

The background of the cover is a large, textured painting. The upper portion features a woman's face and upper torso, rendered in a style reminiscent of classical Chinese portraiture but with a more somber, muted color palette. She has a pale complexion, dark eyes, and is wearing a white garment with a high collar. The lower portion of the painting shows a pair of hands, one of which is holding a small, round, reddish object, possibly a fruit or a flower, against a dark, shadowy background. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

GONG QIGE

官其格

2009

北京工艺美术出版社

图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

官其格: 2009 / 陈高潮, 谢琳编. — 北京: 北京工艺美术出版社, 2009. 7
ISBN 978-7-80526-845-3

I. 官… II. ①陈…②谢… III. 油画—作品集—美国—现代 IV. J233

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2009) 第 110952 号

责任编辑: 陈朝华

责任印刷: 宋朝晖

装帧设计: 3A 设计艺术工作室 / 蔡长海 马 宁

图片摄影: 张双荣 孙元明 王 涛

CIP catalogue

Gong Qige: 2009/Chen Gaochao, Xie Lin. — Beijing: Beijing Arts & Crafts Publishing House, 2009. 7
ISBN 978-7-80526-845-3

I. Gong… II. ① Chen…② Xie… III. Oil painting—Collection—U.S.—Modern IV. J233

A CIP catalogue record of this book is available from the Chinese Library
CIP(2009)NO.110952

Editor in charge: Chen Zhaohua

Person in charge of print: Song Zhaohui

Graphic design: 3A Art Design Studio/Cai Changhai Ma Ning

Photographing: Zhang Shuangrong Sun Yuanming Wang Tao

GONG QIGE

官其格 2009

出 版 北京工艺美术出版社
发 行 北京工艺美术出版社
地 址 北京市东城区和平里七区 16 号
邮 编 100013
电 话 (010) 64283627 (编辑部)
(010) 64283671 (发行部)
(010) 84255105 (总编室)
传 真 (010) 64280045/84255105
经 销 全国新华书店
策 划 中国国际图书贸易总公司艺术品进出口部
制 作 国画研究编辑部
印 刷 北京翔利印刷有限公司
开 本 635 × 965 1/16
印 张 18.5
版 次 2009 年 7 月第 1 版
印 次 2009 年 7 月第 1 次印刷
印 数 2000
书 号 ISBN 978-7-80526-845-3/J. 746
定 价 168.00 元

GONG QIGE

Gong Qige 2009

Publishing: Beijing Arts & Crafts Publishing House
Issuing: Beijing Arts & Crafts Publishing House
Address: NO. 16, Seven District, He Ping Li, Dongcheng District, Beijing
Postcode: 100013
Tel: (010) 64283627 (Editorial office)
(010) 64283671 (Issuing office)
(010) 84255105 (General Editing office)
Fax: (010) 64280045/84255105
Distribution: Xin hua Bookstore
Planning: Art Import & Export Department China International Book Trading Corporation
Producer: Chinese Painting Research editorial office
Printing: Beijing Glory Growth printing co., LTD
Format: 635 × 965 1/16
Printed Sheet: 18.5
Publish Order: First published in July, 2009
Print Order: First printed in July, 2009
Volumes: 2000
ISBN 978-7-80526-845-3/J. 746
China: ¥ 168.00

特别鸣谢

周方 (新华社对外部编辑)

周健 (中国国际图书贸易总公司艺术品进出口部经理)

闫玻 (北京翔利印刷有限公司总经理)

闫欢 (新华社音视频部编辑)

Extremely thanks to

Zhou Fang (editor, Home News for Overseas Service Department, Xinhua News Agency)

Zhou Jian (director, Art Import & Export Department China International Book Trading Corporation)

Yan Bo (General Manager, Beijing Glory Growth Color Printing)

Yan Huan (editor, Xinhua TV News)

GONG QIGE

官其格 2009

主 编：陈高潮
谢 琳
执行主编：西伦娜斯

北京工艺美术出版社



GONG QIGE

官其格 2009

快樂的官其格

黃永玉
丙寅春月北京



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	7
Foreword	9
Inscription of Li Zhaoxing	22
The Son of Grassland Traveling Around the World on Horseback	23
Happy Gong Qige: A True, Kind and Beautiful Artist	25
Comments of Ryotaro Shiba	28
Roaming in Green Dream	29
Extreme Beauty Lies in Great Purity	31
Inner Mongolian Grassland Series	33
Silk Road Series	89
Green Dream Series	225
Mural Series	251
Little Stories in the Painting	263
Afterword	280
List of Gong Qige's Art Life	281
Index of Gong Qige's Art Works	287

目 录

致谢	8
前言	17
李肇星题词	22
骑着马儿走遍世界的草原之子	24
快乐的官其格——真、善、美的艺术家	27
司马辽太郎评论文章	28
徜徉在绿色的梦境里——读官其格的《绿色梦》	30
唯美至情 大觉无邪——读官其格的裸体艺术	32
内蒙古草原系列	33
丝绸之路系列	89
绿色梦系列	225
壁画系列	251
画中的小故事	263
后记	280
官其格艺术年表	281
官其格艺术作品索引	287

Acknowledgements

His Excellency Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of China from 2003 to 2007, himself a poet, graces this book with a most generous salute to Gong Qige. We thank him deeply, truly honored.

This book is the result of a collective effort. The love of Gong Qige and his granddaughter Udbela inspired everything. While playing with Gong Qige, Udbela, at three-and-a-half years old, opened one of the many books always moving from place to place at home, accidentally at a page where she focused on a painting. She asked her granddad, who at the time had also become her painting instructor, something about that appealing work of art. Truly surprised, Gong Qige realized that the image was that of a famous Han Dynasty mural saved thanks to an *in situ* rendering made by himself before its actual collapse. That sprang a long, wholesome family conversation thriving on many of the anecdotes of the fascinating artistic life of Gong Qige.

The initiative to transform that rare moment of magic into a book came from Mauricio, his son-in-law. Gong Qige and his daughter Xilunnasi enthusiastically agreed to the project. In the next few happy months, the three of us, with the generous help of many friends, made it happen.

X helped with the photographing. Y, YY and YYY with several of the translations and correspondence. Y with proofreading. Z with critical reading. Kenji Hirata with queries and representations in Japan. We fully appreciate their generosity.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the late Ryotaro Shiba, celebrated art critic and literary author of Japan, and renowned art critics Fan Dian, currently Director of the China National Art Museum, and X, for their generous remarks and valuable insights, printed in this book with their kind permission.

Relevant museums, institutions and private collectors graciously supported the project. Our special thanks to the China National Art Museum, Forbidden City Museum, the Shanghai Museum, the Inner Mongolia Art Museum, the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, the China National Minorities University and Tomita Corporation.

Our final thanks are to you, discreet reader, for your kind attention.

Gong Qige, Xilunnasi & Mauricio Escanero

致 谢

尊敬的李肇星阁下，作为中国原外交部部长（2003 – 2007）同时也是出色的诗人，不吝笔墨为官其格题词，使本书倍增光彩。在此深表谢忱，不胜感激！

本书是多方努力的结果。是官其格和他孙女乌黛贝乐的爱使然。与官其格玩耍时，三岁半的乌黛贝乐打开了一本经常在家里被东挪西放的书。她很偶然地注意到其中一页上的一幅画，就向爷爷询问有关这幅美好作品的典故。爷爷那段时间正是她的绘画指导。官其格非常惊讶，发现这幅画是一幅著名的汉朝壁画，是他自己在珍品毁损前亲自临摹的。这引发了一场长期、深入的家庭讨论，由此引出了有关官其格多彩艺术生活的很多奇闻轶事。

把这些精彩瞬间编撰成书的想法最初来自于他的女婿Mauricio。官其格和他女儿西伦娜斯 (Xilunnasi) 兴高采烈地赞同该计划。在接下来的令人愉快的几个月里，我们三个人在许多朋友们的慷慨帮助之下促成了它。

X 协助摄影，Y, YY 和 YYY 帮助翻译及书信整理。Y 进行初步校对，Z 接管甄别错误阅读。Kenji Hirata 为在日本的代表答疑解惑。在此对他们的慷慨帮助深表感激。

在此，我们诚挚感谢已故的日本著名艺术评论家、作家司马辽太郎先生。

相关博物馆、学院及个人收藏者也给予该项目很多友善的支持。在此特别鸣谢故宫博物院、上海美术馆、内蒙古博物馆、中央美术学院、中央民族大学以及 Tomita 公司。

最后要感谢您，贤明的读者，感谢您的垂青。

官其格 西伦娜斯 Mauricio Escanero

Foreword

Gong Qiqe is a most talented and accomplished artist.

Born in 1939 in Zarod, a remote village nested at the fusion of the Eastern Inner Mongolian grasslands and the Southern Da Xing An Ling forests, at five years an orphan, his path as an artist has woven through some of the most dramatic moments of Chinese history.

This is an attempt to trace his artistic biography.

1. An Inner Mongolian orphan (1939-1956)

Gong Qiqe was born in 1939, at which year China was suffering from battles.

The village which saw Gong Qiqe born, Zarod, in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, was so remote that barely suffered the widespread ravages of the Japanese invasion and dislocations of the revolutionary struggles that convoluted China at the time. Nested in seemingly limitless, undulating grasslands, nurtured by mountainous forests and countless ponds and streams, his homeland was blessed by beauty and plentiful biodiversity. There, horses, dogs, sheep, cattle, deer, wild boars, birds and many other kinds of wildlife blossomed, though animals had to live aware of the gray wolf of bluish eyes. And human too: Gong Qiqe vividly remembers being forced with few of his carriage bulls and horses to retrench one night at a mountainous crossroad, surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves only deterred by torches, till daybreak, when the weary wolves let them go back to the plains.

The village was small. They lived from husbandry, gathering and hunting. Medicines were made out mostly of goat horns and bones, feathers, herbs and mushrooms, nuts and seeds, even stones, oftentimes mixed with tea and milk, following the teachings of many generations of self-sufficient Mongolian semi-nomads.

Zarod was a haven of ever changing, amazing day and night skies and landscapes, and simple, tough natural life, isolated almost beyond

history.

He was orphaned from her mother at three years old and from his father at five years old. His education at home remained the responsibility of his older sisters and brothers, who taught him the Mongolian language and customs and, through their embroidery skills, gave him his first glimpse at art creation. His passion for horses and traditional festivities, so present in his future artistic works.

He began to draw at an early age, inspired by his elder brother, Guan Bu, the first one to look for his destiny outside the village. His brother, a self-taught artist, studied from 1946 to 1948 at the revolutionary Qiqihar Political and Military College, where he led the art and literary activities and, upon completion of his studies, acted as photographer and chief editor of *the Inner Mongolia Pictorial* from 1948 to 1955, year in which he was elected as Secretary General of the Inner Mongolia branch of the Chinese Artist's Association.

During those years of separation, a sporadic postal correspondence between both brothers provided them with the only means to keep their bond alive and to exchange drawings and criticism. Those were Gong Qiqe's first art lessons, carried through the vast grasslands by horse. When the Revolution triumphed, his elder brother could take more care of Gong Qiqe, being able to send him to school away from his native village in 1951. Initially, Gong Qiqe went to Zhangjakou, on the Great Wall in neighboring Hebei, only to come back after one year to Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, and one year later to Xilinhot, at the heart of the Mongolian grasslands, where he finished his secondary school.

Later, in 1956, his brother managed to take Gong Qiqe with him to Beijing, the great capital of China, where both of them would fully embark into their fantastic destinies as artists.

2. A graduate from the China Central Academy of Fine Arts (1957-1965)

When Gong Qige arrived to Beijing, in 1957, he could not speak Chinese, but he already shined as a most promising young artist. He devoted himself one year full-time to study Chinese to prepare himself to compete for a position as a student in the High School Affiliated To the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the best of China. He succeeded in both accounts.

After finishing his studies at the High School Affiliated To the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, in 1960, he became a Central Academy of Fine Arts undergraduate student, where he joined the Oil Department, established following the Russian school of realism, just before the Soviet Union-China diplomatic rift. There, during the next five years, Gong Qige mastered classic oil painting.

The calamities and ultimate failure of the Great Leap Forward further challenged the weak prospects of Chinese combat of poverty and struggle for development. The Academy was not the exception. Paper and other basic painting materials were extremely scarce. Any scraping surface or brush was a treasure. The students had to build their own frames and sew their own canvases out of small bits to make them big enough. They had to ration their school meals. There, enduring through hardships, both professors and students created an artists' oasis, as each one strived hard to master his or her self creativity.

During his years, Gong Qige rejoiced into a most prolific time of creation. His works, both interpretatively and technically, are the expression of a mature sensibility: his landscape and portrait paintings are indeed intuitive masterpieces achieved.

We only keep record of two sketches. Both are beautiful and rigorous in technique. *Old Man* is a crude depiction of aging and weariness, with no concessions, though you can feel the empathy felt by the painter. *Horse* is the first survivor of the many horses painted by Gong Qige throughout his life, a truly personal memento.

We have access to twenty three oil paintings of the time, comprising

three portraits, nineteen landscapes and a nude.

The portraits successfully explore the unity of color and mood: they are realistic in style, expressionist in essence. Their backgrounds play the temperate role. *Uygur old man* is seminal: it preludes the vast range of paintings that Gong Qige will devote to portraying the peoples of the Chinese Silk Road.

Painted in small format, due to the lack of material resources, the landscapes seduce us with untried frames and perspectives, from single tree cups or forests to nurturing rivers and mountains to rural houses and scenes and pathways disappearing into the distance, close to nature, down to earth. Their color is quite appealing: mostly grays and yellows, browns and greens, with patches of blues and dots of white, red and purple, dissolve into a truly different light, twilight of opaqueness and clarity, difficult to define yet unequivocally real. These landscapes were painted in southern Inner Mongolia, Beijing and its northern rural surroundings. On the spot, observing simple life, just as the serene women in *Pausing and Moonrise* seem to be doing. Two of the paintings, *Harvester and Street crossing*, slightly differ from this pattern, acknowledging the advent of modernity in the countryside and the city.

Nude crowns this creative period. To make the Canvas as big enough, Gong Qige had to saw two pieces of small canvases together. He also had to handcraft the wooden framework out of little sticks. That meticulous preparation laid the humble platform in which he divinized his beautiful model. The soul of *Nude* is its color. Her sensuality and sense of solitude is heightened by the background, layered in different shades of ochre. This masterpiece is clearly influenced by Russian realism, but definitely signals Gong Qige's departure towards a more subtle expressionism sustained on his own sense of color.

Beyond his endeavors, Gong Qige quite often paid visits to Madame Xie Xuehong, the wealthy auntie-in-law of his elder brother. At her home Gong Qige discovered for the first time in his life the luxury of

hot and cold water at the bath. There he began to explore the strange dimensions of comfort.

Also in that rich home Gong Qige met his future wife, Huang Ruiying, a Shanghainese beauty seven year younger than him that lived with Madame Xie owing to a close family friendship built before the Revolution, when both were well off in Shanghai. As her family was forcefully separated, Huang Ruiying found refuge with Madame Xie.

Madame Xie suggested her two protégés to get married. They followed her advice few years later.

3. Surviving the Cultural Revolution, researching and saving Han Dynasty tomb murals at the ancient Great Wall (1966-1974)

Gong Qige had just graduated from the China Central Academy of Fine Arts when the Cultural Revolution erupted. The Academy was abruptly closed.

It was 1969, the peak of the Cultural Revolution. One year later their daughter Xilunnasi was born. Soon after, as victim of the Cultural Revolution, he was sent to forced labor at the coal mines in Tangshan, for a year and a half.

In 1971, as the Cultural Revolution was losing steam, he was reassigned to work at the Inner Mongolian Museum in Hohhot. And there, an improbable, wonderful opportunity arose. Archeologists discovered that year a site of tombs in close-by Helinger, at the Juyong Pass of the Great Wall, where ancient East Han Dynasty tomb murals were at the brink of destruction, and they decided to look for someone able to study and copy them before their imminent demise. Gong Qige got that compelling task.

Thus, escaping by such luckiest turn of events from the barren years of the Cultural Revolution, Gong Qige got back to his brushes. During the next three years, as a pioneer, he meticulously studied the two-

thousand year-old Han murals at Cave No.1 at the Helinger site till he managed to fully understand and copy them to perfection.

Cave No.1 was embedded few meters below the surface and he worked alone in the candle-lighted, having a local man waiting for him outside the tombs to help him to get out at the end of each day or alert others in case of any accident. As in complicity with posterity, the fragile murals waited to finally fade till Gong Qige completed his task.

It was a once in a lifetime opportunity that would save some of the most valuable East Han Dynasty murals known in China and that would change forever the artistic path of Gong Qige, enriching his life as a scholarly trained painter with his so improbably achieved, expert knowledge of Han Dynasty mural painting.

The Han Dynasty murals at Cave 1 depict the life and the times of a Han General at the Great Wall. The tomb is conformed by a frontispiece and two linked chambers.

When Gong Qige finished the copies of those Han Dynasty murals, the best museums of China got hold of them. Today those historical treasures are in the custody of the Forbidden City Museum, the National Art Museum, the Inner Mongolian Museum and the Shanghai Museum.

Gong Qige accompanied the mural painting copies entrusted to the Forbidden City Museum and was reassigned to that museum during the years 1974 and 1975 as an expert-in-residence.

4. Back to oil painting as artist and mentor at the China National Minorities University: first years at the University and journeys to the Mongolian grasslands and to the Panda sanctuary in Sichuan (1975-1979)

After less than one year in the Forbidden City Museum, the China National Minorities University offered him a position as Professor of

Fine Arts. Soon he was a most recognized artist and mentor at the university.

In that capacity he helped many young artists to excel and in the process made lasting friendships.

As part of his professorial duties, in 1975 he visited for one month the Inner Mongolian, Tibetan and Kazak Autonomous Prefecture. He painted a splendid landscape during his journey: it is a depiction of a mountain pass, at the front appears a herd of yaks.

During the summer of 1976 he also had the opportunity to return to his homeland in Inner Mongolia accompanied by his daughter Xilunnasi. Back in Beijing, when he had precious time to devote himself to paint at the university studio, he would find his most important source of inspiration in precious memory of his childhood.

We keep record of three portraits painted in this period: *Man in costume*, painted in 1978, *Head of woman in costume* and *Mongolian man*, both painted in 1979. They are compound and expressive perfection of realism and classicalism.

Gong Qige was rounding his artistic personality, bold and singular, just as China was at the verge of a new era. Two survivor masterpieces painted in 1979 epitomize his creative freedom and self-confidence at the moment: *Mongolian party* and *Mongolian wrestling*.

In *Mongolian party*, a seminal piece, his first and biggest of large format, Gong Qige freely plays with shapes and colors to give movement and substance to the festive attitudes and moods of this celebration that unite the diverse peoples from the grasslands. The delicate perspective at the heart of the painting provides full dimension to the front scene in which the wrestlers acquire almost mythical proportions, embodying the happy and competitive atmosphere of this celebration of human community.

In *Mongolian wrestling*, sublime offspring of *Mongolian party*, Gong

Qige stylizes the wrestling ritual in a supernatural dance woven with incandescent vivid grasslands and a vertiginous golden sky, and finally transforms this powerful image into the cosmic symbol of the *yin yang* (moon and sun) of Chinese life. The wrestlers bear the Chinese symbol of happiness.

5. Researching ancient Chinese Buddhist murals in Dunhuang and Qiuci grotto temples, painting the peoples and landscapes of the Chinese Silk Road (1979-1981)

From 1979's summer to 1981's summer, Gong Qige rejoiced into another extraordinary moment of enlightenment and creation, mainly inspired by his research of ancient Chinese Buddhist mural painting in the Dunhuang and Qiuci cave temples, as well as by his fascination with the colors and beauty of the Chinese Silk Road in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Researching ancient Chinese Buddhist mural paintings

In 1979's summer, China Central Academy of Fine Arts professor of ancient Chinese art Jin Weinuo invited Gong Qige to join a research mission of China's Dunhuang Grotto paintings, on account of Gong's renowned expertise in Han Dynasty's mural painting. Gong Qige was at that time professor of Fine Arts at the China National Minorities University. The mission carried out research at the border area of Gobi and Taklimakan deserts, Xinjiang. The area was antiquely called Qiuci, which located in the heart of Chinese Silk Road's main route.

There Gong Qige discovered the marvels of the ancient Chinese Buddhist mural painting that reached their peak during the Northern Qi and Tang Dynasties. Touched, he meticulously studied these over-1000-year-old murals till he also managed to fully assimilate their teachings.

As it was the case with his saving of the Han Dynasty tomb murals at Helinger, this was an extraordinary opportunity that would allow Gong Qige to make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of ancient

Chinese Buddhist mural painting and that would also enrich once again his own color palette with the patina of ancient art.

At Qiuci, Gong Qige spent most of his time at the soft sandstone cave temples of Kizil, "the Thousand-Buddha Caves" that were the cradle of Chinese Buddhism in Xinjiang. Notwithstanding heavy human depredation and natural deterioration, those extremely important Chinese Buddhist mural fragments of high artistic value had survived in the cave. He concentrated to copy them to absolute perfection. Divided into three sections, the mural described the elegant gods of music chatting in a flowery Pure Land. Their auras glared the light of jade, red coral and lapis lazuli, the talismans of fortune, blessings and divinity that tastefully ornate their bodies and give substance to their garments and their ethereal surroundings. They both enjoy the wisdom of the third eye and bear the symbols of movement and harmony. The interwoven colors of their skins and garments underline the dialectics of human and spiritual life. These graceful Music deities suggest a sensual path to divinity, just as the earthly heroes and heroines immortalized in the Han murals previously assimilated by Gong Qige playfully brave their Way to heaven. Both Han and Chinese Buddhist art converge in splendor at the supreme flourishing moments of the ancient Silk Road, subtly Leading to human joy and enlightenment as the sublime realization of life.

By the time Gong Qige finished rounding up his research at the Dunhuang and Qiuci grottoes, he had fully imbued into his art the spirit of both Han Dynasty and ancient Chinese Buddhist mural painting, truly becoming a modern ancient master who is playful, sensual, in harmony with nature and creation.

Shocked by Gong Qige artworks themed in China's Han Dynasty and Chinese Buddhism, years later the renowned Japanese art critic and author Ryotaro Shiba commented: "Mr. Gong is the most suitable artist as a successor of Dunhuang art. He was born on the wide-open range of the Inner Mongolian grassland where his heart was nurtured by the fantasy-like quality of the grassland. On top of that, the formal education he received in Beijing gave him a strong foundation to his

style of art. Most impressively, he is the spiritual descendant of the ancient Dunhuang artists".

Painting the people and the landscapes of the Chinese Silk Road

Gong Qige research at Dunhuang and Qiuci brought him a fortunate additional outcome. At the magical lands of the Uygur, Kazak, Kirgiz and the other peoples from Mongolian and Turkic and even Persian and Russian origin that were nurtured and brought together by the ancient Chinese Silk Road, he got fascinated with the human beauty and the diversity and intensity of the colors of the skies and landscapes that cascade from the snows of the towering Tianshan mountains into the lush grasslands of the Yili River Valley at its north, the deserts and oases of the Tarim and Junggar basins at its south and northeast and the burning oasis of the Turpan basin, the lowest point of China, at its east.

During the summers of 1980 and 1981, carrying with him a wooden box handmade by a friend, containing only paper of medium size, colors and brushes, he would keep coming back to Xinjiang not only to keep researching ancient Chinese Buddhist murals but mostly to paint these legendary souls and lands of the one thousand and one nights.

He painted close to one hundred pieces. They portray the contrasting peoples and landscapes of Xinjiang, capturing their rich palette of colors and feelings at its fullest. Gong Qige sums it up: "...what I saw and painted in Xinjiang was a new light...".

In the summer of 1980 he visited first Turpan, at the bifurcation of the Northern and Central Routes of the Chinese Silk Road, and then explored Qiuci (antiquely Kucha) and Kashi, the teeming oases at the Central Route of the Chinese Silk Road, bordering the southern flank of the Tianshan mountains and the northern edge of the Taklimakan desert [map].

In Turpan, the burning oasis of grapes and muskmelons, at 45 Celsius degrees, he relied on his mastery of color and composition to encapsulate the light of the desert in mystifying images depicting the landmarks

of this millenarian crossroad: *Camel, Ancient Buddhist city of Jianho and Emin Minaret* are illuminated hallucinations, in perfect temperature and balance. He also painted the first two of his many sensitive portraits of the diverse peoples of Xinjiang: *Uygur lady in the vineyard* and *Black Muslim woman*.

At the oasis of Qiuci, the capital city of the Western Lands (currently Xinjiang) in the East Han and Tang Dynasties, Gong Qige further researched the ancient Chinese Buddhist murals nested at the close-by Kizil grotto temples and, inspired by this second visit, he painted a seminal piece: *Goddess serving water*, in which he transcends his realistic renderings of these ancient murals into an imaginative, personal recreation. Also, at the city proper, a Muslim Uygur stronghold since the one thousand year old historical collapse of Buddhism in Xinjiang, he painted inspired portraits, scouting his models on the dusty roads or in the shadows of the vine trellis or at the bazaar. One of them, *Qiuci old Man*, was painted on a bridge, surrounded by a curious crowd that blocked the traffic for a while. The rest of them are realistic portraits of Muslim Uygur women wearing traditional dresses and scarves. Few of them, like *Woman in the bazaar* and *Seated beauty* are stylized to almost symbolic status. All of them are delicate masterpieces of color. *Beautiful girl* died of a fulminating disease one week after being portrayed. While painting her, Gong Qige had learnt that she was as old as his own daughter and he felt very close to her. We pay homage to her, our beautiful friend.

In the two thousand year old Kashi, the large city oasis at the foot of the Pamir Mountains that commands the access to the high glacial passes of the Chinese Silk Road into Central Asia, India and Persia, a strategic post that for one thousand years has been the most important Muslim Uygur stronghold in China, he painted wonderful, sensitive portraits: three of bearded and strong-featured old men at the grand bazaar, six of women in traditional dresses and scarves, one of a striking couple made by an old man and a beautiful virgin, and one, *Kashi beauty*, of a marvelous lady gazing at us behind her cover in a wonderfully fleeting moment in front of a largest mosque in China. Her

eyes are haunting, her mood trepid, the background is mysterious and contrasting: it is a composition full of energy and expression, in exquisite tension, alive.

One year later, during the summer of 1982, he took the Northern Route of the ancient Chinese Silk Road, at the northern flank of the Tianshan mountains, and discovered the lush grasslands of the Yili River Valley, so different from the arid Central and South Routes of the Silk Road and so similar to the grasslands of Inner Mongolia, his homeland. There he explored Yili, the multicultural capital of the Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, and the wonderful mountainous grasslands of Kaxi at its north. In both places he painted at an exhilarating pace.

Four landscapes, painted at Kaxi, set the tone: in their vivid colors one can feel the breath of life, the vitality of nature so happily embraced by the Kazak people. *Kaxi forests and valleys I-III* are grandiose depictions of the Yili River Valley beauty, where the heavenly steed of the Han Dynasty was born and the Dragon spruce finds its natural habitat.

There, in the midst of charm, Gong Qige captured two intimate scenes of Kazak nomadic life, around the yurt: *Women at homemaking* and *Motherhood*. He rounded this insight with three superb portraits: *Musicians*, *Old man* and *Kazak beauty*. In the last two the light reverberates in ecstasy.

At Kaxi he also painted four splendid realistic portraits, in which he freely played with color to express the mood and personality of the models; three red impressions of nature at sunset and dusk, in the reality of hallucination; and exploring further into the realm of imagination, *Women in Yurt*, in the stylization of *Mongolian wrestlers*, and the delicate *Kazak beauty* with horse.

Beyond Kaxi, at Yili and its surroundings, he kept painting at full bloom, with absolute creative freedom. Inspired, he painted more than forty masterpieces, mostly portraits. The variety and quality of his creations is astonishing, both in thrust and expressiveness, portraying

the inner feelings of women and men with sensitivity and mastery of color. He indeed painted intimate portraits, many at the homes of the models, some in the roads, or in the woods or the grasslands, at ease. In his paintings we can appreciate the different racial roots, cultural traits and psychological demeanors of the people that blend at the Yili River Valley, mostly from Mongolian and Turkic background, such as Uyghurs and Kazaks. A deep, heart-felt humanism embraces all of them. *Carrying water* and *Washing clothes* are touching recreations of grasslands home-making, along the imaginative path that Gong Qige started in Kaxi. So is the case of *Girl in the woods*, a beauty of dreams.

Lady in yellow and *Lady in red* are confident stylizations, with the strength of icons. The use of color and contrast in *Dark woman* and in *Old woman is daring*.

On the realistic path, he paints with *gusto* the beauty and charm of the women of the lands as in *The so-called most beautiful girl of Yili*. Or he paints women observing us, as in *Mirror*, or in a wide range of introspective or sensual moods, sometimes illuminated in backlight or delicate white hues, with few touches of color, as in *Beautiful girl*, *In the woods* and *Red ribbon*. In full diversity, his portraits of other women and men are also quite appealing and meaningful. It is of no use to try to classify or summarize the paintings of this period: each one of them is unique, wonderful, as the exhilarating creative moments that Gong Qige passionately enjoyed painting the peoples and the landscapes of the perennial Chinese Silk Road.

Few months later, crowning those years of artistic bliss at the Silk Road, Gong Qige paints *Kazak Goddess*. A work of synthesis, this rather large format oil painting masterpiece transcends the discoveries and breakthroughs achieved at the Chinese Silk Road, distilling them into a new, amazing light springing from his mastery of composition and color. The *Goddess* delicate yet imperious presence gives depth to her femininity and sensuality and the elegance of her demeanor and discretion heightens her spirituality and refinement. She is glorious in her magnificent feathered hat that rules the wind. The baby sheep in her

lap, beautifully painted into innocence and awe, symbolizes her divine creative power and her natural wisdom. Observing us, inscrutable, she rests and blossoms in the midst of a herd of goats, her improbable male adorers. The inner tension of the hypernatural scene is rendered by cleverly filtering contrasting lines and masses of colors through perspectives finely multi-layered into realist and abstract space bits. The unity of life and energy is illuminated by the bluish eyes of the *Goddess* and her creatures, and by the iridescence connecting the flaming earthen landscape with the ethereal pink Sun of the Inner Mongolian and the Kazak golden grasslands. The whole allegory is a hypnotic lyrical hymn to womanhood, nature and beauty, in the unique glorifying voice of Gong Qige, now fully enlightened.

6. Solo exhibition at the China National Art Museum and Beijing synthesis works (1982-1985)

In 1982 Gong Qige hold his first and to date only solo exhibition at the China National Museum of Art. It was a resounding success: Academy and University colleagues and art critics were impressed and many of his masterworks were immediately bought by enthusiastic Japanese collectors.

Fully confident, in the next few years Gong Qige goes from masterpiece to masterpiece, at his peak. It was a period of artistic synthesis, masterly heralded by *Kazak Goddess*, in which the purposeful use of allegories will allow Gong Qige to give full freedom to his imagination, transcending his previous artistic achievements.

In 1983 he paints *Buddha and deer*. It is Gong Qige's first grand recreation of the essence of ancient Chinese Buddhist mural painting. In the land of the flowered, watchful Dragon spruces, illuminated by the dark starry sky, a sensual, amazingly beautiful Buddha languidly observes herself feeding berries to a hypnotized, greedy male deer. Her soft head-dress is held by a ring of jade and red coral, heralding fortune and blessings. She is lightly attired with soft ribbons that flow with the *chi* of life, softly touching her almost naked body. She enjoys the