Chapter Five

Guangxi, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Sichuan (1928-1935): the landscape of art

As early as the fifth century, Xie He (謝 赫, active ca. 500) outlined what he called the *Six Principles of Painting* (*liu fa 六 法*). “Spirit resonance and life movement” (*qi yun sheng dong* 氣 韻 生 動), the first principle, is what defines Chinese painting and is the most significant and elusive.¹ Since the Song dynasty, the observation of natural phenomena has been an important aspect of artistic creation in China. Artists sketched from nature in order to understand the principles of the life force or *qi* which animated the natural world. In doing so, they were following the first of Xie He’s Six Principles. The great Yuan dynasty landscape painter Huang Gongwang (黃 公 望, 1269-1354), inspired by the Five Dynasties and Northern Song artists Li Cheng (李 成, 919-967) and Guo Xi (郭 熙, ca. 1001-1090), exhorted his students to:

Carry around a sketching brush in a leather bag. Then, when you see in some scenic place a tree that is strange and unique, you can copy its appearance then and there as a record. It will have an extraordinary sense of growing life. Climb a tall building and gaze at the “spirit resonance” (*qi yun*) of the vast firmament. Look at the clouds—they have the appearance of mountaintops! Li Ch’eng and Kuo Hsi both practiced this method; Kuo Hsi painted “rocks like clouds”. When the ancients speak of “Heaven opening forth pictures”, this is what they mean.²

In his “Conversation on art” (*Hua tan 畫 談*), written in 1940, Huang Binhong referred to this passage and synthesised the writings of a number of earlier artists whose art was also

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¹ Osvald Sirén, *The Chinese on the Art of Painting. Translations and Comments*, pp.18-22. There are many translations of ‘*qi yun sheng dong*’. It is sometimes translated as ‘vibration of vitality’.
inspired by the observation of nature. But the ultimate goal of earlier artists was to improve upon nature:

[The ancients also say] Rivers and streams are as beautiful as a painting. In saying that, it is in fact true that in terms of the juxtaposition and spatial resolution of waterways and hills, there are times when the actual landscape is too dense and complex and does not look like a painting. In this case human intervention is required. Dong Yuan said: There should be no trees in the left margin of the painting, but they can be on the right and towards the front and back of the painting, such that you can see through them and the spirit resonance is able to move around in a natural manner, with mind and hand working together, and in harmony. Dong Yuan used the real mountains and waterways of Jiangnan as his model, and the power and energy of Guo Xi’s mountains came from real clouds and waterfalls. After walking ten thousand miles you return and continue travelling in your mind as well as through painting and reading, and in this way you can achieve a true likeness of nature.¹

For Huang Binhong, as for Chinese artists of the past, sketching from nature came after studying the work of recent masters (shi jin ren 師近人) and the ancients (shi gu ren 師古人). It was necessary to first understand the principles of art.²

In a talk given in Shatin 沙田, Hong Kong, in 1935 during a period of travel in south China, Huang Binhong discussed drawing from nature, as it was understood within the Chinese tradition:

In drawing from nature, you must first have understood the techniques of painting textural strokes according to the various historical masters. For example, you need to know which painted mountains correspond to which artists, and then paint [the mountain] using that artist’s style of textural strokes. Learning Chinese painting [guohua] is different from learning Western painting [xiyang hua]. In the early stages of studying Western painting you begin by using mirrors, photographs and actual objects, whereas in Chinese painting it is the transmission of spirit [shen si] rather than the external likeness [xing si] that is important. A student of Chinese painting must approach the natural world through brush and ink technique. It is for this reason that one

¹ Huang Binhong, “Hua tan,” in Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, xia, p. 165.
² Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, xia, pp. 58-59.
needs to understand the textural techniques of various past masters, before drawing from nature.\(^5\)

**Sketchbooks and copybooks**

The Huang Binhong archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum contains many drawing pads, notebooks and albums, filled with sketches in pencil and ink that date from various periods of the artist’s life. Among them are travel sketches, and line drawings made after viewing works of art. Most are undated.\(^6\)

One of Huang’s early albums of ink sketches contains scenes observed from nature as well as from historical works of art. Among the many sketches is a carefully observed “Welcoming Pine Tree” (\(Ying\ ke\ song\) 迎客松) near the Manjuśri Temple (\(Wenshu\ yuan\) 文殊院) on Huangshan, painted using the outline technique (\(baimiao\) 白描). (Figure 5.1) This tree perhaps fitted Huang Gongwang’s criteria of being ‘strange and unique’ and therefore worthy of being recorded. The album also contains a distinctive sketch of a cluster of rocks, which is a detail from a larger landscape. (Figure 5.1a) In this work Huang appears to be experimenting with form and shading. He outlines the rocks and fills them in with wide, regular brush strokes of ink wash, which he repeats next to one another to form solid planes. These are in turn placed next to passages of void to create the illusion of a three dimensional form. It is a curious, hybrid style, similar to that used to depict the mountain forms in the first of the \(Chunhui\ Tang\) scrolls discussed in the previous chapter (See Chapter Four figure 4.3). It is as if he is trying to test or reconcile his own observation of natural form, light and shade, with traditional Chinese type-forms and textural strokes, which were originally developed and codified following the close observation of natural phenomena.

Huang’s sketches of historic Chinese paintings are generally line drawings in ink. Over the course of his life he recorded paintings by artists of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing

\(^5\) Notes from the talk compiled by Zhang Hong which appeared in the magazine \textit{Art (Meishu)} published by the Guangzhou Municipal Art School in 1935. See “Binhong hua yu lu,” in \textit{Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua, xia}, p.44.

\(^6\) For example Huang Binhong pencil \textit{plein-air} sketches (\textit{Huang Binhong qianbi xiesheng huagao}) in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (HS 501-516). See also \textit{Huang Binhong shanshui xiesheng} (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981) which reproduces forty-four sketches of scenes along the Qiantang, Fuqun, Xin’an and Lian Rivers, said to have been painted when Huang was about seventy years of age.
dynasties whose work he admired including Li Tang, Fan Kuan (范 宽, active ca. 1023-1031), Jing Hao (荆 浩, ca. 855-915), Wu Zhen (吳 鎮, 1280-1354), Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan, Dong Yuan, Juran, Mi Fu, Liu Songnian (劉 松 年, ca. 1150-after 1225), Shitao, Hongren, Zha Shibiao, Li Liufang, Xiao Yuncong, and Cheng Sui. The paintings have been quickly executed in dark ink with a dry brush. They record the skeleton of the composition and some of its more engaging details. For example, the sketches of paintings by Fan Kuan and Li Tang focus on vignettes within paintings, such as men riding donkeys through a mountain pass, a boat moored at the river’s edge, or configurations of temples and mountain peaks. (Figures 5.2, 5.2a) The leaves are numbered, presumably to recall the sequence of scenes in the original paintings.

Among the albums is one identified as “Huang Gongwang, Fuchun Painting” (Huang Gongwang Fuchun tu 黃 公 望 富 春 圖). Huang Binhong was interested in Huang Gongwang’s resolution of near and far distance, the relationship between rocks and trees and his incorporation of figures within the landscape. (Figure 5.3) The scenes can be identified when viewed against a reproduction of the original handscroll, now in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. (Figure 5.4) Huang’s renditions are lively records of the compositional components of Huang Gongwang’s famous handscroll.

The handscroll originally formed part of the collection of the Palace Museum in Beiping. It is possible that Huang Binhong inspected the painting as part of the court case against the museum Director Yi Peiji, in the mid to late 1930s. If so, these and other sketches of historical paintings in the Huang Binhong archive in Hangzhou were made while the artist was viewing works in the collection of the Palace Museum and would account for the apparent haste of execution. Alternatively, Huang Binhong may have made the sketch from a reproduction of

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7 Many of these paintings are serial views or details on coarse Chinese paper that have been pasted together along the spine to form simple albums, identified by the name of the artist whose work was copied. For example those in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM HS517-HS753).

the painting published by the Palace Museum.\(^9\) The handscroll was one of the many important works of art later shipped to Taiwan by the Nationalist government.

The method Huang Binhong used to record scenes from nature was developed to a great extent from his detailed examination of historical works of art. In his view, the practices of sketching from historical works and from nature were inextricably linked. Both were integral to art making.

When looking at ancient paintings by famous artists, I make a point of outlining the ridges and gullies, and give little regard to the application of colour and textural strokes. When travelling and in the rush of the moment, I use the outline methods of the ancients to depict [literally to write or depict, \(xie\) 写] the actual scenery. This is because I am aware of the methods of the ancients, that in the process of depicting the motif it is important to achieve a sense of void within the solid, otherwise the solid does not appear solid. No matter what, you cannot avoid this. Using this method, I have made many copies of ancient paintings and many sketches from nature, enough to fill more than six baskets [\(san\ dan\), three carrying poles, or six baskets]. I never show them to people, but sometimes I am entreated by those who want them, but they then look and I never hear from them again.\(^10\)

Viewed together, the sketchbooks and copybooks reveal two of the primary influences on the development of Huang Binhong’s artistic style: his travels to appreciate the landscape and his meticulous and constant scrutinising of the work of past artists.\(^11\) Throughout his life he maintained an interest in empirical research, sketching from nature and making line drawings in ink of art works he had seen. The albums of sketches of natural phenomenon and of landscape paintings were visual diaries. They also functioned as copy-books of compositions and elements of artistic vocabulary that he could use in future paintings.

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\(^10\) Huang Binhong, letter to Fu Lei, 1943, *Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian*, p.203.

\(^11\) Huang Binhong often referred the Ming artist Yun Xiang who “liked to wander in the mountains and study historical works of art in order to achieve creative transformation” (\(xi\ you\ shan,\ shi\ guren,\ yi\ shi\ zaohua\)). See *Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian*, p.562.
Huang Binhong’s travels

From an early age, Huang Binhong enjoyed wandering in the mountains and journeying along the waterways around Jinhua.\(^{12}\) In his youth and middle age, he travelled extensively throughout the Yangtze River Valley, making trips between Jinhua and Shexian, and to major cities including Hangzhou, Nanjing and Yangzhou. Many of the places he visited were situated on the Xin’an, Fuchun, Qiantang and Yangtze Rivers or their tributaries, and therefore much of his travel was by boat. Journeying between these destinations, Huang Binhong passed through some of the most picturesque and lush landscapes in China. Trips further afield to Mount Wuyi and Dingzhou in Fujian, Guichi 貴池 in Anhui, Mount Yandang 雁蕩山 in Zhejiang and Mount Tai 泰山 in Shandong provide further indication of his curiosity and *Wunderlust*.\(^{13}\)

In 1928, at the age of sixty-five, Huang Binhong began to travel more extensively within China, and further afield. Between 1928 and 1937 he made a trip to Guangxi 廣西, Sichuan 四川 and Guangdong 廣東 in central and southern China, and to Hebei 河北 in the north. This period of travel coincided with the so-called “Nanjing decade” of Republican government. After establishing government in 1927, the Nationalist Party promoted national studies and regional education and Huang Binhong became involved in government-sponsored educational and cultural initiatives that provided a focus for his trips. The experience of seeing more distant, and in some cases very remote, parts of China had a profound effect on his evolving artistic vision.

In an autobiographical note written at the age of ninety, Huang commented on the journeys he made to various parts of China. The archaic terms he used for the regions he had travelled through, highlights the historic veil through which he viewed the cultural landscape.

\(^{12}\) Huang Binhong, “Zishu gao,” in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.599-600.

\(^{13}\) In 1882 Huang Binhong travelled to Dingzhou to visit his ailing relative Huang Cisun (Huang Binhong nianpu, p.15); in 1924 he travelled to Guichi to escape fighting between warlords in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, with a plan to settle there, which was not realized (Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.169); in 1931 he travelled to Yandangshan (“You Yandang riji,” in Huang Binhong wenji zazhu bian, pp.596-597 and Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.266-267).
In the past, I travelled to various mountains in Guangdong, Guangxi, Zhejiang, Fujian, the states of Yan and Zhao [Northern China], Qilu [Shandong], Chu [Central Eastern China] and Shu [Sichuan].

Huang continued his reminiscence of past travel by giving a catalogue-style listing of the places he had visited. The mountains and rivers that he mentions confirm for us the significance of the landscape to his travels. He concluded:

 Wherever I travelled, I collected my impressions in my painting sack [shou ru hua nang] in order that I may later be able to re-visit these places through painting in repose. It is not easy to describe places of natural beauty.

Travel provided Huang with the opportunity to experience different kinds of landscapes and gather material for his creative practice. Through the sketches and paintings recorded during his travels Huang would “return” to these distant but familiar mountains and rivers in old age.

Historically, Chinese artists have drawn inspiration from the landscape of their native area, or place of principal residence, and the characteristics of that landscape have affected the development of their artistic style. In his reminiscences, Huang Binhong surveyed some of China’s most famous landscape painters and related their paintings to particular locales.

In terms of the content or composition of a painting the Tang artists Wang Wei 王维, Li Sixun 李思訓 and Wu Daozi 吳道子 painted the landscape along the Jialing River 嘉陵江; Fan Kuan, Guo Xi, Li Cheng, Jing Hao and Guan Tong of the Five Dynasties 五代 painted landscape of the Yellow River valley of northwest [China]; Dong Yuan, Juran and the Southern Song artists Liu, Li, Ma, Xia, and the Two Mi’s as well as the Yuan 元.

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14 Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi er,” part eleven, in Huang Binhong wenji zazhu bian, p.575.
15 “I travelled and painted what I saw in the Southeast: in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Guilin, Yangshuo, Li River, Xun River. I returned repeatedly to the mountains and rivers of Xin’an, Jingkou in Huaiyang, the valleys of the major rivers; [Have also been] up to Eastern Sichuan [Ba Shu], where I climbed Qingcheng and Emei Mountains, along the Jialing and Qu Rivers to Jiazhou; through Wuxia [one of the three gorges of the Yangtze River], to Mount Jing [in the ancient state of Chu, present day Hubei province located West of Nanzhang], as well as Kuanglu and Jiuhua Mountains. I sketched and painted the famous sights of Jiangnan including the Five Lakes and Three Rivers, Jinjiao, Haiwu, Tiantai, Yandang, Lanting, Yuling [the monument of the legendary ruler of Yu in Zhejiang], Huqiu and Zhongfu, which appear different during each season, and travelled as far as Qi, Lu [Shandong], Yan and Zhao and the Yellow River Valley”. Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu zhi er,” part thirteen, in Huang Binhong wenji za zhu bian, p.576.
artists Gao Fangshan, Zhao Mengfu, Ni, Wu, Huang and Wang all painted the mountains of Jiangnan.\textsuperscript{16}

Although many artists followed closely in the footsteps of a revered master, Huang Binhong took heed from Guo Xi who, in the eleventh century, cautioned practitioners against following a single school or style.

Great men and learned scholars do not limit themselves to one school. It is necessary to combine [several models], and to study and make observations on a broad basis, so that one may form a personal style and gradually reach perfection.\textsuperscript{17}

Huang Binhong retraced the footsteps of historical figures, but he also travelled to places that had rarely been depicted by previous artists.\textsuperscript{18} Opportunity and curiosity led him to remote and distant locations, which had the effect of expanding and energising his artistic practice.

**Guangxi, Guangdong and Hong Kong**

During the summer of 1928, Huang Binhong was invited to participate in a seminar at Guangxi University (\textit{Guangxi daxue}) in Guilin, to discuss the development of education in the province. The mountainous terrain of Guangxi necessitated travel via Hong Kong and Guangdong.

In Hong Kong, a welcoming party was held for the lecturers bound for the summer school. A photograph published in the \textit{Feifei Pictorial} (\textit{Feifei huabao}) records the group. (Figure 5.5) Seated at the centre of the photograph is Ma Junwu (馬君武, 1882-1939), President of Guangxi University. Ma had studied in Japan and Germany and played an active role in the 1911 Revolution. Huang knew him well. Ma was a member of the Southern Society and the Revolutionary Alliance, and had been an official in Sun Yat-sen’s provisional government.\textsuperscript{19} He is seen seated next to the wife of Bai Pengfei 白鵬鶴, Professor of Law at

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\textsuperscript{16} Huang Binhong, “\textit{Jiushi zashu zhi er},” part sixteen, in \textit{Huang Binhong wenji za zhu bian}, p.578.

\textsuperscript{17} Sirén, \textit{The Chinese on the Art of Painting}, pp.44-45.

\textsuperscript{18} In a colophon on a 1937 painting by Huang dedicated to a Mr Jiyuan Ye Gongzhuo, who was from Guangdong, acknowledged Huang Binhong’s pioneering role in painting the landscape of Hong Kong. See \textit{Huang Binhong xiansheng hua ji} (Hong Kong, 1961), plate 35.

\textsuperscript{19} Ma Junwu was from Guilin, Guangxi. He travelled to Japan in 1901, studied industrial chemistry, became a member of Sun Yat-sen’s Revolutionary Alliance and returned to China in the summer of 1906. Ma later studied metallurgy in Germany and returned to China in the winter of 1911. After the
the National Peking University, who is wearing the robes of a traditional scholar. Huang Binhong is on Ma’s right. The article refers to Huang as an artist (meishu jia 美術家), but he was also professor of painting history at Jinan University in Shanghai at the time. Chen Zhu (陳柱zi Zhuzun 柱 尊, 1889/90-1944), a Professor at the Daxia University 大廈大學 in Shanghai is on Ma’s left. Chen carries a walking stick and cuts a dashing figure in a Western suit and tie.20 The members of this group are dressed in an extraordinary range of attire, from scholar’s gowns to white Sun Yat-sen uniforms and Western-style jackets worn with shirt and tie or an open-neck shirt. The variety functions as an outward reminder of the political changes that had occurred and the complex cultural undercurrents operating within Chinese society at the time.

Writing in the 1930s, the prominent writer, editor and cultural commentator Lin Yutang (林語堂, 1895-1976) claimed that the superiority of the scholar’s gown was “simply and purely political”.

The Chinese dress is worn by all Chinese gentlemen. Furthermore all scholars, thinkers, bankers and people who made good in China either have never worn a foreign dress, or have swiftly come back to their native dress the moment they have “arrived” politically, financially or socially.21

The summer school was officially opened by Huang Gongjian (黃公健zi Erming 二明), head of the Guangxi Department of Education, who used it as a platform to highlight the need to train professional staff to build a “New Guangxi” (jianshe xin Guangxi 建設新廣西).22 From the perspective of the Nationalist government, education was essential to national reconstruction.
particularly in a remote province like Guangxi. The summer school was one of a number of provincial initiatives that brought experts from across China to Guangxi to give advice on “reconstruction”. Lectures were grouped around the broad themes of national studies, education, philosophy, politics and economics, science and English. Huang Binhong spoke on epigraphy, Chen Zhu on national studies and Bai Pengfei on changes in political thought over the last one hundred years.\(^{23}\)

The content of the conference, the presence of Huang Gongjian and Ma Junwu, and the gathering of distinguished professors from a variety of institutions from across China, including National Peking, Daxia, Jinan and Xiamen universities, a year after the Nationalist Party formed government, indicates that the summer school was part of a wider Nationalist Party agenda relating to regional China and educational reform. It also highlights Huang’s close association with officials in the nationalist government at that time.

While Huang spoke on a subject that was integral to national studies, as previously stated he was also referred to as an artist. Perhaps it was hoped that by painting the landscape of Guangxi, notably the area around Guilin, that he could help promote Guilin as a tourist destination. As Diana Lary has noted in her study of the relationship between region and nation in the period 1925-1937, many of the visits to Guangxi by outside experts at this time were “frequently combined with officially-financed tourist trips in the Kweilin [Guilin] region, one of China’s most famous scenic spots”.\(^{24}\)

On the way from Shanghai to Guangxi via Hong Kong, and while travelling in Guangxi by boat, Huang made many pencil sketches of the country that he passed through.\(^{25}\) (Figure 5.6) He recorded small fishing villages, ancient forts and remarkable mountains. Huang was fascinated by the islands off the coast of Hong Kong and Kowloon and the silhouettes of the mountains in the Guilin, Yangshuo 阳朔 and Zhaoping 昭平 area, which he captured in firm continuous lines. Clearly he wanted to remember their fantastic shapes, which were so different

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\(^{23}\) Other topics included methods of teaching Chinese (guowen) at secondary school, English, social studies, economics, social psychology and revolutionary psychology, educational aims and administration. Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, pp.194-195. For Huang Binhong’s lecture notes, see *Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian*, shang, pp.344-348.


\(^{25}\) See notebook in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM 31647, 72 pages).
to the mountains of the Lower Yangtze valley and Anhui where he had grown up. The sketches are a fascinating document of what Huang Binhong saw. In some drawings a boat is moored by the bank of the river, suggesting the traveller who was recording the scenes. In most cases the drawings are identified by location, and some carry a brief description of the terrain. Many are numbered, which enabled Huang to relive and recreate his journeys. In the ink inscription on a drawing of the fantastic karst mountains of Black Mountain (Heishan 黑山), Huang comments that in his youth he was not attracted to paintings of fantastic mountains and did not collect them. It was not until he saw the actual mountains in Yangshuo that he understood that they derived from natural forms. Now, he says, he regrets that he was not better informed earlier in his life. (Figure 5.7)

One sketchbook contains a series of carefully painted works that relate to Huang’s travels in Hong Kong and Guangxi. They are quiet and austere compared to the spontaneous and loosely drawn pencil sketches from which they derive. For example “Sea and Mountains Looking South” (Hai shan nan wang 海山南望) which derives from the pencil sketch “Looking South from Hong Kong” (Xianggang nan wang 香港南望). (Figure 5.8) In the painting the viewer looks out, from a high vantage point, across mountains and islands off the coast of Hong Kong. It is a sketchy painting that captures the hazy atmosphere of southern China and the raspy quality of the brushwork is reminiscent of the Xin’an artist Cheng Sui. There is a companion pencil drawing titled “Hong Kong Looking East” (Xianggang dong wang 香港東望) recorded at the same time. (Figure 5.9) While the paintings are not dated they are likely to have been painted during or soon after Huang Binhong’s travels to southern China in 1928.

26 Whilst I have had access to many of the travel sketches in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum the drawings are no longer in their original sequence and so it has not been possible to trace Huang’s journey with any degree of accuracy. This is an important task that has not yet been undertaken by curatorial staff at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum, a task complicated by the different numbering systems used by Huang. In some cases drawings have been assigned a number in pencil and another in ink. Notes indicate that Huang conducted inventories of his sketches at different times, which suggests that the drawings were an important visual record.

27 Collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM 21863-52). There are 113 pages in this sketchbook and the images relate to various locations.

By comparing a painting of Dabeikou 大背□ with a pencil drawing of the same subject we can explore Huang’s process of artistic transformation.29 (Figures 5.10, 5.11) Huang Binhong has modelled the ink painting on the pencil drawing, but it is a very loose interpretation. While the primary elements of the landscape are the same Huang has been selective, adopting a higher vantage point, as in the previous example, and emphasising the linear profile of the fantastic karst mountains. He uses modulated ink tones and dry, almost rubbed textural strokes to build up form. These textural strokes follow the principle of a single and consistent light source, heightening the painting’s sense of naturalism and creating an effect that is similar to a carefully worked pencil drawing. It is instructive to compare this painting with “Looking South from Hong Kong,” in the same album, as a reminder that Huang Binhong continued to work simultaneously in very different styles.

One of the major paintings that Huang created around this time is a long handscroll in ink and pale colours dedicated to Chen Zhu and made in July 1928.30 The handscroll entitled the “Eight Peaks of Guilin” (Ba gui feng 八桂) was inspired by the landscape from Zhaoping 昭平 and Pingle 平樂. (Figures 5.12, 5.12a) Huang paints the landscape in a fluid, calligraphic manner using sure lines to outline the fantastic mountain forms, and large, irregular dots to convey substance and life. The painting bears a long poem by Huang Binhong which describes their experience of travelling together by boat along the Li River (Lijiang 漓江). In the poem Huang marvels at the fantastic island-like mountains rising from the water and comments that the blackness of the night and the sparkling stars are so beautiful they cannot sleep. The painting also carries a long inscription by Chen Zhu affirming his long friendship with Huang. Chen’s exuberant yet brooding inscription suggests that he and Huang were literally and metaphorically intoxicated by the landscape. Chen confided that in the past he was a sceptic, but now he believed that immortals did in fact inhabit the landscape. Despite a difference of twenty-four

29 Huang Binhong shanshui xiesheng ce (1962), plate 12.
30 This painting is in the collection of the Shanghai Museum (SM23459). The handscroll includes a number of additional inscriptions by friends including Xia Jingguan, Pan Feisheng, Yang Yuheng and Yang Tiefu. For Huang Binhong’s poem, see Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, p.158. See also Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.197-198.
years in age the sentiments expressed in their inscriptions highlight a shared desire to seek solace and refuge in the beauty of nature.\(^{31}\)

According to Chen Zhu’s daughter, Chen Songying 陳松英, who studied painting with Huang, the two men first met in Shanghai, sometime between 1911 and 1912.\(^{32}\) At the time, Chen Zhu was studying at Nanyang Public School (Nanyang gongxue 南洋公學), later named Jiaotong University (Jiaotong daxue 交通大學), and they became good friends. Both were early members of the Southern Society.

Huang Binhong was generous with his paintings and readily gave them to people who expressed an interest in his art. His attitude was influenced by the past practices of scholar-artists, for whom painting was part of an intellectual dialogue and the giving of works of art was symbolic of both friendship and intellectual affinity.\(^{33}\)

An interesting and in many ways uncharacteristic landscape painting by Huang Binhong is dated winter 1928.\(^{34}\) The inscription does not refer to a specific place but the distinctive

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\(^{31}\) In the summer of 1935 Huang painted a companion piece for Chen Zhu. The painting, in a private collection, was based on the rivers and mountains of Sichuan where he had travelled in 1932-33. At the end of the handscroll there are two colophons, by Qian E’xun and by Mochao Jushi Xuan Gong. Huang painted other long handscrolls for Chen Zhu. See Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, pp.197-198, 357.

\(^{32}\) See Chen Songying, “Huang Binhong xiansheng,” *Xueshu shijie* 1, no.4 (1935), p.102. Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, p.198 quotes inscription by Chen on painting by Huang Binhong dated 1928 in which he says he had known Huang for more than ten years. Chen Zhu had studied at Nanyang Public School (Nanyang gongxue) with Tang Weizhi and continued his studies in Japan. He was a member of the Southern Society and the Chinese Association for the Study of Art (Zhonghua xueyi she) and edited *Art Study* (Xueyi), *Magazine of National Studies* (Guoxue zazhi) and *Academic World* (Xueshu shijie). He was a professor at Wuxi National Institute (*Wuxi guozhuan*), Daxia University (*Daxia daxue*), Jinan University (*Ji’nan daxue*) and was on the founding committee of Guangxi University. He was later Director of Anhui University and Head of the Chinese department at Jiaotong University. See *Zhongguo jin xian dai renwu minghao da cidian*, 517. During the Japanese occupation Chen was the Principal of the Central University (Zhongyang daxue) in Nanjing.

\(^{33}\) Soon after he returned from Guilin, Huang gave fellow artist Tao Lengyue (1895-1985) a painting of the Li River at Guilin. Tao Lengyue was the head of the Chinese art department at Jinan University in Shanghai where Huang also taught. He was an exponent of “New National painting” (*Xin guohua*) and sought to synthesise the strengths of Chinese and Western art in his own paintings. In a colophon Tao explained how the Huang Binhong painting came into his possession: “The colour of the mountains along the Li River was painted by Huang Binhong after his return from Guilin in autumn 1928. This painting was given to me after I saw it”. See Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, p.201. In another painting of the Li River near Guilin that Huang also dedicated to Tao Lengyue, but which is undated, Huang emphasizes the distinctive mountains of the area in forceful calligraphic lines. The strong silhouette of the mountains echoes the forms that can be found in his pencil sketches, indicating the important inspiration he derived from his observation of the Guilin landscape. See *Huang Binhong shuhua paimai jicheng 1995-2002* (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2004), cat.440, p.63.

\(^{34}\) Collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (S1987.248). See also Fu Shen, “Huang Binhong’s Shanghai Period Landscape Paintings and his Late Floral Works in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,” p.70. For a related painting see *Huang Binhong*
mountain peaks suggest that it was inspired by Huang’s recent trip to Guangxi. (Figures 5.13, 5.13a) Huang depicts a stand of trees on a river bank, silhouetted against tall, rounded mountains. The vantage point suggests that the scene was observed from a river boat. There is no other sign of human life. In its realism the painting differs dramatically from Huang Binhong’s conventional landscape paintings, which emphasise foreground, middle ground and background. Here Huang’s brush technique suggests a greater realism—the mountains are outlined in dry dark ink and defined through the addition of repeated layers of dry textural strokes, wet dots and naturalistic colour wash. The conscious building up of form creates an impression of solidity and conveys seasonal colour and atmospheric conditions. Huang has used a splayed brush to create a stippled effect that is repeated with regularity throughout the painting. The effect differs depending on whether the paper and the brush are wet or dry. In some areas wash has been applied to dark ink that is still wet and caused the ink to bleed, creating an interesting tonal effect. The painting calls to mind works by Tao Lengyue (陶冷月, 1895-1985), as well as Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng, who together with Chen Shuren established the Lingnan School (Lingnan pai 嶺南派) of New National Painting (Xin guohua 新國畫).

All of these artists were inspired by Japanese and Western art and sought to introduce aspects of realism into Chinese brush and ink painting. While this was not a direction that Huang Binhong was to pursue, the painting shows his interest in the close observation of the landscape and new approaches to painting at this time.

The painting is dedicated to “elder classmate Bolong” (Bolong xuezhang xiong 伯龍學長 兄). Bolong is Xu Jiashi (徐家栻zi Bolong 伯龍, 1892-1954), the eldest son of Xu Chengyao. Xu Chengyao and Huang Binhong had both been teachers at the Xin’an Middle School in Shexian. Xu Jiashi was a student in the inaugural class at the school and graduated in 1910. He was later a county mayor in Gansu (甘肅) province before settling in Shanghai where he worked in law. A photograph taken in 1934 of nine men in long scholar’s gowns includes Huang Binhong, Xu Chengyao, Xu Jiashi and his brother Xu Shuliang 徐叔良. According to Hu Weisheng 胡蔚生 the photograph records a gathering in Shanghai of teachers and students xiansheng huaji (Hong Kong, 1961, plate 16), titled “The Autumn Mountains of Yangshuo” painted in early winter, 1929.
of the Xin’an Middle School to mark Huang Binhong’s seventieth birthday and the sixtieth birthdays of Xu Chengyao and Yan Gongshang (嚴工上, 1874-1953). The photograph establishes the close relationship between Huang and the Xu family and gives meaning to the self-deprecating term “elder classmate”. Huang Binhong may have consciously chosen this painting to present to Xu Jiashi, who was much younger, and possibly more conversant with western-inspired realist painting, because it was executed in a more realistic style.

On the return journey to Shanghai in September 1928, Huang travelled via Guangzhou where he was welcomed by members of the Guangdong National Painting Research Society (Guangdong guohua yanjiu hui 廣東國畫研究會). His old friend Cai Shou, who years earlier had returned to live in Guangzhou, introduced him and he spoke to a large gathering of society members. In his presentation Huang placed Chinese painting in the context of both Chinese and international art and talked about painting techniques and what he termed san bi qi mo (三筆七墨 three techniques of brushwork and seven techniques of ink). His final observation to the gathering was that the enduring success of the ancients was due to the “scientific methods” they applied to the study of art and their awareness of the need for change. Huang draws attention to the contemporaneity of the fundamental principles of brush and ink painting. By emphasising historical antecedents for an interest in “scientific methods” and the concept of change, he sought to align past and present, implying an ongoing relevance for Chinese brush and ink painting.

During this trip to Guangdong Huang Binhong came across the album of paintings of Tandu village by his forebear Huang Lü, discussed in Chapter One. Through his research into family history, Huang Binhong had discovered that in the early Qing dynasty the family fled to

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36 While in Guangzhou Huang also met with Huang Jie and Gao Jianfu, close friends from his early Shanghai years, who had returned to Guangdong. Huang Jie had recently returned to Guangzhou to take up an appointment, initiated by Chen Jiongming and Li Jishen, as head of the Guangdong Department of Education. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.198-199.
37 Ibid.
Western Guangdong, close to the border with Guangxi. While living in southern China, Huang Lü had travelled in Guangdong and Guangxi and had also taken delight in the fantastic mountains of Guilin. 

Huang Binhong’s family association with Guangxi and Guangdong through Huang Lü no doubt contributed to Huang Binhong’s interest in and connection with the area. 

Huang Binhong returned to Guangxi to teach at another summer school in 1935, this time in Nan’ning 南 宁. The month-long event was organised by the Guangxi provincial government for principals, directors of education and teachers of Chinese working in middle schools and teachers colleges in Guangxi, again, with a strong emphasis on national learning. Huang, who was then a professor at Jinan University in Shanghai, spoke on the history of epigraphy, calligraphy and painting. Other speakers included Chen Zhu, by then head of the National Studies department at Jiaotong University in Shanghai, Feng Zhen 馮 振, head of the School of National Studies in Wuxi (Guoxue zhuannen xuefiao 無 錫 國 學 專 門 學 校) and Chen Yibai 陳 一 百, a professor at Shanghai’s Guanghua 光 華 大 學 and Daxia universities. An article published at the conclusion of the summer school described it as an educational event to foster adult education and the basic education of citizens. 

On this trip Huang travelled with Chen Zhu and Chen Zhongfan 陳 中 凡 to Du Mountain (Du jiao 都 嶂) in Rong county 容 縣 and to Goulou 勾 漏 in Beiliu, close to Chen Zhu’s ancestral home. (Figures 5.14, 5.14a) As a native of Beiliu in Guangxi, Chen Zhu and 

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38 Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, pp.79-80. These references come from inscriptions on the Chunhui Tang scrolls Huang painted for the family ancestral shrine discussed in Chapter Two. 
39 Two images from the Huang Lü album were published in the magazine edited by Chen Zhu, Xueshu shijie 2, no.5 (1937), plates 1-2, together with an article by Chen Huiying, “Huifeng lou du hua ji: Huangfengliu shanren xiangju Tandu tu,” pp.76-77. 
40 The summer school was held from 22 July to 19 August, 1935. See Xueshu shijie 1, no.6 (1935), p.134. 
41 The event was organised by Lei Peihong, who worked in the provincial education department. See Xueshu shijie 1, no.6 (1935), p.133. See also Eugene William Levich, The Kwangsi Way in Kuomintang China, 1931-1939 (Armonk and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp.134-140. 
42 See Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, xia, pp.33-34. At the time Huang was teaching at the Art Research Association of the Jinan University and the Shanghai Art College. See also Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.361. 
43 See Xueshu shijie 1, no.6 (1935), p.133.
was familiar with the area. The journey provided Huang with rich and inspiring source material for sketches and later paintings. A number of works he made during or shortly after this and his earlier trip to Guangxi were published by Chen Zhu between 1935 and 1937 in Academic World (Xueshu shijie) the journal he edited. Chen Zhu also published Huang Binhong’s writings and historic paintings from his collection. Writing in 1935, Chen Songying mentions the large collection of paintings by Huang Binhong that her father accumulated over the years, “a few score including large and small works, enough to completely fill four walls”. The strong friendship and intellectual affinity between the two men highlights the important role played by Chen Zhu in both of Huang Binhong’s trips to Guangxi.44

The inscription on one painting, dated 1935 refers to their journey to famous sights in Goulou. (Figure 5.15) Using strong calligraphic lines and a few horizontal textural strokes Huang depicts houses at the foot of a mountain close to the banks of a river and mountains towering in the distance.45 Another work, published the following year, depicts the Anluo mountain range 暗螺嶺, which was some ten li from Chen Zhu’s ancestral village.46 (Figure 5.16) The sketchy undated painting is an impressionistic scene of a cluster of houses on a rugged mountain-top. Pathways at the foot of the mountain create clear passages of void that lead the eye through the painting. These ink sketches highlight the increasing freedom and spontaneity of Huang’s brush and ink technique as he explores the Guangxi landscape.

A much larger, more detailed and impressive painting of Yangshuo was published in Academic World in 1936. (Figure 5.17) Although poor quality reproduction prevents us from deciphering the three-line inscription, the structure of the painting can be clearly seen. In this work, Huang Binhong features the fantastic, tapered mountains of Yangshuo, using layers of textural strokes to create darkness and depth. Of particular interest are the layers of dark ink, contrasting strongly with passages of void, a distinctive feature of an evolving personal style.

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44 Chen Songying, “Huang Binhong,” Xueshu shijie 1, no.4 (1935), p.102. Some of the paintings reproduced in Xueshu shijie in 1935 include an undated ink sketch of the Min River in Sichuan, dedicated to Chen Zhu and another of Longmen Gorge at Mount Emei. Both paintings are small in scale and were painted quickly with an economy of brush strokes.
45 Xueshu shijie 1, no.1 (1935), p.1. Another painting, published in April 1937, is dated July 1928. The painting is not identified but it was probably made immediately prior to or in the very early stages of the trip to Guangxi. Two figures sit conversing in a pavilion perched high on the side of a mountain. The primary elements of the painting are drawn in thickly brushed lines, with detail provided by large wet ink dots, which are highly abstracted. See Xueshu shijie 2, no.4 (1937), p.2.
the development of which appears to have intensified with his experience of the landscape of southwestern China.47

In a hanging scroll also painted while Huang Binhong was in Guangxi in 1935 the mountain forms are more generic than the paintings previously discussed.48 (Figure 5.18) The viewer is lead into the picture from the base of the painting to a small servant figure walking across a bridge. Our gaze follows him along the path to a dwelling in which a robed figure and his guest are in conversation. The living compound is fenced and shielded by two large trees. The inscription describes the modest dwelling of a scholar official who lives in a remote location:

A thatched roof pavilion with a brushwood door opens onto an adjacent area of bamboo.
The Dong official 峒官entertains a guest, not wanting them to leave.
Covered with plantain leaves, dishes of food and wine in a bamboo carrier are delivered.

1935 in Yongning as we are about to travel to Longzhou,
I take up the brush and write a line from Lin Yuankai.49
For the amusement of Mr Qiaosheng.

The imagery relates very closely to the poem by the Ming scholar-official Lin Bi (林弼zi Yuankai 元 凱), and evokes the life of an official in a remote part of Guangxi province.

Yongning 郧宁is a short distance Southeast of Nan’ning on the Yong River 郧江. Longzhou 龍州could be reached by taking a boat west along the Yong River and then into the arm of the Zuo River 左江. It is located close to the Chinese border with Vietnam in an extremely remote part of Guangxi. It would appear from a later essay that Huang did not in fact complete the journey to Longzhou.50 After the painting was made there appears to have been a change of plans, leaving the painting as evidence of an intention, or even just a fascination with the idea of

47 Xueshu shijie 1, no.8 (1936), p.24.
49 Lin Bi (1347 jinshi) was from Longxi, in present day Fujian Province. Lin worked on revising (xiu) Yuan dynasty history and wrote fine regular script, inspired by calligraphy of the Jin and Tang. See Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian, p.531.
making a journey to such a remote outpost. The painting is about reclusion, a subject that would have resonated with Huang during his travels in Guangxi.

As with the previous trip to Guangxi, Huang travelled to Guangxi via Hong Kong. While in Hong Kong he stayed with Huang Jusu (黃居素 Wong Kui-So, 1897-1986) who lived at Dongshan Tai on Mount Victoria with striking views out to sea. Huang Jusu had been a high-ranking member of the Nationalist Party. Huang was introduced to him by a mutual friend, Hu Pu’an, in 1923. From an early age Huang Jusu was interested in print media, art and culture and Buddhism. He studied painting with Huang Binhong. In 1928 Huang Jusu was closely involved in the purchase of the Shenzhou guoguang she, after which time Huang Binhong became its art editor. The publication of the Shenzhou guoguang ji was resumed then too. A photograph taken by the artist Huang Banruo (黃般若, 1901-1968) shows Huang Binhong standing on Dongshan Tai sketching the landscape, with Huang Jusu looking over his shoulder. (Figure 5.19, 5.19a, 5.19b) They were good friends and Huang Jusu became a major collector of his art.

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51 Huang Binhong was met by Tang Tianru, Li Gongci, Deng Erya and Huang Banruo. See Huang Banruo, “Yi Binhong laoren,” in Huang Banruo meishu wenji, eds., Huang Banruo and Huang Dade (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1997), pp.166-167. 52 In 1919 Huang became Chen Jiongmin’s secretary and later rose to become confidential secretary. He later held various high level government posts in Guangdong. According to John Fitzgerald, he was a co-owner of the Hong Kong News (Xinwenbao) which had been bought with a large grant from the Nationalist Party. Huang Jusu aligned himself with the anti-Communist faction within the Nationalist Party and quickly rose through their ranks. He was appointed head of the Central Peasant Bureau in October 1924, entrusted with the task of ridding the bureau of Communist influence, but failed. After 1927 he became Head of the Farmer’s Department (Nongmin bazhang), a Committee member of the Guangdong Provincial government and Mayor of Zhongshan. In 1933 he retired from politics and moved to Hong Kong. See Guangdong shengzhi, renwu zhi (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2002), pp.983-984; Liu Xian, ed., Zhonghua shuju, Huang Banruo, “Yi Binhong laoren,” pp.166-167; Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.166-167. 53 See Huang Banruo, “Yi Binhong laoren,” pp.166-167; Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.361; and Huang Jusu, author’s preface, Landscapes by Huang Chü-su, First series (Hong Kong: Sinology Press, 1965). Huang Jusu painted in a style that was closely modelled on Huang Binhong. 54 Huang Banruo had just acquired a camera. All of the photos of Huang Binhong in Hong Kong were taken by Huang Banruo. See Huang Banruo, “Yi Binhong laoren,” p.167. 55 Friends in Guangdong and Hong Kong who were important collectors of Huang Binhong’s art include Cai Shou, Huang Jie, Tang Tianru, Huang Jusu, Liu Junliang and Zhang Guchu. Huang Banruo notes that the largest collector of Huang’s paintings was Wu Ming who lived in Macao and owned some 200-300
During this visit to Hong Kong, Huang Binhong was invited by Li Fengpo to travel by boat through the islands off Kowloon. Ink sketches of the landscape around Shatin, in the New Territories were made during or soon after this trip. Huang Binhong used spirited calligraphic lines in dark ink to record the primary features of the landscape. (Figure 5.20) A view of Man An Mountain captures the distinctive swayed saddle-back of the horse after which the mountain was named. (Figure 5.21)

A series of four small dark paintings of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon executed with a thick brush are also likely to have been painted during or soon after these trips. The inscriptions refer to Lion Peak 獅峰, Pingzhou 平洲, Kowloon 九龍, Beishan 背山, and Dazhu island 大竹島 in Huang Pengwan 黃鵬灣 and the paintings are stylistically very different from the above-mentioned ink sketches. (Figures 5.22, 5.23) In each case the island and mountain forms, articulated with simple calligraphic lines, have been given substance through the addition of layers of textural strokes and ink wash. The paintings are generic rather than specific, suggestive rather than descriptive. In the painting of Dazhu Island, for instance, the island dominates the pictorial field. An area of void reserved at the right of the painting carries the inscription and chinks of void relieve the solidity and heaviness of the mountain form. At the bottom of the landscape a tiny figure stares out at the viewer from the confines of his dwelling, dwarfed by the landscape. This motif recurs in Huang Binhong’s landscape paintings and is symbolic of the peace of mind he experienced within a landscape and that he sought to recreate and re-live through painting.

During this trip Huang Binhong spoke to an informal gathering of artists in Shatin. He responded to questions about brush and ink technique, copying ancient works of art and drawing from nature, highlighting the importance of combining inspiration derived from the observation of nature with artistic principles of the past.

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Painting from nature is not divorced from method or principles. Method refers to artistic laws, and principles refer to the principles of objects. All have their place. For example a solid mountain can appear lighter \([xu]\) with the addition of cloud and mist, and the void areas of a mountain can appear more solid \([shi]\) with the addition of buildings and pavilions. But one must not destroy the painting by adding too much mist and too many built structures. Similarly, pathways through the mountains must be like the belly of a snake, without stiffness. This can also be achieved by the mingling of light and shadow. There is a saying that rivers and mountains are like a painting. But the landscape is not necessarily like a painting, hence the need to consider techniques to improve it.\(^{59}\)

The talk was recorded by the artist and collector Zhang Hong (張谷虹, 1891-1968) and a summary was published in 1935 under the title of “Quotations from Binhong on Art” \((Binhong hua yulu 賓虹畫語錄)\).\(^{60}\)

A painting that Huang Binhong made in 1935 for Tang Tianru 唐天如, another friend in Hong Kong, is inscribed “Using scorched black ink to paint the landscape of Kowloon”. (Figure 5.24) As with the previous paintings it reflects Huang’s synthesis of the observed landscape and artistic models to create an “improved landscape,” but one imbued with distinctive local character.

**Sichuan**

In September 1932, Huang Binhong set out on an extended trip to Sichuan 四川 where he was to take up a teaching position at the Sichuan Art College \((Sichuan yishu zhuanke xuexiao 四川藝術專科學校)\) in Chengdu 成都. He was invited by the principal Zhou Ji 周稷, and accompanied by Wu Yifeng (吳一峰, b. 1907), a graduate from the Chinese painting

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\(^{59}\) “Binhong hua yu lu,” in *Huang Binhong wenji shuhua bian xia*, p.44.

\(^{60}\) The choice of title was intended to link Huang Binhong’s thoughts on art with *Shitao’s Sayings on Art (Shitao hua yu)*. See Zhang Hong, introduction to *Binhong hua yulu*, 1935. (No publication details given). The essay was later re-titled *Responding to Question in Shatin (Shatian da wen)*. See “Shatian da wen,” in *Huang Binhong de huihua sixiang*, ed., Sun Qi (Taipei: Tianhua xueshu congkan, 1974), pp.164-167. See also Huang Banruo, “Yi Binhong laoren,” p.167. For a detailed discussion and analysis of the relationship between Huang Binhong and Zhang Hong see Hong Zaixin, “Xueshu yu shichang: cong Huang Binhong yu Zhang Hong de jiaowang kan Guangdong de yishu tansuo,” paper presented at the International Symposium on Guangdong and Twentieth Century Chinese Fine Arts, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, Guangzhou, 20-23 December 2003, pp.1-32. I would like to thank Hong Zaixin for providing me with a copy of this paper. See also Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, p.108.
department at the Shanghai Art College where Huang was a teacher. Huang Binhong’s appointment as a director of the college and head of the Chinese Painting Department was in response to an agreement by Liu Haisu, principal of the Shanghai Art College, to support the Sichuan Art College through guest lecturers and staff support. Huang Binhong and Wu Yifeng took a steamer from Shanghai and at Wusong kou entered the Yangtze River and travelled upstream through Jiangsu, Anhui and Hubei provinces to Sichuan. The artist Tao Lengyue, previously mentioned, also heading to Chengdu to teach, was also on the boat.

The journey from Shanghai to Sichuan provided Huang with an opportunity to see and study the landscape and life along the river. Hand-drawn maps chart the course of his journey along the Yangtze to Chengdu. (Figure 5.25) Huang painstakingly noted the names of the many places that they passed through along the winding, snake-like form of the waterway and recorded other details of information relating to the features of the landscape.

Huang Binhong prepared extensively for his trips. In a letter to Chen Zhu he observed:

If one is sincere about travelling, then it is essential to read about the place you will visit before you set out, for if you do not have an informed guide, you are likely to make many errors of judgement, such that you cannot talk with authority and it is easy to fall into vulgarity.

During the journey Huang made many sketches of the landscape through which they passed. Among other things, he was fascinated by river craft. In one album he has drawn a variety of

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61 Wu Yifeng graduated in 1926. He did not return to Shanghai with Huang Binhong, but stayed on in Chengdu and taught at Sichuan Art College (Sichuan yishu zhuankan xuexiao) and the Eastern Art College (Dongfang meishu zhuankan xuexiao). See Zhongguo jinxian dai renwu minghao da cidian (Hangzhou, Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2001), p.115. Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu (draft), p.190, quotes from Ding Xianghua’s Collected Writings of Layman Snail (Guoniu jushi) in 1940 and states that Wu Yifeng went to Sichuan and followed the military (sui jun) travelling to Emei, Jiange, Qingcheng Mountains and the Jialing and Minjiang rivers to investigate their mysteries, observe the plight of the people, and record the information in pictures and collect their poems and songs. In 1938 Wu held an exhibition in Shanghai, attended by many influential people. He was a member of the Chinese Painting Association (Zhongguo huahui).


63 Tao Lengyue was to take up a two-month appointment as Professor of Art in the Academy of Education at Sichuan University. See Lang Shaojun, Tao Lengyue (Beijing: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), p.13. See also Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.284-285.

64 The maps are in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum. Thanks to Wang Zhongxiu for providing me with copies. There has not been a detailed study undertaken to match the drawings to the maps. The maps were probably made in preparation for the trip, or during the trip and should correspond to the place names on the drawings and paintings that Huang made en route.

65 Huang Binhong, letter to Chen Zhu, 12 July [1936], Huang Binhong wenji shuxin bian, p.117.
boats—nine on one page and six on another. (Figures 5.26) Most are sail boats, with one or two sails, but there is also a punt with two people pushing the craft through the water with poles. The drawings reveal an ability to capture the form of an object with a few sure strokes. One particular image of a sail boat is unlike all of the others. It has been drawn across the page, as if to highlight its difference. The boat is viewed from an angle and foreshortened. It is more realistic and the lines are more tentative than those used to depict other boats in the album. Shading too has been used to create contrast. It is possible that it was drawn by Tao Lengyue as an instructional image to demonstrate the principles of realism and foreshortening. Tao was well versed in Western art techniques, including single point perspective.66 (Figures 5.27, 5.27a) Interestingly, another album from this group contains an accomplished perspectival rendering of a sail boat, consistent with Huang Binhong’s style. Its sure strokes suggest that Huang had learnt his lesson well. (Figure 5.28) While methods of drawing boats, including foreshortened vessels, were included in traditional painting manuals, Huang Binhong’s rendition of this boat reveals a particular attention to detail and suggests that he experimented with this technique as he observed vessels on the river. The drawings reinforce the idea that Huang Binhong used the opportunity of travelling the Yangtze River by boat to test historic type-forms against observed reality which offered greater variety and a more intense lived experience.67

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67 Of the eight pages devoted to boats in the *Jieziyuan huazhuan* (Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting) there is one page of foreshortened sail boats. See *Jieziyuan huazhuan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978) vol.1, p.296.

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In 1932, Sichuan was an independent province, controlled by the five warlords Liu Wenhui (劉文輝, 1895-1976), Liu Xiang (劉湘, 1889-1938), Liu Tsunhou 劉存候, Tian Songyao 田頌堯 and Deng Xihou (鄧錫候, 1888-1964). Within the eastern centres of political and cultural influence, Sichuan was regarded as a remote and dangerous province isolated behind the Yangtze Gorges, as Robert Kapp has explained:

To Chinese living outside of Szechwan during the early years of Nationalist rule, Szechwan was a mysterious, foreign, and menacing land, which brought to mind the
famous line from the T’ang poet Li Po [Li Bai]. “The road to Shu is more arduous than the road to Heaven.”

Kapp goes on to say “Despite the relative stability that prevailed there in the late twenties and early thirties, outside merchants were so intimidated by the province’s reputation for violence that they refused to journey to Szechwan”. 68

The period from 1927 to early 1932 had been relatively peaceful, but soon after Huang and Wu set out on their trip, the political situation deteriorated. In October 1932, heavy fighting broke out between Liu Wenhui and Liu Xiang, which developed into the so-called “Two-Liu war”. This was followed by an invasion of Communist forces from the north which erupted into a civil war that began in late 1932 and extended into early 1933.

Fighting caused Huang Binhong, Wu Yifeng and Tao Lengyue to break their journey and seek refuge in Chongqing 重慶. From Chongqing, Huang and Wu travelled to Yibin 宜賓 and then by small wooden boat up the Min River 岷江 to Jiading 嘉定 where they stayed for a number of days and explored Leshan 樂山 and climbed Emei Mountain 娥眉山. Owing to severe weather they only reached as far as the Elephant Washing Pond (Xixiang chi 洗象池) before being forced to descend. They returned to Jiading by rickshaw and then travelled by road to Chengdu 成都, their ultimate destination. 69 Fighting had prevented Tao Lengyue from travelling from Chongqing to Chengdu. He sent a message to Huang asking if he could step in to teach his two-month block of classes as Professor of Art in the Faculty of Education at Sichuan University. 70

Soon after Huang Binhong and Wu Yifeng’s arrival in Chengdu, serious fighting broke out between the armies of Liu Wenhui and Tian Songyao. According to Kapp the fighting was much heavier than at any time since 1911. 71 Writing to his wife Song Ruoying, who had remained in Shanghai, Huang spoke of the fighting and advised: “I will wait until classes

70 See Lang Shaojun, Tao Lengyue, p.13.
71 Kapp, Szechwan and the Chinese Republic, Provincial Militarism and Central Power, 1911-1938, p.87.
resume, earn one or two months salary and then return to Shanghai.” In a letter to his wife written eleven days later the situation had changed dramatically. The college where he was teaching had been destroyed, salaries were not being issued and staff and students were living a hand-to-mouth existence. Fortunately, Huang was living at Yilu the house of his friend Chen Zepei (陳澤霈zi Rongsheng 戎 生, 1887-1954). The large and comfortable residence with its garden, pond and pavilions was a quiet haven amid the chaos of Chengdu. (Figure 5.29)

The destruction of the Sichuan Art College forced Huang to seek employment in other institutions, notably the art department of the Chengdu Teachers’ College (Chengdu shifan daxue yishu xi 成都師范大學藝術系), and the Eastern Art College (Dongfang meishu zhuanmen xuexiao 東方美術專門學校). Huang alluded to the financial hardship and economic instability caused by the war in a poem entitled “Chengdu”:

Laying down my brush I seek distant mountains and a diverging path,
In Chengdu autumn has come but there is no frost forming on the branches.
We do not talk of literature and ceremony, but instead talk of military action and reform,
Drinking wine on credit and with no choice but to be stingy I watch the game of “go”. In this rather abstract poem Huang Binhong alludes to the unrest and political uncertainty of the period. Many people in Sichuan were killed during the fighting between the rival warlords.

After the hostilities ceased the situation remained chaotic. In a letter written to Song Ruoying in the new year, he suggests difficulties in their own family finances and expenses and the desire to move to a smaller, quieter and no doubt cheaper town. “Coming to Sichuan has not been easy, we can talk again after I return to Shanghai. We could move to Chizhou fu or to

72 Huang Binhong, letter to Song Ruoying, dated 20 December [1932], Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.76.
73 Chen Zepei was a member of the Revolutionary Alliance and had a distinguished military career. He has been described as a general who is an accomplished scholar, calligrapher and artist (Ru jiang). In 1917 he settled in Shanghai where he concentrated on research, calligraphy, painting and Buddhism. He came from the same village in Sichuan as Zhang Shanzhi and Zhang Daqian. It was through the Zhang brothers that Huang met and became friendly with Chen. Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.259-260, 277-278, 287-280. See also Wang Zhongxiu, letter to the author, 22 September 2004.
75 Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, p.95.
In another letter to his student Gu Fei he talks of the challenges of living in a war-torn city.

People here have a love of national studies and are fond of calligraphy and painting. There are also quite a few poets. The climate and produce are not as good as Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Unfortunately, the fighting continues, the place is remote and communication is difficult. These are sad and unhappy times. There are many secondary schools with students from Shaanxi, Gansu, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. The educational facilities are insufficient.

While in Chengdu Huang Binhong became involved in the cultural life of the city and was welcomed as a visiting dignitary. In letters to his wife and friends he refers to his friendships with scholars, writers and artists and their eagerness for him to stay on in Chengdu despite the chaos of war. A photograph that was taken in Shaocheng, Chengdu, in early 1933 bears the text “Welcoming Huang Binhong and Wu Yifeng to the Shaocheng Hall for the Popularisation of Education (Shaocheng tongsu jiaoyu guan) at the beginning of spring 1933”. (Figure 5.30) Huang Binhong and Wu Yifeng stand in the centre holding their hats. Included in the photograph is Fang Xu (方旭 Zi Hezhai 鶴齋, 1852-1940, second from right), who became president of the Chengdu Society.

The Chengdu Society, known as Rongshe 蓮社 was formed by scholars and artists in March of 1933. Fang Xu was from Tongcheng in Anhui (home of a famous school of Qing era writers), and the vice president was Xiang Chu (向楚, 1877-1961). Huang Binhong had participated in preliminary discussions regarding the formation of the society and was appointed head of publications. The group met twice a month at the Chengdu Hall for the Popularisation of Education in Shaocheng Park (Shaocheng gongyuan 少城公園). In May 1933, the society organized a large art exhibition. The exhibition was divided into three sections: works by historical artists, works by contemporary artists and works by local artists.

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76 Huang Binhong, letter to Song Ruoying, early 1933, quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.292.
77 Huang Binhong, letter to Gu Fei [1933], quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.296.
78 Huang Binhong, letters to Song Ruoying, dated 20, 31 December [1932], Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, pp.76-77.
79 Lichun corresponds to 4 February that year. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.293.
80 Ibid., pp.293-294.
Huang Binhong contributed twenty of his own paintings, which attracted a great deal of interest and were sold by the society at the conclusion of the exhibition.\(^81\)

In the late spring-early summer of 1933, Huang Binhong travelled to Guanxian and later to the Daoist mountain Qingchengshan 青城山. At Qingchengshan he stayed at the Changdaoguan 常道觀 Daoist temple where he painted a large, rather careful and orthodox ink-only landscape painting that he presented to the temple as a gesture of his appreciation. (Figure 5.31) The painting bears a long inscription listing the names of people who accompanied him, including Deng Zhichun (鄧只淳, 1888-1976) a professor at Sichuan University.\(^82\) It is one of the few paintings that are known to date from that trip.

In the late spring-early summer of 1933, Huang Binhong travelled to Guanxian and later to the Daoist mountain Qingchengshan 青城山. At Qingchengshan he stayed at the Changdaoguan 常道觀 Daoist temple where he painted a large, rather careful and orthodox ink-only landscape painting that he presented to the temple as a gesture of his appreciation. (Figure 5.31) The painting bears a long inscription listing the names of people who accompanied him, including Deng Zhichun (鄧只淳, 1888-1976) a professor at Sichuan University.\(^82\) It is one of the few paintings that are known to date from that trip.

Fighting broke out in Chengdu again in May 1933. With the fall of Suining 順 宁 to the Communist army in October there was fear in the key Yangtze port of Wanxian 萬 縣 and Chongqing might also be taken.\(^83\) Huang Binhong spent a number of months in Chongqing, staying in Beipei 北 碚, and arrived back in Shanghai on 24 September.\(^84\) A painting that is dated 1933 and inscribed “Sketch of Beipei” (Bei pei jiyou 北 碚 紀 游) was made at this time or soon thereafter.\(^85\) (Figure 5.32) It is inscribed with a poem that describes the beauty of the misty landscape observed while travelling by boat. With his modulated use of ink, Huang has attempted to capture the feeling of a misty riverscape.

Soon after his return to Shanghai a sketch made during his travels in Sichuan was published in the Cultural Pictorial (Wenhua huabao 文 化 畫 報). An accompanying article

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\(^81\) See Xin xin xin wen, 27 April 1933; also 11 May 1933; Wang Zhongxiu, letter to the author, dated 22 September 2004.

\(^82\) Wang Zhongxiu, letter to the author, 14 November 2004. I am grateful to Wang Zhongxiu for providing this image and information. See also Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.300-301.


\(^84\) Huang returned with Duan Xugu, whose home was in Fengxi, near Chongqing. They stayed at Beipei and viewed Yuan dynasty mural paintings at Baofan Temple. Wang Zongxiu, letter to the author, 12 October 2004, and Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.303-304.

\(^85\) See Huang Binhong xiansheng huaji (Hong Kong, 1961), plate 29.
stated that it was one of more than three hundred sketches made during that trip.\(^{86}\) A number of pads of “cream laid bank paper” contained in a box labelled “Pencil plein-air sketches of Sichuan” (Qianbi Sichuan xiesheng gao鉛筆 四川 寫 生 稿) date from this trip.\(^{87}\) (Figure 5.33) Huang Binhong drew on both sides of the paper recording mountain and river scenes. (Figure 5.34) As with the Guangxi sketchbooks, each page has been numbered, highlighting the importance of the visual narrative. In these sketches Huang Binhong has wielded his pencil as he would a brush. Changes in the weight and pressure of the hand are reflected in the thickness and tone of the lines and add visual interest and rhythm to the images. In some albums there are lengthy sections of text which read like entries in a travel diary.

In the Huang Binhong archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum there are also six ink sketches of natural and historic sites in Yunnan including depictions of Cisheng cave (Cisheng dong 茲 圣 洞) outside Lin’anfu 臨 安 府, the Song dynasty Cuanlongyan Stele in Luliang zhou (Luliangzhou Song cuanlongyan bei 陸 涼 [良] 州 宋 龟 龍 頭), Diancang Mountain (點 蒼 山) and the Jinsha River (金 沙 江) outside Lijiangfu. (Figure 5.35) They are grouped in an improvised album that Huang has labelled Mian (眠 Yunn’nan), in each case identifying the places with a brief historical, cultural and geological note, or details about the weather and terrain. In one extraordinary image Huang depicts a person crossing the Jinsha river by cable. In the inscription he says:

Crossing a river by cable. The Jinsha river outside Lijiangfu [present day Lijiang city in northwest Yun’nan] has steep mountains on either side. The river flows very quickly making it impossible to cross by boat. The terrain is unsuitable for a bridge, so there is a cable one hundred zhang in length which people use to cross the river. There are two cables. One passes from the high mountain top on the left side of the river to the lower ground on the right, and the other from the high mountain top on the right of the river to the lower ground on the left. This is probably ‘the ferry hanging in mid air’ of the Western regions that is recorded in the Hanshu [History of the Han Dynasty].

\(^{86}\) Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.305. In an undated letter to Fu Lei, Huang mentions a total of “close to one thousand pages, mostly sketches made while travelling (jiyou suxie), in outline form, without textural strokes, which come close to the abbreviated brush works of Ni [Zan] and Huang [Gongwang].” See Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.218.

\(^{87}\) See drawings in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum HS479 (1-6), HS480 (1-32), HS481 (1-36), HS482 (1:46), HS483 (1:43), HS484 (1:44), HS489 (1:72).
An English traveler, Major H.R. Davies, called the device a “Tibetan rope bridge,” typical of the Yunnan-Tibet border region. He writes:

The rope, which is very thick and strong, is made of twisted bamboo. It is stretched across the river so that the end on the near side is much higher than the end on the far side. At each crossing place there are therefore necessarily two ropes, one to cross each way. A piece of wood, about a foot long, hollowed out so as to fit on to the rope is placed on top of it. To each end of this piece of wood strong leather thongs are attached. The traveller is then tied into these thongs in a sitting position; they are passed up between his thighs, crossed over his chest and fastened off behind his neck. He is then let go and flies across the river at the speed of an express train. 88

The sketch indicates Huang’s fascination with human ingenuity in managing a particular landscape and calls to mind his earlier painting of the Yuliang levee in Shexian. But in this sketch Huang Binhong relates the imagery back to an historical source to underline, once again, the importance of the past in his construction and understanding of the present: “there is no new thing under the sun”. 89

The Jinsha River is close to the Tibetan border and quite inaccessible. While no other extant sources confirm the trip, the paintings suggest that Huang may have intended to cross the border from Sichuan into Yunnan sometime during his long sojourn in Chengdu, perhaps to escape fighting between warlords and later Nationalist and Communist forces.

Given the chaotic situation of the early 1930s, it is unlikely that Huang could have visited all of the places recorded in the Yun’nan sketches. To cover such distances, even in peace time, would have required great planning and determination. Perhaps Huang’s sketches of disparate Yun’nan subjects were inspired by the local gazetteers and travel books in which he was keenly interested. What they highlight for us is the difficulty of distinguishing ink sketches made during and soon after travel from those made after reading historical books or viewing historical artworks. 90

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89 Quoted earlier, from Huang Binhong, “Xin huafa xu,” in Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, shang, p.88.
90 The character “liang” that Huang wrote for Luliangzhou is not correct. If Huang Binhong had in fact visited the place it is unlikely he would have written the character in this way. I would like to thank Sang Ye for drawing this to my attention. In the Huang Binhong archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum.
Paintings inspired by travel

Soon after his travels in Guangxi, Guangdong and Sichuan, Huang Binhong painted many works based on sketches or recollections of those journeys. One of the most striking is an ink painting of the famous rock formation in Guilin known as Elephant Trunk Mountain (Xiangbi shan 象鼻 (山)) in which Huang creates a remarkable, impressionistic image from lines and dots. (Figure 5.36) The painting relates to a drawing of Elephant Trunk Mountain that the artist made while travelling in Guangxi. (Figures 5.36a, 5.36b) In both works two sailboats are visible through the void created between the body and trunk of the “rock elephant”. But in the drawing Huang presents a panoramic view of the landscape emphasising the strong ridge-line of the distant mountains. The passage of time emboldened him to create an image of his own, reduced to essential forms and marks. In the painting Huang gives us a close-up view of the strange mountain form which we view as if hovering in mid-air. He creates a feeling of depth by layering and staggering motifs, including the boats which pass behind Elephant Trunk Mountain and highlight his fascination with solid and void.

Huang’s composition recalls a leaf from the 1909 album discussed in Chapter Three (Figures 5.37, 3.7) in which an area of void in the rock formation reveals a view of a solitary figure.91 When Huang viewed boats passing through the area of void between the “elephant’s trunk and body” he was no doubt struck by the idea of being able to see through a solid form. Finding such a fantastic example in nature allowed him to base his experimentations into the resolution of solid and void, which lie at the heart of Chinese painting, on observed reality. This marks a significant development from the 1909 painting, which was much more closely styled on an historical work.

Many of Huang’s later paintings are identified as records of travels (jìyou 紀游) and attest to the importance of these wanderings to his creative practice. A volume of Huang’s travel sketches, translated into a woodblock prints, was published by his friends in 1934 to mark his

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91 See image reproduced in Chu, ed., Homage to Tradition, plate 2.5, pp.52, 176-177.
seventieth birthday. The album of forty images included a significant number of paintings from the recent Sichuan trip. (Figures 5.38, 5.38a) The production of an album was regarded by friends and associates as being a fitting way to celebrate the artist’s longevity and commemorate his considerable creative achievements. Woodblock printing is a traditional technique and in the 1930s would have been regarded as archaic. It was cheaper than collotype reproduction and resonated with Huang Binhong’s interest in albums of scenic places, printed from woodblocks carved in Shexian. The album reproduced forty of Huang Binhong’s paintings. Its stated aim was to allow him to relive travels made during the previous decade, for it was through painting that he was best able to achieve happiness. As his friends said “Living in today’s world, if you do not seek your own happiness then how can you live to an old age?”

The album opens with eight scenes of Huangshan and continues with four images of Bai Yue, four of Yandangshan, twelve of Sichuan, six of Guilin, one of Shaoxing, one of Wuxi and four of south-eastern Anhui. The large number of images that derive from Huangshan and Anhui confirms the continuing importance of the area surrounding his ancestral home to his artistic practice. Of particular interest, however, is the concentration of images that relate to his travels in Sichuan, which suggests his recent year-long adventure was also an important creative influence.

Twelve landscape paintings of Huangshan and a two-page draft of the introductory text for the album point to Huang Binhong’s close involvement in its production and his understanding of the technical process involved. (Figure 5.39) In each case Huang has used dry, jet-black ink lines and dots to outline the features of the landscape as if anticipating the

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92 An Album of Huang Binhong’s Travel Sketches (Huang Binhong jiyou huace) was produced in November 1934. People who contributed to the album include Yu Kexiong (Xiecheng) [Xuan Zhe] from Dantu, Wang Wei (Qi Mei) of Panyu, Zhu Danwu (Xi Wen) of Beiping, Zhu Jiubao (Zhu Ping) of Piling, Li Cangping (Cang Ping) of Fengshun, Li Shaoqing (Shao Qing) of Panyu, Song Yu (Xiao Po) of Neijiang, Xuan Zhe (Gu Yu) of Gaoyou, Hu Youlin (Pei Ran), Qin Gengnian (Man Qing) of Jingdu, Shang Chengzuo (Xi Yong) of Panyu, Zhang Ze (Shan Zi) of Neijiang, Zhang Ai (Da Qian), Zhang Hong (Gu Chu) of Shunde, Cheng Wenlong (Yun Cen), Deng Shi (Qiu Mu), Bao Ding (Fu Jiu), Jian Jinglun (Qin Shi), Guan Zhaoxin (Chuncao), plus his students Zhu Duan (Yanying) of Haiyan, Huang Yingfang of She, Gu Mufei (Gu Fei) of Nanhai. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.313.

93 Ibid.
95 The ink sketches, in a private collection, are on inexpensive uncut yellow paper (maobian zhi) and record scenes of Huangshan including Tianchi; Lianhua; Wang xian tai; Bilian chi; Hualin wu; Shixinfeng; Lianhua gou; Tianchi beiduan; Dong Yi; Yunfang wulong tai; Tiandu feng.
translation of his brush and ink lines into those carved in wood. Each painting carries Huang Binhong’s seal and a brief description of the place that is depicted. (Figure 5.40, 5.40a) The style brings to mind images of Huangshan by historical artists of the Xin’an school and suggests that earlier albums of topographic prints were a source of inspiration. A comparison of one painting with a corresponding subject in the album does not reveal a perfect match and suggests that the album was created from a larger pool of paintings that Huang had prepared for this purpose. (Figures 5.38a, 5.40a)

Following his return from Sichuan to Shanghai, Huang Binhong made numerous paintings for friends and associates. A large and impressive hanging scroll dated 1933 inspired by his travels, and now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was painted for his friend Gao Xie (高燮 zì Chuiwan 吹 萬, 1879-1966). (Figure 5.41) It is inscribed with a poem entitled Baidi cheng 白帝城, the name of a town on the Yangtze River that had much earlier inspired the Tang poet Li Bai.96 The inscription on Huang’s painting reads:

Ten thousand valleys in deep shade covered with the dense foliage of flowers and trees,
The shadow of Dailou Mountain is reflected in the river like splashed ink,
A few red and yellow leaves fall fluttering from trees,
The town of Baidi is located high in the mountains and Autumn comes early.97

The poem was included in “Miscellaneous Chants Written in Sichuan” (Binhong shi cao Shu zhong za yong 賓虹詩草 雜), a collection that Huang Binhong self-published in 1934, the year after he returned from Sichuan.98 The book of over fifty poems, that mostly record responses to landscape and changing seasons, was distributed among the artist’s friends. The poems were later used as inscriptions on paintings and played an important role in assisting him to recall the experiences, sensations and sentiments of his travels.

96 Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1986.267.200). See Wen Fong, Between Two Cultures, pp.163-165. Gao Xie was a poet who had a large library and collection of ancient books. He was a member of Nanshe. Late in life he became involved with Buddhism. See Huang Binhong shu xin ji, p.208 for brief biography and one letter. According to Wang Zhongxiu the draft introductory text was written by Xuan Zhe. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.313.
97 See also Huang Binhong wenji tiba bian, p.92.
98 The publication included forewords by Pan Feisheng and Xu Chengyao.
Huang Binhong paints the work with great care and discipline, using long, dry brush strokes to give an elongated form to mountains that are piled high in a style and manner that recalls the paintings of Dong Yuan, Juran and masters of the Northern Song. The painting is softened by the application of alternating bands of green and ochre coloured wash, that give the mountains a flickering, jewel-like, autumnal glow.99

While this is a large and impressive painting, it is also rather static, demonstrating a desire to hang on to past artistic styles, that perhaps also reflected the taste of Gao Xie, for whom it was intended. Huang was seventy now, the year Confucius said a person should “follow all the desires of my heart without breaking any rule”. To judge by this work alone, one might wonder whether Huang Bingong would in fact develop an individual artistic style.100

A slightly later painting dated spring 1934, however, shows the artist working in a very different, much freer style.101 (Figure 5.42) In the inscription Huang Binhong refers to Mount Min 岷山 in Sichuan and a river which begins in Long mountain in Gansu (隴山, 甘肅), wending its way through northeast China before finally entering the sea at the Bohai Gulf (渤海). Inspired by his travels, Huang highlights the way the water courses of China traverse vast tracts of land connecting distant provinces and their people. The sure, bold brush strokes and use of strong colour wash in this otherwise conventional landscape painting have a forceful lyricism that hint at the freedom Huang would find in his late works. Long and short lines, dots and passages of simplified textural strokes echo one another and provide visual interest. The painting is a good example of the way in which Huang Binhong could transform visual and textual source material from his travels into highly expressive paintings.

99 In the same year Huang created a stylistically similar painting which is dedicated to Mr Zhongting. It is also a large work, with layers of strong ochre, blue and mineral green wash which overlap and meld to form a tapestry of dappled colour. The painting is inscribed “Painted after my return from Sichuan and inscribed with a poem [ci] by Lu Jiannan [Lu You 1125-1210]”. See Huang Binhong shuhua paimai jicheng 1995-2002 (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2004), p.98. Lu You was a Southern Song poet who had spent periods in Sichuan as an official.
Huang Binhong’s travel through different areas of China and his experience of the country’s mountains and rivers during the various seasons provided rich and detailed subject matter for his painting. In addition to his appreciation of different regional landscapes, the psychological experience of warfare, poverty, remoteness and isolation also left a deep impression on the artist. During a period of instability and sustained warfare, it was through painting and poetry that writers and artists registered their emotional responses to the landscape and the state of their country.

In a colophon on an undated painting Huang Binhong alluded to the psychological dimension of his art:

Splashed ink landscape with near and distant mountain peaks. Mi style dots are difficult to execute layer upon infinite layer. Sitting in the rain on Mount Qingcheng the vastness of heaven and earth is apparent. It was only after entering [the mountains of] Sichuan that I came to understand the depth and profundity of painting [hua yi nong 畫意濃].

The darkness and mystery of the landscape that he experienced and commented upon in Sichuan exerted a profound formal influence on his art. It also expressed an emotional darkness and spiritual despair that cannot be disconnected from the political and social situation in China at that time. In 1931 Manchuria was occupied by Japan. Early in 1932, Shanghai was attacked and bombed by the Japanese army. By March 1934, Puyi was installed as the puppet Emperor of the Japanese state of Manchukuo. In southern China, where Huang Binhong was travelling, there were frequent clashes between local warlords and Nationalist and Communist armies. The complex emotions that people felt towards such turmoil, hardship and uncertainty found expression in much of the literature and art of the period.

While in Sichuan he is said to have discovered the joy of being in the rain (bu ru Shu, bu zhi yu zhong le 不入蜀，不知雨中之樂). Wang Bomin has recounted an instance of Huang Binhong getting caught in the rain during a walk in Qingcheng Mountain. Rather than turn back, Huang is said to have continued with his journey, finding a place to sit and

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102 Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, p.178.
103 For background to this period, see Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), pp.388-396.
marvelling at the sudden appearance of numerous waterfalls caused by the downpour. What had been a quiet landscape was suddenly transformed by the sound of the wind, rain and gushing water. When Huang finally returned to the place where he was staying he was sodden. The next day he experimented with different ink techniques to record the experience of being in the landscape in the rain. While this anecdote may have an element of myth-making, earlier extant diary entries show that Huang enjoyed observing mountains in the rain. The preceding year, for example, during his travels in Mount Yandang in southeastern Zhejiang, Huang Binhong stayed in temples and caves on the mountain, recording his delight in the rain and marvelling at the effects of heat and mist. His diary note for 24 May 1931 records “Sat in Lingyan [Temple] waiting for the rain to stop and painted” (Lingyan zuo yu, zuo hua 倚巖坐雨，作 畫).

The joy of experiencing the landscape in the rain inspired a painting that was part of a collection of images derived from his recent travels published by the Cathay Art Union in 1936. It is a boldly painted, atmospheric work in which a solitary figure, seated in a pavilion, looks out over an expanse of water. (Figure 5.43) It is inscribed “Painted [xie] while sitting looking at the rain on the Hengcuo River”. While the constituent elements of the landscape appear generic, notably the rocks, wintry trees, a pavilion on stilts in the foreground, and a backdrop of tall mountains, the painting is made specific by the inscription and a printed caption “The Hengcuo River flows into the Xun River in Guangxi”. But in this painting it is clear that Huang has translated his specific personal experience of the landscape into a painting that draws on the repertoire of traditional landscape forms and brush-and-ink technique. Huang experiments with wet ink techniques to create a poetic, highly evocative and melancholy image, the meaning of which transcends the particular time and place of its genesis.

In the course of his travels, Huang Binhong experienced nature profoundly. Later, with brush and ink, he relived and recreated those experiences desiring to understand the significance of a moment once again, to and to translate it into a form that could be appreciated by others.

105 Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.597.
106 Huang Binhong jiyou hua ce, di er ji (Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguang ji, 1936), plate 10.
In a poem written in Sichuan, Huang commented that, with few extant ancient works of art to guide him in his study, it was the observation of nature and the landscape that provided inspiration for his own creative exploration.

Travelling upstream along the Jialing River,
I find that it all looks like Suzhou.
Mist wafts through the hills with abandon and expands to fill the available space,
My eyes are filled with images that are like paintings.
The cold soughs of autumn wind penetrate through the window,
No such paintings exist by Tang artists on fine silk.
Where do I obtain models for my art
But from the drops of rain that seep into the wall and the moving shadow of the moon.  

Huang’s senses were heightened in response to new environments and his curiosity and intense interest in the natural world became important factors in his development as an artist. His travels to Guangxi, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Sichuan during the late 1920s and early 1930s allowed him to understand landscapes that he had previously only known from printed sources and showed him as never before the impact that place could exert on the stylistic development of artists and, during these tumultuous years, provided him with the necessary distance to reflect upon his own life and times. The experience gave him the confidence to extend and deepen his formal experiments with brush and ink and heighten the expressive and spiritual or psychological dimension of his art.

Years later, while living in Beiping and Hangzhou, Huang Binhong continued to create paintings that referred to and drew inspiration from his recollections of places he had visited. These works fall into two broad categories: dark, brooding landscapes created through layer upon layer of lines, dots and wash, inspired by his experience of the landscape; and more open paintings, formed from highly energised calligraphic lines, similar to the “Elephant Trunk Mountain” painting discussed above, that are strongly evocative of nature’s life force.

Increasingly, however, the subject of Huang Binhong’s paintings became self-expression and the idea of painting itself.

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107 Huang Binhong wenji, tiba bian, p.104. See also Wang Bomin’s explanation of this poem in terms of Huang’s brush and ink method and resolution of solid and void. Wang Bomin meishu wenxuan, pp.667-668.