

# REN BONIAN

## PAINTINGS BY CHINESE MASTERS

任伯年  
中國名家繪畫

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## GUIDE TO THE USE OF THE SERIES

1. *PAINTINGS BY CHINESE MASTERS* is a large series of painting albums, totaling 30 volumes.
2. *PAINTINGS BY CHINESE MASTERS* is published with English-Chinese bilingual texts.
3. The contents (in presentation order) are: photograph of the artist, outline introduction, general preface, volume preface, reproductions of selected works, the artist on painting, the artist's chronology, postscript and table of contents.
4. Each volume contains between 80 and 100 reproductions.
5. To facilitate appreciation, the works are not arranged in the customary chronological order or by conventional category; they are mainly arranged according to visual effect.
6. The chronology is presented in customary order, and its contents focus mainly on the artistic and academic activities of the artist.
7. The artist's views on painting are arranged according to date of publication. When there are ancient Chinese characters, variant forms of characters or interchangeable homophones, the original characters are adopted. Some of the views on painting are from inscriptions on paintings. Undecipherable characters are replaced by blank squares.
8. The English version of the preface and chronology of each volume is somewhat shortened. In the translation of people's names and place names, pinyin is used in principle. In some instances, when suitable, translations are used, with pinyin added parenthetically.

## 凡 例

- 一、《中國名家繪畫》為大型系列畫冊，分近代、現代、當代三部分，共 30 卷；
- 二、《中國名家繪畫》系列畫冊中的文字採用英文、中文對照方式；
- 三、內容編輯依次為：畫家照片與簡介、總序、分卷序、作品圖版、畫家畫論、畫家年表、跋文、目錄；
- 四、每卷收錄作品在 80—100 件之間；
- 五、作品順序不按畫家創作年代及題材分類排列的慣例；
- 六、年表以年代順序排列，其內容主要為畫家的藝術創作以及與藝術有關的學術活動；
- 七、畫家畫論按照發表的時間順序排列；遇有古字、異體字、通假字等，均尊重作者原字；有些畫論為畫家作品上之題款，對其中的難以辨識之字則以方框取代；
- 八、分卷序文與年表在翻譯時根據向國外發行的特點有所刪減；涉及人名、地名的翻譯，原則上使用漢語拼音，必要時採用意譯解釋。

# GENERAL PREFACE

Wang Bomin

Chinese painting has an extremely long history and is very well established. The artistic images on the Neolithic painted pottery and rock paintings carved into cliff walls are the first sources of Chinese fine arts.

The glory of the paintings of the Han and Tang Dynasties is a source of pride for all Chinese. From the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties down to modern and contemporary times, interest in and practice of Chinese painting have not weakened and in every generation there have always been artists who continue the work, and each of the artistic works they leave behind bears characteristics of its own time. All these traditions are continuing and becoming greater day by day. I have written many histories of Chinese fine arts and I feel profoundly that Chinese painting is as lofty as the Five Great Mountains of China, continuing to flow through the millennia like the Huang (Yellow) River and the Changjiang (Yangtze) River.

Chinese painting is the carrier of Chinese national culture. It contains our national character, the essence and the wisdom and awareness accumulated by the generations of artistic creators. They are an extremely valuable cultural inheritance of all Chinese people. The Chinese have philosophical traditions that are shared by many people of the East, but they harbour especially deep national sentiments with regard to Chinese painting.

In the field of painting theory, Chinese painting constitutes a system of its own. In the selection of subjects -- no matter whether it is the human figure, landscapes, flowers and birds or insects, fish, birds and animals -- the range is wide open and yet specialized, rich and yet disciplined. On the matter of methods of painting, they specialize in brush pen and ink. They can be detailed or free brushwork, they can be blue or green, or just black ink. Each style has its own special qualities. As for the whole of painting, they especially pay attention to the spirit, appeal, thought and scene, as well as to conception and taste. The special characteristics of our nation's artistic styles can be seen in the generations of famous traditional paintings. These artists all have resounding names, for example, Zhan Ziqian, Zhou Fang, Dong Yuan, Ju Ran, Xu Xi, Huang Quan, Li Cheng, Fan Kuan, Mi Fu, Li Gonglin, Guo Xi, Cui Bai, Zhao Chang, Li Tang, Ma Yuan, Xia Kui and Huang Gongwang, Wang Meng, Ni Zan and Wu Zhen of the Yuan Dynasty. Altogether there are just too many to name, and they all have left behind outstanding works. When these works are exhibited in the exhibition halls of Beijing and Shanghai in the 20th century, viewers rolled in like waves. Their eulogies came out in the form of long, thunderous sighs. The powerful and poetic expression of Chinese painting is indeed magical. When painting a landscape, for example, the power of breaking through the time and space of the limited painting surface brings the painted scenery within view of people who generally cannot see it. This is true whether painting the endless stretch of the Changjiang River or painting the towering lofty Mount Hua. When painting with the "misty distance (i.e. viewing the mountain through mist and beyond waters)" method, one of the "six perspectives of painting far away mountains", one can paint "the mountain seems both to be there and not be there", or one might choose to paint "the mountain is in the hazy whimsical mist". When we look at this painting, we feel as if we are reading the poetry of the immortals. One poem says: "Incomparable art of this world moves the gods and ghosts to tears. The blue sea beyond the mountains makes the sky my roof." When studying a Chinese painting, indeed the enjoyment of beauty feels like this.

Chinese artists are willfully devoted to our nation's cultural qualities and stylistic vigor. For instance, if they respect "hills and gullies formed from within" as the way of painting, the artists will all self-consciously observe this principle. This lets the energy of painting come from within, so it is not just added on from outside. This has been formulated by thousands of years of tradition. How rare and valuable this is!

The future for the development of Chinese painting is boundless. We live in an era which is advancing. Development and raising of standards should take place in step, but they are also relative to each other. Therefore various kinds of complexities may develop on the path of advancement around the world. In modern and contemporary China, apart from the artists of the previous generation like Qi Baishi, Huang Binhong, Zhang Daqian and Pan Tianshou, who is the great master of Chinese painting today? This cannot be decided by just anyone. We have to wait until we can see all of the artists' accomplishments. Undoubtedly, the condition of Chinese painting during the first half of this century is that the artists are still in the running. Being still in the running is a normal and unavoidable phenomenon. Being in the running is self-motivated. When there are more runners, the roadway must be widened. We should build more overpasses to let the running go more smoothly without obstruction. Being in the running will bring advancement, more talents and more good works of art. We should appreciate this era of painting being "in the running".

Speaking from the perspective of historical summary, a history of painting naturally praises certain excellent works and intelligent and talented artists. In the final analysis, however, a history should eulogize the existence of people and the value of people's creations. Therefore, in observing the future of development of a country and a nation's art, we mainly should observe the quality and the moral condition of the people of the country and the nation. China is naturally no exception to this. I am very confident and know very clearly that the Chinese people are diligent, brave and wise. Chinese people struggle with heaven and earth and can overcome whatever difficulties until victory is achieved. The art of Chinese painting is situated in such a setting. There is sufficient energy and all the conditions are right. The situation for painting is like the season of spring with gentle winds and beautiful sunshine. Its advancement is occurring naturally and without limits.

I deeply believe that the art of Chinese painting has an incredibly boundless and bright future.

June 2008

中國畫，源遠流長。新石器時代的彩陶，刻在崖壁上的岩畫，其藝術的形象創造，即為中國大美術之先河。

漢、唐繪畫在文化史上顯耀的燦爛光輝，足為華夏人民自豪。宋元明清而至近現代，畫道不衰，繪畫傳承代不乏人，遺留作品各具時代特點，皆蒸蒸日上。余撰中國美術專史多部，深感中國畫如五岳，巍巍然；又如黃河、長江，湯湯而不舍晝夜。

中國畫是中華民族文化的載體，它具有民族性，有精華，有歷代繪畫創造者所積累的智慧和悟性。此皆中國人的極為寶貴的文化遺產。中國人有東方共有的哲學理念，尤其對於中國畫，有着深厚的民族感情。

在畫學思想上，中國畫自成體系。繪畫的選題，不論人物、山水、花鳥以至蟲魚鳥獸，面廣而有專，豐富而有約。畫法上，講求筆墨，或工或寫，或青綠，或水墨，各具一格。對於繪畫之整體，講求氣、韻、思、景以及意、趣。本民族獨特的藝術風格，見諸於歷代傳統的名畫。那些名家有着響亮之名字，有如展子虔、周昉、董源、巨然、徐熙、黃筌、李成、范寬、米芾、李公麟、郭熙、崔白、趙昌、李唐、馬遠、夏圭及至元之黃、王、倪、吳等，不勝枚舉。他們都有傑作傳世。當20世紀在京滬殿堂展出時，觀眾如潮涌，人們之贊美聲，無不化為長嘆而成雷鼓聲。中國畫强有力的又富有詩意的表現力，的確臻乎神化。如畫山水，那種突破時空在畫面上的局限性，使所畫的景物，在人們通常視域內看不見的東西看得見，寫長江萬里、圖華岳千仞皆如此。“六遠”透視法中的“迷遠”一法，能畫“山色有無中”，或寫“山在虛無縹緲間”，令人見之，恍如自己在讀仙游的詩篇。有詩云：“人間藝絕神鬼哭，山外滄州天為屋”。讀中國畫，獲得美的享受，誠如是。

中國畫家恣意於本民族的文化氣質與藝術風骨。如把“內營丘壑”尊之為畫道，畫家們自覺遵守，這就使作畫的能量發之於內在，並非偶然的外加，這是千百年的傳統之形成，這是多麼的難能可貴。

中國畫的發展，前途廣闊。時代在發展，發展與提高應該是同步，但又是相對的，所以在世界各國，在前進的道路上都會產生各種各樣的複雜性。近現代的中國，老一輩的畫家如齊白石、黃賓虹、張大千、潘天壽等不計外，當今的中國畫的大師到底是誰？不是誰說了算，還得看“水到渠成”。因為中國畫的狀況，在本世紀的上半葉，無疑地，它還處在畫家競走的時期。競走是一種正常、必然之現象。競走是自發的，競走者必多，道路可加寬，不妨多設立交橋，使競走暢通無阻；競走必進步，必出人才、必出好作品。我們應當贊賞繪畫的競走時代。

從歷史的總結而言，一部繪畫史，它所贊美的固然是一些優秀作品及其有聰明才智的畫家。但是，歸根結蒂，一部歷史所要歌頌的是人的存在和人的創造價值。所以看一個國家、一個民族藝術的發展前途，主要地還在於看這個國家、看這個民族人民的素質及其精神狀態。這對我們中國自無例外。我堅信並深知我們中國人民，勤勞、勇敢、有智慧。中國人鬥天鬥地，能克服一切困難，直至取得勝利，則中國繪畫藝術處在這樣的情況中，熱能既足，條件具備，在春一般的風和日麗的歲月中，其進境自然無可限量。

我深信中國的繪畫藝術有着無比廣闊、光明的發展前途。



# THE GIANT OF THE “SHANGHAI SCHOOL”: REN BONIAN

Gong Chanxing

“What lively design and such delicate harmony! Within these dense colours, owing to such fresh tastes and simplest but most natural of methods, he easily and smoothly expressed so many things. Are these not the works of a great artist? Ren Bonian is truly a grand master.”  
--Pascal-Adolphe-Jean Dagnan-Bouveret, Paris, France, 1926

**R**en Bonian (1840 – 1895) whose various names include Run, Bonian, and Yi, and whose assumed names were Ciyuan and Xiaolou, pet name “Heshang (Monk),” was born at Hangwushan, Shaoxing in Zhejiang Province. His father was Ren Hesheng, courtesy name Songyun, a man who “studied, but not for the goal of getting a government position. He set up a portrait painting stand by the street and made a living as he studied. He was good at painting, particularly at realistic paintings.” Ren Bonian had received artistic influence in his family ever since he was very young. His father made strict demands on him: he had to do realistic portrait paintings every day – folk portrait paintings. Gradually, he accumulated many small portrait paintings. It was said that when he was about ten years old, whenever his father went out, he would tell Bonian not to bother about asking visitors’ names, but rather only show him their portraits. Indeed, whenever visitors came, Ren Bonian would quickly pick up a pen and do a portrait sketch. When his father returned and saw the portrait, his father would say: “Ah, it’s him.” This indicates that Ren Bonian showed good painting skills when he was no more than a young boy. Under his father’s tutelage, he learned to carefully observe people in such a way that “his mind would remember what his eyes would see.” This was very important in laying the foundation for his portrayal through painting, especially his portrait painting.

Xiaoshan was on the path of the Taiping Tianguo Movement. In 1861 Li Xiucheng’s troops moved east. When the troops passed Xiaoshan during their invasion of Shaoxing, Ren Bonian fell into the hands of the armies of Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing during the chaos of war. “The big chief ordered him to hold the army flag” and “he had to wave the flag in the front of the army”. “Sometimes he marched with the army, and when he was in the fields, he slept under the open sky until morning”. Although it was a short war experience, it had great influence on his creative life later.

After leaving the Taiping Army, Ren Bonian came to Ningbo and this was where his early works began. “Farewell to Dongjin” (1868; China Art Gallery) is one of his representative works during the 1860’s, depicting a farewell scene at the bridge outside the East Gate of Ningbo. The five people in the painting are Chen Duofeng of Yin County, Ren Bonian of Shanyin, Xie Lianshi (also named Fulian) of Zhenhai, Wan Geting (also named Houcheng) of Yin County and Ren Fuchang (also named Xun) of Xiaoshan. This is the earliest extant self-portrait of Ren Bonian. All five of the subjects are wearing Chinese long gowns, and are standing in various poses. The artist’s simple but strong strokes portrayed their lingering farewell feelings. The scene is filled both with void and concrete painting; it is solemn but not stale, as the concrete gives spirit to the void. The vast blue watery background contrasts with the double-lined leaves and the bridge. Using his very own personal experience, this artist under 30 years of age appropriately depicted true, moving farewell emotions, with scenery and feelings woven together. All this demonstrated his outstanding painting skills.

Ren Bonian later left Ningbo with his uncle Ren Fuchang and went to Suzhou. Although he was in Suzhou for only a short time, it was an extremely important period in his life. In painting, he continued the old tradition of the great painters of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, but he also studied the portrait painting techniques of Ren Fuchang who was of the new age. Suzhou itself is an ancient city imbued with culture. The four artists of the Wu School: Shen Zhou, Wen Zhengming, Tang Yin and Qiu Ying, were well known all over in the Jiangnan area. After the Yangzhou School, the market for paintings shifted to Suzhou for a short time. Ancient paintings of famous artists were not hard to find in the Suzhou markets. Ren Bonian was able to expand his vision by viewing many famous works there. He copied and imitated works by Chen Hongshou and his son for practice; he carefully studied the outlining and colour application methods of the Song Dynasty, and expanded upon the special skills of portrait painting that he had learned at home. This was an extremely fast improvement for him in learning the traditional painting skills. He painted “Small Portrait of Sha Fu at 39”, “Small Portrait of Ren Fuchang”, “Small Portrait of Bo Ying at 40”, “Hengyun Mountain People Begging”, “Portrait of Fanshishan Farmers”, “Small Portrait of Madam Peiqiu” and “Portrait of Liu Sheng”. Because of his outstanding portrait painting skills, he made friends with many painters, not only in Suzhou but he also became acquainted with Hu Gongshou of Shanghai. And it was because of Hu’s presence that Ren Bonian moved from Suzhou to Shanghai in 1868. There, he still relied on selling paintings for his livelihood.

When Ren Bonian first arrived in Shanghai, he “lived in the Yu Garden and was very unsuccessful. He went to the

Spring Wind Teahouse for tea every day. There was a sheep pen below the teahouse and by observing sheep everyday, he learned to paint them in such a way as to capture their spirit." Sanpailou was the commercial centre in Shanghai that was densely populated and bustling with commerce with various trades and all types of people with countless displays of feelings and customs. Ren Bonian carefully examined their customs and habits and understood these city folk's interest in beauty, and this is fully revealed in his paintings. During this period of time, Ren Bonian became acquainted with many famous artists there, for example: Yang Runbo, Zhang Zixiang, Xu Gu, Gao Yongzhi, Hu Zhang, Wang Li, Zhu Cheng, Zhao Zhiqian, Wu Changshuo, Liu Dezhai, Pu Hua, Wu Dazheng, Yu Qu Yuan, Zhou Xian, etc. These were all professional calligraphers or painters well known in society and they all had profound understanding of traditional literati paintings. Ren Bonian's contact with them was a great benefit to him. At the same time, in order to express the new artistic needs of citizens, he continuously sought to improve his painting skills. While selling his paintings at the Stationery and Fan Shop, he paid particular attention to the demands and preferences of the mass of citizens. Although painting fans is a simple artistic creation, "the demand kept on increasing because all the merchants considered being able to pull a folding fan out of their pockets or sleeves was something to be proud of." Under the influence of these literary people, Ren Bonian established a sound foundation for the freehand brushwork paintings that arose after the literati paintings. His paintings also became more poetic and not just by inscribing poems on them. Poetry was in the images of his paintings. Ren Bonian often told people: "I can say that my paintings are 'written' ". Both the *Shanghai Forest of Calligraphy* and *The Sequel to the Shanghai County Gazette* testify to what he said. He himself said: "When painting, whether it is well done or not, it all depends on the word 'write' ". Why does he not say "paint"? The reasons are two: 1. To "write" from the heart, is to be poetic. What he meant by "write" is to paint from life ("writing life") and use freehand brushwork ("writing spirit"). And freehand brushwork ("writing spirit") is a technique that is unique to Chinese painting. Only when there is spirit is there content. On many of his paintings, such as "Secluded Bird Singing in Spring", "Myna" and others, he inscribed the words: "written in front of the living object". And on many others, he inscribed: "spirit written by Bonian" and on many more "written by Bonian". He painted the spirit of his images with a strong skillful brush and would not paint too realistically with fine strokes. In other words, he looked upon content as spirit and developed the content with spirit. 2. Why did he select the word "write"? Discussions on Paintings by Wang Xuehao says: "The one word 'write' says everything. It is very sincere. Characters have to be written, not retraced over, and it's the same with paintings. Once a painting is traced over, it becomes rather common." From an objective point of view, Ren Bonian emphasized that his paintings were "written", and this shows that he is no common artisan. When Ren was instructing Wu Changshuo in painting, he taught him to blend calligraphic brushwork with that of painting. This shows that he himself had absorbed the creative ideas of the literati painters. This was particularly so after he read the volume by Bada Shanren (Zhu Da, 1626 – 1705), when he "understood even more the beauty of using the brush. Even when painting something very fine, one must use the strength of the mid-part of the wrist..." Bada Shanren can use the least number of strokes of the brush pen to paint the richest objects. His lines are long and there are many curves. The images he creates are round and smooth, so his strokes can be horizontal, vertical, smooth turning or sharp turning and they are very flexible and versatile. Ren Bonian learned from Bada Shanren that no matter whether one is producing a large or small painting, one has to use the middle part of the suspended wrist, so as to make the lines round, strong and enduring. Therefore, "writing" is inherent in the act of using the brush pen vigorously.

In 1885, Ren Bonian inscribed on a page of a volume of figure paintings: "When Xinluo Shanren uses his brush pen, it is like Lady Gongsun performing her Sword Dance and Breakaway Dance: sharp and smooth with appropriate pauses; and no one can challenge this. Nowadays, when people are just beginning to learn to paint, they will start imitating Xinluo Shanren right away. This is really laughable!" It is true that among the Yangzhou School of painters, both his brushwork and inkwork are marvelous any way you look at them. They are strong, full of spirit and uniqueness. This is why Ren Bonian respected him so much. We can see that among all of Ren's works, many reflect what he learned from Xinluo Shanren, examples being: "Silk Bamboo of East Mountain", "Golden Valley Garden", "Tending to Ducks at Luding", "A Collection of Figure Paintings", etc. Ren Bonian is an artist who truly understood Xinluo Shanren, because although he learned Xinluo's techniques, he only imitated his spirit and not his paintings. As a result, Ren Bonian was able to keep his own style. Ren Bonian said that he "writes" his paintings; one of the reasons is because he obeyed "the six ways of painting" and he made a serious study of traditional paintings. He believed: "What is good about the paintings of Song Dynasty artists is that they are good at painting live objects (*xiesheng*)". This is completely correct and he continued this tradition, but he is not bound by old methods and is able to create whatever comes naturally. Zhang Yuguang said: "Ren Bonian is very strong in painting live objects and there is not one among the ancients who can match him." This is not an exaggeration at all. All his paintings of figures, animals and birds,



birds and flowers and landscapes are from real life, and his portraits of real live objects are well recognized.

In 1876, Ren Bonian painted "Small Portrait of Zhongying at 56". Ma Heng, curator of the Palace Museum, wrote a postscript on the portrait: "I heard Fang Qiaoling of Zhenhai say that at first when Ren Bonian was selling paintings, Ren looked after Fang's household. Fang Qiaoling respected people and was very hospitable. He treated Ren with much respect but Ren never expressed any thanks to him. After half a year when Ren was about to leave, he painted a portrait for his host. Ren pulled out some paper, spread some ink on it and with just a few strokes, he painted a view from the back, and whoever saw it would say it was a marvelous likeness. And Ren Bonian said, 'Ever since I began serving here, there was not a moment when I was not observing my host's behaviour. Now I am just conveying his spirit and not his likeness.' Xi Wen painted my portrait this spring and both my spirit and my likeness were captured. He truly rivals Ren Bonian. Naturally whenever he sees a portrait by Ren Bonian, he collects it and stores it securely. November, 1948. Ma Heng of Shuping, Yin County, at Beiping (present day Beijing)." Xu Beihong (1895-1953) wrote a postscript on the painting: "Ren Bonian excelled in his art and was extremely talented and he had a keen ability to observe. Every time he produced a work, he would reach into a unique realm. Just like in this painting, it is marvelous how he expressed the spirit of the subject. His way of painting this portrait is oblivious to the old ways, but it is natural and at ease, unadorned and graceful. If this is not genius, what could it be? In the autumn of 1948; Xu Beihong happily inscribed these words of praise." Therefore, "write" represents Ren Bonian's excellent skill and "spirit" is his mode of expression. This is the core of Ren Bonian's aesthetic philosophy. Due to his environment, the times, the needs of society and other reasons, he was strongly influenced by literati paintings. Although his figure paintings followed the ways of folk art, soon he would be influenced by Chen Hongshou, Zeng Bochen, Xiao Yuncong, and Fei Xiaolou. He did not simply follow one painter's style; he accepted them all. He also studied the Taoist Priest Qing Teng, Bai Yang, Bada Shanren, Yun Nantian, Shi Tao, Wang Wang'an, Li Shan, Hua Xinluo and many others. His later paintings very clearly are mixed with elements from the literati paintings and western paintings, and the transition from folk art to literati art becomes more and more obvious. This happened until his old age and it will not be an overstatement to say that he had already become one of the literati painters. No wonder he repeatedly said that his paintings were "written". He said the word "write" could make a painting good or bad. This shows that his way of paintings is not quite the same as that of the literati painters. This then is the special characteristic of Ren Bonian's paintings. He chose the word "write" and no doubt it is the most important core. This is the refined theory of his taking "spirit" as the master while he "writes" a painting.

Ren Bonian said to Wu Changshuo who was just beginning to learn to paint: "You are good at calligraphy; why don't you use seal script method to paint flowers and use cursive script method to paint trunks. Change the lines of calligraphy and fuse them together with painting. Then it will not be difficult to discover the secrets of painting."

After Ren Bonian moved to and lived in Shanghai, he had a painter friend Liu Dezhai who had considerable influence on him. Liu who was good at western painting, was the director of a art gallery which was Shanghai Catholic Church's gallery at Tushan Bay at Xujiahui. Under his influence, Ren Bonian studied sketching and painted human models, and this increased his ability to paint from life. It is said that whenever he went out, he would carry a notebook and quickly sketched whatever he needed with a pencil. This enriched his source material for creativity.

Not many years after Ren Bonian moved to Shanghai, he gained surprising fame as a painter; and one after another people came to commission him for paintings and there was quite a backlog. He owned his own residence after he moved from the upstairs of the Stationery and Fan Shop to a place next door to Eternally Great (Jiuda) Tea Shop at Sanpailou in town, and he married Miss Lu. His neighbour was Zhang Ziyun who was good at making opium pipe bowls from purple sand (*zisha*) clay and they were very expensive. When Ren Bonian saw this, he was suddenly motivated to gather high quality purple sand clay and make them into teapots, wine cups and many other kinds of utensils. He also made a statue of his father, which was about three feet tall, complete with great detail in facial expression and clothing. He spent every day on this and neglected his painting so there was not even any money for food. His wife was so angry that she knocked over the table and all his clay works fell to the floor and broke into pieces, except his father's statue. There were other painters in the history of Chinese art, who also did sculpture: Dai Kui and Dai Bo of the Eastern Jin and Yang Huizhi of the Tang Dynasty. There were very few after the Song Dynasty and Ren Bonian was the first one since the beginning of the Qing Dynasty.

Ren Bonian started smoking opium when he was in Ningbo and became too lazy to paint. Commissions piled up, but he could no longer keep his promises. His good friends Dai Yongbo and Yang Borun criticized him sternly because of this. Yet, every time after he had his opium, he would become lively as a dragon or a tiger, full of spirit and energy.

He would then leap up and finish some truly fine work in an instant. He painted swiftly with ink full and dripping – they are indeed exquisite works by gifted hands.

Ren Bonian displayed both talent and hard work. The figures, portraits, historical stories, legendary heroes, immortals, double-lined flowers and birds, freehand flowers, birds and animals and landscapes are all outstanding. He is an all-round artist. He created and painted works with strong eastern qualities to let the whole world know the enchanting charm of Chinese art which surpasses time and space. Ren Bonian painted three different paintings of the ox. In 1997, Togo in Africa issued a set of stamps: “Ox Paintings in the Year of Ox – selected works of Ren Bonian”. This shows indisputably that Ren’s paintings definitely have entered the international painting and overseas art markets and enjoy world fame.

Ren Bonian is an outstanding and talented grand master of art. He has had profound and wide influence in the history of modern Chinese art and he enjoys an extremely good reputation around the world. He was an equal of his contemporary, the world famous Vincent Van Gogh (1853 – 1890) , and was as talented as Anders Zorn (1860 – 1920) of Sweden and Joaquin Sorolla Bastida (1863 – 1923) of Spain. He was a supreme epoch-making creator. In an environment solidly grounded in traditional painting, unafraid of ridicule by writers, artists and traditionalists, he dared to create new realm and injected modern ideas into both the content and the form of the old traditional painting, making it more popular, more up-to-date and more personalized. Thus he has become the finest of the Shanghai School of artists. A Collection of Authentic Paintings by Mr. Ren Bonian (1887) was published during his lifetime and it enjoyed the reputation of being “the grand view of six ways”. *Paintings From the Mustard Seed Garden (Jieziyuan)* also added Ren Bonian’s figures, flowers and birds, and landscape paintings. Because of these, he is considered the chief artist of the “Shanghai School” and was the most outstanding and famous artist in Shanghai during the Tongzhi and Guangxu eras (1862 – 1908). After he passed away, there appeared many special studies of him and many collections of his works, and his artistic achievements have been fully confirmed. Xu Beihong thought that Ren Bonian was “way ahead of the four greats of the Yuan Dynasty, and Wen Zhengming, Shen Zhou and Tang Yin of the Ming Dynasty. I certainly think he is the greatest painter since Chou Ying (Shizhou) and this is not at all an overstatement.” Wu Changshuo calls him the “Holy Man of Painting” and deems him one whose skills in art have reached the highest realm. From this, we can see the esteem and respect in which Wu held him. “Ren Bonian was the star of his generation, but he was not pedantic; he was a lyrical poet, but not an epic poet. He was limited by his life and profession. His talent is closer to Li Bai (701 - 762) than to Du Fu (712 - 770) of ancient times.” Li Keran (1907 – 1989) said: “Ren Bonian is very good at composition in his paintings. In some paintings, a few trees occupy most of the painting, and the figures below are perfectly placed and in a marvelous way.” The revered Zhu Qizhan thought “Ren Bonian is an all-round artist who is good at figures, flowers and birds, and landscapes. He has many works and a wide variety of topics. He has refined skills and his ways are fresh. The only regret is that his personal qualities are a bit lacking.” All the praise received from Chinese and foreign artists naturally makes him the greatest figure in Chinese art in the 19th century. He is well known to the whole world with his fearless creative spirit. Ren Bonian truly is the greatest of his generation, and his paintings are on top of the crowd of painters; he is the greatest of the Shanghai School, and his elegance and talent are peerless.

Ren Bonian had a difficult time all his life but he never ceased struggling and working hard. He left behind thousands of works. In his late years, he suffered from tuberculosis and became weak and old before his time. He panted and coughed and sickness invaded his whole body. Therefore he could not devote himself to painting and not very many works are left behind from his later years. In 1895, this world famous grand artist Ren Bonian could not bear his cold and harsh environment any more. On December 19, 1895, he died in sickness and poverty when he was 56 years old. A great star in China’s art world had fallen.

Wu Changshuo traveled to Shanghai from Suzhou and cried bitterly over Ren’s body. Ren’s friends Gao Yongzhi, Xu Gu, Pu Hua, Wu Changshuo, Shu Pingqiao and others took care of his funeral.

Xu Gu wrote an elegy for Ren Bonian:

“Your brush pen is not run of the mill; you always come up with new ideas, your art is supreme. Heaven has stolen you from us; who can continue your work? Our ways will no doubt decline.”

Wu Changshuo composed an elegy:

“Everlasting fame in painting; even in dust, you will forever live on.

I cried and cried in the wind, the world of water and ink has lost an understanding friend.”



# “海派”巨匠任伯年

龔產興

多麼活潑的天機，多麼微妙的和諧。在這密致的色彩中，由於一種如此清新的趣味，一種意到筆隨的手法——並且祇用最簡單的方法——那樣從容地表現了如許多的事物。難道不是一位大藝術家的作品麼？任伯年真是一位大師。

——達仰 法國巴黎 1926 年

任伯年（1840—1895）名潤、伯年、頤，字次遠、小樓（曉樓），小名和尚。生於浙江蕭山航塢山。父任鶴聲，字淞雲，“能畫像，從山陰遷蕭山，業米商”。“讀書不苟仕宦，設臨街肆，且讀且買。善畫，尤善寫真術。”伯年自幼受到家庭的藝術熏陶，其父要求甚嚴，每天要他畫寫照——即民間的肖像畫。久而久之，伯年畫的小照甚多。據說任伯年十歲左右，父親出外，告訴伯年：凡有客人來不用問姓名，祇要將寫照拿給他看即可。果真，家裏有客來訪，伯年迅速操筆把來訪者的形象畫好。父親回來後看到來者的像，“嗯，原來是他來了”。由此可見，年幼的任伯年已顯示出較高的繪畫才能。顯然任淞雲的寫真術經驗，直接傳授給任伯年了。在其父的影響下，任伯年養成了對人物的精細觀察，“目識心記”，甚至能把人物默寫得惟妙惟肖，對他後來繪畫描寫，並獨擅肖像畫奠定了深厚的基礎。

任伯年出生那年正是鴉片戰爭爆發，戰爭失敗後，1842 年清政府與英國簽訂喪權辱國的《南京條約》，開放廣州、廈門、福州、寧波、上海作通商口岸。帝國主義對中國人民的殘酷壓榨、欺凌，使人民義憤填膺。洪秀全率領的太平天國軍在廣西起義。蕭山曾是反帝反封建太平天國運動所經之地。1861 年李秀成部太平軍旌麾東指。經蕭山進軍紹興時，任伯年在戰亂中陷洪楊軍，“大酋令掌軍旗”、“戰時揮之，以為前驅”。“行軍或野次，草塊枕藉，露宿達晨”。這段戰鬥經歷，雖然時間不長，對他後來的創作生涯是有影響的。任伯年自離開太平軍後，即來到寧波，他的早期創作，就始於此。《東津話別圖》（1868 年作，中國美術館藏）是任伯年 19 世紀 60 年代的代表作，此圖描繪寧波東門外大橋頭一帶送別時的情景，畫中五人為鄞縣陳朵峰、山陰任伯年、鎮海謝廉始（輔濂）、鄞縣萬個亭（後丞）、蕭山任阜長（薰），是任伯年傳世最早的自畫像。五人皆穿長袍，站立的姿態各異，畫家簡練的筆法，勾畫出即將惜別的依依之情，畫面虛實相生，嚴而不板，實能空靈，碧波淼茫的背景與雙勾的樹葉、橋梁形成對比，一個不到三十歲的青年藝術家，用自己親身的經歷，恰當地渲染出《話別》時的真摯動人的離情別緒，寫景、抒情交織在一起，顯露任伯年不凡的繪畫才能。

任伯年從寧波隨叔阜長到蘇州，在蘇州時間不長，在他人生經歷上是個極為重要的時期，繪畫上遠紹宋元明清各家之長，近學阜長的小寫意畫法。蘇州本是個文明古城，吳門四家沈周、文徵明、唐寅、仇英名滿江南，揚州畫派之後，繪畫市場一度轉到蘇州，歷代名家之古畫在蘇州市場並不難見。任伯年在蘇州拓展了眼界，見到許多名作，並臨摹陳洪綬父子的作品，精究宋人勾勒設色的工筆重彩畫法，並施展了家學肖像畫的特長，在學習傳統繪畫的技法上，顯然是一個突飛猛進的提高。由於他肖像畫的出眾，其間他畫有《沙馥三十九歲小像》、《任阜長小像》、《伯英四十小像圖》、《橫雲山民行乞圖》、《飯石山農像》、《佩秋夫人小像》、《榴生像》等，結交了許多畫家，不但有蘇州的，還有上海的胡公壽，通過胡的關係，1868 年冬任伯年從蘇州移居上海，仍以賣畫為生。

任伯年初到上海，“居豫園，極不得志。日至春風樓品茗，其下為瓶圈，日久對之畫羊得其神理。”三牌樓本是上海的商業中心，各行各業，商業繁華，人口稠密，市民三六九等，各有不同人情世態，任伯年細察市俗民風，對市民的審美情趣有所體會，有所理解，這在他繪畫中也有所體現。其間任伯年在上海畫壇上，結識了一批著名畫家：楊潤伯、張子祥、虛谷、高邕之、胡璋、王禮、朱偁、趙之謙、吳昌碩、劉德齋、蒲華、吳大澂、俞曲園、周閑……。他們大都是靠筆耕墨耘的職業畫家和社會名士，對傳統文人畫的認識較為深刻，任伯年與他們接觸得益良多，同時為了適應表現新的市民的審美需要，不斷探索着自己的畫法，尤其他在古香室箋扇店賣畫，對廣大市民的要求、愛好體會更深。扇面雖為小品，“而乞者愈盛，蓋經商者皆思得一筵出入懷袖為榮也”。任伯年在文人們的薰陶下對文人畫興起後出現的寫意畫有了深厚基礎，在自己繪畫中吸收文人畫的詩情而不是祇在畫上題詩。詩意貫注於畫面的形象之中。任伯年常對人說：“我作畫可稱得上是寫出來的”。《海上墨林》、《上海縣續志》均為他這一說法作了佐證。伯年自語：“作畫如頤，差足當一‘寫’字”。他為什麼不說是畫出來的？這裏含有兩層意思：一、以心寫者，抒其情意。他所說的“寫”，是指寫生、寫意。而“寫意”是我國繪畫創作的特點。有意才能生境。任伯年在不少畫上如《幽禽鳴春》、《八哥圖》等均署有“對景寫生”。他在許多作品上題“伯年寫意”，更多的是署“伯年寫”。他用凝練的筆墨勾畫出物象的神形，不作工細的如實的描寫，也就是以意取境，以境發意。二、任伯年何以拈出一個“寫”字？清代王學浩《山南論畫》曰：“祇一寫字盡之。此語最為中肯。字要寫，不要描，畫亦如之，一入描畫，便為俗工矣。”從客觀上看，任伯年強調自己的畫是寫出來的，說明他並非是個畫工。任伯年在指點吳昌碩作畫時將書法的用筆滲和到畫法中去的見解，證實了他已吸收文人畫家的創作思想；特別是他見到八大山人畫冊之後，“更悟用筆之妙，雖及細之畫，必懸腕中鋒……”。八大山人之畫，能用最少的筆，畫出最豐富的景物，用筆大都是長線條多弧形，畫出的形象圓渾，所以筆鋒橫轉豎折，極其靈活。任伯年從八大山人用筆體會到畫不論大小都要用中鋒，線條才能圓勁而有韌力。故用筆力存“寫”字意。

1885 年任伯年在一幀人物畫冊頁上題：“新羅山人用筆，如公孫氏舞劍器渾脫，瀏灑頓挫，一時莫與爭鋒。今人才一拈筆，輒仿新羅，益可笑焉”。的確新羅山人在揚州畫派中，他的用筆用墨相為表裏，骨氣神韻，獨具匠心，故任伯年對他極為欽佩。至今我們在他的遺作中，看到有相當多的作品是師法新羅山人的，如《東山絲竹圖》、《金穀園圖》、《蘆汀放鴨圖》、《人物冊頁》等。任伯年真是理解新羅山人藝術的畫家，雖師新羅畫法，却能師其意而不師其迹，故畫風仍有自家的面貌。任伯年說他的畫是寫出來的，一方面是遵循“六法”矩矱，對傳統繪畫有過多方面的研究，他認為：“宋人畫，得力於寫生。”這是不錯的。他繼承了這傳統。但他不囿於古法，能對自然各造其妙。張聿光先生說：“任伯年寫生能力之強，古人中找不出一個能和他相比。”這並不誇張。無論人物、禽獸、

花鳥、山水都是從現實生活中來的。任伯年的肖像畫寫生，更爲人所公認。

1876年任伯年作《仲英五十六歲小像》，故宮博物院院長馬衡在畫上跋：“曩聞鎮海方樵舸君言，伯年之初鬻畫也，嘗主其家。樵舸之尊人本好客，優禮之，伯年亦不言謝。半年後將辭去，謂當主人畫像，伸紙潑墨，寥寥數筆，成背面形，見者咸謂神似。伯年曰：‘吾襪被投止時即無時不留心於主人之舉止行動，今所傳者在神，不在貌也。’希文先生今春爲余寫照，神貌兼到，堪稱與伯年抗衡，宜其見伯年之寫真而什襲藏之也。三十七年十一月鄭叔平馬衡識於北平。”徐悲鴻在該畫上跋云：“伯年高藝雄才，觀察精妙絕倫，每作均有獨特境界。即如此作，其傳神阿堵無論矣，其章法亦一洗以往寫像恒格，而自然高逸簡雅，謂非天才得乎。三十七年秋悲鴻歡喜贊嘆題之。”所以“寫”字代表了任伯年用筆的功力，而“意”實爲之神。這也是任伯年美學思想的核心。任伯年因環境、時代、社會需要……種種原因，深受文人畫思想的影響。雖然他早期的人物畫承襲了民間藝術的衣鉢，但不久取法陳洪綬、曾波臣、蕭雲從、費曉樓，他不師一法，兼容並包，學習青藤、白陽、八大山人、惲南田、石濤、王忘庵、李鱓、華新羅……。他後期的繪畫明顯地滲和着文人畫和西洋畫諸因素，而且從民間藝術向文人畫過渡的成分越來越多，直到晚年，說他已躋入文人畫家之林，恐不爲過。無怪，他一再說是“寫”出來的了。所謂差足當一“寫”字，說明了他的畫與文人畫還不完全相同，還有距離，這就是任伯年繪畫特色。所以他拈出一個“寫”字，無疑是任伯年畫論中最重要核心，也是他以意爲師，用筆存“寫”的精闢的論點。

任伯年對初學畫的吳昌碩說：“你工於書法，不妨用篆書的筆法寫花，用草書的筆法畫干，把書法的綫條加以變化，使之與繪畫融會貫通，得到畫法奧妙就不是什麼難事了。”

任伯年僑居上海後，有位對他影響較大的畫友劉德齋，是上海天主教會在徐家匯土山灣圖書館主任。他擅長西洋畫。任伯年在劉的影響下，學習素描，畫過人體模特兒，增強了任伯年對物寫生的能力。據說他每當外出，總備有一手折，把需要的物象用鉛筆速寫下來，積累素材以豐富創作。

任伯年到上海不幾年，畫名赫然，訂畫者接踵，畫件積壓日多。他從古香室箋扇莊樓上搬到城內三牌樓久大茶葉店隔壁，自己有了住宅，並與陸氏成親。他鄰居有張紫雲者，善以紫砂搏爲鴉片烟鬥，時稱“紫雲斗”，價值絕高，伯年見了忽有觸發，羅致佳質紫砂，作爲茗壺酒甌以及種種器皿，還塑有其父任淞雲像，高三四尺，須眉衣褶，備極工致。日日從事於此，畫事爲廢，致斷糧無以爲炊。妻怒，盡舉案頭所有而擲之地，碎裂不復成器。唯存父像尚保完整。繪畫者搞雕塑，中國美術史上早已有之，如東晉戴逵、戴勃，唐代楊惠之，宋以後則少見，有清以來，任伯年是第一人。

任伯年在寧波時就抽上鴉片烟，就懶於濡毫，所訂畫件堆積如山，失信拖拉，爲此他的好友戴用柏、楊伯潤就曾嚴肅地批評他。然他一過足烟癮又如生龍活虎，精神振奮，一躍而起，頃刻完成一批精美之作，用筆迅疾，色墨淋漓，確實是神來之筆的精美之作。

任伯年天資人功，所寫人物、肖像畫、歷史故事、傳奇人物、神仙、雙鉤花鳥、寫意花卉、禽獸、山水俱臻卓絕，是個全能畫家，他創造並揮灑出具有濃郁東方色彩的繪畫，讓世界領略了中國藝術超越時空的魅力。任伯年畫有三幅不同形態的牛圖，1997年被非洲多哥發行了一套名爲《牛年牛畫——任伯年作品選》的郵票。這也證明任伯年的繪畫融入國際畫壇和海外藝術市場，已成爲不爭的事實，並享譽世界。

任伯年是一個非凡的、天才的藝術大師。在我國近現代美術史上產生了廣泛的影響，在世界上贏得崇高聲譽。他與同時代世界級畫家梵高相若，如瑞典初倫、西班牙索羅蘭、伊白司底達，俱才氣縱橫，是不可一世的破格創新者。他在傳統繪畫根深蒂固的環境下，不怕文人墨客和封建文化衛道士的譏笑諷嘲，敢於創新，對古老的中國畫從內容到形式注進了現代意識，使其通俗化、時代化和個性化，成爲海派畫家中的佼佼者。他生前出版了《任伯年先生真迹畫譜》（1887年）被當時譽爲“六法大觀”。《芥子園畫譜》也增添了任伯年的人物、花鳥、山水。正因爲此，他被稱爲“海派”的主將，是同光（1862—1908）間上海顯赫一時最爲杰出的畫家。爲此，在他身後，國內外研究的專著、畫集不斷出現，並對他的藝術成就予以充分肯定。徐悲鴻認爲任伯年是“元四家，明之文、沈、唐所望塵莫及也！吾故定爲仇十洲以後中國畫家第一人，殆非過言也”。吳昌碩稱任伯年爲“畫聖”。聖者，聖人也，就是畫學技藝能達到最高境界的人。可見吳昌碩對他的推崇、敬佩。“任伯年爲一代明星，而非學究，是抒情詩人，而非爲史詩，此則爲生活職業所限，方之古天才近於太白而不近杜甫。”李可染稱“任伯年很會構圖，有的畫幾棵樹占領畫面，下面的人物穿插得很好，很奇。”朱屺瞻老人認爲，任伯年“是一位全能畫家，人物、花鳥、山水都擅長，作品多、題材廣、技術熟練，手法清新，祇是氣質稍嫌薄些。”中外藝術家對任伯年的一致贊揚，使他理所當然地成爲19世紀中國藝壇的巨匠。他以無畏的創新精神而名傳於世。任伯年真是：一代巨擘，畫壓群倫；海派名將，風華絕代。

任伯年坎坷一生，始終勤奮不已，遺作以千計數。晚年患有肺病，未老先衰，哮喘咳嗽，病魔侵蝕了他的身體，致使他不能盡力畫事，故晚年作品爲少。1895年的隆冬，名滿全國，蜚聲海外的大師任伯年，難於煎熬嚴寒的環境，於農曆十一月初四日（1895年12月19日）在貧病中默然與世長逝，享年才五十六歲。中國畫壇上的一顆巨星殞落了。

他的好友高邕之、虛谷、蒲華、吳昌碩、舒萍橋等爲其治喪。吳昌碩從蘇州趕到上海，撫尸大慟。

虛谷悼任伯年的挽聯云：

筆無常法，別出新機，君藝稱極也；天奪斯人，誰能繼起，吾道其衰乎。

吳昌碩作挽聯：

畫筆千秋名，漢石隨泥同不朽；臨風百回哭，水痕墨氣失知音。







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**REN BONIAN**  
中國名家繪畫  
**任伯年**  
1840 – 1895

Ren Bonian is a famous modern Chinese artist, born in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province, and his ancestral home is Shanyin. His given name is Yi; his style name is Bonian and his assumed name is Xiaolou. He was one of the important founders of the "Shanghai School of Painting".

中國近代繪畫名家。

浙江蕭山人，祖籍山陰。名頤，字伯年，號小樓。為中國畫壇“海上畫派”的重要創始人。



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People in Huafeng Offering Best Wishes to  
Emperor Yao Three Times  
Detail of painting on P3-P4, P5-P6)  
華祝三多圖(局部一見P3-P4, 局部二見P5-P6)

