

Orientalism Versus Organization: The Professionalization of American and Chinese Women Artists in China, 1900-1949

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American Studies scholar Mari Yoshihara defines Orientalism as “Western ways of perceiving, understanding, and representing the ‘Orient’ that are founded upon the material reality of unequal power relations between the West and the East and upon the belief in the essential difference between the two.”⁸⁸ At first glance, this definition has nothing to do with art, or with the women who fought to be seen as professionals in the gendered confines of American and Chinese society. Yet Orientalism highly influenced the methods that American women used to professionalize themselves as artists in a colonized world, while Chinese women faced the consequences of living in a country rapidly modernizing for the sake of not being labeled “backward” by Western societies that maintained colonies within its boundaries.

Both Chinese and American women artists’ in China throughout the first half the twentieth century faced numerous obstacles in their quest to enter the artistic profession, among them intersecting normatives of gender, women’s education, and newfound ideas of modernism and national pride all influenced by the various patriarchal systems in which they developed. These obstacles would all come to a head from 1900 to 1949, roughly the last years of the Qing Dynasty to the end of the Republican Period, as the Boxer Protocol allowed increased foreign involvement. In the age of a rapidly developing China, newly open to a rush of foreign influence, both native and foreign female artists in China proposed the identity of a professional, educated female artist by taking advantage of new educational and professional art opportunities for women and pursuing multiple avenues to publish and advertize their work. Despite this commonality, both American and Chinese women artists utilized different strategies to differentiate themselves in a male-dominated and patriarchal field. While Chinese women artists organized themselves into new art associations and adhered to new Chinese notions of gender to gain influence, American women artists worked within and even fostered a short-sighted Orientalism that prevented much interaction among the two groups.

By no means were “women artists” a Western invention brought to China by North American women serving as both artists and missionaries. This is in spite of

⁸⁸ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

American missionaries' self-appointed duty of rescuing Chinese women due to "the treatment of the female sex" being considered the "darkest blot upon the civilization of China."⁸⁹ Chinese artists who were women had existed for most of imperial times, regardless of a somewhat invisible status in modern Chinese art history. Marsha Weidner argues through citing multiple women artists that by the beginning of the Qing Dynasty the concept of a scholarly woman painter was by no means a bizarre concept and had historical precedent.⁹⁰ The earliest Chinese artist who was a woman is often claimed to be the Jin Dynasty calligrapher Madam Wei, who is credited with teaching the great master of calligraphy Wang His-chi.⁹¹ Guan Daosheng, a Yuan Dynasty bamboo painter, transcended the realm of women artists and entered the canon of great bamboo painting masters; Weidner also considers Guan Daosheng the most famous woman painter in Chinese history.⁹² During the Qing Dynasty, the only strict limit on Chinese women artists was the impossibility of them serving as court artists.⁹³ However, under Empress Dowager Cixi this policy changed, as the presence of Miao Jiahui demonstrates. Miao Jiahui was a court artist in the late years of the Qing Dynasty. She served as one of the Empress Dowager's "substitute brushes," painting works that the Empress Dowager would give as gifts to officials that repeatedly bore the artist seals of the Empress Dowager herself.⁹⁴ A native of Yunnan province, she was recommended by the Yunnan governor for her position, and was honored with an exemption from the kowtow and was paid a monthly salary in gold.⁹⁵ Outside of the Qing imperial court, some tinges of an art profession for women came about by the end of the Qing Dynasty. This is evidenced by a woman artist in 1914 who demanded payment from the Republican government for an embroidered portrait she made that was presented to the Italian queen by the Qing court.⁹⁶ Although this woman (called only "Mrs. Shen-tseng-shou") was the wife of a

⁸⁹ Chester Holcombe, "The Missionary Enterprise in China," *The Atlantic*, September 1906, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1906/09/the-missionary-enterprise-in-china/306000/>.

⁹⁰ Marsha Weidner, "Introduction," in *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁴ Marsha Weidner et al., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300 to 1912* (Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988), 164.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ "Chinese Female Artist. Peking, April 18: Commands High Price for Portraiture," *South China Morning Post*, April 28, 1914, accessed via ProQuest at <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1499106630?accountid=10629>.

wealthy Chinese public official and thus was more likely to have the ability to publicly demand payment for her art than someone without as much privilege, such a public demand for payment for an artistic work demonstrates that Chinese women artists were professionalizing themselves without the intervention of Western artists or missionaries by the end of the imperial period. Arts education for girls would aid further advancement of Chinese women into art fields as the Republican period progressed.

Both foreign missionaries and historical precedent would lead to a growth in the opportunities for education and arts education for women in China. Before the establishment of various schools for girls, families in the Chinese gentry and literati classes during the Ming and Qing dynasties commonly taught daughters painting or calligraphy through friends or family members.⁹⁷ This trend continued into the Republican Era, as many prominent women artists founding the institutions that would support women artists were taught artistic skills at home by their fathers. Two examples of this are Feng Wenfeng, the first leader of the Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society, who was first taught calligraphy by her father,⁹⁸ and Wu Qingxia, a member of the CWPCS and painter who had learned the local professional style of her birthplace in Wujin from her father.⁹⁹ These male mentor relationships mirrored student-teacher relationships where women often learned under the tutelage of a teacher who was a man, which was commonly seen in professional art schools.¹⁰⁰ The first girls' schools started by Chinese gentry and intellectuals started appearing in 1897, a half century after the first girls' missionary school was founded in Ningbo in 1844.¹⁰¹ Arts programs were frequently given in both gentry schools and missionary schools as training for future domestic work.¹⁰² Both this precedent and the growth in more public roles for women in the aftermath of the May Fourth Era influenced the decision of the Shanghai Fine Arts College to begin admitting female students in 1920, making it one of the first art colleges in Shanghai to do so.¹⁰³ According to Jane Zheng, the College proved effective in

⁹⁷ Jane Zheng, "The Shanghai Fine Arts College: Art Education and Modern Women Artists in the 1920s and 1930s," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007): 195.

⁹⁸ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, "Traditionalism as a Modern Stance: The Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Lesley W. Ma, "Blossoming Beyond the Pages: Female Painterly Modernities in *Liangyou*" in *Liangyou: Kaleidoscopic Modernity and the Shanghai Global Metropolis, 1926-1945*, eds. Paul G. Pickowitz, Kuiyi Shen, and Yingjin Zhang, (Leiden, Brill: 2013), 214.

¹⁰¹ Jane Zheng, "The Shanghai Fine Arts College," 196.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 197.

training women for artistic careers because female students were held to the same requirements and professional training as men.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the Shanghai Fine Arts College not only accepted women into its ranks, but also trained them as equals to their colleagues who were men, something that Jane Zheng claimed was crucial in its success in educating professional women artists.¹⁰⁵ Such policies illustrate the role that arts education could play in launching women's careers, but these advancements do not mean that every woman in China had an opportunity to study art or other academic subjects in the educational realm.

In the early years of the twentieth century many Chinese women still faced obstacles in receiving an education, as Chow Chung-Cheng's account of her childhood experiences attest. Chow Chung-Cheng was born in Yenping (Yanping) in Fukien (Fujian) province in China in 1908,¹⁰⁶ later travelling and living in Europe for much of her later life. In her childhood, Chow struggled to convince her conservative parents to let her attend school. In one of her memoirs, she explained that in their eyes "I was only a daughter to marry. Such things as studies, a profession, a future – these were not for me [...] I didn't even belong to my parents really, for soon I should be going to another family. That was my only future."¹⁰⁷ The girls' school in Tsientsin (Tianjin) that Chow eventually attended left her wanting more of an academic challenge. She recounted the obstacles that stood in her way of going to another school: "This school was a disappointment to me. I wanted to go elsewhere. But in Tsientsin there was only one other school, run by American missionaries, and this didn't appeal to me. There was the excellent Nan-Kai secondary school, but that was for boys only."¹⁰⁸ This account reveals that despite the gains in women's education in China, institutional education for girls was far from universal in the early twentieth century. It also depicts the barriers that many women had to overcome to attend school in China, such as their family's ideas of gender, the possible lack of educational options in their location, and the struggle to find a school that matched their religious preferences. Somewhat ironically, Chow, who would become an artist later in life, revealed the extent of arts education for women in her memoir. Not content with how women were taught art skills like

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 201.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 208.

¹⁰⁶ Chow Chung-Cheng, *The Lotus Pool*, trans. Joyce Emerson (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1961), 11. The book's original title in German is *Kleine Sampan*, and what it is more frequently cited as.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 133.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 190.

sewing and drawing in schools that could easily be taught at home, Chow's younger self scoffs: "I don't want to learn drawing [...] [a]ny girl can learn drawing."¹⁰⁹ Such a comment reflects the commonality of arts education in girls' schools: arts education was so common that a girl could not avoid participating in it. Yet, the teaching of skills that were associated with the domestic sphere of life demonstrates that girls were taught skills intended to prepare them for doing work in the home instead of for professions in the public sphere.

Regardless of some setbacks in the quality and extent of institutionalized girls' education in China, an overall growth in women's education allowed women artists, both American and Chinese, to find multiple avenues in which to publish and advertize their work. This was essential for how they modernized their profession and defined themselves as professional educated artists rather than amateurs doing art as a hobby. For example, Canadian missionaries who were women acted as press artists for the Canadian Mission Press headquartered in Sichuan Province,¹¹⁰ and some, such as Harriet McCurdy, exhibited their works in Shanghai.¹¹¹ American artist Katharine Carl painted a commissioned portrait of the Empress Dowager for the Saint Louis Exposition,¹¹² and multiple American artists, some of whom are discussed later in this paper, wrote and published books detailing their experiences in China. Many American women artists actually appropriated Asian subjects and techniques in order to distinguish themselves from their male counterparts and gain celebrity in the art world.¹¹³ For example, Bertha Lum gained acclaim when she was the only foreign woodcut artist to be featured at the Tokyo Annual Art Exhibition.¹¹⁴ Despite the problems stemming from the use of cultural appropriation, women artists appropriating traditional Chinese techniques demonstrate some of the ways in which women artists sought to professionalize themselves and develop their art within the confines of artistic patriarchy.

Chinese women artists also exhibited themselves and found varied opportunities to publicize their work. Many did this through the coeducational art schools they attended, as these educational institutions served to largely shift the activities of Chinese women creatives outside of the private sphere into the public sphere. This was especially true in Shanghai, where various non-missionary

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 190.

¹¹⁰ Catherine MacKenzie, "'And thereon lies a tale': Canadian Women Missionary Artists in China," *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien* 34, no. 2 (2013): 269.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 276.

¹¹² Katherine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager* (New York: The Century Co., 1905), xix.

¹¹³ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 49.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 58.

institutions fought to make the work of Chinese women artists public and visible. For example, some former students of the Shanghai Fine Arts College became teachers on the college's faculty, as this was considered a way of becoming a member of Shanghai professional art circles.¹¹⁵ Women faculty benefitted professionally and publicly from a connection with the school, as they participated in activities with male artists and the Shanghai press reported their names along with those of male faculty for various events.¹¹⁶ Many women students also held solo exhibitions upon graduation from art schools.¹¹⁷ Other artists were featured in the *Liangyou* magazine, which aimed to educate its audience with up-to-date information about Chinese educational and cultural affairs.¹¹⁸ However, *Liangyou* exceedingly favored the work of women artists who painted in Western styles¹¹⁹ and the magazine often painted a woman's success relative to her connections to other well-known men in the art field.¹²⁰ Both of these practices questioned the professional legitimacy of a Chinese artist who was a woman. The former practice resulted in women artists who painted in traditional Chinese styles to be underrepresented in the magazine, conveying that the work of artists painting in the traditional styles was not modern enough to be professional. The latter focused not on the artist's artistic achievements but on her relationships to other men and questioned if she could truly be a professional artist independent of male mentors. In light of new notions of gendered modernity such as the concept of the "Shanghai New Woman" these practices are not surprising. In addition, women reacted to some of these publicity practices by forming artistic associations of their own to promote their own work.

Another key aspect of how Chinese women pursued various artistic avenues was how they formed artistic associations dedicated to promoting women artists. A key Shanghai organization in promoting women's art was the Chinese Women's Calligraphy and Painting Society. No Shanghai Fine Arts College graduates were members of its ranks, revealing the College's mixed success in producing active women artists. Nevertheless, the Society itself strived to cross class and educational lines to promote the economic status of professional women artists in Shanghai. The society hosted exhibitions in order to provide opportunities for women artists to

¹¹⁵ Jane Zheng, "The Shanghai Fine Arts College," 207.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Lesley W. Ma, "Blossoming Beyond the Pages," 206.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

boost their artistic reputations, as well as to create showings of artistic solidarity for women's art.¹²¹ Perhaps surprisingly, the prices that women artists listed for their exhibited art work compares to those that contemporaneous male artists advertized for their art pieces.¹²² Membership in the society not only gave women artists networking opportunities, but also allowed women artists to be associated with prominent women artists painting in the traditional style and to participate in promoting the art of traditional Chinese painting in China and around the world.¹²³ Lesley Ma also notes the importance of the CWCPs in being one of the first organized groups of women to argue for and defend a genre in which they had a passion for, and the women artists involved were among the first to be offered recognition as members of a “nationally registered and reputable group.”¹²⁴ Being in such a well-recognized artistic organization established the members of CWCPs and their artwork as professional and worthy of attention.

Shaping these artist's experiences in Shanghai's art scene were new notions of feminine modernity. This centered on the idea of a Shanghai “New Woman” who “strived for a reputable career in the public eye, challenged gender boundaries and expectations in multiple ways.”¹²⁵ Popular artists who were women in the Shanghai art scene, such as Guan Zilan and Pan Yuliang, exemplified this concept. Both were oil painters who were celebrated in the China art world.¹²⁶ Guan Zilan was influenced by European modern art movements such as Fauvism,¹²⁷ yet interestingly enough the subject in her famous painting *Portrait of Miss L* fits the archetype for a Shanghai New Woman, dressed in the latest Shanghai fashion.¹²⁸ Pan Yuliang was the most famous woman artist that attended the Shanghai Fine Arts College,¹²⁹ where many women attended to develop cross-cultural sensitivities, social and conversation skills, and knowledge of both Chinese and Western literature.¹³⁰ Both Guan and Pan studied abroad to advance their artistic skills, Pan in Paris¹³¹ and Guan in Japan.¹³² A side effect of these modern notions of gender was that the New

¹²¹ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, “Traditionalism as a Modern Stance,” 12.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹²³ Lesley W. Ma, “Blossoming Beyond the Pages,” 208.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹²⁷ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 70.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Jane Zheng, “The Shanghai Fine Arts College,” 206.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 70.

Woman feminine normative prioritized women's beauty, as did the double standard in how women artists were publicized compared to men. In magazines publicizing artists such as *Liangyou*, women artists were often portrayed with their personal photograph or a self-portrait, their artwork being on the page periphery, while men's artwork were always displayed on the center of the page often accompanied by a small headshot and text biography.¹³³ Some women artists featured in *Liangyou* only had their photograph displayed, with none of their artwork.¹³⁴ This double standard visually emphasized men's artwork, while diminishing women's artwork and artistic merit in favor of displaying their looks. Hence, this new idea of Chinese femininity was cosmopolitan and stressed women's public roles in cultural society while at the same time relying on traditional ideas of women being defined by their beauty.

While prominent Chinese women artists utilized organizations and conformed to modern normatives of gender in order to become darlings of the Chinese art world, American women artists in China worked within the philosophy of Orientalism to gain prominence in a field dominated by men. Orientalism towards China had been rooted in Western pre-conceived notions of Chinese culture that had existed since the beginnings of the China trade and, to a greater degree, since the Boxer Rebellion. This Orientalism stemmed from an imbalanced political relationship between China and Western countries that had been demarcated in the aftermath of the Boxer Protocol in 1901, where the rules dictated to China about the regime's conduction of foreign relations "made clear that the most important business of the Qing government would henceforth be its relations with the eleven foreign powers who signed the protocol."¹³⁵ One of these foreign powers was the United States, and this new power differential between China and the US allowed American women artists opportunities they likely would not have had otherwise. The ways in which American women artists wrote about and exhibited their own work throughout the first half of the twentieth century built upon, instead of challenged, the Orientalism that came out of the Boxer Protocol by making generalizations and assumptions while dehumanizing and negating the Chinese population. This process gradually grew in intensity, as seen by how three different American women artists in three different decades understood the China they were painting. American women

¹³³ Lesley W. Ma, "Blossoming Beyond the Pages," 213.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 249.

artists were also able to use Orientalism to secure positions in the male-dominated art world of the United States, and Mari Yoshihara claims: “white women often used Orientalism not only to make their interventions in American ideas about Asia per se but also to assert, address, and/or challenge women’s roles in American society.”¹³⁶ Evidentially, three American artists who traveled to China all reaped professional benefits that they used to differentiate themselves from other artists while frequently being appropriative of Chinese art and techniques. In doing so, they elevated their status as women artists in the United States while at the same time advancing negative stereotypes of China.

The American artists Katherine Carl, Bertha Lum, and Marion Greenwood all demonstrate how women artists contributed to notions of Orientalist views of China based on the differences in how these artists regarded their Chinese subjects. Katherine Carl was an American portrait painter who painted multiple portraits of Empress Dowager Cixi that were later exhibited in the United States around the same time of the later portion of Miao Jiahui’s career. Carl later wrote a memoir of her time in China, elaborating in-depth on her experiences with the subject of her portrait. In this memoir, Carl devotes a notable amount of time detailing why the Empress Dowager should be considered an exemplary woman by American standards. Notably, Carl makes careful record of the Empress Dowager’s artistic talent, especially in regards to her calligraphy. Carl recounts that by this time (1903-1904) although the Empress Dowager was talented in painting (“for she is very artistic, and paints flowers in a charming way”) and partook in embroidery, the Empress Dowager’s eyes had degraded to the point of making it difficult to paint and embroider.¹³⁷ Instead, she is known for writing scrolls “with a single great character written upon it by Her Majesty’s own hand. This is considered one of the most difficult feats of a Chinese writer. These characters are sometimes four feet long.”¹³⁸ Karl even includes an illustration in her book of this artistic process.¹³⁹ Such emphasis on the Empress Dowager’s artistic skill level humanizes her in ways that many Westerners did not at the time, and Carl continues this humanization effort while discussing members of the Chinese royal family and the other Chinese people she encounters during her time in China.

¹³⁶ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 8.

¹³⁷ Katherine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, 136.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 135.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 136. The illustration itself sits between book pages 136 and 137.

While sometimes reducing imperial family members to caricature or negative descriptions of their physical features,¹⁴⁰ the effort Carl extends into documenting the native Chinese she interacts with in her day-to-day life is notable compared to later women artists who coupled as writers, notably Bertha Lum. The detail that Carl exercised in describing the sophistication of the Empress Dowager and the humanness of members of the imperial family she met likely stemmed from her reasoning for writing her book in the first place: after Carl returned to the United States, various newspapers used quotes ascribed to her (statements Carl claimed she never made) in order to paint the Empress Dowager as “shrewd” and “tempestuous.”¹⁴¹ Carl felt obligated to write her account due to these negative claims, in many ways attempting to challenge the Orientalism and “otherness” that these claims likely aimed to promote and establish.

However, Carl’s efforts to counteract Orientalism in her account fundamentally do not work because Carl only was able to gain prominence due to Orientalism in the first place. Carl’s very presence in the Forbidden City came about due to the power differential that existed between China and the United States that granted Americans substantial privilege in China. Carl also benefitted from the pioneering professionalism of Chinese imperial artists who were women such as Miao Jiahui. After all, it was only shortly before Carl that women were allowed to be official imperial artists working within the Forbidden City’s walls. Carl occupied a role in the Chinese imperial court exclusive to a select few Chinese, and her status as an American and personal connections allowed her to bypass obstacles that many like-minded Chinese women would have faced. Scholar James Hevia reflects this sentiment when he claims the Boxer Protocol’s regulations relating to the Qing court effectively made it “an animated ethnographic display [...] for the pleasure of well-connected globetrotters.”¹⁴² Carl was indeed well-connected, as her invitation to paint the Empress Dowager did not come from the imperial court but from Sarah Conger, the wife of the US Ambassador to China, who in 1903 sent a letter to Carl asking if she would be willing to paint a portrait of the Empress Dowager that could

¹⁴⁰ For example, Carl describes the secondary wife of the Emperor on Ibid. page 42: “She has very large, full-orbed, brown eyes, and still has a beautifully clear complexion, but her nose is flat, her mouth large and weak; the contour of her face is marred by layers of flesh, her forehead does not indicate much intelligence, and she has very little distinction in appearance.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid, xxi.

¹⁴² James Hevia, *English Lessons*, 273.

be shown at the St. Louis Expedition in the United States.¹⁴³ Although Carl made efforts to counteract negative American impressions of the Empress Dowager, the Qing imperial court, and China by documenting the human aspects of the Chinese people she met and the skilled artistic abilities of the Empress Dowager, her access to the Forbidden City came about due to an American diplomat. Without the imbalanced power relationship between China and the United States stemming from the Boxer Protocol, Carl, as a foreigner, likely would not have been admitted to the Forbidden City at all. Furthermore, by displaying her final work at the St. Louis Exhibition and writing a memoir about her time in the Forbidden City, Carl provided access into the Forbidden City for the greater American public at a time when only a fraction of Chinese people had ever stepped inside the City's gates. In doing so, Carl created a way for the American public to occupy a position of privilege by seeing inside the Forbidden City's gate via her paintings and words. She rendered the complexities of the Forbidden City "an animated ethnographic display" for the American people to gaze at.

Bertha Lum, another artist who granted the American public access to China through her travel writing, would take advantage of her privileged status as a foreigner to gain prominence in the 1930s. Lum traveled to China and adopted Chinese woodcut printmaking techniques after three voyages to Japan, where she had learned and appropriated *ukiyo-e* printmaking methods into her art. Bertha Lum was unique in the fact that she was not connected to missionary work, diplomatic relations, or government work. Nevertheless, her upper class stature allowed her to eventually hire more skilled male Chinese and Japanese craftsmen to do her printmaking for her.¹⁴⁴ Her attitude towards these craftsmen was highly patronizing. On the one hand Lum admired the high level of skill of Chinese and Japanese printmakers, while on the other hand she maintained direct control and supervision over those she hired.¹⁴⁵ Mari Yoshihara claims that Lum's ability to travel and hire Chinese and Japanese to do much of the grunt work of her artwork only occurred because Lum was "a white American woman of means, which situated her in a position of power vis-à-vis Asian craftsman."¹⁴⁶ Lum thus used her privilege as an American traveling throughout East Asia to not only appropriate Chinese and Japanese artistic techniques, but also to exploit Japanese and Chinese craftsmen into

¹⁴³ Katherine Carl, *With the Empress Dowager*, xix.

¹⁴⁴ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

manufacturing her artwork for her. Such a phenomenon reveals how directly Lum interacted with the consequences of Orientalism in her professional life.

Lum's published memoirs underline how she participated in fostering instead of challenging Orientalism. In *Gangplanks to the East*, Lum details her travels of Japan, China, Korea, and the Philippines. Unlike Carl's writing Lum is not making an argument for the existence of talented and sophisticated Chinese civilization embodied in the Empress Dowager. Instead, *Gangplanks to the East* resembles current day travel writing with its use of second person, travel directions, and advice. In some places the memoir meticulously describes Lum's movements as she showers illustrious language on such places as the "Garden of Peaceful Brightness," which is near what she terms "the most beautiful small pavilion I know in China."¹⁴⁷ By attentively focusing her description on the places she travels to and not the people of China itself, Lum provides access to the beautiful, traditional parts of China to the American reader without subjecting them to the "otherness" of the Chinese people. Additionally, Lum takes every opportunity in her memoir to relate folk tales and legends captured in her print illustrations. Tellingly, these only depict the "otherness" of East Asia by exclusively consisting of heroes from folk tales, detailed sketches of Chinese architecture, or images of the extremities of Chinese life. For example, Lum's chapter describing Hong Kong and Canton includes an illustration of river sampans where "some two hundred thousand of [two million Canton residents] are born, live, and die."¹⁴⁸ This quote casts Canton residents as impoverished, potentially backward, and in the end little more than a part of the scenery. Instead of humanizing the Chinese people she interacts with in Canton, Lum chooses to objectify them via a large statistic and image of their homes devoid of human life. This objectification describes the book's tone towards China at large as a land ripe for Western tourism and exploitation with no one living there except people in poverty who can quickly fade into the background.

All in all, Lum strives to anchor China in Orientalism's inherent timelessness. Lum's description of China appears highly selected and curated, as only six of the 142 pages focused on China are spent in Shanghai, which was the art capital of China in the period. By narrowing her memoir's focus onto the "otherness" of Chinese culture while ignoring the ways in which Chinese culture was innovating at the time (highlighted by such a brief description of Shanghai). Lum reduces China to what it

¹⁴⁷ Bertha Lum, *Gangplanks to the East* (New York: The Henkle-Yewdale House, Inc., 1936), 218-219.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 274. Illustration is on page 275.

was at the end of the Qing Dynasty, ignoring political and cultural change in favor of acknowledging the folk tales and imperial palaces that distinguish China from the West. Her use of travel writing also exhibits China for American readers while ignoring more modern aspects of Shanghai and Hong Kong. Lum views her Chinese subject as both outdated and as a part of a dying culture, and her views echo those of another American artist who painted Hong Kong shortly after World War II: Marion Greenwood.

Marion Greenwood, an artist today known mostly for her murals, spent a year in Hong Kong from the summer of 1946 to the summer of 1947.¹⁴⁹ Her husband at the time, Charles Fenn, had served for the Office of Strategic Services (a predecessor to the CIA) in Hong Kong during World War II, and had many acquaintances in the British colonial administration.¹⁵⁰ Because of these connections Greenwood lived a privileged life in Hong Kong, spending her nights at nightclubs and fifty-course dinners.¹⁵¹ Notably, Greenwood mostly stayed primarily within the boundaries of the British colony, with a couple of weekend trips to Canton and Macao.¹⁵² She nonetheless continued painting during this yearlong voyage, and the subjects she publicly exhibited in New York a year later ranged from rice lines to a Buddhist priest, an artist, and a calligrapher.¹⁵³ Greenwood's display of these paintings would be influenced by the politics surrounding all of Republican China during World War II even as they at-large depicted subjects from the European colonies Greenwood spent her time in.

Greenwood's exhibition of her paintings based on her experiences in Hong Kong, titled *Marion Greenwood: Paintings, Gouaches, Drawings: China*, opened in December 1947 and highly exaggerated the knowledge and experiences Greenwood had in war-torn Republican China. Her four-day trip to Canton became two years spent in South China (according to the exhibition's catalogue).¹⁵⁴ Both the artist and the press that reviewed the exhibited considered her works representatives of the state of Republican China as a whole despite almost exclusively stemming from Greenwood's experiences in Hong Kong. Hong Kong, which was a British colony until 1998, was devastated by World War II but was not a part of the Republican China that had just entered a civil war with the Chinese Communist Party at the time

¹⁴⁹ Catherine MacKenzie, "Place Really Does Matter: Marion Greenwood's 1947 'China' Exhibition," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 25, no. 1/2 (1998): 58.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

of Greenwood's arrival.¹⁵⁵ In addition to housing the refugees of a Japanese wartime occupation, Hong Kong was now filling up with refugees fleeing the civil war happening just outside of the colony's boundaries. In her exhibition, however, all these refugees became symbols of a Republican China decimated by World War II. Historian Catharine MacKenzie argues that this symbolism may have originated from the politics regarding China at the time, primarily the question of and demand for US aid to China in the years following World War II. "When Greenwood first played loose with her geography," MacKenzie claims, "she named 'China.' That, in combination with the timing of her exhibition, seems to have unleashed a set of well-established assumptions which at the time were being massaged by some in order to secure support for Chiang Kai-shek and his American backers."¹⁵⁶ The repositioning of Hong Kong's refugees as impoverished, war-torn Chinese citizens desperately needing US aid, besides being geographically fallacious, ignores the plight of the Chinese citizens fleeing the Chinese Civil War and paints Chiang Kai-shek's militaristic regime as a needy American ally. By relabeling her paintings as being representative of China, Greenwood was responsible for her artwork communicating political messages that were ignorant of the war many Chinese citizens now faced, and strictly narrowed China down to a nation of impoverished people who had no agency to improve their situation.

MacKenzie also highlights the various missed opportunities that Greenwood could have taken advantage of in her art, namely the opportunity to comment on the Chinese intellectuals fleeing from the Nationalist regime who were present at the clubs she frequented. Instead her work came to support the anti-communist agenda in the United States at the time.¹⁵⁷ This was not only due to the publicized falsehood that claimed Greenwood's artwork depicted war-torn Republican China, but also due to Greenwood's negative perception of Chinese communists. Greenwood surmised her perception of Chinese communists in one of her letters as "mediocre artists and writers who are nice, childish & flighty like the Mexicans were, but most can't speak English."¹⁵⁸ Greenwood repeated this sentiment in a 1964 oral history interview with Dorothy Seckler where she explained that she knew "wonderful Chinese artists and writers," yet added "[u]nfortunately, though, I found that most of them who were

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 69.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 67.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 60.

being socially conscious were even more backward than the Mexicans from the standpoint of childish symbolism and the usual old propaganda except for the fine traditional Chinese painters.”¹⁵⁹ With such negative perceptions of Chinese communists and artists, it is no surprise that Greenwood likely avoided interacting and conversing with the Chinese intellectuals and refugees she might have encountered.

Greenwood unfortunately does not mention who specifically she considers a “fine traditional Chinese painter” in her statements, but her perspective reveals a definite change in how American artists perceived China, especially relative to Katharine Carl’s celebratory views of Empress Dowager Cixi. It also stands in stark contrast to what the Chinese art world in the 1930s considered artistic modernity. By labeling all Chinese painters who did not paint in the traditional style propagandists, Greenwood completely negates the artistic innovation and value in their work. Instead of her comments stemming from her interactions with Chinese artists and mirroring those of Katherine Carl complimenting the Empress Dowager, they harshly criticize modern Chinese artists who rejected traditional painting and in many ways strips them of their professionalism, while at the same time completely ignoring the fact that women artists in China often had to paint in the “modern” Western style to often be considered professional at all. Although Greenwood does not differentiate between Chinese artists who were men and Chinese artists who were women, her ignorance of the realities of the Chinese art world further illustrate the fraud of her claims of spending two years in mainland China. Marion Greenwood nevertheless drew from her experience in “China” for seven more years after her original China exhibition,¹⁶⁰ appropriating Hong Kong subjects in the creation of her modern art.

American women artists created their artwork within the Orientalism and cultural appropriation that had influenced not only the creation of modern art in the Western world since the beginning of the twentieth century but also the United States’ foreign relationship with China. Instead of challenging this Orientalism these artists allowed it to hamper their understanding of their Chinese subjects. Orientalism also hindered their interaction with their Chinese artistic colleagues. While Carl viewed the Empress Dowager as a skilled artisan, Lum used her

¹⁵⁹ Marion Greenwood, interview by Dorothy Seckler, January 31, 1964, transcript. Accessed at “Oral history interview with Marion Greenwood, 1964 Jan. 31,” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-marion-greenwood-11871>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

privileged position as an upper class American white woman to reduce the Chinese artisans she viewed as highly skilled to mere workshop assistants, and Greenwood blatantly negated the artistic value of Chinese art that was not in the traditional Chinese style. One wonders that if Lum or Greenwood had ever stumbled on a Chinese woman artist what she would have seen her as: an artistic colleague or as a mere skilled worker whose techniques and skills were ripe for exploitation and appropriation.

Orientalism was nonetheless an ideology shaped by the early twentieth century colonialist patriarchy that defined the power differential that existed between the East and the West in terms of gender, the East historically being associated with passive femininity and the West with virile masculinity.¹⁶¹ However, as Mari Yoshihara notes, the presence of white women in Asia complicates this narrative.¹⁶² The complication lies in the question of why white women would willfully participate in an ideology that equated the outbalanced power relationship between the West and Asia with the unequal relationship between men and women in Western society. One part of the answer lies in the fact that women, including American women artists, worked within the framework of Orientalism to lift themselves out of the traditional confines of patriarchal Western society. In order to advance in the art world, artists like Lum and Greenwood appropriated and exhibited “China” in artistic terms, giving themselves a unique artistic edge while at the same time supporting the Orientalism that granted them access and power in China (and Hong Kong) in the first place. At the same time, Chinese women artists such as Guan Zilan and Pan Yuliang subjected themselves to new Chinese notions of gender that both incorporated cosmopolitanism while building upon traditional ideas of a woman being principally defined by her beauty. Although both American and Chinese women artists succumbed to cultures dominated by men in order to advance their art, by working in their respective frameworks they established themselves as artistic professionals. Regardless of their lack of artistic interaction caused by American women’s Orientalist ideas regarding Asian artistry, both American artists and Chinese artists who were women in the first half of the twentieth century shared a common goal: to be taken seriously as artists in their own societies. In light of other women’s gains throughout the twentieth century in both Chinese-speaking societies and the United States, these artists pioneered the notion that women can

¹⁶¹ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 4

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

have careers and be known for their talent whether or not they failed to revolutionize the gendered systems that subjected them in the first place.

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