Chapter Eight

Hangzhou (1948-1954): the politics of art in new China

On 23 July 1948, at the age of eighty-five, Huang Binhong left Beiping for southern China. After a short stay in Shanghai he moved on to Hangzhou to become a professor at the National Art Academy (Guoli yishu zhuanke xuexiao 国立 藝術 專科 學校).

Soon after Huang’s arrival an exhibition of paintings from his personal collection was displayed at the Hangzhou art academy. The two-day exhibition coincided with National Day on 10 October and included artworks said to be from the Six Dynasties, as well as the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing, along with a number of Huang’s own paintings.¹ The linking of his own works with historical paintings underlines the close connection that existed between the two in his mind. The exhibition celebrated traditional Chinese brush and ink painting, past and present immediately prior to the Communist Party assuming power. Because of its association with the scholar-élite, such an exhibition would not be held again for many years.

While some of his friends and associates would flee to Taiwan and Hong Kong, as a result of the Communist victory, Huang Binhong chose to remain in China.² The largely ceremonial post at the academy provided him with financial security and conferred status and respect.³ The social and cultural transformation that would unfold in China under a Communist government was as yet unknown. This chapter charts Huang’s life and artistic development from the time of the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, examining his personal response to the new political environment. For a scholar-artist whose practice related closely to the art of the past, it proved to be a period of artistic transformation and renewal.

¹ The exhibition was held 9-10 October 1948 and was reported to have attracted a large number of people including many students, who also attended a one-hour long lecture by Huang. See exhibition notice in the archive of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM 04747). See also Xia Chengtao diary entry quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.502. Xia was a professor of literature at Zhejiang University.
² Huang Binhong, letter to Huang Shuzi [1949], Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.282.
³ An early employment contract in the archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum, dated 1 August 1949, covers the period 1 August 1949 to 31 July 1950, and is signed by Liu Kaimu, Ni Yide and Jiang Feng.
One of Huang Binhong’s most beautiful works from this period is an album of paintings of Huangshan, dated 1949, and painted for Wang Cong (汪聰 zi Xiaowen 孝文, b. 1924), a friend from Shexian. The album, made soon after Huang moved from Beiping, may be thought of as marking his “homecoming”. While Huang did not travel to Huangshan again, through painting he was able to return there in spirit. The title page is inscribed in seal script “Travelling in Huangshan while remaining at rest” (Huangshan woyou 黃山臥游) and is followed by an introductory text written in a blunt cursive calligraphy (Figure 8.1):

Every pine tree and rock in Cloud Valley has found its way into these paintings. The sound of a lute being strummed and the movement of someone exercising echo the sound of the mountains.

The first painting in the album depicts a misty, low-lying landscape executed with a dry brush and subtle colour washes. (Figure 8.1a) In the lower left corner there is a pavilion on the bank of a river, close to a large bridge that spans the waterway. Another bridge can be discerned to the right of the composition suggesting a complex river system. It is inscribed:

The Fengle River travels some one hundred li from its source in Huangshan to my village where it gathers to form a deep pool. In the Tang dynasty, my ancestor Huang Chungong [Huang Rui] moved from Huangtun north to a point where you cross the deep pools, hence the name Tandu Village. In days gone by there was a Binhong pavilion, which was one of the most beautiful sites in the area. Looking west you can see the mountain range [of Huangshan], the two peaks of Cloud Gate [Yunmen] and Tiandu [Tiandufeng] and Lotus Flower Peaks [Lianhuafeng], the tallest of them all.

The autobiographical nature of the image and text provide an important context for understanding the album, and a key for appreciating many of Huang Binhong’s late paintings, suffused as they are with memories of travel and personal experience. In the fifteen leaves that follow, paintings and poems written by Huang Binhong during his travels to Huangshan face one another on the page. The paintings depict people communing with nature, solitary figures walking in mountains shrouded in cloud on a moonlit night, and recluses in secluded valleys

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4 See Huangshan xiesheng ce (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao chubanshe, 1997). In the final years of Huang Binhong’s life Wang Xiaowen assisted Huang to make an inventory of his collection of calligraphy, paintings and artefacts. Wang Xiaowen later published Huang Binhong shufaji. See Huang Binhong shuxin ji (1999), p.40.

5 See Huang Binhong wenji ,tiba bian, pp.122-126. The poems have headings that differ from the captions of the paintings.
listening to the sound of bubbling streams. (Figure 8.1b) The pairing of image and text creates a dialogue between the complementary modes of artistic expression and highlights the interdependence of calligraphy, poetry and painting in Huang’s art.

According to an inscription, the images were gathered more than ten years earlier, most probably during the last trip that Huang made to Huangshan in September 1935, with his wife Song Ruoying and student Huang Bingqing. The paintings evoke a vivid mental landscape, and the delight of returning to southern China. They resonate with the feelings of elation and freedom on leaving the city and public office so famously expressed in Tao Yuanming’s poem:

Return home!
My fields and garden will be covered with weeds, why not return?
When oneself has made the mind the body’s slave,
Why sorrow and solitary grieve?
I realise that “the past may not be censured,”
Yet I know “the future may be striven after.”
Truly I am not far astray from the road,
I feel today is right, if yesterday was wrong.
My boat rocks, lightly tossing,
The wind, whirling, blows my coat.
I ask a traveller of the way ahead.
I resent the faintness of the dawn light.
I espy my humble dwelling,
So I am glad, so I run.
The servants welcome me,
The children wait at the door.
The paths are overgrown,
But the pine and the chrysanthemum remain.

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6 The party set out from Shanghai on 19 September 1935 and returned on 1 October. They also travelled to Tandu and Huangdun, and in Tangmo viewed Xu Chengyao’s collection of calligraphy and paintings. See Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, pp.365-366.
Taking up residence in Qixialing (棲霞嶺) close to the West Lake, Huang Binhong found great pleasure in his new environment and painted a large number of works that took the West Lake and the area below the Qixia mountain ridge as their subject.

Looking south from the West Lake and Qixia Ridge to the mountains in the distance. Mr Liu Junliang is learned and virtuous. He writes in the inscription for an image of a rustic, lakeside residence painted in 1949 for Liu Zuochou, his former student, friend and patron in Hong Kong. (Figure 8.2) A visitor bows to greet a scholarly host figure, suggesting a longed-for meeting between the two men. Huang’s use of warm colour washes imbue the painting with a warm, spring-like atmosphere. The rustic hut with its thatch roof evokes his new home close to West Lake, conjuring up the idyllic world of Tao Yuanming. Hangzhou, capital of the Southern Song, was a centre of learning and culture where many former Song officials and intellectuals lived in retirement. The beauty of the West Lake and temple environs have offered solace and inspiration to poets and artists for centuries, making it an ideal home for an elderly artist with a love of landscape. ⁸

Huang’s friend Chen Zhongfan (陳中凡, 1888-1981) writing in late December 1949, noticed the change in the artist’s style. ⁹

I recall that the year before last you sent me a painting from Beiping in which I discerned the description of boundless space through your dry wintry and desolate brushwork, and a spirit of luxuriance within the wet brush strokes. I could imagine that you painted the work freely, filling up the entire pictorial space expressing your pent up feelings and the dejection you felt in your heart. But according to the prevailing spirit of this landscape painting that you have presented me with [now], it is obvious there has been a change; your brushwork is pure and ethereal and yet down to earth, and there is a wild, untrammelled vitality such that the entire paper is suffused with a faraway feeling of seclusion. I guess that since Liberation your spirits have been radiant and your

⁹ Chen Zhongfan graduated from Peking University in 1917. At different times he was a professor of literature at the South-eastern, Guangdong, Dongwu, Jinling and Jinhua Universities. During the war against Japan he taught at Sichuan University. In 1952 he became Professor at Nanjing University. See Chen Yutang, ed., Zhongguo jin xiandai renwu minghao da cidian (quanbian zengdingben), pp.668-669. In 1928 and 1935 Chen Zhongfan travelled with Huang Binhong to Guangxi.
enthusiasm considerable, as a result you have painted many works with a rare sensibility. This is evidence of your longevity. When will you be turning ninety?\textsuperscript{10}

In this fascinating letter Chen Zhongfan interprets Huang’s paintings as a visualisation of emotions arising from the contemporary political situation. Paintings by scholar artists have long been regarded as expressing the cultivation of the artist’s heart/mind. Huang’s paintings of 1949 that Chen is referring to—like the scenes of Huangshan painted for Wang Xiaowen or the hanging scroll painted for Liu Zuochou—are lighter, brighter and more colourful than the landscape paintings Huang typically created in Beiping. For many scholars and intellectuals the final resolution of the political conflict between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, after years of warfare and Japanese occupation brought renewed hope for peace and stability in China. Chen Zhongfan sees the changes in Huang’s style as reflecting that new beginning.

On 3 May 1949, the Communist Party took control of Hangzhou, some five months before the declaration of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing (again the capital) on 1 October 1949. In a letter to his relative Huang Shuzi 黃樹滋 in Shexian, most probably written in early 1949, Huang Binhong conveyed a sense of the chaos and uncertainty of that period and the large numbers of people who were on the move, heading towards Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The national situation is difficult and dangerous. Everywhere people are suffering. Large numbers of people are moving to Southern China and Fujian and the cost of living is soaring so high it is hard to believe. I have heard that many outside troops have moved into Tangmo village in Shexian and are billeted in peoples’ homes, which I presume only adds to the sense of panic. What have you heard about Tandu village? You are all in my thoughts. Even though the roads are congested, and I am living far from the city centre, old friends and new have been continuously coming to see me, travelling by boat or car. [It is as if] I am living in a cave in the mountains. I am fortunate to be surrounded by literary and artistic people like Ma Yifu 馬一浮, 1883-1967, Yu Yueyuan 余樾園 Yu Shaosong 余紹宋, 1883-1949] and other elderly people, as well as staff from various teaching institutions, people whom we all hold in high regard, so I am not lonely.\textsuperscript{11}

In June the Party’s Hangzhou Military Control Committee appointed military representatives to take over the administration of the art academy and began the process of establishing


\textsuperscript{11} Huang Binhong, letter to Huang Shuzi, [1949], *Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian*, p.279.
Communist Party doctrine within the school curriculum. In September 1949 the revolutionary woodcut artist Jiang Feng (江豐, 1910-1982) was transferred from Beijing and made vice-director of the academy and party secretary, giving him effective control of the institution. The Director, Liu Kaiqu (劉開渠, 1904-1993), a sculptor, was little more than a figurehead. As part of the re-organisation the National Painting Department (guohua ke 國畫科), to which Huang was attached, was abolished and a Department of Painting (huihua xi 繪畫系) created in its place. Mo Pu (莫樸, 1915-1996) was appointed Head of the Department of Painting and Pang Xunqin the Dean of Studies. The teaching of the traditional genres of landscape and bird-and-flower painting ceased. The new department promoted realist figure painting, propaganda posters, new year pictures, and serial pictures (lianhuan hua 連環畫). (Figure 8.3) The provisional regulations of the academy outlined by Jiang Feng in 1951 echoed Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” of 1942, the guiding document in the Party’s cultural work. In Jiang Feng’s words the educational policy was to:

 carry out political and ideological education on the basis of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, to eliminate feudal, comprador and fascist counter-revolutionary thought and establish scientific views and methods, to develop patriotism and the ideology of serving the people. Using the principles of realist, Chinese nationalist and revolutionary art, carry out education in art theory and practice.

Related to the radical ideological and pedagogical shift at the academy was a prohibition on students viewing and studying traditional Chinese paintings. An exhibition of historic brush and ink paintings, such as those from Huang Binhong’s collection shown the previous year, was no longer possible.


13 The former head of the Guohua ke was Wu Fuzhi. Other teaching staff included Pan Tianshou, Zhu Lesan and Pan Yun. See newspaper report in Minbao, Yifeng, quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.299.


Despite these changes Huang Binhong’s employment at the academy continued. He had an annual contract with a monthly stipend of 500 yuan, but like some other elderly artists he was directed not to teach. In the archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum there is a notice from the office of the principal dated 15 July 1950, just prior to the commencement of the academic year, advising that staff instructed not to teach were “required to carry out professional research and political study in accordance with the methods laid down by the school”. Staff were instructed to attend a summer school organised for tertiary teaching staff in Hangzhou. With the notice were guidelines for requesting leave:

Those teachers who are temporarily not teaching must carry out professional research in accordance with the rules of the Research Department, and carry out political study in accordance with the rules of the Teachers’ Federation. If there is reason to seek leave you must speak with and obtain approval from the head of the Research Department and the leader of the Teachers’ Federation group one day prior to the intended leave. Those seeking a period of leave of more than one week must obtain approval from the Principal.

Huang Binhong did not attend many meetings, but he had to write numerous letters to satisfy the bureaucratic process. In a letter to Huang Shuzi he comments on the meetings that were held at the academy during the summer of 1950, “so many as to be annoying”.

The transition to what the Communist Party called “New China” was neither smooth nor easy, and like so many other people, Huang Binhong was deeply affected by the political campaigns of the time as former scholars, landowners and the business élite were subjected to intensive interrogation in an attempt to assess their status within the new society. In the words of Theodore Chen:

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16 The archive has a contract for the period 1 August 1950 to 31 July 1951 signed by Liu Kaiqu, Principal, and Ni Yide and Jiang Feng, Deputy Principals. The printed year date is 1949, but 49 has been stamped with “50”, indicating a date of 1950 (ZPM 03898). Another document covers the period 1 August 1951 to 31 July 1952. According to Yang Siliang, Pan Tianshou and Lin Fengmian received salaries of 560 yuan per month, which was said to be ten times the wage of a regular worker. Yang states that Huang Binhong received a salary of 520 yuan, according to the Zhejiang Provincial Archives 32-882, p.2698. See Yang Siliang, “Pan Tianshou and Twentieth-Century Traditional Chinese Painting,” PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 1995, p.115, note 197. The discrepancy between Huang’s salary and that of Pan and Lin perhaps reflected Huang Binhong’s predominantly figurehead role.

17 See document in Zhejiang Provincial Museum archive (ZPM 03899).

18 Ibid. (ZPM 03897-2-1).

19 Ibid. (ZPM 03897-2-2).

20 Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.283. Huang’s comment reflected the popular saying “Too many taxes under the Nationalist Party, too many meetings under the Communist Party” (Guomindang shui duo, Gongchandang hui duo). I would like to thank Geremie Barmé for this reference.
The Communists ... do not follow the traditional respect of the Chinese for scholars. To them, it is not enough that the intellectuals should be competent in their respective field of study or service; the more important requisite is that they must have the ‘correct’ ideological ‘viewpoint’ or political outlook. If they do not, however eminent they may be in their chosen fields, they must undergo reform before they can be accepted.21

Mao stated his attitude towards intellectuals very clearly in a session of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference on October 23, 1951:

Thought reform, especially the thought reform of the intellectuals, is one of the most important prerequisites for the realisation of democratic reform and industrialisation.22

For many scholars the early 1950s was a dark period marked by fundamental change, uncertainty and shattered hope. Prominent figures were targetted in sustained campaigns and criticised for their ideas, including Hu Shi (胡 適, 1891-1962), Huang Binhong’s distinguished compatriot from Jixi 縫溪 near Shexian in Anhui, who in 1949 left for America and later moved to Taiwan.23 For those who remained in China, confessions were extracted, an admission of wrong-doing and the promise of a change in outlook. Theodore Chen observes that “The events since 1949 had had devastating effects on the self-respect and mental calm of the intellectuals. They were under ceaseless pressure to ‘study’ and ‘reform’. In their confessions they had to bow low and renounce what they had cherished. They were made to understand that they were not only politically ‘backward’ and ideologically uninformed, but that even in their scholarly pursuits they had been on the wrong path.”24 The “bitter struggle” for land reform did not preclude the killing of landlords. As a landowner in Shexian Huang was also subject to political pressure and as part of the new Land Reform policy, a number of families were moved into Huang’s old house in Tandu Village.

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22 Ibid., 11.
23 Hu was educated in America, obtained a doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University and on his return to China played a prominent role in the “New Culture Movement”. From 1938 to 1942 Hu was the Chinese Ambassador to America and became a high-level advisor to the Nationalist Party Government and President of Beiping University. See Chen, *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals*, pp.43-46, and “Hu Shi,” in Li Changhua, *Jindai yilai Zhongguo you yingxiang de Anhui ren* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2001), pp.141-144.
A number of Huang’s friends and associates became high-ranking and influential figures in the new government. Notable among them were Li Jishen (李濟深, 1886-1959), Ye Gongzhuo, Chen Shutong(陳叔通), He Xiangning (何香凝, 1878-1972), Liu Yazi, Ma Xulun (馬叔倫, 1885-1970) and Bian Xiaoxuan (邊曉軒). Huang Binhong was not actively involved in politics, but throughout his life he operated with the support of friends and associates who wielded political influence. In the uncertain period from 1949 to 1951 he sought ways of accommodation with the new order. Huang’s effort to find a voice within the new cultural environment is reflected in some important paintings and calligraphic works from that period. In the context of Huang’s oeuvre they might be dismissed as aberrations, except that they confirm the important relationship between Huang’s art and the contemporary political situation.

“A view from a boat on the Hengcuo River,” painted in 1949, depicts a number of boats travelling along a river that has carved a path through a mountainous landscape. (Figure 8.4) The painting is distinctive for an extreme bird’s-eye view that heightens the drama of the image and creates a more realistic sense of three-dimensionality. It recalls Huang Binhong’s earlier travels in Guangxi and the wording of the inscription (Hengcuo jiang shang zhoucheng suojian 横搓江上舟中所見), read in the context of the 1950s, suggests the act of drawing from nature, as if the artist is subtly taking note of the new artistic policy’s emphasis on realism.

Sketching the landscape, or xiesheng 写生, was a practice that Huang Binhong advocated long .

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25 Li Jishen was from Guangxi. He was Chairman and one of the founders of the Guomindang Revolutionary Committee, one of the so-called “Democratic Parties,” formed in January 1948 by former members of the Guomindang gathered in Hong Kong who were opposed to Chiang Kai-shek. Li was Vice-Chairman of the People’s Republic of China from 1949 to 1954. (See Chen, Thought Reform, p.109, and Chen Yutang, ed., Jinxiandai renwu minghao dacidian, p.440). He Xiangning was born in Guangdong and married Liao Zhongkai in 1897. In 1902 she travelled to Japan where she studied with the painter Tanaka Raisho and in 1905 joined the Revolutionary Alliance. She returned to China in 1910 and became Minister for Women in the Guomindang republican government. After the death of Sun Yat-sen and her husband’s assassination in 1925 she moved to Hong Kong. In 1949 she returned to mainland China and played a prominent role in Communist Party affairs. (See Chen Yutang, ed., Jinxiandai renwu minghao dacidian, p.516). Ma Shulun was an epigrapher and educationalist from Hangzhou. He was a member of the Revolutionary Alliance and the Southern Society and a former editor of the Journal for the Preservation of the National Essence. After the 1911 revolution he became principal of Shanghai Worker’s University and professor of Qinghua and Peking universities. He was appointed Minister for Education in 1951. After 1949 he was a committee member of the Central People’s Government, and in 1951 was appointed Minister for Education. Other positions included Minister for Higher Education, Chairman of the Committee for the Research into the Reform of Chinese Language and Deputy Chairman of the National People’s Political Consultative Conference. (See Chen, Thought Reform, p.33, and Chen Yutang, ed., Zhongguo jinxiandai renwu minghao da cidian, p.27).
before 1949, but his paintings were never faithful replications of exactly what was before him. This work is no different. The painting may appear more realistic because of the high vantage-point, but it is not a view that could have been seen from a boat on the river. Echoing the freedom and spontaneity of his brushwork, Huang Binhong suits his artistic needs to recreate the sensation of travelling along the Hengcuo River by boat, a poetic rather than a literal interpretation, yet one that fits with the new artistic ideology. Huang’s brushwork is calligraphic and impressionistic and the touches of pale crimson wash imbue the landscape with a warm and positive atmosphere.

A related painting, dated 1951, depicts the Fuchun River in Zhejiang. (Figure 8.5) Huang adopts a similar high-vantage point, but this time his use of it is more consistent with the inscription:

The eastern and western lookouts above the Fuchun River are so high you can see the clouds. I once climbed to the highest peak and returned with this image [in mind].

The painting is distinguished from the previous work by Huang Binhong’s painterly use of mid-grey ink and strong colour wash to give a heightened sense of form. Huang has outlined the mountains in fine, precise ink lines, which he has then filled in with broad, wet brush strokes that overlap to create planes of ink and colour. The effect is an impressionistic painting that dazzles the viewer with its naturalistic use of intense burnt orange and mineral green pigment.

Both works have a stylistic relationship with a series of small paintings of the islands of Hong Kong and Kowloon made in 1949, recalling the artist’s travels there in 1928 and 1935. Two of these paintings are album leaves created for Huang Jusu. (Figure 8.6) Using a worn-out brush with splayed bristles (tu bi 秃筆) and loaded with scorched ink, Huang has outlined the mountain forms, houses and sailboats with a few sure brush strokes. Wet ink dots and daubs take the place of more conventional textural strokes and, in a highly abbreviated manner, which is highlighted by veils of striking mineral green wash, and a touch of red ochre and blue, allude to the mountains’ rich foliage. The free brushwork and strong colour of these abbreviated and lyrical works evoke the beauty of Kowloon and the islands around Hong Kong.

Another undated album leaf of Hong Kong, one of four probably created at the same time bears the inscription (Figure 8.7):
On the Terrace of the King of Song, there is the tomb of the Concubine Yangtai, Princess of the Kingdom of Qing, now a Zoroastrian temple.26

Again Huang uses mineral green for the lush tropical undergrowth so characteristic of the landscape in Hong Kong and southern Guangdong. He was fond of using mineral green, a colour used prominently in the traditional style known as “blue and green landscape painting” (qinglǜ shanshui 青 綠 山 水), though he rarely covered such large areas with it as in these album leaves. Was he in part responding to the new exhortation by the Communist authorities to paint in a more realistic or naturalistic manner?

The close relationship between style and content in these paintings makes it likely that they were mostly created in 1949, for close friends and supporters of Huang Binhong who lived in Hong Kong. He made few other paintings of Hong Kong and Kowloon.27 That adds significance to the date of their creation, a monumental political and social juncture for China. At the very least these paintings show that in 1949 Huang kept up close relations with people living outside mainland China, notably in Hong Kong. The uncertain future of “New China” prompted many intellectuals and business people to maintain channels of communication with the outside world, so that they could flee the country if the situation became untenable or their life was in danger.

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26 Each painting is inscribed and bears the seal “Huang Binhong,” though it is a different seal from that used on the above-mentioned two-leaf album. Other paintings in the album reflect Huang’s travels by boat around the islands close to Hong Kong, and in particular Lantau Island. For a related painting, also dated 1949, that depicts the landscape of Hong Kong, see Huang Binhong zuopin zhan (Hong Kong, 1980), no pagination; Huang Binhong shanshui xieshen ce (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962), plate 23; and Paintings by Huang Binhong (Beijing: Beijing Foreign Languages Press, 1979) in which the colour appears to have been enhanced.

27 Another painting of a Hong Kong-Kowloon subject dated 1949 is dedicated to Fu Lei. The painting of Sha Tau Kok has stylistic affinities with a group of album leaves depicting various scenes of Guilin landscape that are in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum, discussed in Chapter Five. The album leaves depicting scenes of Guilin are undated and bear no identifying inscriptions. They remained in Huang Binhong’s personal collection, which was gifted to the State by his family after his death. Huang Binhong rarely signed or affixed seals to his paintings unless he was parting with them. (Conversation with Huang Yingjia.) The inscription on the Fu Lei album leaf reads “Sha Tau Kok is part of the Kowloon Mountain Range. A scene from the boat while travelling from North to South, skirting the ocean. 1949 Binhong.” In keeping with the album of Guilin paintings the palette is ink with pink and blue wash. Unlike earlier paintings, where Huang Binhong used colour to re-outline motifs articulated in ink or to block in colour in a naturalistic manner, here coloured wash no longer respects any boundaries. Instead it covers large areas, bleeding and connecting man-made structures and the landscape in a highly fluid and impressionistic manner. The gift of the painting to Fu Lei would have occasioned the identifying inscription and date. This painting and the Guilin leaves bear the same seal, also suggesting a common creation date. The painting is in a private collection.
At the age of eighty-six Huang Binhong was too old to be a threat to the new regime. As part of the “United Front strategy” to win over distinguished writers and artists who were not members of the Communist Party, the regime soon bestowed Huang with titles and honorary positions as an outward sign of respect and to proclaim his involvement in the new society.28

On 5 August 1949, Huang Binhong was invited to attend the Hangzhou Municipal People’s Congress as a Peoples’ Representative.29 The first meeting of the Zhejiang Peoples’ Representatives took place in August of the following year and was chaired by Tan Zhenlin (譚震林, 1902-1982), Party Secretary for Zhejiang Province and Chairman of the provincial government. In a bold speech Huang Binhong spoke out in defense of China’s long artistic tradition. By linking painting to calligraphy and highlighting the fact that image-making predated writing, he sought to uphold the pre-eminence of the Chinese script at a time of increasing debate over language reform.30 Huang also championed the importance of spiritual values, which he feared were threatened by the Communist Party’s emphasis on material realities.

While the ancient tradition of painting in China has not yet reached its ultimate perfection, by drawing on the strengths and eliminating the weaknesses of it, future creative practice can surpass that of our predecessors. We must not completely discard our origins and seek another path. National painting derives from calligraphy and the brush techniques of seal and clerical scripts. It is different from photography because it requires the pursuit of virtue and self-cultivation in order to achieve success. That is why court, academy, itinerant and marketplace artists have generally not been accorded significance. It is only through researching inscriptions on bronze and stone, which is part of the scholar-official’s preparation for painting, that a state of elegance and refinement can be achieved. Today many people discussing painting say that art is food for the brain, and that food and literature nourish the body. Culture and the sustenance of life are very much interconnected. Just as it is impossible to separate the sounds of the bell, drum and flute [in music], [culture] can ensure that people remain happy and

29 See document in the archive at the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM H.Y 34?, document number unclear).
30 The Association for Reforming the Chinese Written Language was established in Beijing in October 1949 and immediately began work on a Chinese phonetic alphabet. In February 1952, the Research Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language was established to simplify Chinese characters and research an appropriate model for a phonetic alphabet. See Reform of the Chinese Written Language (Beijing: Foreign Languages press, 1958), pp.43-44.
content. If we compare Chinese characters and Latin script, in terms of appearance and sound and the affect on the ears and the eyes, they represent two different streams. You cannot say that one is better than the other. Image-making predates writing and over the course of history many ancient objects have been recovered from the ground, to corroborate this. They cannot be obliterated from history. My views are not lofty, and are offered as a guide in the discussion of culture and education. In order to progress we need to understand the challenge of spiritual civilisation, that it must not fall behind material civilization. These are not empty words.\(^{31}\)

Among the most precious items in Huang Binhong’s personal collection of antiquities were his ancient seals. When he flew from Beijing to Shanghai on 23 July 1948, he carried his most coveted seals as hand luggage.\(^{32}\) In a letter to his Jinan friend Zhang Haiqing (張海清), who shared an interest in the study of inscriptions on bronze and stone and who had amassed a collection of some one hundred works by the artist, Huang spoke of the importance of retaining the distinctive Chinese script. He considered it an embodiment of the national spirit. The letter further articulates Huang Binhong’s views on language reform at a time when the Communist Party was determined to introduce simplified, vernacular Chinese in order to improve literacy among workers, peasants and soldiers.

For those who are currently debating the creation of a new script, it is as if form and sound are of equal importance. But form is something that is particular for classical Chinese characters. It is where national spirit and feeling [minzu qing shen 民族 情神] reside. For those who study them they are even more precious and are what continually transmit ancient traditions. I hope that our comrades will increase their efforts to ensure that the study of Zhou and Qin non-canonical texts competes with and surpasses [the study of] Greek, Latin and Egyptian and never dies out.\(^{33}\)

A work of calligraphy, written in large seal script derived from inscriptions on metal and stone, highlights Huang’s interest in ancient Chinese forms of writing at this time. (Figure 8.8) The content of the work and the brilliant red paper that it is written on, however, reflect the contemporary political mood:

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31 Speech to the Inaugural Meeting of the People’s Representative Committee of Zhejiang Province (Zhejiangsheng diyi jiejie renmin daibiao dahui) in August 1950. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.518-519.
33 Huang Binhong, letter to Zhang Haiqing [not dated], Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.187.
Heavenly immortals play music,
Fish and dragons dance.
In the harvest period,
Even grains in far away places have entered the warehouses.

Binhong of Huangshan, aged 87.

The calligraphy was written in early spring, 1950, most probably for Chinese New Year. The use of auspicious red reflects folk custom. This particular paper is decorated with a watermark pattern, giving the impression of fireworks illuminating the night sky. Under the Communist Party, the colour red remained auspicious, but it also came to symbolise revolutionary zeal and faith in the Party. Huang’s calligraphy reflected a common hope, in 1950, for peace and prosperity. Huang employs ancient national symbols of the dragon, grains and harvest, writing a joyous poem that resonated with folk tradition and contemporary atmospherics.

A small, beautifully conceived and impressionistic work made in 1950, now in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum depicts the sunrise. (Figure 8.9) The painting is inscribed:

Painted after watching the dawn below the Qixialing Ridge.
Twelfth month of the lunar new year, 1950.

Eighty-seven year old man Binhong.

Abbreviated brush strokes suggesting houses and trees meld with the land-forms as if they were one. The whole is overlaid with spontaneous irregular upright brush strokes of darker ink made with the tip of the brush that give definition and rhythm to the landscape. The breaking dawn is conveyed by subtle washes of contrasting red ochre, yellow and mineral green which give the painting a warm glow. Dots of brilliant orange-red describe fresh spring leaves caught by the morning sun. The painting contrasts with the work for Liu Zuochou made in 1949, which depicts a similar subject in a very different manner. (Figure 8.2) The date of this painting suggests that Huang Binhong’s depiction of dawn sunlight and his use of colour may well have been influenced by the dominant new ideology. Many landscape painters at this time adopted

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the iconography of the sunrise as a way of acknowledging the hope promised by the new regime. Any positive mood expressed through colour, however, is tempered by the dark landscape and heavy clouds on the horizon.

Another work painted at the same time, during the twelfth month of the lunar calendar (layue 臘月) of 1950, shows Huang Binhong’s versatility as a painter. (Figure 8.10) The painting of a solitary figure in a dwelling deep in the mountains is inscribed:

During the Qi-Zhen [Tianqi-Chongzhen] reigns of the Ming dynasty [1621-1644] many literati painters looked to Northern Song models. [The brushwork was] fine but not tight, bold but not wild. Studying the works of Ni [Zan] and Huang [Gongwang] is the best. Here I emulate the spirit of their paintings.

Despite the new era, Huang Binhong again alludes to Northern Song painting, as he had done in the 1940s, affirming an artistic lineage that traces back to the Ming, Yuan and Northern Song dynasties. In the context of cultural politics of 1950, the painting shows Huang Binhong’s determination to continue to paint in a manner that made sense of the present through an awareness of art history. He was ignoring changes in official artistic policy that sought to make a radical break with a past dominated by the Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist philosophy espoused by the scholar élite. The painting is anachronistic, displaying Huang’s increasingly idiosyncratic late artistic style. The figure is located at the centre of a circular flow of energy, in an idealised dark, brooding setting that is governed by the rules of geomancy. The landscape that surrounds the figure, conveyed by layers of irregular brush strokes using wet and dry, dark and light ink, suggests movement and flux, but the figure, seated in a posture of contemplation, is quiet and still. Huang continued to regard painting as part of a philosophical discourse in which the spiritual took precedence over the physical or material. This work demonstrates a continuation of the scholarly yearning to withdraw to a simple hut or a temple deep in the mountains in times of trouble or uncertainty. Such an impulse was regarded as elitist and escapist, a dangerous remnant of the “feudal” past in the “New China”. 

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In the summer of 1951 teaching staff displayed their paintings at the academy. According to Shi Gufeng, one of Huang’s students who saw the exhibition, Huang Binhong’s paintings were displayed in a dark corner of the gallery, making it difficult for people to see them, and Pan Tianshou’s (潘天寿, 1897-1971) paintings were hung in the corridor where they were blown about by the wind. The works of both masters were marginalized. Huang was publicly humiliated by the exhibition. He was deeply disillusioned with his situation and seriously considered retreating from public life and returning to his ancestral home in Anhui.\(^{35}\) (Figure 8.11)

The type of art encouraged at this time may be inferred from the works from East China selected for the 1951 National Art Exhibition. Of the eight brush and ink paintings published in the commemorative catalogue, the majority are figurative. Only three paintings could be described as landscape paintings, all of them using the landscape as a backdrop for subject matter associated with the new regime. A large collaborative painting by Zheng Wuchang (鄭午昌, 1894-1952) and Ge Xianglan 戈湘嵐, for example, depicts the Red Army entering southwestern China. (Figure 8.12) A painting of a river and mountains by Ying Yeping 應野萍 shows army trucks crossing a newly-constructed bridge at the Dadu River, once crossed by the Communist army during the Long March. (Figure 8.14) A snowscape by Zheng Wuchang and Xie Zhiguang (謝之光, 1900-1976) features the Red Army on horseback.\(^{36}\) By comparison Huang Binhong’s paintings of unpeopled landscapes, or solitary figures communing with nature, failed to reflect cultural policy and the material reality of “New China”. Huang’s paintings did not overtly break with the past, nor did they convey a popular, approved and easily understood message to a mass audience.

\(^{35}\) See 1951 entry of Shi Gufeng’s biographical chronology in Shi Gufeng huaji (Hefei: Anhui meishu chubanshe, 1999), unpaginated. Huang Yingning was sent to Shexian by his father in the period soon after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China to take a letter to Wang Renzhi in the People’s Committee (Shexian renwei) expressing his desire to return to Shexian. Huang Yingning states that “owing to a number of factors this matter was put to one side”. See also Huang Yingning “Wang shi lili yi fuqin,”, p.164, and Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.525.

\(^{36}\) The exhibition included many works by professional artists, workers, students and amateur artists working in the popular genres of new year pictures, serial pictures, posters and cartoons, woodcut, oil painting, national painting (guohua), sculpture and applied arts. Quanguo meishu zhanlanhui Huadong zuopin guanmohui pingxuanweiyuanhui, ed., 1951 Huadong meishu zuopin xuanji (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1951). For a detailed discussion of the artistic policies and the art of the period, see Andrews, Painters and Politics, pp.34-109.
In accordance with the new, mass-oriented artistic policy, Huang Binhong was instructed to carry out research into Chinese figure painting, the genre of brush and ink painting with which he was the least practised and least familiar. Figure painting was traditionally regarded as the starting point for instruction in Chinese painting and landscape painting the end point or pinnacle. This pedagogic progression related to the need for a systematic acquisition of technical skills in which landscape painting techniques were regarded as the most complex: the ideas inherent in landscape painting aimed at transcendence. For Huang Binhong to be forced to return to figure painting late in life was not only frustrating, but also demeaning. An essay titled “The Method of Outlining Used in Ancient Figure Paintings” (Gudai renwuhua de goule fangfa 古代人物畫的勾勒方法) was published in the academy magazine *Art Forum* (Meishu zuotan 美術座談) in mid-1953, apparently the result of a conversation between Huang Binhong and Wang Bomin recorded in 1952. Huang Binhong offers few concessions to the new officially promoted socialist realist style of art in his traditional Chinese approach to realism:

> With painting you cannot just copy what is before you. Starting from the basis of realism, you must transform the appearance of the object so that it comes to life … . Of the eighteen brushstrokes used for outlining, those most common in figure painting are “iron wire lines” and “orchid leaf lines”. “Iron wire lines” are made with an erect brush and therefore bring out the spirit of a figure. “Orchid leaf lines” are made with a soft brush and are ideal for depicting clothing.

Four figure paintings by Huang Binhong in the collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum date from this period. They are not at all characteristic of Huang Binhong’s artistic

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37 In a letter to a friend, which appears to have been written in 1951, Huang Binhong observed that the academy was proposing to increase research into national studies and art (guoxue yishu). Huang Binhong, letter to Guo Xuqiu, not dated, in *Huang Binhong wenji, shuxian bian* 黃�.pebang:wenji,shuxian bian, p.303.
38 Sun Qi, ed., *Huang Binhong de huihua sixiang* (Taipei: Tianhua chubanshiyouzai, fufen youxiangongsi, 1979), pp.168-169. The article is said to have been published in *Meishu zuotan* (Art Seminar), no. 8 (15 February 1953), pp.9-10.
style, nor are they great works of art. The most striking of the four works is a painting of an elderly farmer leaning on a hoe. (Figure 8.13) Following traditional practice the figure is iconic and solitary, set against the all-encompassing void of the white paper ground. Thick brushstrokes outline the figure, the studied, self-conscious lines showing Huang’s concentration. He did not want to make a mistake in his attempt at verisimilitude. The figure wears simple traditional clothes. The fluency and energy of “iron-wire” and “orchid leaf” lines are not present. The posture of the old man is passive and contemplative and the hoe that he leans on functions more as a prop than a tool. Huang has employed realistic colour, particularly in the flesh tones and shading used for the face, hands and feet. The shading, although not consistent, attempts to depict three-dimensional form. Huang’s lack of expertise in large-scale figure painting must partly account for the awkward and naïve style of this work. The signature “Binhong” appears tentative and the title “Labouring People” (Laodong renmin 劳動人民) on the outside of the scroll is not in Huang’s hand as if someone else has aligned the work with the contemporary political climate. The painting scarcely displays the revolutionary enthusiasm demanded of the new art of the period. By isolating the figure, Huang highlights its significance (tuchu zhuti 突出主體) in accordance with policy, but he provides no narrative context for its interpretation. The long face, with its solemn, introspective expression, the distinctive eyes, wispy beard and moustache, and skull-cap, reveal an uncanny resemblance to Huang Binhong himself. It may well be self-portrait. Was Huang Binhong remembering his youth, when he worked on irrigation projects in Shexian, as depressed and disillusioned, he considered returning finally to his ancestral home?

Another painting of “Labouring people” is more ambitious, but is unsigned. (Figure 8.14) Huang’s rendition of three standing figures in different postures reveals his dependence on traditional painting models. The hands and feet are particularly clumsy. The figures and their clothing have a heavy, modelled quality not found in Huang’s other figure paintings, but it is still far removed from realism. This large, sombre work, with its pale, mid-grey and pink wash, is surely not the positive portrayal of contemporary life that the Communist authorities were hoping for.
The two other figure paintings in the museum collection are a handscroll in which six seated figures are dispersed across a horizontal field and a small album leaf depicting a Boddhisattva. The handscroll is a compilation of figures copied from traditional painting sources and appears to be a practice sheet that Huang Binhong did not ever envisage being mounted. (Figure 8.15) The Boddhisattva is, on the other hand, is a more spontaneous, fluent and coherent painting.\(^\text{40}\) (Figure 8.16) The figure is outlined with a fine, dry ink brush and clear, strong blue and red and pale ink that imbue the painting with warmth and realism, but again the effect is naïve as Huang abandons his own creative practice and looks to earlier sources for guidance. In any case a Boddhisattva was no longer an appropriate role model. These four figure paintings poignantly expose Huang Binhong’s difficulties adjusting his painting style to a socialist realist art education regime that was populist on the one hand and demanded a radical synthesis of Chinese and Western approaches to art making on the other. Huang drew his figures from a “memory bank” of types from within the canon of Chinese figure painting, rather than painting figures from contemporary life. Huang Binhong believed that the traditional approach to brush and ink painting had relevance to the present, yet the awkwardness of his figure paintings reveals just how difficult it was to fuse artistic styles and ideologies. It was even more unrealistic to expect an elderly artist to make such a radical change. These paintings, made at a time when Huang Binhong’s spirits were low (xingq\v{e}ng h\v{e}n bu h\v{a}o 心情 很不好),\(^\text{41}\) stand as stark illustrations of the crisis of consciousness experienced by the veteran master as a result of the new cultural policies of the People’s Republic of China.

A striking painting, dated 1951, is one of the very few works by Huang Binhong to feature a large, prominent and carefully painted figure within a landscape environment.\(^\text{42}\) (Figure 8.17) The date of the painting suggests that Huang Binhong may well have been emboldened by his forced experiments in figure painting. Huang explains his inspiration in the inscription:

\(^{40}\) The painting has been mounted as an album leaf with a cover page attached, which suggests that it was one of a series of paintings.

\(^{41}\) Huang Yingjia, conversation with the author, 10 December 2001.

\(^{42}\) Collection of the late Qian Xuewen, Hong Kong.
In the past, when travelling in Qingcheng Mountain, I came across a woodcutter who maintained that what he was gathering was Huanglian [黃連 Coptis chinensis whose bitter seeds are used in Chinese medicine]. The seeds were as big as plums. He said that he was gathering them to sell and that there were people who would pay a high price for them. People went crazy for them and called them ‘chicken white Huanglian’ [ji bai huanglian 雞白黃連]. They were not easy to find. There are limits to what can be grown but there are no limits to knowledge. Is this not the case?

Qingcheng is a Daoist mountain in the south-western area of Guan County 灌縣 in Sichuan, where Huang had travelled in 1933. Whether the encounter was real or imagined, it was a likely place for such a figure to reside. The mountain contains eight large caves and seventy-two smaller caves and is known by Daoists as “Number five among nature’s cave sites” (Di wu dongtian 第五洞天). Zhang Daoling (張道陵, 34-156) of the Eastern Han, one of the founders of religious Daoism, is said to have undergone Daoist training (xiu dao 修道) there. Huang Binhong depicts the woodcutter holding a large huanglian seed between his fingers. In his other hand he holds a cutting implement.

The painting was probably created for Huang Jusu in Hong Kong. The woodcutter and seed gatherer of Qingcheng Mountain occupies the focal point of the painting. He is outlined with a sure dry brush and is silhouetted against a band of bright white light that makes him even more prominent. Read in the political context of the period, the painting subverts the exhortation to draw inspiration from contemporary life and sits very awkwardly with the cultural politics of 1951. Huang Binhong ignores the call to depict heroic subjects, creating instead an image that fuses the memory of travel with interest in the activities of a Daoist recluse and which perhaps reflected his own state of mind and continued a personal dialogue with an old friend living outside Communist China.

In an autobiographical note written at the age of ninety, Huang Binhong alluded in a self-effacing manner characteristic of an elderly scholar, to his difficulties and the gulf that existed between him and the new politicized educational aspirations of the Zhejiang Art Academy.

43 Cihai, pp.2492, 4552.
Five years ago I accepted an invitation from the Hangzhou art academy in Zhejiang Province and moved to the West Lake. My scholarship is very superficial and I have been unable to make a contribution, which causes me to feel humiliated.\(^{44}\) Many intellectuals were affected by the radical social and political changes. On 23 September 1951 Fu Lei wrote to advise Huang that Deng Shi had passed away on the 14\(^{45}\) day of that month. He went on to reveal his own personal difficulties in dealing with the political changes that had turned their world upside down.

I live in seclusion not going out, and continue to rely on translating books to make ends meet. Aloof and good for nothing, I cannot deal with the vicissitudes of the times. When I see fellow students from the old days, such as Pang Xunqin, I feel deeply ashamed and out of step with the contemporary situation.\(^{45}\)

In late 1951 Huang Binhong travelled to Beijing to attend the Third Meeting of the First National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi diyijie quanguo weiyuanhui di sanci huiyi 中國人民政治協商會議第一屆全國委員會第三次會議). Ironically his presence at this meeting marks a turning point in the period of political and cultural limbo from 1949 to 1951 and the beginning of his recognition by Communist authorities at the national level. (Figure 8.18) Some one hundred and forty national committee members, various government committee members and five hundred and eleven specially invited representatives from different fields attended the conference, held from 23 October to 1 November.\(^{46}\) Huang was a specially invited public figure (te yao shehui renshi 特邀社會人士) and participated in most of sessions of the week-long conference.\(^{47}\)

He met and spoke with Mao Zedong (毛澤東, 1893-1976), Chairman of the People’s Republic of China, and had a long conversation with the Premier Zhou Enlai (周恩來, 1898-1976). Mao Zedong apparently proposed a toast to Huang Binhong as the oldest of all the

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\(^{44}\) Huang Binhong, “Jiushi zashu, yi,” section 2, in Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, p.571.

\(^{45}\) Fu Lei, letter to Huang Binhong, 23 September 1954, Fu Lei wenji, shuxin juan, shang, p.132.


\(^{47}\) See Huang Binhong’s identification card and book of tickets to be signed, dated and handed in when attending conference sessions. Eight tickets were used, and four remain unused. Collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM 05644).
conference delegates and asked what he was working on. Huang replied that he was studying ancient inscriptions of the Warring States, to which Mao responded that he was currently reading non-canonical texts of the Zhou and Qin dynasties. Mao Zedong, the iconoclast who brought radical political and cultural change to China was also a keen reader of ancient Chinese history and had an interest in Chinese poetry and literature. Transcriptions of historical poems in his distinctive calligraphic script came to be renowned, and he composed poems which had a strong classical flavour. The personal insight that Huang gained into Mao’s interest in ancient Chinese literature and history, through their brief exchange, would have heartened Huang Binhong at a time when much traditional Chinese culture was under threat.

In 1953 Huang Binhong made a painting for Mao Zedong. (Figure 8.19) It is dedicated to “The Chairman, Mr Runzhi, with wishes for a long life”.

In a traditional way of expressing respect to a superior, Huang has placed Mao’s name higher than the rest of the inscription. It would appear that the work was painted on the occasion of Mao Zedong’s sixtieth birthday, in the year that Huang Binhong turned ninety. A painting by someone of such advanced years was in itself symbolic of longevity. The painting is inscribed with a carefully written poem replete with historical allusions, that praises Mao Zedong’s leadership by linking Mao with Yu 禹, the legendary founder of the Xia dynasty, and China’s classical past.

The legacy of the Great Yu is carved on Mount Heng

Brilliant stars salute the northern heavenly body [Beidou 北斗, referring to Mao].

With a spirit descended from heaven, heaven responds by granting authority to rule,

According to the [sixty-year] cycle of life there are reforms.

Drawing and painting pave the way for a flourishing cultural civilisation,

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48 See Xia Chengtao’s dairy entry for early 1952, following a visit to see Huang Binhong, quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.526-527. Xia Chengtao was an academic and researched ci poetry of the Tang and Song dynasties. In 1952 Xia became head of the Chinese department at the Zhejiang Teacher’s College (Zhejiang shifanxueyuan) in Hangzhou.

49 Mao Zedong’s brush and ink calligraphy became ubiquitous in China. It could be found on newspaper mast heads, the name plaques of institutions and in the many books that were published to promote his ideology. See Zhongyang dang’an guan, ed., Mao Zedong shou shu gu shici xuan (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984). See also Mao Zedong shici moyi (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1978).


51 Runzhi was Mao Zedong’s pen name. See Zhongnanhai canghua ji (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanshe, 1993), vol. 1, plate 5. The painting under discussion is the only work by Huang Binhong included in the published album. According to Huang Bingong’s son Huang Yingyu, his father painted two works for Mao Zedong and one for Zhou Enlai. See Huang Yingyu, “Wang shi lili yi fuqin,” p.164.
Boats and vehicles travel to virtuous neighbours.
Looking back on engravings in bronze and stone,
We join to wish you eight thousand springs.

The painting, signed Huang Binhong of Huangshan at the age of ninety, has a traditional tripartite composition. The river appears calm and is animated by a number of river craft, including a working sailboat and a punt, that form focal points of the painting. The boats and pine trees are painted in great detail and with considerable care. Mao Zedong would have delighted in the auspicious sentiments conveyed by the pairing of sail boats and pine trees which indicate smooth sailing and a long life. Huang saluted Mao as a ruler with a mandate from heaven, highlighting at the same time the importance for Chinese civilisation of history, embodied by the inscriptions on bronze and stone, which he was researching.

Not long after the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) meeting in Beijing, Huang produced a work in response to a request from Zhou Enlai. (Figure 8.20) The painting is inscribed:

A scene from a boat in Gudang, Wulin [Hangzhou]
Which I seek to capture through brushwork.
1951, old man Binhong aged 88.

A second inscription reads:

Mr Enlai, for your refined adjudication.

The painting again uses a tripartite compositional structure but in this work thick, abbreviated calligraphic brush strokes sketch in the landscape elements. Bold areas of paler ink and colour wash have been applied to add moisture to balance the initial dryness. The highly simplified, almost perfunctory painting lacks the heaviness and textual complexity of some of Huang’s earlier landscape paintings. It is animated by a solitary figure in a boat. The work is an example of one “made on request” (yìngchou 應酬), marking a relationship between an artist

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54 Compare with “A place deep within Xishan” (Xishan shenchu) dated 1951, which makes use of similar thick, dry calligraphic brushstrokes, but is a much more complex and moody painting with a longer and more detailed poetic inscription, reproduced in Huang Binhong huaji, 1985, plate 99.
and a political figure. The presentation of a work of art to a political leader was expected and, from the point of view of the artist, was designed to win favour, a kind of insurance policy for positive treatment in future.

A series of eighteen pencil drawings made on the pages of a small lined notebook record the landscape between Shanghai and Hangzhou, the final leg of Huang’s return journey from the Beijing meeting in 1951. The places Huang recorded include Xujiahui, Fengjing, and Qixingqiao near Shanghai, and Wangdian and Linping in Zhejiang. (Figure 8.21) The drawings show his alertness to and interest in his surroundings, even while travelling by train. The sketch of Fengjing is different and of particular interest because Huang Binhong uses shading to block in areas of the landscape, creating a greater contrast between black and white, solid and void. It is reminiscent of Huang Binhong’s dark ink paintings where he builds form and solidity through layer upon layer of ink. In this case Huang uses a soft lead pencil placed at an angle to create broad, solid areas, in the manner of pencil sketches by Western artists seeking to convey the solidity of form. Despite his advanced age Huang continued to experiment.

Huang Binhong had good contacts in Beijing and in a number of letters to friends and relatives refers to the purchase of antique paper. A long handscroll painted in 1951 soon after his return to Hangzhou using dry black ink and intense colour is inscribed (Figure 8.22):

During a recent trip to Beijing I obtained some antique paper of very high quality. On my return to Zhejiang I toured the lake and mountains and enjoyed the crisp air. This is what I saw looking out from beneath the Qixia Ridge.

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56 The sketches were mounted in an album in late 1960. According to inscriptions by Wang Bomin the drawings were given to him by Song Ruoying in 1959. One inscription uses the words huicun and the other huizeng.
57 See letter to Huang Shuzi, dated 28 January, in Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, p.282, and an undated letter to Huang Jusu in which he observed that there was previously a lot of antique paper in Beiping, but that Zhang Daqian had forced the price up. He observed that antique paper was often used for forgeries. See Huang Binhong wenji, shuhua bian, p.240.
58 Collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art (FA 1996.221). In a colophon by Huang Jusu, dated 1966, reference is made to a Mr Chengxun. According to a curator at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, the museum purchased the painting from Luo Fu. See Chu, ed., Homage to Tradition, cat.53. For related paintings, see Zhejiang sheng bowuguan, ed., Hua zhi da zhe Huang Binhong yishu dazhan teji (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin meishu chubanshe, 2004), pp.128-129. Huang Binhong painted other
The eye quickly focuses on a small figure in a punt sailing in the direction of an open expanse of water. As the handscroll is unrolled we journey back in time, into an increasingly dense landscape of entangled trees, foliage and rocks, barely indistinguishable from one another. Now and then the river comes into view before we reach another clearing created by a bend in the river, and a man in a covered boat who approaches a cluster of houses deep within the landscape, his ultimate destination. In this painting Huang Binhong builds up form through layer upon layer of thick, dark, blunt, dry-ink brush strokes. The black ink, areas of void and flying white (feibai 飛白) create an intricate painted surface, like a complex, loosely-woven fabric, that is mesmerising. The danger of complete chaos is relieved by occasional figurative elements, carefully placed areas of void and the addition of strong naturalistic colour—mineral green, indigo blue and red ochre. In some places so much ink has been applied that it sits on the surface of the paper, unable to be absorbed. The execution of the painting has a restless, almost violent creative energy. The painting is dated 1951 and the inscription refers to Huang’s recent trip to the capital, but to what extent the content of this relatively abstract painting may be linked to his state of mind following the meeting in Beijing cannot be known. The painting is inspired by Qixialing Ridge where he lived, and is painted with force, conviction and strong emotion. The painting shows two men in boats, travelling in opposite directions, one toward an open area of void represented by the West Lake, and the other travelling against the tide to a solitary hut, deep within the mountains. These two directions suggest the choice between embracing the unknown and retreating into the familiar, dark, protective embrace of the natural world. The short, scorched, jet-black ink brush work contrasts with the white paper ground to evoke the crisp autumn air, creating a striking, reductive image that is as much a portrait of a mental landscape as it is a depiction of any particular locale.

A turning point

The lack of figure paintings in the last years of his life suggests that Huang made a decision to turn his back on superficial stylistic change for reasons of political expediency and

handscrolls using antique paper acquired in Beijing during the 1951 trip. See a painting of Lin’an landscape dedicated to Liu Zuochou in Chu, ed., Homage to Tradition, cat.55.
to return to landscape painting. The handscroll may be seen as marking a turning point related in part to a general shift in artistic policy around this time. As Julia Andrews, in her study of art and politics in the People’s Republic of China during the period 1949-1979, explains:

By 1952 … there was a tacit acceptance within the party that both guohua and oil painting might be useful to the regime. Guohua survived initially because important political figures remained convinced of its value and because its destruction might adversely affect the United Front, Mao’s policy of enlisting educated non-Communists to help the new regime.59

In addition to painting works for Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, Huang also painted artworks for Li Jishen, who was a vice-chairman of Central People’s Government Council from 1949 to 1954, and Chen Shutong who was a committee member of the Central People’s Government and vice-chairman of the First National People’s Congress, 1954-1959, and other leaders and people of influence.60 Through the efforts of highly-placed friends his situation with the new regime improved and he established a position of respect.

Li Jishen, who was from Guangdong and had purchased Cathay Art Union (Shenzhou guoguangshe) in 1928, was Huang’s most powerful supporter.61 In 1950 Huang Binhong, Tao Guang (陶 廣, 1888-1951) and Shao Zhang (邵 章, 1874-1953) created a collaborative painting which they inscribed with a long poem to mark Li Jishen’s sixty-sixth birthday.62 On 13 September 1950, Li Jishen wrote to thank Huang Binhong for a painting:

Guo Xuchu recently returned to Beijing and I received your letter, which brought me great comfort. I have already had the painting mounted and it hangs in the reception room. Whenever I look at it my heart/mind enters the painting. Thank you. Famous calligraphers and artists who have reached an elderly age and are experiencing some difficulties should, as a sign of respect, be supported by the government. I have already

60 In a letter from Guo Xuchu to Huang Binhong, dated 29 January [1952], there is a reference to Huang having sent many paintings to “Jingtao” (ZPM 02636).
62 Tao and Shao were both political figures who had an interest in literature and culture. This painting was requested by Li Jishen and Huang Binhong added a long inscription of some two hundred characters. Two years later, Huang painted “Autumn at Kuimen” (Kuimen is the first gorge on the Yangtze River), for the Vice-Chairman. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong nianpu, pp.521, 534.
raised this matter with the relevant authorities. As soon as they have made a decision I
will let you know.\textsuperscript{63}

Huang no doubt welcomed this letter. Its assurances reflected the improved treatment by the
authorities which had resulted in his move to a new and larger house and official recognition of
his age and achievement.\textsuperscript{64}

A key aide was Guo Xuchu (過旭初, 1903-1992), a student of Huang’s from Shexian
in Anhui. Guo Xuchu worked at the Cultural Club of the National Committee of the Chinese
Peoples’ Political Consultative Conference in Beijing (Zhongguo renmin zhengzhixieshang
huiyi, quanguo weiyuanhui, wenhua julebu 中國人民政治 協商 會 全國 委員 會 文 化 俱
樂 部 ) offering advice on Chinese chess (weiqi 圍棋). As a Chinese chess champion, he had
good access to the Communist Party leaders who favoured the game. Li Jishen provided an
introduction for the job.\textsuperscript{65} In a letter that Huang wrote in 1951, he asked Guo to pass on his best
wishes to Li Jishen and Chen Shutong.\textsuperscript{66} Guo was instrumental in arranging for Huang to paint
works for distribution among the leadership in Beijing in return for what would amount to a
monthly stipend. In one letter he describes the progress of his plan:

\begin{quote}
Yesterday at Renlao’s [任老 Li Jishen] house I talked with his secretary Zhang about an
allowance for my teacher. Zhang and Li talked and said that in a few days you will
receive a letter from Chairman Li, who will enclose a letter to Chairman Tan in
Zhejiang Province [Tan Zhenlin, Chairman of Zhejiang People’s Government]. My
teacher can take the letter and discuss the matter [with Chairman Tan]. From now on
you will receive a monthly stipend direct [from Zhejiang], which is more convenient.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} Collection of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum (ZPM 3637-2, -3). Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong
nianpu, p.520. Wang Zhongxiu dates the letter to 1950. I would like to thank Wang Zhongxiu for drawing
this letter to my attention.

\textsuperscript{64} In 1951 Huang Binhong, together with his wife, son, daughter-in-law, two grand children and two
helpers, moved into a new two-storey Western-style house at 32 Qixialing. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang
Binhong nianpu, pp.523-524. Theodore Chen comments that improving the living and working conditions
of intellectuals was one of the measures adopted by the Party to counter dissatisfaction that was expressed
by intellectuals. Many new houses were built around 1956. Huang Binhong’s move into a new house in
1951 would appear to mark the beginning of this trend. See Chen, Thought Reform, p.105.

\textsuperscript{65} Guo Xuchu and his brother Guo Tisheng were Chinese chess champions. Chinese chess was a game
favoured by Huang Binhong also. See Wang Zhongxiu, Huang Binhong shuxinji, p.576. Guo Xuchu
wrote to Huang Binhong using the letter paper of Cultural Club of the National Committee of the Chinese
Peoples’ Political Consultative Conference, which was located at 25 Nan heyan, Beijing (ZPM 02636,
02624). See also Guo Xuchu, letter to Huang Binhong, page two (ZPM 02624).

\textsuperscript{66} Huang Binhong, letter to Guo Xuchu, [1951], Huang Binhong wenji, shuxin bian, p.303.

\textsuperscript{67} Guo Xuchu, letter to Huang Binhong, 10 January [1951] (ZPM 02638).
In another letter, Guo noted that Huang had sent many paintings to Beijing and that he believed that Li and others would gradually send him money to repay his kindness. Chen Shutong also greatly admired Huang Binhong’s paintings and each year asked Huang Binhong for a work. Guo refers to a calligraphic work that Chen Shutong had admired at Li Jishen’s home and suggests that by helping out he can get a cut himself:

In days to come, if you have any calligraphy or paintings please send them all to Mr Deliang’s home address, and at the same time send me a confidential letter so that the money can be paid and the paintings collected. Renlao [Li Jishen] said that they can find three to five people each month [to buy paintings]. In this way [Guo] Xu [chu] can also make a bit of money on the side, which will not cause too much harm to elegant pursuits. I guess my teacher will be pleased to help me out in this way.

The treatment of Huang by the Communist authorities exposes the paradoxical and conflicted attitude that many high-ranking officials, like Li Jishen and Chen Shutong, and indeed Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, had towards scholars and China’s cultural past, particularly during the early transitional period of socialist transformation. The tens, if not hundreds of works that Huang painted for distribution in Beijing, were ultimately not painted in vain.

In 1953 Huang Binhong turned ninety sui. It was an appropriate time for an official event to acknowledge his achievements as an artist. On 28 February of that year the Hangzhou branch of the National Art Workers’ Association (Quanguo meishu gongzuozhe xiehui 全国美术工作者协会) and the East China Branch of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Zhongyang meishu xueyuan huadong fenyuan 中央美术学院华东分院) held a meeting to celebrate the occasion. Lai Shaoqi (賴少其, 1915-2000), representing the Cultural Bureau of the East China Administrative Committee (Huadong xingzheng weiyuanhui wenhua ju 華東行政委員會文化局), presented Huang with an award honouring him as an “Outstanding Artist of the Chinese People” (Zhongguo renmin youxiu huajia 中國人民優秀畫家). (Figure 8.23)

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68 Guo Xuchu, letter to Huang Binhong, 29 January [1951] (ZPM 02636).
69 Chen Shutong, letter to Huang Binhong, 8 April 1950, Huang Binhong nianpu, p.517.
70 Guo Xuchu, letter to Huang Binhong, undated (ZPM 02635). Other people whose names were mentioned in the letter are He Xiangning and Zhang Xing.
Officials acknowledged his contribution to creative practice, teaching and research, particularly in the areas of archaeology and epigraphy. Huang Binhong’s painting and calligraphy were on displayed with some ancient paintings and calligraphy from his personal collection.\textsuperscript{71}

Qi Baishi had turned ninety in 1950 and was also honoured for his artistic achievement. The celebration for Qi was treated as an event of national significance. Major national newspapers and magazines reported that the artist, who lived in Beijing, was congratulated by Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the writer Yu Pingbo (俞平伯, 1900-1990) at Zhongnanhai 中南海.\textsuperscript{72} Qi Baishi’s humble peasant origins in rural Hunan, and his charming bold and colourful paintings of life’s simple pleasures, accorded with the image of Chinese tradition that the Communist Party wished to promote. (Figure 8.24) In January 1953 Qi Baishi was named an “Outstanding Artist of the Chinese People” \textit{(Zhongguo renmin zhuoyue yishujia 中國人民卓越的藝術家)}.\textsuperscript{73} The phrase “Qi of the north, Huang of the south” \textit{(Bei Qi Nan Huang 北齊南黃)} was coined at this time, encapsulating the official recognition of Qi Baishi and Huang Binhong as China’s oldest and most distinguished living artists.

In an article in the \textit{Literary Gazette (Wenyi bao 文藝報)} in August 1953 the poet and artist Ai Qing (艾青, 1910-1996) praised Qi Baishi as a “painter of today”. He said Qi had fine powers of observation, was “courageous in creating” and “does not paint things he has never seen”.\textsuperscript{74} Ai Qing went on to use the opportunity to attack traditional style landscape painting.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item "Lao huajia Huang Binhong jiushi shouchen Huadong wenyijie juxing qingjuhui," \textit{Jiefang ribao}, 5 March 1953, p.3. One of Huang’s paintings was reproduced, an ink sketch \textit{(xiesheng)} of Yula Peak in Guilin.
\item Yu Pingbo, a scholar of classical Chinese literature, was a professor at Peking University and participated in the First National People’s Congress. See \textit{Zhongguo wenxue jia cidian, xiandai di yi fence} (Beijing: Beijing yuyan xueyuan, 1978), pp.383-384.
\item On 7 January 1953, the Chinese Artist’s Association and the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing held a celebration which was attended by Zhou Enlai and some 200 dignitaries. See Yang Siliang, \textit{Pan Tianshou}, p.121. Note the different characters used for Qi Baishi’s title. See Lin Haoji, \textit{Qi Baishi: Zhongguo xiandai mingren zhuangzi xilie congshu} (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1987), pp.411-413.
\item \cite{Andrews:1990} Andrews, \textit{Painters and Politics}, pp.114-115. See also \textit{Zhongguo wenxue jia cidian, xiandai di yi fence}, pp.68-70. Ai Qing studied at the National West Lake Art Academy in Hangzhou and in Paris 1929-1932. On his return to China he became involved with the left-wing art movement. In 1940, he travelled to Yanan and in 1944 joined the Communist Party. Mo Pu also praised Qi Baishi’s paintings of ordinary subjects such as live prawns and crabs, which he said were closely observed and not like Western still life paintings of dead things. He also discussed Huang Binhong’s paintings and noted that while some were very dark they conveyed the density of mountains and drew on Huang’s experience of travelling in mountains. See \textit{Meishu} 7 (1954), pp.12-13.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
which may well have been intended as a critique of Huang Binhong’s more scholarly and aloof art.

Is it permissable to paint landscapes? I believe it is. China is so large and has good mountains and good rivers everywhere. If you paint well you produce in people an intense love for their own land. But what of the landscapes we see? These landscapes mostly come from books of ancient models and are concocted without basis in fact after an extended period of copying. The unconvincing piecing together and piling up [of such elements] has become the fashion … . The artist’s idea is that the viewers of the paintings can climb up to enjoy themselves. As for himself, he actually strolls on the asphalt streets of Shanghai. This [approach] is also a lie … . In painting landscapes one must paint real mountains and rivers. You must paint what you have seen, not what people have already painted many times. Paint what no-one has yet painted. To sum up in one sentence, you must paint your own paintings. China is so large, its people are so numerous, its scenery so beautiful, and its life so rich; how can there be nothing to paint? Why must you plagiarize someone else’s things? Why must you paint people who are dead?  

While Huang Binhong painted in a traditional manner, his paintings made use of type forms and techniques that had evolved from an examination of historical works and the close observation of nature. Ai Qing’s critique would have struck him as curious. The Chinese artists Huang most admired sought inspiration from nature. Their aim was to evoke real mountains and real rivers, but not necessarily by rendering every detail nor using strong realistic colours.

Official support was given to traditional forms of artistic practice in a speech made by the Minister for Culture Zhou Yang (周揚, 1908-1989) to the Second Congress of Literary and Art Workers on 24 September 1953.

All writers and artists should diligently study the national literary and artistic heritage and take as their mission the continuation and development of the excellent tradition of national heritage.  

Reflecting their official recognition as “Outstanding Artists of the Chinese People” and the increased importance placed on traditional Chinese artistic practice Qi Baishi was appointed Chairman of the state-sponsored Chinese Artists’ Association (Zhongguo meishujia xiehui 中國)

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75 Translated by Andrews in *Painters and Politics*, pp.115-117.
美術家協會) in 1953, and Huang Binhong the inaugural Director of the Chinese Painting Research Centre (Zhongguo huihua yanjiu suo 中國繪畫研究所).\textsuperscript{77}

The establishment of the Chinese Painting Research Centre was part of the Communist Party’s strategy to reassure elderly scholars and artists that it valued art historical research and to provide a focus for their activity.\textsuperscript{78} The research centre was attached to the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and followed policy guidelines on national art established by the Ministry of Culture.\textsuperscript{79} The role of the centre was to research the history of Chinese painting and painting theory, as well as painting techniques, and to arrange activities to encourage brush and ink painters to develop their creative practice. Li Jishen’s involvement in the official recognition of Huang Binhong and his appointment as director of the research centre is alluded to in a number of letters from Li and Guo Xuchu. Li and Guo encouraged Huang Binhong to travel to Beijing to take up the appointment, but owing to ill health, old age and difficulty in allocating housing he chose to remain in Hangzhou.\textsuperscript{80} Huang Binhong was a figurehead and the specific work of the organisation was carried out by the vice-director, Wang Zhaowen (王朝聞, 1909-2004).\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{77} Huang Binhong was appointed an executive member (lishi) of the Chinese Artists’ Association. Vice Chairmen of the organisation included Jiang Feng, Liu Kaiqu, Ye Qianyu, Wu Zuoren and Cai Ruohong. Wang Zhaowen and Wang Manshi were appointed vice-directors of the Chinese Painting Research Centre in Beijing.

\textsuperscript{78} In 1954 the name of the Zhongguo huihua yanjiu suo was changed to Minzu meishu yanjiusuo and later to Zhongguo meishu yanjiusuo. Full time staff included the brush and ink painters He Tianjian, Yu Fei’an, Feng Chaoran and Wang Xun, and part-time staff included Pan Tianshou, Fu Baoshi, Guan Shanyue, Li Keran, Lu Fengzi, Chang Shuhong, Chang Renxia, Chen Banding, Jiang Zhaohé and Ye Qianyu. See Shui Tianzhong, “Meishu yanjiusuo sishi nian,”\textit{Meishu shilun} 1 (1993), p.4.

\textsuperscript{79} The research centre was modelled on the China Theatre Research Academy (Zhongguo Xiqu yanjiu yuan) established on 3 April 1951 with Mei Lanfang as the inaugural director. Mao Zedong wrote a calligraphic inscription for the inauguration of the academy “The China Theatre Research Academy. Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom, Weed Out the Old to Bring Forth the New” (Zhongguo Xiqu yanjiu yuan, baihua qifeng, tuichen chuxin). This was the first time that Mao Zedong used this famous phrase, which came to exert a profound influence on artistic policy in 1956 and 1957. See “Mao Zedong ‘Baihua qifang, tuichen chuxin’ tici de gushi” Zhonghua dushu bao, 17 October 2001, p.5. In 1953 the phrase was promoted by Zhou Yang, the Minister for Culture, as the official arts policy. See Andrews,\textit{Painters and Politics}, p.119. In 1956 Mao Zedong launched a movement called “Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” and in February 1957 he wrote an essay “On ‘Let a Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend’”. See \textit{Mao Zedong on Literature and Art} (Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp.134-141.

\textsuperscript{80} See Li Jishen, letter to Huang Binhong, and Guo Xuchu, letter to Huang Binhong, in Wang Zhongxiu,\textit{Huang Binhong nianpu}, p.547.

\textsuperscript{81} Shui Tianzhong, “Meishu yanjiusuo sishi nian,” p.4.
In a letter to Huang Jusu in early 1953 Huang expressed concerns about artists and their livelihood in “New China”. Yet in the face of the ever-increasing difficulties he maintained a hope that things could improve.

At present no one has any money which makes it even more difficult for those involved with the refined arts of calligraphy and painting. You have continually been concerned for me. I cannot thank you enough. But recently the Shanghai Cultural Bureau came up with a plan to establish an art research centre and in Beijing there is an association for ancient calligraphy and painting. You can see that in the future the cultural standard will rise steadily.82

Whilst outward encouragement was given to historical research, there was in fact little interest in the type of research conducted by Huang Binhong and many other traditional scholars. Huang wrote to friends that when changed circumstances prevented publication of his research on Xin’an scholar-artists, he would not be deterred but would copy his work by hand and disseminate it that way.83

Reflecting his new status, Huang involved himself in activities associated with the evolving polity.84 Following the announcement of the Draft Constitution of the People’s Republic of China on 15 June 1953, the Zhejiang Daily (Zhejiang ribao 浙江日报) carried many articles by influential figures. Commentators included Huang’s friends Chen Shutong, He Xiangning and Ma Shulun. In the archive of the Zhejiang Provincial Museum there is a

82 Huang Binhong, letter to Huang Jusu, 4 February 1953, quoted in Wang Zhongxiu, *Huang Binhong nianpu*, p.536
manuscript by Huang Binhong entitled “Thoughts on the Study of Painting Prompted by Reading the Constitution” (Du xianfa zhong linghui youguan huaxue zhi ganyan 論憲法中領導有關畫學之感言). The article is beautifully written in sure pale-grey ink on pearlescent paper. At the end of the article Huang authorised the editor to “remove any superfluities, correct errors or make necessary additions”. Huang acknowledged the “record of national revolutionary reality” and the “current situation of organisation which places the working class in a leadership role, with the alliance of workers and peasants as its foundation”. He referred to the change as “New Democracy” (Xin minzhu zhuyi 新民主主義), Mao Zedong’s term, and welcomed the prospect of self-determination (zizhiquan 自治權) for all people. Once again, he used the opportunity to emphasise the importance of literature and art:

Since ancient times the fortunes of literature and art have been tied to the triumphs and decline of world events. This has long been recognised by people everywhere. In the creation of the myriad things by heaven and earth, human beings represent the soul [ling]. Drawings and pictograms predate written script and [in the earliest times] were used to represent language. While they are different from language and occupy a realm that is different from the written word, paintings [huihua] have the capacity to lead to an awakening of the spirit. There is no one who does not understand this.

The article divides Chinese history into three periods; prehistory (shang gu shiqi 上古時期); middle antiquity (zhong gu shiqi 中古時期) and recent antiquity (jin gushiqi 近古時期).

Huang comments on the influence of Western civilisation on China and the influence of Chinese civilisation on the West in the current period. He speaks of convergences between science and philosophy and notes that “Chinese artists are now selecting from the best of past art, based on the original schools of art and national spirit” (minzu xing 民族性), in order to “weed through the old and bring forth the new” (tuichen chuxin 推陳出新) and “create new works of art” (texing chuangzao 特興創造). Despite the fact that Huang makes use of Mao Zedong’s phrases however, the ideas in the article do not clearly follow the Communist Party’s
understanding of history. The way Huang wrote and thought about art did not accord with the
new ideology and could not be printed as a “representative view”. The article did not appear in
the Zhejiang Daily and its presence in the archive suggests that it was returned to him.

A heavily modified version of Huang’s article was eventually printed in the September
issue of the magazine Art (Meishu 美術), the journal of the Chinese Artists’ Association.
Entitled “The Constitution Will Allow this Old Man to Lead a More Meaningful Life” (Xianfa
shi wo zhege laoren shenghuode gengyou yiyile 憲法使我這個老人生活得更有意義了), the piece was recast by the editors in the politicised vernacular language of the day. What
is significant for our discussion is Huang’s willingness to write a response to the draft
constitution and his agreement for a heavily reworked version of his article to appear under his
name. Huang felt compelled to express his appreciation for the official respect that he had been
accorded and to maintain his standing within the new political context.

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89 Meishu 9 (1954), p.5. See also Huang Binhong wenji, zazhu bian, pp.583-585.