美术史与观念史

范景中 曹意强 主编

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HISTORY OF ART AND HISTORY OF IDEAS

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目 录

Unframing Chinese Art

Craig Clunas

A paper by my former teacher, Tim Barrett, entitled 'Some Imaginary Sinologists', deals with the image of practitioners of that singular discipline from the popular fictions of Somerset Maugham, through the sardonic returned gaze of the Asian intellectual Lao She, to the modernists Elias Cannetti and Jorge Luis Borges.[1] None of the scholars pictured is a happy and uncomplicated soul, whistling his way [they are all male] through the pages of the Chinese classics before retiring to sleep the sleep of the just. Rather the sinologist in fiction is a figure of huge but impotent knowledge, the man who knows too much about things too obscure, and whose common humanity is in some sense impaired by them. And if sinologists had a bad press in high modernist literature [they seem invisible in more contemporary writing], then it is art historians who have taken up something of the burden of representation of our culture's distrust of the egghead, of its conviction of the impossibility of the coexistence of sense and sensibility. In a number of very recent novels, the figure of the art historian is prominent, and in the four examples which I have in mind he [in all cases once again he] stands for a particular kind of pointless and passionless pedantry, missing the point of Art [with a capital A] by knowing too much about it.

John Banville's *The Untouchable*[*1998*] is a thinly disguised version of the life of Anthony Blunt, director of the Courtauld Institute of Art and latterly-disgraced agent of the Soviet Union, and the same author's Booker prize-winning *The Sea*[*2005*] features an art historian beset by a mid-life crisis on the beaches where he spent his childhood. Adam Thorpe's *The Rules of Perspective*[*2005*] is set among bickering German museum curators cowering in a basement in *1945* as shells rain down. Zadie Smith's very recent *On Beauty*[*2005*] centrally features an Art History professor who has spent his career taking the enchantment of 'genius' out of Rembrandt. It has not made him happy. In all four cases, it's made obvious to the reader that knowing a lot about the history of art stops you really 'getting' it.

It would seem to follow, then, that the sinologically trained art historian of China is doubly blasted, that no ivory tower is higher and no desiccated occupant of it less fitted for life in the 'real world'. Archaeologists for some reason get a better press, from Indiana Jones to Tony Robinson via such raffish figures as Sir Aurel Stein and Max Mallowan. That, I will not go into. Rather, I want to set about again trying to unpack the notion of 'Chinese art', as one which cannot be separated from the numerous institutional and methodological frameworks which have constituted it as an object of study over the last century. Many of these institutions and methodologies are now on under stress, not least the very concepts of 'Chinese' and 'art' themselves. I confess I thought I was being terribly clever when in *1997* I called a survey volume, *Art in China*, and explicitly eschewed what I took then to be the more essentialising title of *Chinese Art*. Now it looks to me like a naïve and not very convincing get-out clause. I am therefore going here to have another try to address the effects the frameworks of sinology and

art history have on what gets studied and how it gets studied, and then I am going to suggest, through a new look at one neglected cultural context of the Ming period in China, the years from *1368* to *1644*, how much enduring narratives still frame the stories we tell about Chinese art and culture. This is not, therefore, going to be a metanarrative of liberation, despite its title. I have often played a rather mean trick on first-year undergraduates, standing them in front of a museum case and asking them to tell me what they can see. After they have finished describing the objects displayed inside the case, I remind them, in as kindly a manner as a sinologically trained art historian like me can muster, that I asked what they could *see*, and I point out the shelves, the rectangles of cardboard, the plates of glass and the framework of wood or metal which constitute the case. I get them to confirm that they too can see these and, yes, they can see their own and my reflections in the glass. You *can* learn to see the case and the object in it; you cannot wish it away. Similarly, I hold to the view that it is our duty to investigate the larger and less tangible frames and reflective surfaces which constitute our practice; not to do so does not free us from them, but can only do the reverse.

The pairing of sinology and art history, the discursive domains of China and of art respectively, has a history itself, and one of its monuments is John Pope's essay, 'Sinology or Art History: Notes on Method in the Study of Chinese Art'. Published in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* in *1947*, it opens with a ringing declaration of war by a man who went on to be Director of the Freer Gallery of Asian Art in Washington, 'for too many years the study of Chinese art has been pursued by art historians'.[2] It is important to historicise Pope's argument, to consider its precise moment in the course of the two

disciplines which it juxtaposes so starkly. 'Sinology or Art History' is a review article, a response to the publication in *1946* of Ludwig Bachhofer's *A Short History of Chinese Art*. In his brief preface, written in Chicago in *1944*, Bachhofer sets out an uncompromising agenda:

> No explanation should be necessary for the great emphasis laid upon problems of form. Form is the only means of expression an artist has at his disposal, whatever considerations may have determined his subject matter. It is form alone that makes a vessel, a statue or a painting, a work of art. But form never remains the same. It changes continually, and I saw my main task in describing these changes. They revealed themselves as so many phases of a logical, orderly, and organic evolution.[3]

It is above all in the phrase 'logical, orderly and organic evolution' that Bachhofer [*1894—1976*] shows himself to be the developer of the ideas of his teacher Heinrich Wölfflin [*1864—1945*], a name almost synonymous in art history's history with the term 'formalism'. In *1947* formalism enjoyed a considerable degree of intellectual clout, not just in the study of the art of the past, but, through the work of such as Clement Greenberg, as an interpretative tool with which to approach the challenging new art with which New York sought to replace Paris as the core of an 'art world'. A family squabble about contextual versus formalist approaches, looking into and looking around the object, is deeply inscribed in art history from its inception in the academic politics of late nineteenth-century Germany, but right from the outset one of the attractions of a formalist approach was grounded in the growing body of

material from Asian origins as objects of study; formalism was seen as having 'methodological principles that were sufficiently flexible to encompass the new diversity and abundance of objects'.[4] It was this freedom that the sinologically innocent or ignorant Bachhofer was taking advantage of.[5]

The two elements of his thesis which most angered Bachhofer's numerous critics were his insistence on a unilinear scheme of artistic development in every part of the globe [through 'archaic', 'classical', 'baroque' phases], and the move by which he underpinned this, the supposedly western origins of most significant elements of Chinese art. This latter position had a long history in European studies of other types of Asian art, and scholars of the historiography of Indian sculpture [in particular my former colleague at Sussex Partha Mitter] have drawn attention to the way in which the 'Hellenistic' sculpture of Gandhara was used to build an argument about the European origins of all representational art in India.[6] The similarly Greek origins of Chinese art had been argued in a brief essay by another member of the generation preceding Bachhofer. Franz Wickhoff [*1853—1909*] was Professor of Art History at Vienna, who, in an *1898* paper entitled 'On The Historical Unity in the Universal Evolution of Art', concluded:

> The degree of artistic expertise thus remained constant in China, entered Japanese art, and has been maintained down to the present day, so that one could say that it is classical illusionism which is instrumental in shaping the artistic achievements of today. It truly is a single tradition that came full circle, and all arts of the modern civilised nations can be traced back directly to the Greeks, whose influence spread in all directions. ... Since all art derives from one common

> source, so much of the original must have been preserved in each of its branches that a lost thread could be found anywhere by means of which the rediscovered remains of past periods could be tied into the artistry of the present.[7]

This unity of past and present was an absolute given for nineteenth-century pioneers of Chinese art, but it did not die out with the nineteenth century, even if the extreme diffusionist position did. In his inaugural lecture, delivered on *15* May *1956*, my predecessor as Professor of Chinese Art and Archaeology in the University of London, S. H. Hansford talked to the title, 'The Study of Chinese Antiquities'. Although totally innocent of explicit theoretical propositions, he is quite clear that:

> The remote past of China is not an alien past, which the Chinese of today have supplanted, but an inheritance handed down through countless generations of Chinese forbears in an unbroken tradition, receiving and absorbing fresh streams from time to time through conquests of arms or ideas, but always distinctively Chinese. So, for example, the Chinese schoolboy feels incomparably closer to the Chou Dynasty than the British schoolboy does to ancient Greece and Rome.[8]

It is easy now to mock this way of talking. Remember that Hansford's 'today' was *1956*, and that he spoke on the eve of the Hundred Flowers Movement, the results of which would be so personally disastrous for his Chinese peers. Ten years after he spoke, as at least one British schoolboy curled up entranced with Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tale of Troy*, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution took the minds of schoolboys across China off their sense of closeness to the Bronze Age.

Now, in an age which is sadly post-Saidian in the literal sense, we can smile at the orientalist confidence with which the English professor can tell us what 'the Chinese' know and do and think, deploying the same condescension available to those before us who, after reading their Freud for the first time, could look back to the art and literature of the past and spot the phallic symbols and instances of the Oedipus complex. As an irresistible aside, perhaps if Sir Percival David actually *had* had a consultation with Sigmund Freud in Hampstead in *1939*, as the researches of my colleague Stacey Pierson show he very *nearly* did, the whole parameters of the discourses of Chinese art in Britain might have been different. Less speculatively, I do not think it is pushing it too far to divide the study of Chinese art written in English into pre- and post-Said phases, and my own career is certainly shaped, for better or for worse, by the fact that *Orientalism* hit me at an impressionable age, as a postgraduate at this school in *1978*, when it was still possible to borrow the one copy of this alluringly difficult new volume from the Library and devour it on the top deck of the bus, experiencing the same sense of having one's life experience compellingly articulated as friends have told me they felt at the same time, when they first read Germaine Greer or Marilyn French or Simone de Beauvoir.

But the last laugh, the smiling condescension of posterity, may well not be on Howard Hansford, but on me, and on those who choose to frame the debate in terms derived, at however many removes, from Edward Said. For Hansford goes on to say:

> It is this sense of continuity, of being one with a remote but glorious past, which gives the Chinese an assurance of stability, whatever may be the doubts of their neighbours in the light of current events. It is the basis of the racial pride of this

remarkable people, that can well afford the luxury of understatement, or of laughter at its own shortcomings. The Chinese, like the British, are quite sure that they are the salt of the earth, and do not feel the need of proving it by tedious argument.[9]

Who would be willing to say that it is not Hansford's awareness of 'the Chinese' as the salt of the earth, which will ensure him an honoured place in a hundred years when the definitive and official history of Chinese art history comes to be written? The palatability of his words to officially-promoted and powerfully-supported popular discourses of nationalist triumphalism may well be much greater, *is* already much greater, than that of those hand-wringingly concerned with whether such a thing as 'Chinese art' even exists at all.

If Said [and I use the name not as direct influence but as a shorthand for a whole bundle of factors] changed how the field was studied, there was an impact too arguably on what was studied. Hansford knew in *1956* what the important categories of study were, under his broad umbrella of 'antiquities', in a Chinese-encyclopaedia-like list which begins with bronze vessels, and goes through works in stone, 'glyptics' [by which he means jades], touches extremely fleetingly on painting, and ends with ceramics, the category which by synecdoche comes to stand in this country for 'Chinese art' as a whole. The numerous exclusions of this interpretative framework are too numerous to mention individually, but let me just focus on one which was self-evidently correct to Hansford and his audience, and indeed is signalled in his very title. That is the presumption that the Professor of Chinese Art and Archaeology will necessarily deal not just with far away but with long ago. What was for many years the definitive survey

volume, Sickman and Soper's *The Art and Architecture of China*, first published in the same year as Hansford lectured, stops dead at the eighteenth century. William Willett's *1958* survey, *Chinese Art* goes no further. In *1967* Michael Sullivan's *Short History of Chinese Art* explicitly challenged this exclusion of everything after the abdication of the Qianlong emperor in *1796* with six pages [2% of his total] to those most recent two centuries. But Michael Sullivan was for many years alone, and remains distinctive, in his championing of the art of modern China, and the *1796* cut-off point was certainly operative in the Victoria and Albert Museum which I joined in the last year of the *1970*s. One of the biggest single changes in my career so far, though I remain in no sense a scholar of modern Chinese art, is the degree of interest and attention which it now commands, to the point where it is the focus of interest of the majority of the graduate students I work with, the topic of the classes I teach, and is on the verge of successfully escaping the gravitational field of sinology completely, to be the object of work by curators, scholars and students who would reject the label of 'Chinese art' altogether in favour of a focus on a globalised contemporary visual culture.

Hansford's exclusions and his inclusions are part of what I mean by the framing of Chinese art. The process by which, in an institution like the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, one type of object came to stand for all of 'Chinese art' has now been well studied, by Stacey Pierson and Judith Green among others.[10] Their work would essentially reinforce, if in a much more theorised way, the kinds of connection between ownership and scholarship which are exemplified in the collection of Sir Percival David, and which Hansford eulogises with a final rhetorical flourish. 'Our delight,' he says, 'in Chinese porcelain

is spontaneous and sincere. It has served thousands, including myself, as an introduction to Chinese art and to wider fields of oriental studies; and it will surely continue to do so.'[11] Well, me too; I felt that delight long before any formal study, even if what strikes me most now is an uneasiness about the phrase, 'our delight'. Not that I feel delight has no place in academic study, like the desiccated art historical husks of Banville's or Zadie Smith's fictions. Rather do I feel that unease about the phrase '*our* delight', through no longer knowing who *we* are. A poetics in which *they* make the stuff and we write about it, which pervades a text like Hansford's, can no longer be so innocently indulged in.

But what makes the framing device of *we* and *they* particularly complex in the study of Chinese art, in a manner which Said has justifiably been criticised for failing to understand, is the extent to which an orientalist discourse is constructed out of native materials, and in particular out of the vast written record of Chinese engagement with painting and calligraphy and bronzes and stone and jades and ceramics. These are not categories he has plucked from nowhere, as he carefully tells us by citing Chinese terms such as *jinshi xue*, 'the study of metal and stone', an emic category of epigraphy. There is a complicity, which has only begun to be worked on by young scholars like Aida Yuen Wong, between the Chinese elite discourses of high cultural production, and the discourse of art, transferred to China via Japan in around *1900*.[12] It suits many to see these discourses as a timeless part of 'Chinese culture'. It suits a still largely Eurocentric art history practised in Europe and North America which feels happier with 'them' being 'over there', and is quite happy to churn out surveys called 'The Portrait' or 'Modern Art' or 'Landscape Painting' which deal purely with European

material but ignore China along with everywhere else put in the basket marked 'non-Western'; but it equally suits the soft nationalism of a 'Chinese approach' to Chinese art, a piece of academic identity politics of US origin, and a fantasy which the finest Chinese scholars of Chinese art have often been at pains to dismiss. In his intriguing polemic entitled *Provincializing Europe* [the title alone is worth the price of admission], Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to the construction of modernity as a project in which Third World nationalisms have been 'equal partners'. He says, 'The project of provincializing Europe cannot be a nationalist, nativist, or atavistic project. In unravelling the necessary entanglement of history. . . one cannot but problematize "India" at the same time as one dismantles "Europe".' His ideal is one in which 'the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous'. However, he adds a caveat, 'This, as I have said is impossible within the knowledge protocols of academic history, for the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created.'[13] But is it impossible? Here I think the Chinese context is significantly different from that of India. On a basic linguistic level, no Indian art historian is not fluent in written academic English, whereas probably the vast majority of Chinese art historians never read it at all. 'They made it and we write about it', is no longer tenable at the simple bibliographic level, and of course the bad news for students who want jobs is that Pope's simple dichotomy between sinology and art history was long ago replaced by a situation in which command of both discourses is a minimum entry requirement. Attempts to claim otherwise are bound to fail. One such attempt is that promoted by James Elkins, who has raised eyebrows in my field with his insistence that the study of Chinese painting is Western art history. He argues that autochthonous discourses

provide no meaningful point of entry, and that anyone studying Chinese painting today is necessarily the intellectual heir of, for example, Heinrich Wölfflin rather than the heir of, for example, Zhang Yanyuan, author of the Tang dynasty collection of painter's biographies entitled *Li dai ming hua ji*, *Records of the Painters of Successive Dynasties*, written eleven hundred years before Wölfflin died. He argues empirically that 'Chinese' approaches are no longer used, in that no-one today is writing work which uses the poetics of *Li dai ming hua ji* as its framework of interpretation.[14] Empirically he may be right, but then anyone who tried writing about Renaissance art using the framework of Giorgio Vasari, which is that God had chosen Michelangelo because He favoured Florence above all other places, would find that they were equally not *dans le vrai* of art historical discourse. I do not think for a moment that James Elkins means to imply this, but the political effect of his underlying 'first in the West and then the rest' paradigm, when applied to the expansion of art historical interests beyond a perceived European core, has the effect of seeming to say that when the natives at last get to sit at the table they are to be told dinner has unfortunately been cancelled, and in fact did not taste good anyway.

I have dealt in this lecture so far in metanarratives and discourse. But what are we in fact to do, not to pretend that we don't see the framing devices of Chinese art, the metal and the cardboard and our own reflections in the glass, but to enable us to work in a way which moves the subject on, without disappearance into a total self-reflexivity which too easily descends into solipsism? What material might we approach, and how might we approach it? Let me offer an example, in the form of a rapid sketch of my current research topic, the cultural role of the hereditary aristocracy of Ming dynasty China. By this, I mean