

The Paintings of Ren Zhiyu

任之玉作品集



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任之玉教授和她的画儿

陶洛诵

“美色已逝而价值犹存”，每当看到任之玉教授女士，我总不由自主地想起十七世纪法国思想家罗拉什福科这句名言。

任之玉女士原是中国最高美术学院——北京中央美术学院油画系教授，并当过新加坡南洋美术专科学校客座教授。现在旅居澳大利亚，已经是古稀之年。

我是通过一幅画认识任之玉教授的。

六年前，我去著名老作家刘真大姐家玩，看到满墙挂着名人字画，一幅精美的油画十分醒目，画的是几枝白芍药花，带着绿油油坚挺的叶子，躺在一个盘子中，千娇百媚，美不胜收。一看便知不是凡俗之笔。刘真大姐告诉我这是任之玉的代表作。我请刘大姐代为介绍，就这样认识了任教授。

认识任教授时，我住在金宝镇，后来搬回卡市，与任之玉教授家只有一桥之隔。随着对她的了解、熟悉，越发觉得她不是个平凡的女性。

她一个人住在两室一厅的单元楼里，楼很高，加上底下的车库，相当于第四层。任教授一九八九年来澳洲，一九九一年九月二十一日在悉尼 Eddy Ave 和 Georgest 交界处出过车祸。

当时她为了变身份，与一个澳大利亚出租车司机结婚，准备第二天登飞机回中国，等批永久居留，因为太匆忙，红灯过马路，不幸被汽车撞倒。左臂与双腿骨折，头部受伤，在医院里昏迷了好几个月。

刘真大姐就这件事曾写过篇文章，名叫《危情》在《华声日报》上发表。《移民导报》也刊登了她出事的消息。

她现在走路，基本要拄着手杖，两只小腿的肤色至今没有恢复正常，上这么高的楼行吗？每当我怀疑她的爬高能力时，她总是满怀信心地说：“行，我行，我爬得上去。”

任教授屋内的布置十分简单，到处都整齐地摆放着她完成与未完成的油画、国画和画布、画框、油彩颜料、笔、松节油、画箱、写生用的马扎。

问她为什么连电视都不看，她说本来是有电视和录像机的，被人偷走了，就没再置办。还说，楼下的防盗门正因为它的被窃才安。

第一次与任教授见面时，我送她一本我的拙作，没想到的是任教授也拿出一大摞写满蝇头小字的手稿给我，因为太长，我借回家看。

这并不是小说，而是记录她一生的许多原始资料，从日记、随笔到结婚证、离婚证，应有尽有，翔实的资料烘托出一位女画家丰富多彩，曲折波澜的一生，我用一个晚上一口气就读完了。

我劝她出书。我为她打电话，我找了许多人，人家反过来认为我最合适。我女儿当时只有五六岁，几乎占去我全部精力，我自知无力承担这个重任。后来刘真大姐的先生刘枫晓接下了这个活儿，用了半年的时间，帮她整理，并帮助她在北京出版。这本书就是著名的《暮年闯世界》。题目是中国国宝级艺术大师吴作人夫人肖淑芳女士亲笔所题。

我写这篇文章时，这本书正在翻译成英文。

这部十八万字小说的形式是颇耐人寻味的。说它是传统意义上的小说并不假，它讲述了一个著名女画家的背景与成长过程；说它是游记也未尝不可，她详述自己旅行过的西欧二十几个国家，亚洲的新加坡、日本，北美洲的美国及她最后的归属地——澳大利亚；说她是一本美术教科书也不为过，书中搜集了一些名家对任之玉绘画的评论，也有任教授对大师们绘画的独到理解与讨论，让对美术有兴趣的人士或专业人士受益匪浅。

但任教授毕竟不是小说家，她的一生与精神与其这么一本在形式上无法十分确定的书来诠释，不如用她的一生的绘画来诠释更为美妙。我在这里所要做的就是通过某一张画来看她的某一个历史时期的动向。

我见过任之玉两百幅画儿左右。我把这些画分为两大类，以一九八七年为界，这年以前都是在中国画的，这年以后基本上都是在中国以外的国家画的。

有四十六张油画是在中国画的，是我亲眼所见。我相信她画的远不只这些，有些是无法带来的，例如她画的壁画《天池之冬》，画的“是新疆天池的冬天，很多雪，中间是天池，后面是冰雪覆盖的山，前面是冰雪覆盖的雪松。已经都装到白天鹅宾馆的墙上了，效果很好。”^①

一九七六年，唐山市大地震，任之玉女士去了唐山，“我们的画画，画地震后的唐山，有些具体的事例，都是用纸画的，画完了搞小型展览。”^②但不知这些关于大地震劫后余生的珍贵资料哪儿去了。

一九八六年，任之玉去中国民航体验生活，她画了一幅巨大的波音747客机起飞时的壮观景象，挂在飞行总队大楼进口处，旨在提醒飞机上的全体工作人员注意安全。这画儿当然带不来。

有些画是在澳洲丢人的，她在车祸住院时，让洋丈夫偷偷给卖了。

……

现存的四十六张里有十二张画的是中国画的是中国首都北京。

北京是世界上有名的古城，城里城外有许多文化古迹和风景区。任之玉是土生土长的北京人，对北京的风土人情相当熟悉。在她的笔下，有雄浑伟大的万里长城，有雪中的紫禁城，有香山红叶，有白塔寺，有鼓楼西斜街，还画了一间西四中国人民银行分理处。真让人倍感亲切。

一九三二年，任之玉诞生在北京一个书香门第的家中，爷爷是清朝拔贡，父亲是中学教员，外祖父是悬壶济世的中医，任之玉是老二，上面有个姐姐，下面有个妹妹和一个同父异母的弟弟。是家底很厚的殷实人家。

任之玉的童年是在北京西城区北沿二十六号度过的。任之玉非常留恋这座典型的北京四合院，她写到：“……爸爸是教生物的，在大学读的是生物系，所以他喜欢种树、种花、养蜜蜂。……在我们院子里，除了原有的两颗树，他又种了一些树，比如窗前种了杏树，影壁后面种的是海棠树，还有柳树、丁香、珍珠梅、榆叶梅、枣树等。枣树是隔壁邻居家枣树根长到我们院子里来的，他们院里长了好多枣树，枣很好吃，很脆。

我对家里的院子印象很深，它很好看，虽然不是特别大，但对于我们是很意思的，春天有很多花，丁香、杏花，还有藤萝，夏天有茉莉花、喇叭花，还有草和萤火虫。影壁前的大荷花缸里长满了荷花，一进门就能看到，所以院里很幽静，也很好玩。小孩们也可以玩一些萤火虫、蝌蚪等小虫子。……”^③

这是一幅多么安详、恬静、美丽的图画！我之所以不厌其烦地整段摘录这段话，是因为这个百草园奠定了任之玉今后一生的绘画方向与风格。这个百草园是她艺术的根。

她爱画北京的胡同，北京的人。海外有同胞来自越南，不明白何谓“胡同”。胡同一般在大路两边，胡同里有时还套着胡同，胡同有大有小，有的书专门论述北京的胡同，并对胡同的名称给与繁琐的考证。

任之玉在自传里谈到一九六六年至一九七六年这十年里，因为是所谓“文化大革命”，她基本没画画。所以任之玉笔下的北京胡同是“文革”前的，没有被红卫兵破坏的北京。

她画的《北京街道一角》，有一座完整无损的大石狮子，狮子旁边是两个小摊贩，卖货的妇女穿着白罩裙，戴着白帽子，表情祥和，一个小童正骑三轮小脚踏车。

她画的《北京四合院中吃饭的人家》，一家三口，丈夫，妻子和儿子坐在小板凳上，围着小炕桌，吃着香喷喷的饭菜，院里的黄瓜搭架成凉棚，为他们遮阴蔽阳。

这就是普通的北京人家的普通生活，充满温馨，充满情趣。

这可爱的生活在“文革”中惨遭破坏。

关于“文化大革命”，我在任之玉女士的手稿中看到较多的描写，给我印象深刻的是，一九七一年，中央美院与附中全体师生下放到河北省农村劳动，每天走四十里路，有一个有肺病的学生走到目的地立刻死掉了。干完一天活儿，晚上开批斗会，夜里要写交代材料，叫做“熬鹰”。

但这些对任之玉思想发生变化都是至关重要的。“文革”是中国许多知识分子思想的转折点，对任之玉也是一

样。

任之玉曾是位热血女青年，解放初期，她主动报名参加华北革命大学学习，后来投笔从戎，随大军南下，经南京、武汉、湖南，直至四川、西藏。

五年的军旅生涯不仅锻炼了她的体魄，更造就了她顽强的意志，这就是为什么后来她在“文革”不幸，婚姻不幸，车祸不幸中依然能顽强地走出来，继续从事绘画事业的身体与精神基础。

五年后，她重回北京，“北平艺专”已改名为中央美术学院，校长是驰名中外的艺术大师徐悲鸿，而她的指导老师则是名气直追徐悲鸿的吴作人。

任之玉始终保留着她两张初期作品，即是在吴作人先生亲自指导下画的模特儿临摹“女人体”。两张都是侧卧的姿势，一张脸朝前，一张是背部。这两张画虽然不如以后的作品笔法娴熟，但因是名师耳提面命的作品，任之玉始终视其为珍宝。

美院毕业后，任之玉留校教书。中央美院条件之好可谓世界艺术院校之冠。“文革”前，任之玉几乎走遍全中国，她许多重要的作品都是在“文革”前画的。

从目前留下来的作品，有六张是关于西藏、七张关于新疆、四张关于江南水乡、一张山西、一张河北、一张福建、一张敦煌，这些弥足珍贵艺术价值历史价值很难估量。

对任之玉绘画影响最大的吴作人先生，于一九四三年至一九四五年远赴青海，西藏，画了大量边疆风物人物的速写，水彩和油画，著名的《负水女》就是反映藏民生活的。据我考证，这是最早的关于西藏的油画。

任之玉当兵入过西藏，对西藏有感性认识。六张关于西藏的画里，两张画的是喇嘛庙（其中一张以庙宇为主；一张以朝拜者为主，朝拜者里又以女信徒居多）。

一张《青年喇嘛》油画，画中是一个十六七岁的穿着橘红背心、深玫瑰红喇嘛袍的青年，微微侧靠着宫墙。我们看到的是他的背影和侧面的面庞，令人难以捉摸的是他的表情，猛一看，像是愉快宁静，再细看好像有些是迷惘。远处是山是水是云是雾，小喇嘛在想什么呢？我们不知道。

另三张是关于藏民日常生活的：

一张是年轻的女牧民和马。任之玉很少画动物，这匹马是我看到的唯一一张最大的动物像，白色的马驮着棕色的马鞍，被女牧民牵着，很温顺。

一张是个“小牧民”，画中是个穿白色羊皮藏袍，梳着一根不长小辫子的小男孩。小男孩微微地皱着眉头也难掩饰满脸的稚气与纯真。旁边有白色绵羊。

另一张生活气息最浓，母女二人，坐在草地上，母亲赤裸着上身坐在那儿给蹲在她面前的女儿梳头，旁边放着内地出产的洗脸盆，不太远处是四五只吃草的山羊，无论在世界上什么地方，母亲都是女儿最贴心的人。

三

新疆这块有着特殊地域风格的地方很早就受到内地艺术家的垂青。

任之玉是一九三二年正月初五（她以这个日子为生日，感到非常自豪）出生的。

一九六一年，她二十九岁，她与油画研修班一起去了新疆。

之后，在一九六四年，任之玉第二次入疆，去了库尔勒、喀什、塔什。《塔吉克新娘》这幅画就在这时候画的。一个美丽非凡的塔吉克姑娘身穿红色的新娘装，蹲在花丛里采花。这幅画色彩鲜艳，人物轮廓分明，气氛欢快。

两次入疆留下的作品还有《新疆男孩》、《新疆女孩》、《清真寺》、《天山赛马场》、《帐篷，汽车和做饭的女人》、《巩乃斯之夏》。

《巩乃斯之夏》是一幅甚得名家好评得画儿。这幅画与画北京近郊《香山红叶》一样，是风景画，画的都是山。我去过香山，我一眼就认出秋天的香山，层林尽染。我去过新疆，但没到过天山，只看过一张天山天池的照片。但《巩乃斯之夏》却让我一眼看出是画的新疆天山，我就有点不明白为什么，画的名字并没有写在画上，可是高原气象一看便知。

我想这应归功于任之玉对植物学精髓的掌握。前面提到她父亲是生物教师与她家的“百草园”，任之玉擅长人物肖像与花卉。《巩乃斯之夏》前面画的是一片齐小腿般高的花，这种花在内地并不多见，后面是深绿色的塔松树

林，远处是坡度缓和的山。花丛中有两个弯腰采花的女孩，服装一般，并无民族特色。天空湛蓝，开阔。

这种表现地域特点的功力在任之玉的画上有着非凡的体现。这种功力在我眼中有着几分神秘。也许是她周游了全中国的缘故吧。

目前留有的纯粹以花为描绘对象的油画有十三张，有在国内画的《鸡冠花》两张、《白芍药》、《菊花》，其余都是在国外（澳大利亚）画的，有《马蹄莲》、《小红花树》、《玉兰花》等。其中《鸡冠花》是每一个见过该画的人公认为人间极品。

任之玉对这幅《鸡冠花》极为珍视，标价最高。通过与任教授多年的接触，听她的谈吐，看她的书，欣赏她的画儿，我以为，她是一个古典写实派的唯美主义画家。使她能感受到美的事物才能入她的画儿，她在画中，可以摒弃一切她不喜欢的丑恶。尽管她生活在一个政治气氛极浓的社会主义国家里，历经了种种运动，包括“文化大革命”，都在她的筛选下，在她的绘画艺术里，没有丝毫的痕迹，也许是她有目的有意识地为我们创造了一个美好的世界，让我们徜徉在艺术的海洋里，却忘却人间的烦恼。

她有素描基础，基本功扎实，受的是徐悲鸿、吴作人这些人师们的身教言教，艺术素养高超。俄国写实派对她初期的绘画有很大的教益，后来她接收了法国印象派对光的运用，又发现印象派过于强调光和颜色，让人们过于沉湎于视觉享受，而忽视了内容的不坚实。她在不断地吸收与探索中找到自己独特的路。她的任之玉风格在《鸡冠花》里得到了最充分的表现。

十几株鸡冠花高低错落，疏密有致，相交掩映，繁茂荣盛，色彩鲜艳，赏心悦目。只有在一个国家，一个民族走上坡路的时期，画家才能有如此这般的笔力与心境。

任之玉对我说：“我是第一个画鸡冠花的，在这以前没有人画的。”

纯粹以西方油画技法画的任之玉的精品《鸡冠花》，注意到光与影的作用，因而使每朵花、每根茎，每一片叶子都有立体感，都有昂扬的生命。

在植物园里画的《玉簪花》与《鸡冠花》艺术水平伯仲之间，《玉簪花》的远影更为深远、幽邃，而主画面更为向前推进。

四

任之玉女士在中国有相当的社会地位，她是有名的中央美术学院副教授，是新中国培养的第一代女油画家。一九八五年，三四月间在中国南部贵州省贵阳市，遵义市办过个人画展，于五月间在北京举办个人画展。遵义办的“任之玉画展”横幅题字是她的老师，全国美术家协会主席吴作人先生亲题。五月间在中央美术学院展览楼举办的个人画展，更为风光、体面，造访者中文化名流、社会贤达不计其数，连朱德委员长的夫人，全国妇联主席康克清，国防部长张爱萍，法国大使馆文化参赞也来参观。

那么任之玉为什么还要出国，最后选择澳大利亚为归属国，九死而无一悔呢？

我认为原因有两个，一是追求艺术的自由，而是因为她在国内两次失败的婚姻。

她总是对我说：“我生命的真正开始，是在我五十五岁离休以后。”也就是她暮年闯世界的开始。

我理解她的话的意思是，以前是在别人的眼色下进行一切，以后则是在自由意志支配下进行一切。

但她对第二次婚姻却耿耿于怀，无论是要我为她写传写研究写剧本都让我别忘了提她这段“上炕老妈子”的经历。

她第一次婚姻是一九五三年，当时她二十一岁，在部队里服役，对方也是军人，是西南军区政治部青年部的一名科长，名叫葛服。他们当时在重庆，米年十月，他们有了个男孩，取名葛晓林。

在经过刘枫晓先生删繁就简的原稿中，任之玉提到与葛服离婚的原因是因葛服的“男女关系问题”。

我以为，错也不能全在葛服，因为任之玉于一九五四年从部队转业，考上重庆美术学院，她没去。她回到北京，到中央美术学院调上班学习两年，又转入油画系四年级，等到毕业后留校工作，以后一直都在北京定居。

在白传里，她提到一九五七年，她为搞毕业创作去云南，后因反右运动开始，有人通知她回北京，回京路过重庆，她与丈夫孩子在家中同住了一个月。

也就是说她与葛服离合多聚少，葛服出问题也是事出有因。但这导致了她与葛服于一九五八年离婚。孩子归葛

服抚养。

关于第二个丈夫肖前，她在自传原稿里提到很多，对于“上炕老妈子”这段耿耿于怀的生活描写甚多。在成书时，这些全部被刘老先生删去。

肖先生是某大学的哲学系教授，妻子病逝，留下几个孩子与老母，娶任之玉为续弦。时间是一九六二年十月。

任之玉为什么选择肖先生，在原稿中，她说肖“是个手段很厉害的男人”，也就是很会殷勤很会俘获女人的心。

在原稿中，任之玉女士还提到了几个追求过她的男士，对她关怀得无微不至，嘘寒问暖，诚实可靠，但她因考虑人家个子比她矮等形式上的问题予以放弃。这些文字我也只是看了一遍，但字里行间流露的都是真情，令人过目难忘。

回过头来再说这肖先生。肖先生比任之玉大八岁，当时三十八岁，任之玉三十岁。任之玉在原稿中提到肖先生身体不太好，需要吃补药顶着，每晚任之玉要为他按摩等等，还要照顾她高堂老母与前妻留下的几个孩子，每月的工资也都搭进去等等。任之玉认为这段生活甚为不值，所以她把一九六二年至一九八五年的这第二次婚姻生活称为“上炕老妈子”。

这段错爱一开始就不被看好。在原稿中有这样一句，再婚“失去了美院一大批人的同情”。在《暮年闯世界》中，任之玉提到两次与肖前离婚。她在《四十年大事记》里写道：“在舆论的压力下，一九七二年我去江西跟正在下放劳动中的丈夫办离婚，当时那里都管的很严，也没有见到他本人。”

在《主要经历》里写道：“一九六二年十月，与肖前结婚（一九七二年底离婚，一九七五年复婚）。

“一九八五年十一月二十五日，与肖前离婚。”

那个时代那个时期更为动乱，想保住一个美好的婚姻实非易事，任之玉的婚姻不幸只是其中之一。

这次的离婚非任之玉所愿，她已经五十二岁了，她在原手稿中写道：一个妇女听说被判离婚时当庭自杀。女多于男，再成家相当不容易。

在自传中，对离婚后的孤苦无助，多种疾病缠身也有所记录。

这个时候最反映出任之玉坚强不服输的个性。她总念念不忘一位救命恩人——李为民医师，这是她姐姐工作单位二轻局医务所的一位医师，医术高明，为她做这三个月的按摩治疗，治好了她一切疾病，并为她以后承受种种打击（包括车祸）奠定了身体基础。

单身固然孤苦，可也有自由身，有了时间，她在这期间，自学英文、法文，画中国画与油画，练书法和篆刻。并且准备出国。

从七十年代末期，出国热在中国民间兴起，去欧洲艺术胜地考察一直是任之玉向往之事。一九八五年，法国大使馆隆重邀请任之玉去法国举办个人油画展，作为庆祝中法建交二十周年文化交流的重要项目。但由于某种原因未能成行。

一九八七年五月，任之玉如愿以偿，通过写信给何家良先生，成功地受到新加坡文化学术协会邀请，去新加坡举办个人画展。这是任之玉迈出国门的第一步。

五

在新加坡画展上展出的画除了上述内容外，还有一批她在北京画的外国留学生肖像画。给外国留学生画肖像是任之玉的一个发明。

中国社会一直比较封闭，在中国的外国人不是很多，一九七二年中美建交后，到中国来的外国人开始多起来。因为中国属于第三世界，所以亚、非、拉国家来的人居多，在中国的外国留学生有许多黑人青年。不知道哪位中国画家能像任之玉这样画了这么多黑肤色人的肖像画，而且画的如此之美。

现存有七张留学生的画像，题目分别为《黑人留学生》、《黑人女留学生》（两张）、《尼泊尔姑娘桑吉塔》、《肯尼亚留学生》、《多哥留学生像》、《尼日利亚留学生在写作业》。

她原来有一张画着穿白色纱裙的黑人女留学生像，画上的黑女子美若天仙，可惜只留下了张照片，原作不知去向。

《黑人留学生》和《肯尼亚留学生》画的是两个男青年，其余都是女青年。

这两个男青年的肖像解答了我心中长久以来的一个谜。在中国，我有一个英国女友 Celia，她是英国来北京大学学中文的留学生。她把自己的名字英译中为寇莉亚，让中国人叫起来亲切。寇莉亚的爸爸是位律师，妈妈和姑姑来中国时我也见了。这位极为高贵的 England lady 在中国竟爱上了一个多哥留学生，要死要活。我当时以过来人的眼光审视这事，觉得那多哥小伙子没有多少诚意，劝过寇莉亚几句。寇莉亚对黑肤色多哥青年痴情不减，一直追到他的出生的多哥。事情最后终归如我预料。但任之玉的画让我明白了寇莉亚如痴如醉的原因：黑青年真是外貌结实有力，性格质朴豪迈热情。据说这份魅力对白人女青年尤其有吸引力。

这几张出神入化的肖像画使得新加坡人认准了任之玉画肖像的功力，每日来找她画像的人络绎不绝。她每天画两个，上午一个，下午一个，每画一位，收费五百元新加坡币。两个月下来，任教授挣了一万多美金，奠定了她周游西欧各国的经济基础，实现了她的梦。

任之玉在中国干了一辈子，出国时两手空空，在新加坡只做了两个月，口袋就鼓起来了，这也是“出国热”的原因之一吧。

任之玉对新加坡极具好感。我视新加坡为她事业的顶峰，因为就在她周游西欧列国之时，收到了新加坡南洋美术专科学校的聘书，聘请她为客座教授一年。

一九八八年，是任之玉非常幸福的一年。

《西克老人》，《马来女》，《伴娘》就是教学后留下的纪念。

《西克老人》画的是一位缠着深蓝色头巾，留着浓密白胡子的六七十岁的印度老人。他端坐在椅子上，左手抚膝，右手握着一把伞，伞是黑色的，伞把是透明棕色塑料的，右臂搭放在小圆桌上。老人的肤色是棕红色，胡子，裤子，衣服，桌布，背景全部都是白色。老人有个高而挺直的鼻子，眼镜很大，炯炯有神，直视前方。这副画用去十二至十六小时。

拿这张画与油画大师里贝拉的《圣·赫罗尼莫》相比，也不会觉得逊色。

西克老人面部横向的肌肉与额头的皱纹显示着他已走过的漫长岁月，宽阔的额头与坚定不移的目光又显示出经历的不平凡与智慧。这幅画里体现了任之玉的基本精神，如何度过人生，尤其是如何度晚年。《西克老人》这幅画是任之玉《暮年尚世界》精神的形象体现。

西克老人的原型是任之玉在教会里发现的，她觉得这位老人五官端正，遂请到学院当模特儿。

任之玉画肖像速度很快，一个多小时到两个小时就能完成一幅栩栩如生的肖像，用她的话来说：“不快也不行，衣服的褶子必须一次完成，换个姿势就全变了。”

任之玉是写实派大师的得意高徒，因而她有着解剖学的基础，她画出的肖像头、颈、手、臂、腰、腿比例十分正确，色彩鲜艳柔和，光的控制运用准确到位，人物的精神面貌高贵、平和。

她到澳大利亚后，画过墨尔本女市长、霍克总理、黛安娜王妃、玛丽莲·梦露的肖像，都惟妙惟肖，酷似真人。

新加坡的经历在任之玉的记忆里如此美好，使她写下数篇文章缅怀新加坡的人和事。如《热带亲人——新加坡》、《新加坡印象》、《在新加坡教学》。

任之玉写道：“在新加坡遇到的无论是朋友还是学生，都非常热情亲切，关怀备至，使人感到真比在家里还要温暖。在新加坡握从来没碰到过坏人，也没听说过什么新加坡任欺骗人，坑害人的事例……政府廉洁没有贪污，领导以身作则，处处做表率，新加坡人之好心，好客和富有人情味，是大陆和香港很多去过新加坡的华人的共同体会，他们是华人中最好的，华人的表率。我深深地怀念他们。”⁶

六

任之玉女士不仅是个画家、作家，同时也是个旅行家。她的足迹走遍全中国（台湾省除外）。从一九八七年七月开始，用了半年的时间对西欧十八个国家进行艺术旅行，瞻仰西方大师的真迹。她画了一百多幅速写、写生、油画描绘各国的风土、人情、风景、建筑。这些画也包括她后来去美国、澳大利亚与日本的作品。

作品之丰盛，艺术水准之高，并不多见。

这些画带着我们也身历其境她去过的地方。

任之玉以法国为基地，在法国住了半年，出入法国边境八次周游列国。她十分喜爱美丽的法兰西，称巴黎为“世界的公园”。

在巴黎的卢浮宫里，她观赏了达·芬奇的《蒙娜丽莎》和艺术女神维纳斯的塑像。在 Oresy 博物馆她看到了近代米勒、库尔贝及打量印象派画家的作品。在蓬皮杜中心，她看到了印象派鼻祖莫奈，立体派创始人毕加索，雕塑家罗丹的作品……

登上巴黎的铁塔、凯旋门、圣母院钟楼，她感到世界在她脚下。漫步在香榭里舍大道上，枫丹白露的森林里，赛那河畔……，一切烦恼全部烟消云散。

巴黎的艺术与美景驱走了她心中的阴霾，净化了她的心灵，她拿起画笔，绘出一幅激动人心的图画。

我们看到了巴黎火车站，看到了巴黎的地铁歌唱家，看到了巴黎街上一间间生意繁忙的咖啡馆，看到了两位身穿皮裘的中年妇女在华灯初上的巴黎街上谈话，我们看到了美丽无比的枫丹白露之夜，高高悬挂在深蓝色高空中的月亮，月光洒在杉树林上，在地上投下树影；亮着灯的别墅里令人有许多遐想，房前弯弯曲曲的小路一直伸向画面前方。

在这批关于法国的画里，任之玉还表现了高超的绘画建筑物的能力和技巧。《傍晚的巴黎圣母院》，高高尖尖的钟楼在暮色苍茫中，使你好像听到了驼背的卡西莫多敲响的钟声。她画的《巴黎小王宫雕塑上坐个姑娘》，画面主调是蓝色，姑娘身着海蓝色连衣裙，背后的王宫柱子与雕塑以浅蓝色相呼应，姑娘亚麻色的头发在随风飘动，脚上穿着黑色平底鞋，整个儿画面和谐动人。

任之玉画的《法兰克福中心广场》、《法国卢昂建筑》、《法国卢昂采场斜顶》，令人感到法国一切艺术，蓬莱市场的顶建都像埃及金字塔。

在周游瑞士这个如诗如画的国家时，任之玉用速写的方法画下了童话里才会有的瑞士房舍。在游荷兰时，她到阿姆斯特丹参观了伦勃朗和凡·高馆，并画了一幅《荷兰阿姆斯特丹运河上》。

从画面上看，荷兰的建筑有些类似法国。法国与荷兰中间隔着比利时，并不交界，然而十九世纪人类最杰出的艺术家之一荷兰人温特森·凡·高却与法国有着千丝万缕的联系。

任之玉认为法国是艺术家的摇篮，学习绘画的人有条件都应该去法国，其艺术珍藏丰富，风景优美，建筑别具一格，连太阳都与别的地方不一样，是孕育画家的特殊环境。她写到：“凡·高法国风景那特别的笔触，不仅由于他的神经质，而且法国南方的树就是那样拧着长的。”^⑤

画过船上的一个大胡子水手和两艘夜色中在海面上航行的轮船，寥寥的几笔速写，也画尽了水手的豪迈善良，画尽了海上夜色的美丽平静。

但在北欧挪威，任之玉很有创作欲望。他喜欢挪威的自然风光和漂亮的白人女郎。相形之下，她认为丹麦较荒凉单调，气候太冷，人的头发颜色很浅，黄、白。

她画了一张在挪威首都奥斯陆王宫前她与站岗士兵合影的油画。王宫的墙是白色的，士兵的小岗楼是白色的，任之玉身上穿的大衣是白色的。像木偶一样直立不动的士兵军呢制服是黑色的，头盔与耷拉在前面的头盔羽毛是黑色的，头盔上有一小块红色标记，色彩运用十分完美。

在同是北欧的芬兰，任之玉为我们留下了一张《赫尔辛基鱼市场》油画。这是芬兰湾边上的一个卖鱼的集市，鱼摊一字排开摆在岸边，卖鱼人的背后就是他们的捕鱼船，要买鱼的人要从台阶上走下来。远景是整整齐齐的大厦高楼。这张画生活气息很浓，让我们看到了芬兰普通人生活的一页。

从瑞典的斯德哥尔摩乘船去芬兰的赫尔辛基，十月五日下午五时上船，十月六日清晨，船只航行在波罗的海的海面上，一轮红日冉冉升起，被任之玉从轮船窗口看到。她为我们留下了这迷人的美景，她把这幅画命名为《波罗的海日出》。这幅画让观赏者好像也在乘船一样，从窗口眺望，海平线那边是一轮刚刚初升的太阳，它映红了海与天空结处的云彩，它的影子投向海上，海水泛起银光……

热爱旅行的任之玉很爱海，她有幅画叫做《地中海老式船》。一只船身有些残破的十九世纪流行式样的船屹立在风平浪静的地中海岸边，好像在夸耀它昔日的荣耀，又好像在坚持不肯退出历史的舞台。远处有灯塔，水天地相连，让人在时空中遨游，令人遐思。

任之玉笔下的海都是驯顺的、祥和、安静。只有那张名为《从意大利过地中海到希腊在轮船上》的画好像有些暗示，大海将要起风浪。你看，天空的云被风吹的有些凌乱，甲板上的人裹着毛毯，一些人不安地看着海面，一切预示着暴风的即将来临的样子。

在西班牙首都马德里的方形广场上，有西班牙人引以为骄傲的世人皆知的作家塞万提斯的雕塑，他的名著《唐吉珂德》里面两个不朽的人物拿着长矛盾牌的唐吉珂德先生与他的忠仆也在那里陪伴着他，瘦高的唐吉珂德先生骑着那匹瘦马，矮胖的桑柯骑着毛驴。从任之玉这幅《西班牙马德里方形广场》油画里，我们看到作家在西班牙人心中的地位，在这个国家里这样的作家是何等荣耀。

任之玉的油画里有三张是关于教堂的，一张是《西班牙巴塞罗那大教堂》，一张是《西柏林被战争破坏了的教堂》，一张是《罗马》。

巴塞罗那大教堂的造型在世界上是独一无二的。是塔群组成的。从画面上来，有七座塔形建筑物，一个塔顶相对矮一点，其他六个高高插入云层。灰中带绿的颜色显示着教堂的庄严、肃穆、不可知。与其说是教堂，不如说是更像孩子们童话中坐落在高山上的神秘堡垒。这种建筑物存在在幻想世界里，却却是现实中实实在在的存在。据任之玉在她书中讲，整个儿教堂是用大块灰色砖石砌的，从中间以上全是用浮雕和雕塑来表现的宗教故事。我们不禁感叹西班牙人的巧夺天工。

画面上，两颗树的绿纸分别从左右两边伸出，左边少些，右边浓密些，繁茂些，掩映着大教堂，平添了优雅、高贵的氛围。

以后，我在任何地方看到这教堂的图画，便立即知道这是西班牙的第二大城市巴塞罗那。

《西柏林被战争破坏了的教堂》这幅画前面有许多行人，教堂在一方形建筑物的后面，教堂的尖好像被削去一截，秃秃的。任之玉是一九八七年十月初去的，当时德国尚未统一。西德人没有修复这在二战被盟军炸毁的尖顶，为的是什么？发人深省。

这幅提名为《罗马》的油画实际上画的是世界上最著名的教堂——梵蒂冈教堂，它可以把巴黎圣母院整个儿装进去。

我初中学地理时，老师说梵蒂冈是世界上最小的一个国家，在意大利首都罗马境内。但梵蒂冈又是个势力很大的国家，它是全世界天主教徒的众望所归。是教皇所在地。

从外形上看，梵蒂冈大教堂气魄恢弘，圆顶，大立柱，大广场，广场相对而开，两排大立柱，柱顶有蓝宝石般的灯。柱子也是圆形的，好像与圆顶相呼应，全部是白色，在蓝天的映照下，又好像轻轻地发出些淡蓝色。广场上停泊着五颜六色的汽车，两边还有朝圣的行人。

巴塞罗那大教堂与梵蒂冈大教堂是建筑中的杰作，任之玉绘出了它们，是油画中的杰作。

任之玉在对建筑的描绘上能力是相当出色的，其表现力丝毫不亚于人们津津乐道的她的肖像画、景物画、花卉画。这种能力在未出国前，从她画的故宫已可见一斑。出国后，她考察了西欧各国最著名的博物馆、博物院、展览厅、美术馆，参观欣赏了世界上顶尖级的雕塑与绘画，眼界大为开阔，艺术水平更上一层楼。她另外三张有关建筑的绘画使我们叹为观止。这三幅是：《威尼斯》画的是这座水乡城市的一座古典风格与现代风格相得益彰的石桥。一张是《西班牙马德里街的一角》，这张画画的是两座拱形的大门，油画一角有个电话亭，电话亭镶嵌在交接处的两墙上，整个儿画面都是土棕色。一位穿白衣戴短裙的姑娘一只脚蹬在墙上，专心致志地打电话，电话亭与电话都是蓝色的，区别在于深浅的不同，姑娘与拱形门的笔力是1比4，衬托处建筑物的雄伟高大，拱形门里面是黑的，给人以无限想象空间。

再有一幅就是《希腊雅典巴特农神庙》。巴特农神庙的命运与中国的圆明园一样，都是人类艺术史上最大的悲剧。圆明三园在咸丰十年即公元一八六一年被英法侵略军烧毁。巴特农神庙则毁得更早，“十七世纪土耳其占领希腊，把巴特农神庙当火药库，一六八七年威尼斯军队得炮火击中神庙，引起爆炸，使建筑和装饰雕刻遭到毁灭性得破坏，残存雕刻得大部分后来被运往英国和法国。”

这座公元四边多年前得伟大建筑遗址在任之玉笔下仍令我们仰视，她画的角度是从下往上观赏，坚实高大的地基，下宽上尖的通天圆柱顶着破壁残垣，气势威风仍在，一个残缺不堪的建筑尚能描绘得如此磅礴宏伟，令人

惊叹。

七

一九八九年十月下旬，任之玉持旅游护照来到南半球的澳大利亚，她把在澳大利亚的经历和遭遇写在自传体小说里，题目叫《天堂噩梦》。

任之玉凭着她的才能和在新加坡挣的周游世界后剩的一点钱，曾在墨尔本开过一次画展，但只卖出一幅二百块的小画儿。从此以后，她对澳大利亚卖画心灰意懒，一心想到美国、日本打开局面，把她的画儿卖出好价钱。

现在来讨论任之玉是否应该到澳大利亚来似乎一点意义也没有。如果假设她去法国会怎样，如果是美国呢？车祸就不会发生。

可是命运偏偏安排她来到澳大利亚，澳大利亚尽管环境艰难，任之玉还是决定留下，否则她就不会走结婚变身份这条路，并在准备回中国等永久居留的批准头一天遇上车祸。

经过种种磨难，肉体上的精神上的，任之玉终于还是留在了澳大利亚。车祸后的身体有些不方便，但她再度离开了“丈夫”，重新过着自由单身的生活，其时，她已经六十出头了。

任之玉在澳大利亚画的画儿有些是受伤前画的，有些是受伤后画的，但去美国和日本皆是她处车祸以后的事情。

她的功力经过一段恢复时间，还有了长足的进步，刘枫晓先生就说过：“她的颜色比以前更鲜艳了。”我女儿的绘画老师（上海华东师大美术系毕业）朱女士也说过：“任之玉的画儿太棒了。”

在一篇关于澳大利亚最为乐观的文章《花的世界》里，任之玉说：“我来澳洲后，使我最惊奇和感受深的是澳大利亚的花之茂盛，种类繁多，可能是世界之最了。”“我尤其喜欢澳洲的情调，田园风光，木制篱笆，花枝伸出……任其自然。”也许这些是任之玉不顾一切走结婚变身份的部分原因吧。

玉兰花在中国是稀罕物，很多人只在北京颐和园里看到过。每年春游，到颐和园去看玉兰花是很大的事情，几株娇小的粉色、白色的玉兰成为各地人们观赏目标所在。

到了澳大利亚，发现到处都是玉兰花，稀松平常，树干高大，树枝繁茂，花朵肥硕，颜色璀璨，种类繁多，单单紫玉兰就有三种不同的颜色：浅紫、中紫、深紫，花瓣也有宽窄之分。任之玉本是画花高手，英雄更有了用武之地。她画了一颗高大的茂盛的深粉色玉兰花树，因为太高大，用四块画板组成。

她画了许多条不同的紫花树风景，因为她从未见过紫花树。她画墨尔本普通人家的后院，因为一个普通的院内就有超过四十种以上的花，三条街道的花就有二百五十二种，这些她都亲自点数。

她画悉尼公园里的荷花、荷叶、露珠，她画湖中自由自在的黑天鹅，她画古老大树下野餐的男女，她画坐在湖边观赏天鹅嬉戏的母女……，她画节日里欢歌劲舞的人群，选美的小姑娘，她画晚年幸福的老人家，她画贝壳形的悉尼歌剧院。……澳大利亚的宽广美丽，人民生活的幸福欢乐在它笔下展现无遗。

她去美国，她画白宫、国会山、独立纪念碑、自由女神像。她在自由女神像里注入了太多自己的感情，以至于看起来，这举着火炬的雕塑像是个活生生的女人。

以一幅题名为《美国纽约》的人画里，整个儿城市沉浸在黎明中：近处是街头长长的椅子，两边是华灯、桥梁；远处是一幢幢摩天大厦，最高的两座是世贸大楼，矗立着，像两座纪念碑。整个儿画面空无一人，静的出奇，只有一只鹰从世贸大楼上空掠过。这幅画作于一九九九年，我亲眼目睹它的起草与完成。今天世贸大楼已成废墟，这张画更有了它的价值（调子以灰色为主）。

任之玉最后去的一个国家是亚洲的日本。她对日本经济的发达，人民生活的富裕，在游西欧时就深有体会。她曾写道：“在西欧日本人最厉害，因其经济实力雄厚，所以到处都是日本人在旅行，不仅不要签证，各旅游点到处写着日文导游说明，日本人在那备受欢迎。”

有一次她被当成日本人而省却了被检查的麻烦。

有一位日本青年以十英镑买她一张速写的拷贝。

所以她要亲自考察日本国，画一些关于日本的画，再到这个国家开个画展，把画卖给他们。

她有三张画儿画的是日本的路和街道。一看就是繁忙城市，立交桥，飞驰的卡车，汽车、摩托车，紧张、忙

碌。

日本的街道两边摩天大楼林立，两边的太阳旗像排队一样直伸远方，汽车奔驰再清洁的街道上，整齐有序。

她去的时候正值樱花盛开的季节，她画了一幅《樱花盛开时日本女人弹琴》，一位穿和服的日本女人坐在石凳上弹着古月琴，背景是盛开的樱花，蓝天白云与女人绿花篮地的衣服遥相呼应，十分清爽、高雅。

她画了一幅《日本富士山和箱根湖》，远处蓝色山顶上亮着白色永不融化的积雪，湖中有艘红色的带红色帆的大游艇，岸边是绿色的森林。好一幅令人神往的迷人风景。天空是蓝色的，湖水是较深一点的蓝的，山与湖水是一种颜色的蓝，颜色，色调悦目怡神。

八

任之玉不仅是油画家，还会画中国画，这种人才并不多见。任之玉是个极勤奋好学的人，她的国画老师是两个有名的人。一个是同宿舍的中国画系教师焦可群，一个是中国画系教师李琦。

李琦是我母亲所在中学校长老干部阎立明的儿子，一九五八年我和小学同学雷元去中央美院玩，看见李琦当时正在起草毛主席去十三陵水库劳动的各种各样的草图，后来他的那张《主席走遍天下》，使他一举成名。

李琦瘦瘦高高的，当时也不过三十岁左右，长的很英俊，待人也和善，书生气十足。我对李琦印象极好，至今不忘。

名师出高徒。任之玉的国画共有四十六张，画的有牡丹花、水仙花、菊花、玉兰花、荷花、丝瓜、葫芦、腊梅、红花……

动物画的有鸡、麻雀、鸽子、黑猫、白猫、山雀、老鹰。

建筑物有中国的万里长城。

任之玉的国画意境高雅，超凡脱俗，充满生活情趣。

经过和她五六年的接触往来，我时时被她的精神所感动，看着她日复一日地绘画，看着她为艺术奔走忙碌，听着她的理想、抱负，将我这个嬉皮士风格极浓的人唤醒，愿意帮助她做一些事情。

比起任之玉教授来，我往日的伤痛算不了什么，我没有必要总沉浸在回忆与悲哀之中。任老师除了右臂完好无缺外，头部与其他一肢皆受过重伤，我看着她，总想起凡·高，我称她是“活着的中国女凡·高”，评论家说她的画印证了凡·高，有着浓烈的凡·高之风。

我觉得她的经历也与凡·高有着惊人的相似，但任老师比凡·高幸运，她活着就能看到自己的成功。

她自费出了中文自传，即将出版英文版，她有自己网上画廊。她正式邀请我做她的经纪人。这篇文章，就是我这个沉睡多年的人在她的精神感召下为她做的第一件事情。

注：

① 引自任之玉《暮年闯世界》

② 引自《暮年闯世界》

③ 引自《暮年闯世界》

④ 引自《暮年闯世界》

⑤ 引自《暮年闯世界》

Professor Ren Zhiyu and Her Paintings

Written by Ms Tao Luosong

Translated by Mr Tao Jiang

"There are few women whose charm survives their beauty" Each time I meet Ms Ren, I cannot help but think of the famous words from Francois La Rochefoucauld the French author and ideologist in the 17th century.

In her career life, Ms Ren worked as a professor at the Painting Department of the Central College of Arts in Beijing which is the best fine arts institution in China. She was also a visiting professor in Singapore Nanyang Academy of Arts. She is currently living in Australia and is now more than 70 years old.

I

I came to know Professor Ren Zhiyu through a painting.

Six years ago, I went to visit Ms Liu Zhen, a famous writer, on her walls displayed many Chinese calligraphs and drawings, among which a magnificent painting stood out, in it, are several twigs of white peonies lying on a plate, the leaves are green and lifelike, it was beautiful. By the dainty charms and elegance revealed in it, one might judge at first glance that it was apparently not from an ordinary hand. Ms Liu told me that the painter was Ms Ren Zhiyu and this was one of her signature pieces. So I asked Ms Liu to introduce me to her, this is how I made acquaintance with Professor Ren.

I was living in Campbelltown at the time I met Professor Ren but later moved back to Cabramatta. So my home was quite close to Ms Ren's, as there was only a high way bridge between us. The more I became familiar and know her, the more I felt she was an uncommon female.

She lives in a two bedroom unit on the third floor, the garages are on the ground floor, so there are in fact four levels in the building. Ms Ren came to Australia in 1989 and on the 21st of September, 1991 she was involved in a car accident at the intersection of Eddy Ave and George St in Sydney. At the time it happened she was married to a taxi driver in order to get permanent residency in Australia, she was flying back to China the next day to wait for her application result. She was in a hurry and tried to cross the street on red light, and was unfortunately hit by a car. As a result her left arm and both legs were fractured, her head was also seriously wounded. She lost consciousness and was in a coma for several months.

Ms Liu wrote an article about this accident, titled Ms Ren in Danger, and published on the Chinese Voice's Daily Guide to Immigrants also reported it.

At present she has to walk with the help of a walking stick and the skin of her legs has not recovered to the normal colour. "Can you walk upstairs to the fourth floor?" each time I doubted her ability to climb up so high she would give me a confident answer, "Sure I can. I can climb up."

The decor in the professor's room is quite simple. Everything are in neat order: finished and unfinished oil paintings, Chinese style drawings, canvas, frames, oils, brushes, turpentine, painting boxes, and a foldable stool.

When I asked her why she didn't watch television, she said that both her TV and VCR were stolen and she wouldn't buy any more new ones. The security door downstairs was installed for this reason, she added.

The first time I went to visit her, I gave her a book of mine. Unexpectedly, Ms Ren gave me in return a pile of manuscript thickly dotted with small writings. It was so long that I had to take it home to read it.

It wasn't a novel but some original files recording the path of her life, including all kinds of things from diaries and essays to marriage and divorce certificates. This abundant and reliable data revealed the colourful and winding life of a female artist.

I suggested to her that she publish a novel of it. For this reason, I made many calls and contacted many people. To my surprise, the response I got from everyone was that I was the right person to do the job. However, my daughter was only 5 or 6 years old, it consumed almost all of my time and energy taking care of her, I knew I could not have undertaken such a huge responsibility. At last Mr Liu, husband of Mrs Liu, agreed to do the work. It took him 6 months to help Ms Ren to write and compile the files into a book, which was published in Beijing and titled The Saga of a Female Painter. Ms Xiao Shufang, wife of Wu Zuoren one of the most renowned Chinese artists, calligraphed the title for the book.

As I write this article, the book is being translated into English

The style of a book of 180,000 Chinese characters is significant. It is not incorrect to say that the book is a novel in a traditional sense, it records the background and life experience of a famous female artist. But it can also be said that this is a travel journal, in the book she depicts more than 20 countries she has travelled to, including more than 20 countries in Western Europe, Singapore and Japan in Asia, the United States in North America and Australia -- the last country of her travelling. Moreover, it might be regarded as a textbook of art because it collects lots of comments from famous Chinese artists on Ms Ren's paintings as well as exquisite remarks from the professor herself on some world-famous masterpieces, which will benefit both amateur and professional artists.

Ms Ren, however, is not a novelist after all, her life and spirit will be better annotated by the drawings she has made rather than such a book that can hardly be exactly classified to any style of literature. What I intend to do here is to observe, through one or more pictures of hers, the changes of her feelings at a certain period in time.

II

I have seen around 200 paintings by Ren Zhiyu. I have classified these paintings into two categories: pre 1987 and after 1987. The former includes those she drew in China and the latter were mainly drawn in countries outside of China.

Among them there are 46 paintings drawn in China which I appreciate very much. But what she drew in China are more than these because some are too big to be carried to Australia, such as the fresco *Winter in the Lake of Heaven*, which depicts "a winter scene around the Lake of Heaven in Xinjiang, the Lake being in the centre of the picture with snow capped mountains at the back and frosted cedars in the front. It was hanging on the wall in White Swan Hotel and brought good effect."¹

In 1976 Ms Ren went to Tangshan just after the great earthquake took place. "We drew pictures, recording Tangshan ruined in the earthquake. Certain particular events were drawn on paper instead of canvas, afterwards we held a small scale exhibition."² However, nobody now knows the whereabouts of these precious files of Tangshan surviving the great earthquake.

In 1986 Ren Zhiyu went to Civil Aviation of China to enrich her experience of life, where she painted a huge picture depicting the magnificent scene of a Boeing 747 taking off. The picture now hangs at the entrance of the building of the aviator crew in order to remind them of flight safety. Obviously this painting could not be brought to Australia.

Some of her drawings were lost in Australia. When she was hospitalized after the car accident, her ex-husband sold them without letting her know.

Twelve among the present 46 pictures are about scenes from Beijing.

Beijing is one of the most famous and oldest capitals in the world, it has many historic and scenic sites. Ren Zhiyu was born and raised in Beijing, she is very familiar with the tradition and culture. Under her brush, are the magnificent Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City, the red maple leaves in Mount Xiangshan, the White Pagoda Temple, and the West Slant Street in the west of the Drum Tower, as well as a picture of the Xisi branch of People's Bank, which would bring a even dearer feeling to immigrants from Beijing.

Ms Ren was born to a scholar family in Beijing in 1932. Her grandfather was a Bagong³ in Qing Dynasty; her father was a high school teacher; her maternal grandfather was a physician who practiced traditional Chinese medicine. Ren Zhiyu is the second oldest child, she has an elder sister and a younger sister, as well as a half-brother from her stepmother. The family was quite wealthy.

Ren spent her childhood in a courtyard at No.26 Beihai St, West District of Beijing City. It was a typical Beijing siheyuan. When speaking of it in her book, she revealed a deep sentimental attachment, she writes, "My father was a biology teacher in high school, and because he majored in biology in university, he was fond of planting trees, flowers and breeding bees...Besides the original two trees in our courtyard, he planted more trees, such as apricots before the window, Chinese flowering crab apples behind the screen wall, as well as willows, cloves, sorbaria, kirilowii & flowering almond and Chinese dates. The date trees grew from the root of other date trees in our neighbour's courtyard. That courtyard had many date trees and the fruits were crisp and delicious. I have vivid memories of the courtyard. It was nice though not so big, and it was interesting and significant for our children. In spring, there were many flowers, such as cloves, apricot flowers, as well as cirrus flowers; while in summer you might enjoy the jasmines, morning glories, grass and firebugs. The urn before the screen wall is full of lotus flowers -- one might see them as soon as he stepped into the gate. The courtyard was quiet and interesting for children, for they could catch bugs there such as firebugs and katydids..."⁴

What a serene, peaceful, and attractive picture! The reason I have quoted these words at great length is because the plant-abundant garden set Ms Ren a foundation for her art style and direction -- it was the root of her art.

She liked to paint the hutongs and locals of Beijing. Many Chinese people from overseas do not know what a hutong is. It is an alley on the side of some main streets in Beijing. There are big hutongs and small hutongs, one linking with another, one in another. There have been books written on hutongs in Beijing, in which they made harangue textual researches on the names of hutongs.

The hutongs under Ms Ren's brush may soon become ancient relics. Due to the rapid construction speed in Beijing, they are disappearing bit-by-bit and being replaced by high rise buildings.

Ms Ren related in her autobiography that she scarcely drew any pictures during the so-called "Cultural Revolution" in the period of 1966 to 1976. Therefore, the hutongs she drew were before the Cultural Revolution, the Beijing not ruined by the Red Guards.

On her painting *A Scene in a Lane*, there is an intact stone lion with two peddlers aside, a woman peddler being in white dress and white cap, with a serene expression, and a little boy is riding a small tricycle.

A Family Dining in a Siheyuan is about a family of three--the husband, the wife and their son sitting on short stools around a short table enjoying their delicious food while the shelves on cucumber vines form a cool shed to keep them away from the hot sunlight.

Such is the life of common people in Beijing, full of warmth, full of fun.

All these were vitally destroyed in the "Cultural Revolution".

I have seen lots of descriptions in Ms Ren's manuscript on the topic of the Cultural Revolution. What deeply impressed me were the events which happened in 1970. During that year, all the teachers and students of the Central College of Art were transferred to Hebei Province to drudge in the countryside. They had to travel to Hebei on foot and walk 20 kilometres per day, one of the students who had a lung condition died upon arrival. Moreover, after a day of hard labour work, the teachers had to be "criticized and stricken" in evening meetings and had to write papers to confess their "crimes" at night -- it was called "taming the eagles".

These were important inducement for Ren Zhiyu coming to disenchantment. The Culture Revolution was the division for many Chinese intellectuals to disillusion from the communist ideology, and the case was the same with Ren.

She was once a radical youth. Before 1949, she entered out of her own will to North-China Revolution University, and later she joined the Army and marched to South China with the troops, through Nanjing, Wuhan, Hunan, until Sichuan and Tibet.

The five years of hard life in the army strengthened her both physically and mentally, this might be the reason why she was still able to go on and continue to paint after a series of heavy blows from the Cultural Revolution, the divorce with her husband, the traffic accident and so on.

When the five years in the army ended, she returned to her former school in Beijing -- Beijing Academy of Arts and now the Central College of Arts. The dean was Xu Beihong the world-renowned master of art and her tutor was Wu Zuoren whose reputation is on par with Xu.

She still keeps two paintings from those days. They are her early works that are portraits of nude woman and drawn under the instruction of Mr Wu Zuoren. In either of the pictures the female model is in a posture of lying on her side, one facing forwards and another backwards. Though the two pictures are not as skilful as her later works, she treasures them very much because they were performed under the guidance of the famous master.

After graduation, Ren remained in college and worked as a teacher. The Central College of Arts might be regarded as one of the top art colleges in the world based on the training conditions the college provided to the students. Before the Cultural Revolution, Ren Zhiyu had the advantage of travelling across the country and painted many beautiful drawings, and some of them are magnum opuses of hers.

Of the present drawings remaining in her hand, six were about scenes in Tibet, seven on Xinjiang, four on river-winding villages in South China, one about Shanxi Province, one about Hebei Province, one about Fujian, one on Duhuang Caves, whose historic merits are hard to evaluate.

Wu Zuoren, who gave Ren Zhiyu's art life the greatest influence, went to Qinghai and Tibet in 1943-1945 and drew a large quantity of pencil sketches, aquarelle paintings and oil paintings on the natural scenes and people's life there, among which the famous *The Girl Shouldering a Kettle of Water* describing a living scene in Tibet. According to my research, it was the first western-styled painting focused on the life of Tibet people.

Ms. Ren had a better understanding of the Tibet' life since she has been to Tibet as a soldier. Among the six paintings on Tibet, two of them depict scenes in Lama Temples (one is focused on the building of the temple and another on the pilgrims, most of whom are female).

On the picture of *A Young Lama*, a young man about 16 or 17 years old wears an orange waistcoat and a lama gown in dark rose-red leaning against the palace wall. We can catch a view of his back and one side of his face, with an expression somewhat elusive. In the first glance, you may feel he is happy and quiet, but in another sight he seems in a perplexity. Remote mountains, rivers, clouds and fog forming the setting, what is he

thinking about? We can't tell.

The rest three are about daily life of Tibet people.

A young shepherdess and a horse are there on one picture. The white horse, with a brown ladder on its back and led by the shepherdess, looks tamely. Because Ms. Ren has rarely drawn animals, this one is the sole big-scaled picture on animal I have ever seen in her works.

On another picture Little Shepherd, beside a white sheep, there is a little boy with a pigtail on his head and in a white Tibet-styled gown made of sheepskin. His slightly knitted brows cannot cover the childishness and naivety on his face.

The last one is full of human flavor. A mother and a daughter are sitting on the grassland and the mother, with her upper half naked, is combing hair for her daughter, and the latter is squatting before the former. By their side on the grass, there is a basin made in the inland, and not far from them, there are four or five sheep grazing grass. Mother is always the most intimate person to daughter wherever in the world.

III

Xinjiang, the beautiful place of unique geographical landscape and ethnological characteristics, has raised artists' interests for long.

Ren Zhiyu was born on the first month 5th, 1932 (month and day are in lunar calendar) and she felt proud of her birth date.

In 1961, at the age of 29, Ren went together with her colleagues in the Oil Painting Studio to Xinjiang.

Later in 1964, Ren went to draw pictures in Xinjiang for the second time, where he trudged to Kuerle, Kashi and Tashi. The painting A Tajiki Bride was performed at that time. On the picture, there is a marvelously beautiful girl in red bride dress, squatting in a cluster of flowers and picking flowers. This picture is brightly colored, with the figure clean-cut, revealing a joyous feeling.

The drawings made during her two times to Xinjiang and left to the present includes A Xinjiang Boy, A Xinjiang Girl, Mosque, The Race Track in Mount Tian, A Canvas, a Jeep and a Cooking Woman, and Summer at Gongnaisi.

Summer at Gongnaisi got popular recognition from famous artists. Just as Red Maple Leaves in Mount Xiangshan on the autumn mountain scenery in Beijing suburb, it is a landscape on mountain scenes. I have been to Xiangshan, so from the bright colors of the forest on the mountain I could judge at the first glance it was about Xiangshan. I have been to Xinjiang, either, but never been to Mount Tian. What I knew about Mount Tian was from a photo of the Lake of Heaven in Mount Tian. However, I recognized on the instant Summer at Gongnaisi was drawn on Mount Tian. I could not tell the reason because the title was not written on the picture. Maybe it was because the drawing depicted so well the exquisite scenery and climate on Mount Tian in Xinjiang.

Ren Zhiyu is adept at drawing human portrait and flower piece. The latter should owe to that she has a good understanding of botany, since his father was a teacher of biology at middle school and there was a "plant-abundant garden" at her home as I have mentioned. On the picture Summer at Gongnaisi, a patch of leg-deep flowers forms the front, with a forest of cedars at the back and slow-sloped mountains afar. Amid the flowers, there are two girl picking flowers with their bodies bending. No characteristic of minority can be seen because their costume is very common. The sky is blue and broad.

Her extraordinary talent to depict regional features can well be seen on her pictures, and for me, it is of some mystery. It may owe to that she traveled all over the country.

Of the present paintings, thirteen are pure flower pieces, including two pieces of Coxcomb, a picture of White Peony and one Chrysanthemum performed at home, the rest were drawn in Australia, such as Cella, A Tree of Little Red Flowers, Yulan Flowers, etc. The Coxcomb is regarded as a masterwork by everybody who has seen it.

Ms. Ren treasures the Coxcomb very much and marks it at fancy price. Through the many years I have affiliated with the professor, by listening to her talk, reading her book and watching her pictures, I think her art style is sorted to that of aestheticism and classical realism. Only those that she considered as beauty could enter her picture while those dislikable and ugly were all abandoned. Although she lived in a socialist country flooded with political doctrines and went through a series of political movements, including the so-called Cultural Revolution, no trails of these remain in her world of art under her filtration. Perhaps it is from her purpose and intention to create a better art world for us to linger pleasantly in and forget the troubles in the real one.

Under the direction and example of master artists Xu Beihong and Wu Zuoren, Ms. Ren got a solid foundation for bare drawing. She was also influenced by Russian realism in her early works, and later she studied the French Impressionist skills of using light. She found the Impressionism