction in English to the techniques of rubbing is R. H. van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur* (Rome, 1958), pp. 86–101.
- 102 Traditionally there were two major ways of making a rubbing: the 'wet method' and the 'dry method'. Most rubbing makers today in China, however, only employ the wet method. For an introduction to the 'dry method', see *ibid.*
- 103 Ye Changchi, *Yu shi* [Talking about stone carvings] (Shenyang, 1999), p. 264.
- 104 *Ibid.*, p. 264; translation based on van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art*, pp. 92–3.
- 105 Ye Changchi, *Yu shi*, p. 251.
- 106 *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- 107 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 108 One possible exception is the carvings of the Wu Liang Shrine. These carvings were studied by Song antiquarians based on rubbings made from them. But the carvings were buried again and rediscovered by Huang Yi in 1786. When Huang made rubbings from the rediscovered stones, therefore, he claimed that, because the stones remained unchanged during these years, 'these new rubbings are Song rubbings'. See Huang Yi, *Xiaopenglai Ge jinshi wenzu* [Bronze and stone inscriptions from the Xiaopenglai Pavilion] (Shimoxuan, 1834). But as Ma Ziyun has argued, imprints in Huang Yi's rubbings differ from those in a Song rubbing of the shrine preserved in the Palace Museum. Ma Ziyun, 'Tan Wu Liang Ci huaxiang de Song ta yu Huang Yi taben' [On the Song rubbing and Huang Yi rubbing of the pictorial carvings on the Wu Liang shrine], *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* [Journal of the Palace Museum], 2 (1960), pp. 170–77. It is possible that the stones were not reburied till the Yuan dynasty, because it is recorded that in 1344 a flood destroyed the shrine and other stone monuments in the Wu family cemetery. See Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, p. 329.
- 109 I have suggested that colophons in a painting constitute an 'internal textual enclosure' for interpreting the painting. See Wu Hung, *Double Screen*, pp. 29–48.
- 110 See Palace Museum, *Gugong Bowuyuan 50 nian rucang wenwu jingpinji* [Selected gems of cultural relics – newly collected in the Palace Museum over the last 50 years] (Beijing, 1999), pl. 390.
- 111 The rubbing has been variously dated to the Southern Song, Yuan and Ming. Ma Ziyun first dated it to the end of the Southern Song or the early Yuan, but changed his opinion later to the Middle Ming. Here I follow his later dating. See Ma Ziyun, 'Tan Xiyue Huashan Miao bei de sanben Song ta', p. 31; Ma Ziyun and Shi Anchang, *Beitie jianding* [Rubbing connoisseurship] (Guilin, 1993), p. 50.
- 112 Ma Ziyun and Shi Anchang, *Beitie jianding*, p. 46.
- 113 See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, vol. III (Chicago, 1985),

- pp. 116–19. All the quotations in this paragraph are from this part of Ricoeur's highly original book.
- 114 Ibid., p. 118.
- 115 Ye Changchi, 'Preface', *Yu shi*, p. 11.
- 116 Li Qingzhao, 'Jinshi lu houxu'. From Owen, *Remembrances*, p. 32.
- 117 Ma Ziyun, 'Tan Wu Liang Ci huaxiang de Song ta yu Huang Yi taben'.
- 118 See James Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, p. 424.
- 119 See Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu* [History of the later Han] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), p. 2590, n. 9: 'Ji means xun ["to search for"]'.
- 120 Li Daoyuan, *Shuijing zhu*, 'Heshui 4'. Translation from Richard E. Strassberg, *Inscribed Landscape: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA, 1994), p. 83, with minor modification.
- 121 Li Daoyuan, *Shuijing zhu*, 'Heshui 4'.
- 122 Besides Yu, Cang Jie, the creator of writing, also falls into this category, as legends tell that 'he invented Chinese characters from observing the traces [ji] of bird tracks'. This legend is recorded in many books, including *Diwang shiji* [A genealogy of ancient rulers], *Shuowen jiezi* and others.
- 123 For some examples of this pictorial tradition, see Dorothy Wong, 'A Reassessment of the Representation of Mt Wutai from Dunhuang Cave 61', *Archives of Asian Art*, xlvi (1993), pp. 27–52; Wu Hung, 'Rethinking Liu Sahe: The Creation of a Buddhist Saint and the Invention of a "Miraculous Image"', *Orientations*, xxvii/10 (November 1996), pp. 32–43.
- 124 For a detailed discussion of this album and the artist, see Kathryn M. Liscomb, *Learning from Mount Hua: A Chinese Physician's Illustrated Travel Record and Painting Theory* (Cambridge, 1993).
- 125 There are different opinions about the date of the album. Richard Edwards suggests that it was probably made around 1670, when Shitao was 30 years old. But he also cautions that Shitao often depicted a journey long after the event. See Richard Edwards, *The Painting of Tao-chi, 1641–ca. 1720* (Ann Arbor, 1967), pp. 31–2, 45–6. Other scholars have dated the album to the 1680s based on stylistic evidence.
- 126 For more information about this album, see Wai-kam Ho, ed., *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang 1555–1636*, vol. II (Kansas City, 1992), pp. 177–9.
- 127 In addition to the story in the *Wu Yue chunqiu*, Zhang Ji's *Bo ya* (third century) states: 'Above the Goulou Peak there is the stele of Divine Yu.'
- 128 Zhao Ye, *Wu Yue chunqiu* (Nanjing, 1992), pp. 79–88.
- 129 According to Wang Yaochen, who lived in the eleventh century, *Wu Yue chunqiu* [The annals of Wu and Yue] was first written by Zhao Ye in the first century and substantially abridged by Yang Fang in the fourth century. About the complex issues involved in dating the text, see Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Biographical Guide* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), pp. 473–5. The story appears in *juan* 6, 'Yue Wang Wuyu waizhuan'.
- 130 Translation from Charles Hartman, *Han Yü and the Tang Search for Unity* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), p. 66. Han's contemporary Liu Yuxi (772–842) also wrote a poem about the 'Divine Yu inscription' ('Shen Yu ming'). Both poems are collected in Cao Yin et al., comp., *Quan Tang shi* [A complete collection of Tang poetry] (1707), *juan* 338.
- 131 Wang Xiangzhi, *Yudi sheng ji* [Records of famous places], in *Xuxiu Siku quanshu* [A sequel to *Complete Library in Four Categories*], vol. DLXXXIV, *juan* 56, p. 506. According to Zhang Shinan's (13th century) *Youhuan jiwen* [A record of hearsay by a travelling official], the 'gentleman from Sichuan' mentioned in the passage is He Zhi, who found the inscription in 1212 and had it recarved at Mt Yueli near Changsha.
- 132 Hong Gua, *Li shi* [Interpreting Han clerical writings] (1166), in *Shike shiliao xinbian* [A new compilation of historical materials on stone carvings] (Taipei, 1957), 6749; see R. C. Rudolph, 'Preliminary Notes on Sung Archaeology', p. 170. Hong Gua's other work is *Li xu* [Addendum to *Li Shi*], 1168–79, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 7087–7202. These two books together catalogue 258 inscriptions.
- 133 Zhao Mingcheng, *Jin Shi Lu xu* [Records of bronze and stone inscriptions], 1117, in *Jin Shi Lu Xiao Zheng*, ed. Jin Wenming (Guilin, 2005), p. 1.
- 134 Ouyang Xiu, 'Jigu lu mu xu' [A preface to the catalogue of records of collecting antiquity]. For a detailed study of Ouyang's collection and the catalogue, see Yun-Chiahan C. Sena, 'Pursuing Antiquity', Chapter 1 and Appendix A.
- 135 Upholding the motto of 'seeking truth from facts', evidential scholarship in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China constituted a revolution in academic discourse that challenged the previous norms of acceptable knowledge. For a comprehensive discussion of this intellectual movement, see Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series (Los Angeles, 2001). The section of the book on 'evidential' scholars' use of archaeological and epigraphic evidence (pp. 188–91) is closely linked to their studies of ancient steles.

- <sup>136</sup> For an insightful discussion of this development, see Eileen Hsiang-ling Hsu, 'Huang Yi's *Fangbei Painting*' in Cary Y. Liu et al., *Rethinking, Recarving: Ideals, Practices, and Problems of the 'Wu Family Shrine' and Han China* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), pp. 236–59.
- <sup>137</sup> These include Qianshen Bai, 'The Intellectual Legacy of Huang Yi and his Friends: Reflections on Some Issues Raised by *Recarving China's Past*', in Liu et al., *Rethinking, Recarving*; Eileen Hsu, 'Huang Yi's *Fangbei Painting*: A Legacy of Qing Antiquarianism,' *Oriental Art*, LV/1 (2005), pp. 56–63; Lillian Lan-Ying Tseng, 'Retrieving the Past, Inventing the Memorable: Huang Yi's Visit to the Song-Luo Monuments', in Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin, eds, *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago, 2003), pp. 37–58; and Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, pp. 4–7, 11.
- <sup>138</sup> These albums include: *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles* (*Debei shier tu*), *Visiting Steles in the Song-Luo Region* (*Song Luo fangbei tu*), and 'Visiting Steles in the Mount Tai Area' (*Daiyue fangbei tu*). The first album is in the collection of the Tianjin Municipal Museum of Art. The others are housed in Beijing's Palace Museum. For images, see *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* [An illustrated catalogue of ancient Chinese paintings and calligraphy] (Beijing, 1986–2001), x, pp. 215–16; xxiii, pp. 223–38.
- <sup>139</sup> Huang Yi, *Song Luo fangbei riji* [A diary on visiting steles in the Song-Luo region].
- <sup>140</sup> For a transcription of this colophon, see Cai Hongru, 'Huang Yi debei shier tu' [Huang Yi's *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles*], *Wenwu*, 3 (1996), pp. 72–9. This colophon appears as a summary of a longer essay by Huang Yi, trans. in Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, pp. 5–6.
- <sup>141</sup> Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, pp. 4–5.
- <sup>142</sup> Huang Yi, 'Xiu Wu Shi Citang jilue' [Commemorating the construction of the Wu preservation hall]. In *Shike shiliao xinbian*, p. 7427.
- <sup>143</sup> The last image in the *Twelve Paintings of Obtaining Steles*, for example, depicts his finding a ruined stele on the roadside in 1792. Only three characters in the inscriptions could be deciphered. He then moved this stele to the local academy. Similarly, the second leaf in the album represents his moving a Han stele to the nearby Longhua Temple. See Hsu, 'Huang Yi's *Fangbei Painting*'.
- <sup>144</sup> Tseng, 'Retrieving the Past, Inventing the Memorable'.
- <sup>145</sup> This and the following events are described in detail in ibid., pp. 46–50.
- <sup>146</sup> For a summary of these surveys, see Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, pp. 7–10, 46–9.
- <sup>147</sup> Pamela K. Crossley, *The Manchus* (Oxford, 1997), p. 117.
- <sup>148</sup> Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 172–84.
- <sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp. 176–7. Translation modified.
- <sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 175. Poem retranslated.
- <sup>151</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that some *yi min* artists painted dilapidated architectural structures. A fan painting by Wu Hong, for example, is centred on a cottage with a broken roof. Similarly, Fan Qi painted a temple gate that again has a deteriorating roof. Although discreet, such details may convey important messages. In an interesting essay, Alfreda Murck reads these and other paintings by these two artists as the political expressions of *yi min* artists. 'Responses to the Manchu Conquest: Wu Hong and Kong Shangren', *Orientation*, xxxvi/8–9 (2005), pp. 56–62.
- <sup>152</sup> Zhou Lianggong, *Duhua lu* [Lives of painters], in Lu Fusheng et al., eds, *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* [A comprehensive collection of writings on Chinese painting and calligraphy], 13 vols (Shanghai, 1992–8), vii, p. 955. For an English translation of Zhang Feng's biography, see Hongnam Kim, 'Chou Liang-kung and his "Tu-Hua-lu"', PhD diss., Yale University, 1985, ii, pp. 116–22.
- <sup>153</sup> Based on Bai, *Fu Shan's World*, p. 182.
- <sup>154</sup> See Laurence C. S. Tam, *Six Masters of Early Qing and Wu Li* (Hong Kong, 1986), pp. 34–58.
- <sup>155</sup> Wu Li, *Mojing shichao* [Wu Li's poetry collection], in *Mojing ji* [A collection of Wu Li's writing] (Shanghai, 1909). Trans. from Tam, *Six Masters of Early Qing and Wu Li*, p. 34.
- <sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 34.
- <sup>157</sup> See Wen Fong, ed., *Possessing the Past: Treasures from the National Palace Museum, Taiwan*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1996), pp. 488–9.
- <sup>158</sup> Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature from Early Times to the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 167–8. See Richard M. Barnhart, *Peach Blossom Spring: Gardens and Flowers in Chinese Painting*, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (New York, 1983).
- <sup>159</sup> Lin Xiaoping, 'Wu Li: His Life, His Paintings', PhD diss., Yale University, 1993, pp. 113–19 (p. 118).
- <sup>160</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that, according to Lin Xiaoping, during this period, from the 1660s to the 1670s, Wu Li experienced 'the most significant change' in his life. Ibid., p. 127.
- <sup>161</sup> Wu Li, 'Second Poem on Painting' [*Tihuashi zhi er*], in *Mojing shichao*, *Congshu jicheng xubian*, vol. CLXXIV, p. 13.

- 162 For a discussion of the gaze in the handscroll format, see Wu Hung, *The Double Screen*, pp. 57–61, 68–71.
- 163 Jonathan Hay, ‘Ming Palace and Tomb in Early Qing Jiangnan’, pp. 1–48.
- 164 These lines are from ‘Guo Jinling lun’ [An essay on passing through Jinling], which Emperor Kangxi wrote when he visited the former palace in 1684. Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 165 Wang Huanbiao, *Ming Xiaoling zhi* [Records of the Xiaoling mausoleum of the Ming] (Nanjing, 1935), pp. 400–408. Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 26.
- 166 Kangxi, ‘Guo Jinling lun’. Trans. from *ibid.*, p. 19.
- 167 Meng Haoran, ‘Climbing Mt. Xian With Others’ [Yu zhuzi deng Xianshan], in *Quan Tang shi* [A complete collection of Tang poetry] (Shanghai, 1887) p. 1644. Trans. Owen, *Remembrances*, p. 24.
- 168 The classic work of scholarship on this mountain is Édouard Chavannes, *Le T’ai Chan: Essai de monographie d’un culte chinois* (Paris, 1910).
- 169 Trans. Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 293; slightly modified.
- 170 These include Stephen Wilkinson’s PhD dissertation on this subject and an article based on the dissertation: ‘Paintings of “The Red Cliff Prose Poems” in Song Times’, *Oriental Art*, xxvii/1 (Spring 1981), pp. 76–89; Daniel Altieri, ‘The Painted Visions of the Red Cliffs’, *Oriental Art*, xxix/2 (1983), pp. 252–64; Jerome Silbergeld, ‘Back to the Red Cliff’, *Ars Orientalis*, xxv (1995), pp. 19–38; and *Chibi fu* [Poetic exposition on Red Cliff] (Taipei, 1984).
- 171 In some paintings, such as Wu Yuanzhi’s ‘Red Cliff’ in the National Palace Museum, both ‘Expositions’ are inscribed after the painting.
- 172 An illustration of this painting can be found in *Min Shin no bijutsu* [Art of the Ming and Qing dynasties] (Ōsaka, 1981), p. 69, cat. no. 4-31.
- L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC, 1995), pp. 7–28.
- 5 Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*; Benjamin A. Elman, *On their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550–1900* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). For a summary of some new trends in scholarship, see Hevia, pp. 15–25.
- 6 Two sets of such images were created by Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and Bernard Picart (1673–1733). For a general introduction to European representations of China before the nineteenth century, see Marcia Reed, ‘A Perfume Is Best from Afar: Publishing China for Europe’, in *China on Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè (Los Angeles, 2007), pp. 9–28.
- 7 Neil Chambers, *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks: A Selection, 1768–1820* (London, 2000), pp. 140–42, 145–6.
- 8 John Barrow, *Travels in China* (London, 1804).
- 9 George Leonard Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (London, 1797); Aeneas Anderson, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794* (London, 1795); Samuel Holmes, *The Journal of Mr. Samuel Holmes* (London, 1798).
- 10 John Barrow, *An Auto-Biographical Memoir of Sir John Barrow, Bart* (London, 1847), p. 49. Cited in Patrick Connor and Susan Legoux Sloman, *William Alexander: An English Artist in Imperial China* (Brighton, 1981), p. 9.
- 11 Staunton, *Authentic Account*, II, p. 233.
- 12 Barrow, *Travels in China*, p. 3.
- 13 Frances Wood, ‘Closely Observed China: from William Alexander’s Sketches to His Published Work’, *British Library Journal*, xxiv/1 (1998), pp. 98–121. Also see Susan Legoux, *Image of China: William Alexander* (London, 1980), Appendix II.
- 14 See Connor and Sloman, *William Alexander*, p. 9.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 7; a different number is given in Legoux, *Image of China*, p. 6.
- 16 Staunton, *Authentic Account*. The book’s two volumes have 26 illustrations. It is also accompanied by an album consisting of 44 images, 25 of which were reproduced from Alexander’s paintings. According to Huang Yi-long, a 1798 version of the book, now housed in Hong Kong University Library, has 210 colour illustrations. See Huang Yi-long, ‘Long yu shi duiwang de shijie – yi Mageerni shituan fanghua hou de chubanwu weil’ [Viewing the Encounter between the Dragon and the Lion: A case study on publications

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- 1 William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London, 1772), p. 39.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41; John Harris, *Sir William Chambers, Knight of the Polar Star* (London, 1970), p. 156.
- 3 For basic information on the Macartney mission, see J. L. Cranmer-Byng, ‘Lord Macartney’s Embassy to Peking in 1793’, *Journal of Oriental Studies*, iv/1–2 (1957–8), pp. 117–87; Alain Peyrefitte, *The Immobile Empire*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York, 1992).
- 4 For a critical assessment of this scholarship, see James

- in the aftermath of Macartney's visit to China], *Gugong xueshu jikan* [National Palace Museum Research Quarterly], xxi/2 (Winter 2003), pp. 265–97 (especially p. 272).
- 17 Staunton's book was published in these countries in major European languages before 1800. See Edward Godfrey Cox, *A Reference Guide to the Literature of Travel, Including Voyages, Geographical Descriptions, Adventures, Shipwrecks and Expeditions* (Seattle, 1935–49), vol. 1, pp. 344–5; Huang Yi-long, 'Long yu shi duiwang de shijie', p. 275.
- 18 William Alexander, *The Costume of China* (London, 1805).
- 19 William Alexander, *Picturesque Representations of the Dress and Manners of the Chinese* (London, 1814).
- 20 Patrick Connor, Susan Legouix and Huang Yi-long have all noted that the 50 illustrations in this book are drawn in a style quite different from Alexander's authentic works. Legouix, *Image of China*, pp. 15–16; Huang Yi-long, 'Long yu shi duiwang de shijie', p. 281. Having examined these images in the Newberry Library in Chicago, I also feel that many images synthesize elements from various sources, some from China images published before the Macartney expedition.
- 21 Johannes Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperour of China* (London, 1669).
- 22 A common mistake made by William Alexander's biographers is that he studied with William Pars. But as Legouix has demonstrated, this is impossible because Pars moved to Italy in 1775 and died there in 1782. For the artistic education of Alexander, see Legouix, *Image of China*, pp. 5–6. A commemorative plaque dedicated to him after his death contains these lines: 'He accompanied the Embassy to China in 1792 and by the power of his pencil introduced into Europe a better knowledge of the habits and manners of China than had before been attained. That he was rich in the feelings and knowledge of art his works evince.' *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 24 Bernard Picart, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (Amsterdam, 1723–43). For a general introduction to European representations of China before the nineteenth century, see Marcia Reed, 'A Perfume Is Best from Afar: Publishing China for Europe', in *China on Paper*, ed. Reed and Demattè, pp. 9–28.
- 25 Many books and articles have been written on the 'picturesque' movement in British art, literature and aesthetics. For a general introduction, see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot, 1989).
- 26 See Barbara Maria Stafford, 'Toward Romantic Landscape Perception: Illustrated Travels and the Rise of "Singularity" as an Aesthetic Category', *Art Quarterly*, n.s. 1 (1977), pp. 89–124; Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, pp. 41–50.
- 27 The watercolour version, belonging to a private London collection, is reproduced in Connor and Sloman, *William Alexander*, pl. 46. The engraving was first published with Staunton's *Authentic Account* as pl. 41, and has been reproduced many times since in monochromatic and colour versions.
- 28 This drawing is now in the British Library (India Office Records WD961, fol. 18, 51). According to Connor and Sloman, the inscription is 'apparently in Alexander's handwriting'. The added signature of 'J. Barrow' in a different ink, however, has led the two authors to propose that the passage may have been copied from Barrow's writing. See Connor and Sloman, *William Alexander*, p. 61. In my view, regardless of whether the passage was written by Alexander himself, by illustrating it more than once and by copying it on one of his drawings, he clearly demonstrated his strong interest in this building. Additional evidence shows that this fascination was in fact shared by other members of the embassy. For example, Macartney himself wrote about Thunder Peak Pagoda in his journal: 'On one side of the lake is a pagoda in ruins, which forms a remarkably fine object. It is octagonal, built of fine hewn stone, red and yellow, of four entire stories besides the top, which was moldering away from age. Very large trees were growing out of the cornices. It was about two hundred feet high. It is called the Tower of the Thundering Winds, to whom it would seem to have been dedicated, and is supposed to be two thousand five [hundred] years old.' J. L. Cranmer-Byng, ed., *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during his Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-lung, 1793–1794* (Hamden, CT, 1963), p. 179. In addition, Lt Parish also drew this building. One of his drawings of the pagoda and Lake Xihu, dated 12 November 1793, was included in the Sotheby's sale of 1 April 1976 (lot 48). See Connor and Sloman, *William Alexander*, p. 61.
- 29 Eugene Wang, 'Tope and Topos: The Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic', in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, eds, *Writing and Materiality in China* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), p. 515.
- 30 For a discussion of this structural principle of picturesque painting, see Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 29.

- 31 Connor and Sloman, *William Alexander*, p. 14.
- 32 Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), p. 13.
- 33 As mentioned in n. 28, Alexander painted several sketches of the Leifeng Pagoda. But because he did not mention a visit to the Leifeng Pagoda in his travel journal, Connor and Sloman suspect that these sketches may have been based on sketches made by Lt Parish and other members of the embassy. *William Alexander*, p. 61. It is equally possible, however, that Alexander did visit the site but did not record the visit.
- 34 It was then included in *The Costume of China* in 1805. Judging from the inscription on the front wall of the stupa, this picture is flipped, possibly due to a mistake during the process of transforming the original water-colour into an engraving. Similar situations are found in some, but not all, illustrations in *The Costume of China*.
- 35 The earliest recorded use of a camera on Chinese soil was at the closing of the First Opium War. It is said that two Englishmen, Dr Woosnam and Major Malcolm, experimented with daguerreotype photography in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province. But 1844 probably marked the real beginning of photography in China. In this year, the American commercial photographer George West (c. 1825–1859) arrived in China and took daguerreotypes in Guangdong, and Jules Itier (1802–1877) accompanied a French commercial mission to China and took a number of daguerreotypes that have survived. For a detailed introduction to early photography in China, see Terry Bennett, *History of Photography in China 1842–1860* (London, 2009).
- 36 Ibid., pp. 73–4.
- 37 For Legrand's career in China, see Régine Thiriez, 'Ligelang: a French Photographer in 1850s Shanghai', *Orientations*, xxxii/9 (November 2001), pp. 49–54.
- 38 For an introduction to Beato's activities before he reached China, see David Harris, 'Imperial Ideology and Felice Beato's Photographs of the Second Opium War in China', in his *Of Battle and Beauty: Felice Beato's Photographs of China*, exh. cat., Santa Barbara Museum of Art (1999), pp. 19–24.
- 39 John Thomson, *The Antiquities of Cambodia* (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 6.
- 40 John Thomson, *China and Its People in Early Photographs: An Unabridged Reprint of the Classic 1873/4 Work* (New York, 1982), vol. 1, pl. xvii.
- 41 For a more detailed discussion of these categories, see Wu Hung, 'Introduction: Reading Early Photographs of China', in Jeffrey Cody and Frances Terpak, eds, *Brush and Shutter: Early Photography in China* (Los Angeles, 2011), pp. 1–17.
- 42 Régine Thiriez has noticed that, contrary to Shanghai and Hong Kong at the time, where photographic practice mainly focused on scenes of daily life, Beijing's ancient monuments generated much interest among foreign photographers. See her *Barbarian Lens: Western Photographers of the Qianlong Emperor's European Palaces* (Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 75–6.
- 43 For an introduction to this group of photographers, see ibid., pp. 4–15.
- 44 Child's situation is rather special: although he served as a gas engineer in the Maritime Customs, he also developed a second career as a commercial photographer, selling photographs through the journal *The Far East*. See Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, pp. 75–83.
- 45 Thomson, for example, photographed ancient architecture alongside his investigations into people's customs in various regions. For examples, see Thomson, *China and Its People in Early Photographs*.
- 46 For the introduction of photography to China, see Ma Yunzeng et al., *Zhongguo shiyingshi 1840–1937* [A history of Chinese photography 1840–1937] (Beijing, 1987), pp. 3–59.
- 47 Two of these popular pictorials are the *Dianshi Studio Pictorial* and the *Fleeting Shadow Pavilion Pictorial*. Most of their lithographic illustrations were designed by Wu Youru, the most famous illustrator in Shanghai during the 1880s and '90s. For a detailed discussion of Wu and his works, see Rudolf Wagner, 'Joining the Global Imaginaire: The Shanghai Illustrated Newspaper *Dianshizhao huabao*', in *Joining the Global Public: World, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers 1870–1910*, ed. Rudolf Wagner (Albany, NY, 2008), pp. 105–73.
- 48 Li Chao, *Zhongguo zaoqi youhua shi* [A history of early oil painting in China] (Shanghai, 2004), pp. 402–10.
- 49 Chen Shuren, 'Xin hua fa' [New painting methods], *Zhenxiang huabao*, 1–10 (Shanghai, 1912–13).
- 50 Qian Bocheng, 'Yan Wenliang xiansheng nianpu' [A chronology of Mr Yan Wenliang's life], in *Yan Wenliang*, ed. Lin Wenxia (Shanghai, 1996), p. 160.
- 51 Stephanie Wen-hui Su made this point in her 'Ruins and Travelers: Yan Wenliang's Representation of Roman Ruins in 1930', unpublished manuscript (courtesy of the author), 2009, p. 2.
- 52 This style is exemplified by a set of paintings depicting scenes in Hangzhou and Suzhou, which Yan Wenliang created in 1925. For images, see Lin Wenxia, ed., *Yan Wenliang*, pls 4–13.

- 53 Yan Wenliang, 'Falanxi jindai de yishu' [French art of recent centuries], *Yilang*, 11/1 (June 1934), reprinted in Shang Hui, *Yan Wenliang yanjiu* [A study of Yan Wenliang] (Nanjing, 1993), pp. 208–10.
- 54 For a detailed analysis of these paintings, see Su, 'Ruins and Travelers'.
- 55 Ibid., p. 4.
- 56 Liu Haisu, *Ouyou suibi* [Notes on a European trip] (Shanghai, 1935), p. 156. Translation from Su, 'Ruins and Travelers', p. 3.
- 57 These comparative examples were suggested by Stephanie Su and Quincy Ngan in a seminar course I taught at the University of Chicago in 2008.
- 58 Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires*, p. 12.
- 59 For the 'pedagogical' roles of this war, see James Hevia's excellent discussion in *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC, 2003), pp. 29–118.
- 60 Today the name Summer Palace is used to designate Yihe Yuan garden west of Yuanming Yuan. But as Thiriez has noted, to Beato and his contemporaries, the Summer Palace applied not only to Yuanming Yuan, but to a much larger area. Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, p. 9. This understanding is reflected in the captions that Beato inscribed on his photographs.
- 61 Archival evidence shows that Beato knew Sir James Hope Grant, the commander-in-chief of the British army back in India and joined the latter in Hong Kong just before the expedition began. See Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, pp. 24–7.
- 62 Although these images only bear Robertson's signature, as Ulrich Keller has contended, the signature should be understood as a kind of 'brand name', rather than the name of the actual photographer. See Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 164–5. Moreover, the striking similarity between these images and the images of destroyed batteries that Beato made in China and Korea a few years later reveal his role in the making of the Crimean war pictures.
- 63 Beato was in Lucknow in March and April 1858, within a few weeks of the capture of that city by British forces under Sir Colin Campbell.
- 64 Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, p. 23, caption to illus. 2.8.
- 65 George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career* (London, 1893), p. 4: 'There was a first-rate photographer in attendance taking all the scenes, and I have a set of his photographs still. Lucknow architecture showed better in photographs under those circumstances than afterwards in quiet life, and many of the scenes were really very striking. One very horrible one was the Shah Najaf. The great pile of bodies had been decently covered over before the photographer could take them, but he insisted on having them uncovered to be photographed before they were finally disposed of.'
- 66 For an image of this photograph, see Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, p. 23.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Sir James Hope Grant, the commander-in-chief of the British army, personally permitted the inclusion of Beato in the expedition army and arranged for him to photograph Beijing. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.
- 69 The sequence of Beato's photographs at the Tanggu Fort has been carefully established by David Harris, see *ibid.*, pp. 28–31.
- 70 Rennie, *British Arms in Northern China*, p. 112; cited in Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, p. 29.
- 71 For these references, see Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, pp. 31–7.
- 72 Robert Swinhoe, *Narrative of the North China Campaign of 1860* (London, 1861), pp. 120–21, cited in Harris, *Of Battle and Beauty*, p. 31.
- 73 In the words of Lord Elgin, who ordered the burning of the Summer Palace, the destruction of the palace was 'a solemn act of retribution'. See Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 107. Hevia discusses in detail the 'pedagogical roles' of looting and burning carried out by the invaders, see *ibid.*, pp. 74–121.
- 74 Other Western photographers represented war ruins between 1860 and 1900. For example, John Thomson photographed the ruined Sisters' Chapel in Tianjin, destroyed in an anti-Western riot in 1870.
- 75 For this episode, see Young-Tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden of Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu, 2001), p. 182.
- 76 Melvin E. Page, ed., *An International, Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2003).
- 77 Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 187.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 79 Charles Merewether, 'Traces of Loss', in *Irresistible Decay*, ed. Michael S. Roth (Los Angeles, 1997), p. 28.
- 80 Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (New York, 1989), p. 69.
- 81 For a general discussion of colonialist photography, see Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, eds, 'Introduction', *Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place* (London, 2002).
- 82 Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', in H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), p. 70.

- 83 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, (Chicago, 1985), trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, vol. III, p. 99.
- 84 The reason is obvious: war became almost ceaseless from 1840 onward. Internationally, the Qing was forced to engage in battles with all the major powers in the industrialized world: Britain in the Opium War of 1839–40 and several times thereafter; France in the 1880s; and Japan in the 1890s. In 1900 it took on all of them at the same time.
- 85 Scholars commonly trace *The Globe to Church News* [*Jiaohui xinbao*], which was founded by the American Methodist missionary Young John Allen (Lin Lezhi, 1836–1907) in 1868. But as Liu Jialin points out, these two newspapers, or two phases of the same newspaper, differ fundamentally in their nature. The former was primarily a religious publication, while the latter focused on political events; *Zhongguo xinwen shi* [A history of Chinese news media], vol. 1 (Wuhan, 1995), p. 61.
- 86 *Dianshizhai huabao* was not the first Chinese pictorial, however. It was preceded by *Child's Paper* [*Xiaohai huabao*], published in Shanghai from 1875 to 1915. But *Child's Paper* only had occasional illustrations, and *Dianshizhai Illustrated News* was far more influential. See Ge Boxi, “Xiaohai yuebao” kaozheng’ [A study of *Child's Paper*], in *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* [Research materials of news reporting], 31 (1985), pp. 168–75. There are numerous studies of *Dianshizhai huabao*. The most important ones include: Ye Xiaoqing, *The Dianshizhai Illustrated News: Shanghai Urban Life, 1884–1898* (Ann Arbor, 2003); Chen Pingyuan and Xia Xiaohong, *Tuxiang Wanqing – Dianshizhai huabao* [Picturing the Late Qing: *The Dianshizhai Illustrated News*] (Beijing, 2006); Wagner, ‘Joining the Global Imaginaire’.
- 87 *Dianshizhai huabao* (*Dianshizhai Illustrated News*), no. 1 (April 1884). For a different translation, see Wagner, ‘Joining the Global Imaginaire’, p. 132.
- 88 Wagner, ‘Joining the Global Imaginaire’, pp. 121–6.
- 89 *Dianshizhai huabao* (*Dianshizhai Illustrated News*), no. 1.
- 90 Translation partially based on Wagner, ‘Joining the Global Imaginaire’, p. 135.
- 91 This is a very old painting tradition in China and can be traced back all the way to the Han dynasty. During the Qing, the Qianlong Emperor commissioned a series of battle scenes to commemorate his pacification of Chinese Turkistan. This tradition continued until the end of the dynasty. As Hongxing Zhang has demonstrated, the Qing court commissioned a large series of battle paintings and employed Wu Youru as the main painter. Some of his drawings were actually incorporated into the *Dianshizhai Illustrated News*, demonstrating the close relationship between the two. ‘Studies in Late Qing Dynasty Battle Paintings’, *Artibus Asiae*, LX/2 (2000), pp. 265–86.
- 92 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproductivity’, 2nd version, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. III, ed. Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA, 2002), p. 102. Here is a brief introduction to how lithographs are made: ‘The lithography procedure is based on the principle that water and grease repel each other and that grease attracts grease. A limestone slab is first polished to a great degree of fineness. Images are then either drawn with greasy crayon line directly onto the stone or are transferred to the stone from special paper. The stone is moistened so that the unillustrated part absorbs the water, which repels the greasy ink from the blank areas of the stone. Then a layer of thick ink is spread over the surface (the process is called ‘inking’), which is repelled by the water and yet attracts the greasy mark. In the end, a piece of paper is applied onto the stone; through hand or mechanical pressing, the image is then impressed on the paper. The printing surface is perfectly level; the process does not involve raising or lowering the surface that receives the ink as in woodcut or engraving and etching.’ Bao Weihong, ‘A Panoramic Worldview: Probing the Visuality of *Dianshizhai huabao*’, *Journal of Modern Chinese Literature*, 32 (March 2005), p. 411.
- 93 Ibid., p. 102.
- 94 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1981), p. 53.
- 95 Henry Knollys, *Incidents in the China War of 1860, Compiled from the Private Journals of Sir Hope Grant* (Edinburgh and London, 1875), pp. 209–10; cited in Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, p. 3.
- 96 For descriptions and discussions of this famous event, see Ts'e-tung Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA, 1964); Jonathan Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution, 1895–1989* (Harmondsworth, 1982); Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York, 1983).
- 97 Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995), p. 4.
- 98 Newsphotos first appeared in 1920 in the ‘Pictorial Weekly’ [‘Tuhua zhoukan’] of *Shibao* [Times] and became increasingly popular in the following years. See Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo jindai baokanshi* [A history of newspapers and magazines in modern Chinese]

- (Shanxi, 1983); Liu Jialin, *Zhongguo xinwen tongshi* [A comprehensive history of Chinese journalism] (Wuhan, 1995).
- <sup>99</sup> Ma Yunzeng et al., *Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937* [A history of Chinese photography 1840–1937] (Beijing, 1987), p. 86.
- <sup>100</sup> *Jinghua ribao* [Jinghua daily], 29 March 1906. Cited in Ma Yunzeng et al., *Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937*, p. 87.
- <sup>101</sup> *Guoshi bao* [National affairs newspaper], 20 August 1907.
- <sup>102</sup> *Da geming xiezhen hua* [Photographs of the great revolution], (Shanghai, 1911–12), nos 1–14.
- <sup>103</sup> One of the Chinese photojournalists was Guo Zhicheng, whose photographs appeared ‘in major Chinese and international newspapers’. Cited in Ma Yunzeng, et al, *Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937*, p. 94.
- <sup>104</sup> This was *Cheng bao*, founded in 1916. According to *Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937* (p. 108), this magazine lasted until 1919.
- <sup>105</sup> Although most historians date the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War to 7 July 1937, when the Japanese army attacked the Chinese army at the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing, the war had actually started in 1931, when Japan invaded and occupied Manchuria.
- <sup>106</sup> See Mark Seltzer, ‘Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Space’, *October*, 80 (Spring 1997), pp. 3–26.
- <sup>107</sup> See Paul G. Pickowicz, ‘Victory as Defeat: Postwar Visualizations of China’s War of Resistance’, in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley, ca, 2000), p. 365.
- <sup>108</sup> For a detailed discussion about how art and media served the resistance movement, see Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley, CA, 1994). This book contains two chapters discussing wartime newspapers and cartoons, respectively, but unfortunately omits wartime photojournalism entirely.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 151–86.
- <sup>110</sup> Ma Yunzeng, et al., *Zhongguo sheying shi 1840–1937*, p. 136.
- <sup>111</sup> About the general themes of wartime newspapers, see Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, pp. 153–6.
- <sup>112</sup> *Shijie huabao* [Global pictorial], no. 308, 18 October 1931.
- <sup>113</sup> *Tuhua shibao* [Illustrated times], no. 791, 15 February 1932.
- <sup>114</sup> Wang Xiaoting was born in the United States, but he spent his entire career as a photojournalist in China and died in Taiwan.
- <sup>115</sup> This was the war between Jiang (Jieshi) and Feng (Yuxiang) in 1929, which resulted from mistrust between different factions within the Republican camp.
- <sup>116</sup> This information is provided by the Shanghai Huangpu Archives, ‘Shanghai Nanzhan Ri jun kongxi xia de ertong’ beihou de gushi’ [The story behind ‘The child during the Japanese air raid at the Shanghai South Railroad Station’], at <http://hpaj.shhp.gov.cn>, accessed 6 September 2011. The author of this essay has reconstructed the situation based on three images that Wang Xiaoting took during the air raid. The first image shows the baby alone on the platform and crying. The second picture includes the father, who has brought an older boy, possibly the baby’s brother, to the spot. It is possible that he left the boy there and took the baby to a safe place, since the third picture shows the boy alone on the platform looking at the camera. The sequence is consistent with Wang Xiaoting’s memoir.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid; Taiwan Journalist Association, ‘Wang Xiaoting: Guankan de liliang’ [Wang Xiaoting: the power of looking], at [www.atj.org.tw](http://www.atj.org.tw). Both sources refute the accusation that this photograph was a forgery, and attribute this accusation to some right-wing Japanese who intend to deny any charge of war crimes conducted by the Japanese army in China during the Second World War.
- <sup>118</sup> Mark Seltzer uses these words to characterize the operation of ‘trauma’ in constructing a ‘wound culture’; ‘Wound Culture’, p. 11.
- <sup>119</sup> This reminds one of Nietzsche’s discussion of pain: ‘Psychological pain does not by itself seem to me a definite fact, but on the contrary only an interpretation – causal interpretation – of a collection of phenomena that cannot be exactly formulated – it is really only a fat word standing in place of a skinny question mark.’ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On the Genealogy of Morals’. Cited and discussed in Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), p. 197 and Chapter 13, ‘Trauma’.
- <sup>120</sup> Merewether, ‘Traces of Loss’, pp. 29–31.
- <sup>121</sup> See Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), p. 102.
- <sup>122</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1968), pp. 174–5.
- <sup>123</sup> According to Zhang Zhen, there were ‘lots of scenes of bombing and destruction in films made in the early 30s and after the war’, including *Yuguang qu* (*Fisherman’s Song*), *Da Lu* (*Big Road*), *Yijiang*

- chunshui xiāngdōngliu (*Spring River Flows East*) and *Xiaocheng zhī chūn* (*Spring in a Small Town*); private correspondence.
- But this subject would need a separate study.
- 124 For a detailed discussion of wartime cartoons, see Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, pp. 93–150.
- 125 Cheng Zheng, *Cóng xuētu dǎo dàshí – huàjia Zhao Wangyun* [From apprentice to master – the painter Zhao Wangyun] (Xi'an, 1992), pp. 131–46.
- 126 Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, p. 136.
- 127 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 99.
- 128 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 124.
- 129 One section of the painting was finally rediscovered in 1953. About 10 m of the scroll is lost.
- 130 There are numerous writings on Gao Jianfu and his political-artistic activities. For a concise introduction, see Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York, 1998), pp. 65–74.
- 131 Li Gemin and Mai Hanyong, ‘Guangdong zhezhongpai huajia Chen Shuren he Gao Jianfu’ [Chen Shuren and Gao Jianfu, two Guangdong painters who integrate Chinese and Western styles], in *Guangdong wenshi ziliao* [Literary and historical data of Guangdong], no. 33 (1982); cited in Ma Yunzeng, et al., *Zhongguo shèyǐng shí 1840–1937*, p. 90.
- 132 Gao Jianfu travelled twice to Japan between 1903 and 1911. In Japan he studied Western painting, sculpture and Japanese-style painting, and started to combine Western painting techniques and Eastern aesthetics. See Chen Xiangpu, *Gao Jianfu de huibhua yishu* [Gao Jianfu: his life and his paintings] (Taipei, 1991), pp. 74–82.
- 133 Chun Kum-wen, ‘Art Chronicle’, *T'ien Hsia Monthly* (August 1939), p. 82.
- 134 This is the English title in Chun Kum-wen’s report, and hence very likely the painting’s English title in the exhibition. Its Chinese title is *Dōng zhānchang dé lièyán*, literally *Roaring Flames in the Eastern Battlefield*. Some books date this work to 1932. But based on the contemporary record, mainly Chun Kum-wen’s exhibition review, and Lu Fusheng’s dating of the work, there is little question that it was created in 1939. See *ibid.*, p. 83; Lu Fusheng, ed., *Lingnan huapai yanjiu* [Studies of the Liangnan School] (Shanghai, 2003), p. 12.
- 135 Numerous books and papers have been devoted to the garden’s history and architecture. Some basic historical information about the garden is gathered in Wang Daocheng, ed., *Yuanmingyuan: lishi, xianzhuang, lunzheng* [Yuanming Yuan: past, present, debates], 2 vols (Beijing, 1999). The most detailed scholarly sources on the garden in Western languages include Hope Danby, *The Garden of Perfect Brightness* (London, 1950); Geremie R. Barmé, ‘The Garden of Perfect Brightness, a Life in Ruins’, in *East Asian History*, no. 11 (June 1996), pp. 111–58; Che Bing Chiu, *Yuanming Yuan: Le jardin de la Clarté parfaite* (Besançon, 2000); and Young-Tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost: The Imperial Garden of Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu, 2001). Other important discussions about the garden’s destruction and reconstruction include Hevia, *English Lessons*; Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (London, 2004), and Haiyan Lee, ‘The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan; or, How to Enjoy a National Wound’, *Modern China*, xxxv/2 (March 2009), pp. 155–90.
- 136 For Foucault, a utopia is a special kind of ‘emplacement’ curiously connected to all other places. Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. J. D. Faubion (New York, 1998), p. 178. Haiyan Lee has applied this concept to the design of Yuanming Yuan in ‘The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan’, p. 159.
- 137 Written from exile in Guernsey, ‘to Captain Butler’, on 25 November 1861. Cited in Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, p. 59.
- 138 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 139 Wang Kaiyun, a Chinese scholar and poet, visited the ruins of Yuanming Yuan in 1871 and recorded what he saw there. But he did not go far enough to visit the destroyed European Palaces.
- 140 Algernon B. Freeman-Mitford, *The Attaché at Peking* (London, 1900), pp. 113–15; cited in Carroll B. Malone, ‘History of the Peking Summer Palaces under the Ch'ing Dynasty’, *Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, xix/1–2 (1934), p. 195.
- 141 Cited in Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens*, p. 85.
- 142 *Ibid.*, pp. 67–101.
- 143 Kang Youwei, ‘Shàng Qīngdì diiyishù’ [The first memorial to the Qing emperor], October, 1889. Cited in Kong Xiangji, *Kang Youwei bianfa zouzhang jikao* [A comprehensive study of Kang Youwei’s memorials to the throne during the reform period], (Beijing, 2009).
- 144 *Yuanming Yuan ziliao ji* [A collection of historical materials of Yuanming Yuan].
- 145 This exhibition, including Xiang Da's essay, is documented in *Zhongguo yingzhao xueshe huikan* [Journal of the Chinese Architecture Society], II/1 (April 1931).
- 146 Teng Gu, *Yuanming Yuan Oushi gongdian canji* [Remains of the European-style palaces in Yuanming Yuan] (Shanghai, 1933).

- <sup>147</sup> For the historical origin of this symbolic meaning of the *ding* vessel, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford, CA, 1995), pp. 4–11.
- ### 3 BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE Transience as a Contemporary Aesthetic of Ruins
- 1 Feng Yimei, 'Yi Situ Qiao' [Commemorating Situ Qiao], 1963. Published in *Situ Qiao huaji* [A collection of paintings by Situ Qiao] (Beijing, 1980). In other places, Feng Yimei stated that Situ Qiao created 'more than seventy paintings' on this journey. See *Wei wancheng de hua* [An unfinished painting] (Beijing, 1978), p. 172.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 174–8.
- 3 Lu Xun, 'Kan Situ Qiao de hua' [Reading Situ Qiao's paintings], in *Lu Xun Quan Ji* [Complete works by Lu Xun] (Beijing, 2005), pp. 73–4. The essay was first published in *Yusi*, 2 April 1928.
- 4 Guangdongsheng Meishuguan, *Situ Qiao de yishu shengya* [The artistic career of Situ Qiao] (Guangzhou, 2007).
- 5 Feng Yimei, *Wei wancheng de hua*, p. 144.
- 6 Ibid., p. 177.
- 7 Guo Moruo, 'Cong zainan zhong xiang juren yi yang jueqi' [Rising like a giant from disaster], *Qingming*, 4 (1946). Cited in Feng Yimei, *Wei wancheng de hua*, p. 176.
- 8 In addition to Huang Xinbo's *Seeds*, these works also include, among others, Han Jingbo's *Airport after a Japanese Bombing* and Feng Zikai's *Yuanyuan Studio*.
- 9 Chen Ji, 'Weibei guixun de jiqing – Huang Xinbo Xianggang shiqi (1946–1948) de youhua chuangzuo jiqi xianguan wenti' [Unrestrained emotion – Huang Xinbo's oil painting during his Hong Kong period (1946–1948) and related issues], *Guangzhou meishu yanjiu*, 37 (2006).
- 10 Mao Zedong, 'The Current Situation and Our Tasks', 25 December 1947. Translation by the Maoist Documentation Project. HTML, revised 2004 by Marxists.org.
- 11 Paul G. Pickowicz has demonstrated that the same period also saw the creation of 'a coherent body of fiction and film that treat[ed] the central social and economic problems of the combined wartime and civil war eras . . . and provided answers to urgent questions about the disintegration of society'. 'Introduction: Pa Chin's Cold Nights and China's Wartime and Postwar Culture of Disaffection', in Ba Jin, *Cold Nights*, trans. Nathan K. Mao and Liu Ts'un-yan (Hong Kong, 1978), p. xxii.
- 12 These films include *Blood on Wolf Mountain* (*Langshan diexue ji*, 1936) and *Song of Ancient China* (*Gu Zhongguo zhi ge*, 1935).
- 13 A representative study in this vein is Susan Daruvala's 'The Aesthetics and Moral Politics of Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town*', *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 1/3 (2007), pp. 171–87. Ai-Ling Wong has gathered nearly all available information about Fei Mu and *Spring in a Small Town* in her *Shiren daoyan – Fei Mu* [The poet-director – Fei Mu] (Hong Kong, 1998).
- 14 Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York and London, 2004), p. 102.
- 15 Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York, 2006), p. 88. The Chinese film critic Li Zhaotao has made a similar observation: 'Except for the town wall [and the Dai family house], the film does not show any other building inside the town. The symbolic overtone is obvious. We can say that the ruined house of the Dai family is a microcosm of the "small town", and in extension a microcosm of China at that time.' From 'Yihu Zhongguo, chaohu chuantong: shiping Xiaocheng zhi chun' [Fitting China, transcending tradition: a review of *Spring in a Small Town*], in *Shiren daoyan*, ed. Ai-Ling Wong, p. 292. To my knowledge, the most focused study of the film's representations of ruined architecture is Yinxing Liu's unpublished paper 'Springtime in Ruins: Remembrance and Reconstruction in Fei Mu's *Xiao Cheng Zhi Chun*', which she wrote for a graduate seminar on representation and the aesthetics of ruins that I taught at the University of Chicago in 2005. In the introduction to the paper (p. 3) Liu states: 'Surely a triangular love story is not uncommon in either Chinese or world cinema and literature. What makes *Springtime* stand out immediately in Chinese film history is the imagery of ruins.'
- 16 Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*, pp. 88–90.
- 17 Ibid., p. 90.
- 18 Zhang Zhen has discussed *Song of Midnight* in terms of ruination. See her *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago, 2006).
- 19 The film's original script was written by Li Tianji, then a 26-year-old playwright in Shanghai. Fei Mu helped him cut down the script significantly and rewrite the entire storyline. See Li Tianji, 'Sanci shou jiao, shuran yongjue' [He instructed me three times, then suddenly departed forever], in *Shiren daoyan*, ed. Ai-Ling Wong, pp. 189–93.

- <sup>20</sup> Yinxing Liu, 'Springtime in Ruins', p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> For a detailed account of Feng Zikai's family and early education, see Geremie Barmé, *An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai (1898–1975)* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), pp. 14–27.
- <sup>22</sup> Feng Zikai, 'Gao Yuanyuan Tang zai tian zhi ling', in *Feng Zikai wenji* [A collection of Feng Zikai's writings] (Hangzhou, 1990–92), vi, pp. 57–8. Trans. from Barmé, *An Artistic Exile*, p. 216.
- <sup>23</sup> Feng Zikai, 'Shangli huangxiang ji', May 1947, *Feng Zikai wenji*, vi, pp. 195–6.
- <sup>24</sup> Li Qingzhao, 'Shengsheng man' [Slow slow tone].
- <sup>25</sup> Michael S. Roth, 'Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed', in *Irresistible Decay*, ed. Michael S. Roth (Los Angeles, 1997), p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup> It may be argued that she is pointing at Zhichen on the road. Judging from the direction of her raised arm, however, it is more likely that she is pointing at the rising sun.
- <sup>27</sup> The most thorough study of Chinese art from the 1950s to the 1970s is Julia F. Andrews's *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994). For an English translation of Mao Zedong's talks, see Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* (Ann Arbor, 1980).
- <sup>28</sup> Violence was widespread during the Cultural Revolution, of course, and some journalists documented the destruction of traditional architecture and books. Most of these images, however, were not published during the Cultural Revolution. A few were featured in official newspapers, but were used to legitimate the revolutionary actions of the Red Guards to destroy the 'four olds' (i.e. old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas).
- <sup>29</sup> According to Huang Rui: *The Stars Times 1977–1984* (Beijing, 2007), a third painting related to Yuanming Yuan was also shown in this exhibition. In this painting, the ruined stone columns have been transformed into the fingers of a huge hand, which emerges from the ground and is about to reach the sun. But the signed date on this work indicates that it was created in 1980, not in 1979.
- <sup>30</sup> Chang Tsong-zung, ed., *Xingxing shinian* [The stars: 10 years] (Hong Kong, 1989), p. 70.
- <sup>31</sup> This exhibition was closed down by the authorities two days later, on 29 September. After negotiating with the leadership of the Beijing's Artists' Association, a semi-official organization, the 'Stars' artists resumed their exhibition in Huafang Zhai inside Beihai Park; the number of participating artists increased to 31, and 170 works were displayed in the show. The second *Stars* exhibition was held in the National Art Gallery from 24 August to 7 September 1980. As I have stated elsewhere, the changing locations of the exhibitions reflected the changing position of the Stars group. See Wu Hung, *Transience: Experimental Chinese Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 1999), pp. 17–18. For a comprehensive introduction to the *Stars* exhibitions and participating artists, see Hou Shaoxia, *Xingxing yishujia: Zhongguo dangdai yishu de xianfeng 1979–2000* [The Stars artists: pioneers of contemporary Chinese art, 1979–2000] (Taipei, 2007).
- <sup>32</sup> An exception is Hou Shaoxia's *Xingxing yishujia*, pp. 85–6.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 81. For a related discussion, see Wu Hung, *Transience*, pp. 31–4.
- <sup>34</sup> Cited in Hou Shaoxia's *Xingxing yishujia*, p. 80.
- <sup>35</sup> This new policy was introduced in the Third Plenary Session of the Tenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, held on 17 July 1977 in Beijing. Through this meeting, Deng Xiaoping re-emerged as the central figure of the Party and the government.
- <sup>36</sup> The English title of the journal was initially *Moment*, but was changed to *Today* with the second issue.
- <sup>37</sup> For an introduction to *Today*, see Pan Yuan and Pan Jie, 'The Non-Official Magazine *Today* and the Younger Generation's Ideas for a New Literature', in *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society, 1978–1981*, ed. Jeffrey C. Kinkley (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 193–219.
- <sup>38</sup> The second *Stars* exhibition took place in 1980 inside the National Art Gallery. For a brief introduction, see Wu Hung, *Transience*, pp. 17–18.
- <sup>39</sup> Huang Rui made two cover designs, the first for the inaugural issue and the second for the subsequent issues of *Today*. Many illustrations in the journal were provided by Qu Leilei and Ma Desheng.
- <sup>40</sup> Shi Mo [Bei Dao], 'Zai feixu shang', *Today*, 1 (1978), pp. 3–10.
- <sup>41</sup> The real name of Bei Dao or Shi Mo is Zhao Zhenkai. But Bei Dao is the name he is known by to the world.
- <sup>42</sup> *Today*, 1 (1978), pp. 61–7. It is significant that in the Chinese translation, the essay's title is rendered as 'On Ruin Literature' [Tan feixu wenxue]. For an English translation of the text, see Heinrich Böll, *Stories, Political Writings, and Autobiographical Works*, ed. Martin Black (New York, 2006), pp. 269–73.
- <sup>43</sup> Yang Siping, 'Bei Dao lun' [On Bei Dao], *Ershiyi shiji*

- [Twenty-first century], web version, no. 37, 30 April 2005; at [www.cuhk.edu.hk](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk), accessed 6 September 2011.
- 44 Shi Mo [Bei Dao] 'Zai feixu shang', *Today*, 1 (1978), p. 7.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 46 Yang Siping's phrase. See 'Bei Dao lun'.
- 47 A typical example is Jiang He's 'The Monument' (*Jinianbei*), *Today*, 3 (1979), pp. 1–3.
- 48 Manuscript provided by Huang Rui.
- 49 Yang Lian, 'Zhuixun geng chedi de kunjing – wode "Zhongguo wenhua" zhisi' [Pursuing a more radical dilemma – my thinking on 'Chinese culture'], at [www.blog.boxun.com](http://www.blog.boxun.com)
- 50 Yang Lian, trans. John Minford with Seán Golden, *Renditions, Special Issue: Chinese Literature Today*, nos 19 & 20 (Spring & Autumn 1983), pp. 250–51. It should be noted that the poem translated here is a revised version of the original poem written in 1977. For the original version, see *Poèmes et Art en Chine les 'Non-Officiels'*, *DOC(K)S* 114.f, No. 41 (1981/82), folio 104.
- 51 It should be noted that from the late 1980s quite a few freelance artists and writers moved into a village near the park, earning it the name Yuanming Yuan Huajia Cun (the Yuanming Yuan Artists' Village). They moved there, however, mainly because of the cheap housing and the friendship between artists, not for Yuanming Yuan's historical symbolism.
- 52 Although scholars often date this trend to the early 1980s, a painting by Huang Rui in the first *Stars* exhibition, which depicts the June Fourth Movement in Tiananmen Square, can be viewed as an early example of 'scar art'.
- 53 Interview with Yin Xiuzhen conducted by the author, 13 May 1998. Unpublished record.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 See Judith Zeitlin, 'Shared Dreams: The Story of the Three Wives' Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion*', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, LIV/1 (July 1994), pp. 127–79 (especially pp. 144–5).
- 56 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 20, pp. 8–9.
- 57 Interview with Yin Xiuzhen conducted by the author, 13 May 1998.
- 58 For more information about the East Village community, see Wu Hung, *Rong Rong's East Village* (New York, 2003).
- 59 Interview with Rong Rong conducted by the author, 11 May 1998. Unpublished manuscript.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago, 1994), p. 57.
- 62 Interview with Rong Rong conducted by the author, 11 May 1998.
- 63 Zhan Wang said in an interview conducted by the author on 11 May 1998: 'These forms of mine realized an idea I had acquired from childhood, that when the useless skin of a cicada falls from a tree trunk it registers the dramatic struggle during which a new life emerges from its old body . . . But the new body is nowhere to be seen. We have no idea what it has become – either dead or reborn, in heaven or in hell.' Unpublished record.
- 64 Zhang Lin and Lin Song, 'Shengcun kongjian' [Space of living], *Hanmo yixun* [Art News], 1 (1994), p. 9.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 Karen Smith, 'Contemporary Rocks', *World Sculpture News*, 30 (Winter 1997), p. 32.
- 67 Interview with Zhan Wang conducted by the author, 11 May 1998. Unpublished record.
- 68 A bilingual text provided to this author by Sui Jianguo. The translation is slightly modified to reflect the original meaning of the Chinese text.
- 69 For a discussion of this second project, see Wu Hung, *Transience*, pp. 73–8.
- 70 Zhan Wang, 'Property Development': The First Public Exhibition of the Three Men United Studio' (Beijing, 1995). Unpublished manuscript.
- 71 For more information about this project, see Wu Hung, *Transience*, p. 113. Also see Hou Hanru, 'Towards an Un-Official Art: De-ideologicalization of China's Contemporary Art in the 1990s', *Third Text*, 34 (Spring 1996), pp. 37–52 (p. 50).
- 72 For a more detailed introduction to Zhang Dali's personal experience in Italy, see Wu Hung, 'Zhang Dali's *Dialogue*: Conversation with a City', *Public Culture*, XII/3 (2000), pp. 749–68.
- 73 Cited in Leng Lin, *Shi wo* [It's Me] (Beijing, 2000), p. 168.
- 74 See Lin Zhu, *Jianzhushi Liang Sicheng* [Liang Sicheng the architect] (Tianjin, 1996), p. 110.
- 75 Cited in Mathieu Borysewicz, 'Zhang Dali's Conversation with Beijing', in *Zhang Dali: Demolition and Dialogue*, exh. cat., Courtyard Gallery, Beijing (Beijing, 1999), p. 13. This article was first published in *ART Asia Pacific*, 22 (1999), pp. 52–8.
- 76 Interview with Zhang Dali conducted by the author, 2 July 1999. Unpublished record.
- 77 *Ibid.*

## CODA

### State Legacy

- <sup>1</sup> I want to thank Nina Dubin for bringing my attention to her paper ‘Robert des Ruines’, *Cabinet* 20 (‘Ruins’) (Winter 2005/6), pp. 92–7; available at [www.cabinet-magazine.org](http://www.cabinet-magazine.org), accessed 6 September 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>4</sup> Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 12.
- <sup>5</sup> Such representations continued after the 1990s. Some excellent works have been produced, including Ou Ning’s 2006 documentary film *Meishi Street* (*Meishi jie*), which focuses on a controversy surrounding the demolition of Dashalan, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Beijing. At the same time, ‘demolition’ has also become a conventional and predictable theme in Chinese art, and lost its specificity and psychological power.
- <sup>6</sup> Zeng Li, *Yugong de shidai* [A China chronicle] (Beijing, 2006).
- <sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of new types of exhibition spaces in China, see Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 9–46.
- <sup>8</sup> Some famous examples of such spaces include the Hongfang Art District at the original site of the No. 10 Steel Factory in Shanghai, the Landing Art District in Chengdu, which utilizes the old factory shops near Chengdu Airport, and, of course, Beijing’s 798 Art District.
- <sup>9</sup> For a fuller documentation and discussion of the history of this art district, see Huang Rui, ed., *Beijing 798: Reflections on Art, Architecture and Society in China* (Beijing, 2004).
- <sup>10</sup> Luo Peilin, ‘Recollections on the History of 718’, in *ibid.*, p. 10 (English section).
- <sup>11</sup> It has been reported that between 2002 and 2006, 11,000 workers and more than 300 administrators were forced to ‘retire’ from the factories in Dashanzi, and 3,000 workers ‘left their posts’ (*xiagang*), a euphemism for being laid off. See *ibid.*, p. 39 (Chinese section).
- <sup>12</sup> The sculptor Sui Jianguo, the designer Lin Qing and the musician Liu Suola first set up their studios there. They were followed by Huang Rui, Chen Lingyang, Cang Xin and Bai Yiluo.
- <sup>13</sup> See Huang Rai, ed., *Beijing 798*.
- <sup>14</sup> It is reported that the makeover cost €5 million, a staggering price given the sound condition of the 1950s building and the low cost of labour in China.
- <sup>15</sup> Other examples in Beijing include Tuanhe Palace Ruins Park, Yuan Dynasty City Wall Ruins Park and Imperial City Ruins Park.
- <sup>16</sup> See anonymous, ‘Ming Chengqiang Yizhi Gongyuan, quanmin doyuan wanliu canque zhi mei’ (Ming Dynasty City Wall Ruins Park: The whole population is mobilized to save the ruined beauty), *Xin jing bao*, at [www.thebeijingnews.com](http://www.thebeijingnews.com), accessed 8 October 2011.
- <sup>17</sup> See ‘Ming chengqiang fujian, jizheng lao cheng zhuan’ (The Ming city wall is being reconstructed; old wall bricks are urgently needed), at [www.btxx.cn.net](http://www.btxx.cn.net), accessed 8 October 2011.
- <sup>18</sup> The park was established in 1983 and opened its doors to visitors in 1988. For an inspired discussion of the complex meaning of the Yuanming Yuan Ruins Park, see Haiyan Lee, ‘The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan; or, How to Enjoy a National Wound’, *Modern China*, xxxv/2 (March 2009), pp. 155–90.
- <sup>19</sup> As Haiyan Lee has observed, however, the dispute at times appeared moot because the restorationists’ enthusiasm was mostly reserved for the Chinese sections, whereas their opponents mainly objected to the restoration of the European Palaces. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- <sup>20</sup> According to Wang Daocheng, one of these anti-restorationists contended that ‘restoration would amount to eradicating the evidence of the destruction and covering up the crimes of the imperialists; tinkering [with the ruins] and altering their present state is tantamount to tampering with history.’ Wang Daocheng, ed., *Yuanmingyuan: lishi, xianzhuang, lunzheng* [Yuanmingyuan: past, present, debates] (Beijing, 1999), p. 673. Cited in Haiyan Lee, ‘The Ruins of Yuanmingyuan’, pp. 163–4.
- <sup>21</sup> The restored section is called the ‘Ten-Thousand Flower Maze’ (Wanhua zhen), a miniature garden-within-a-garden.
- <sup>22</sup> For the historical origin of this symbolic meaning for the *ding* vessel, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford, CA, 1995), pp. 4–11.
- <sup>23</sup> I have discussed the concept of ‘internal perspective’ in Wu Hung, *Monumentality*, pp. 18–19.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the many years of research, writing and rewriting that went into this book, I have received enormous support, help and encouragement from many institutions, colleagues, friends and students. A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1999 enabled me to spend a year in China, to travel to various historical sites and to discuss related issues with scholars and artists. During the following decade, I presented drafts of the chapters and sections in many lectures, symposia and workshops; the settings included the British Academy, Columbia University, Harvard University, McGill University, Princeton University, Taiwan National University, University of Southern California, Wesleyan University and Zhongshan University. On all these occasions I received invaluable comments and suggestions, many of which came from fields outside Chinese art. At my home institution, the University of Chicago, I have benefited from routine discussions with colleagues and students. It was in a symposium called 'Ruins in Chinese Visual Culture' in 1997 that I first presented some initial ideas on this project; the lively discussion following each presentation clinched my decision to pursue this book. A graduate seminar I taught in 2003 on the subject further provided me with a more extensive platform to examine various cases throughout Chinese history. Finally, a fellowship from my university's Franke Institute for the Humanities not only gave me precious time to write, but also provided me with a fertile intellectual environment to ponder some key concepts in the book in a multiregional and multidisciplinary context.

I owe my gratitude to many scholars, who have helped and inspired me at different stages of this project. Among them are Salvatore Settis, Stephen Owen, Inger Sigrun Brodey, Jonathan Hay, Geremie Barmé, Barbara Stafford, Froma Zeitlin, Jas Elsner, Nina Dubin, Robert Nelson, Robert Harrist Jr, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Eugene Wang, Lillian Lanying Tseng, Katherine Tsiang, Freda Murk, Gloria Pinney, Li Ling, Irene Winter, Shelley Rice and Thomas Cummins. I also want to thank many Chinese artists, who shared with me their works related to ruins and their personal experience in creating these works. Among them, I developed close working relationships with Huang Rui, Rong Rong, Song Dong, Sui Jianguo, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhan Wang and Zhang Dali. Their works are discussed extensively in this book.

As always, my deepest appreciation goes to my wife Judith Zeitlin, a scholar of Chinese literature, theatre and music. Many ideas in this book grew out of our discussion of Chinese art and culture, both past and present, often en route to historical sites and art exhibitions. My thinking about ruins echoes her writings on historical memory and the ghost. As with my other writings, she has been the first reader and critic of this work.

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