

## Editor's Note

The central theme of this issue is China's interactions with other parts of Asia, as reflected in modern art history and visual culture. The three articles on this topic explore, respectively, the similar artistic paths taken by three Guangdong-born and Japan-trained twentieth-century Chinese painters, the representations of railroads in China during the war against Japan, and how three contemporary Asian artists reconstruct and reflect on colonial history through mediations. Pan Lu deserves our special thanks for initiating and supervising the selection, translation, review, and revision of these articles.

Cai Tao's piece examines the artistic practices of three Chinese artists from Guangdong—Guan Liang 關良, Tan Huamu 譚華牧 and Ding Yanyong 丁衍庸—who studied in Tokyo, Japan during the late Taishō period, when intense interactions between Eastern and Western cultures in Japan gave rise to the phenomenon of “Tōyō review” 東洋回顧, which not only brought about the concept of “Chinese painting,” but also led to the rise of the notion of the “superiority of Chinese art.” All three artists began to engage in cross-media practice in oil and ink paintings after returning to China. Facing the sudden rise of literati paintings in Japan, and inspired by Western modern art currents, they began to re-examine their own cultural tradition, and, as a result, created a trans-media creative model.

Japan began large-scale railway construction in China in the 1930s, and the railroads were not only used to transport Japanese troops and supplies for the war effort, but also served to showcase Japan's achievements in “constructing” East Asia. Whereas the propaganda of Japan and Manchukuo portrayed railroads and trains as signs of technological progress, the Chinese resisters saw railroads and trains as symbols and tools of colonialism deserving to be demolished, and they created a variety of photographs and woodcut prints to depict the destruction of Japanese-operated railways and trains by Chinese civilians and troops. Focusing on the opposing ways of representing railroads and trains, Wu Xueshan's article analyzes how different visual narratives were used to validate or subvert the existing social-political order.

Three contemporary Asian artists, Chen Min, Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, and Chen Chieh-jen, are the subject of Tang Hongfeng's study, which focuses on how each of these artists reflects on modern colonial history through mediations. Tang argues that archival art, by employing media materials handed down from the past, moves from medium to mediation, mediates between

subjects, media materials, and the artistic works themselves, and highlights the materiality and mediality of media, forming a historical picture, where media and the message, objects and narrations, images and the deceased form a unified entity. While the narrative and memory of history rely on media, mediation can summon the memory of the past.

The two other research articles in this issue make meaningful connections with two themes covered in the previous issues: the Chinese in Southeast Asia, and the voyages of Zheng He.

In his case study of Lim Boon Keng (1869–1957), Ong Soon Keong offers a new answer to an old question: Why would a foreign-born overseas Chinese endeavor to reconnect or return to China? While scholars have generally attributed such acts to the emigrant's primordial affinity to the ancestral homeland, or his nationalistic concerns for China, Ong applies Philip Kuhn's concept of "corridors" to explain Lim Boon Keng's engagement with China, although he disagrees with Kuhn's assessment that the overseas Chinese had never actually "left" China because of these "corridors." Ong argues that Lim Boon Keng was secure with his racial hybridity and his identity as an overseas Chinese, and that it was in response to the changing socio-economic conditions in Singapore that he acknowledged Chinese culture and China, with the hope of employing both to ensure the welfare and continual prosperity of his Straits Chinese community in their place of residence.

Norman Kutcher's article challenges the conventional narrative, which holds that the voyages of Zheng He were a climax in Chinese history, and that after Zheng He China turned inward and rejected naval development as well as maritime engagement with the wider world. This narrative also holds Confucianism responsible for China's inward turn. By examining a consistent strain in Confucian thought of the late Ming and early Qing, Kutcher demonstrates that China's most important Confucian thinkers of that period regarded Zheng He and his voyages as dangerous not because of the naval development or engagement with the world they represented, but because of Zheng He's eunuch status. These thinkers saw in Zheng He's voyages the seeds of the circumstances that had led to the fall of the Ming.

The editors agree with David Li that only an extended review can do justice to Zev Handel's book *Sinography*, which provides a thorough study of language exchange and the role of the Chinese writing system in cultural interactions in pre-modern East Asia. We plan to present to our readers more studies on this important theme in the near future.