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The Art of Irene Chou (Zhou Luyun, 1924 – 2011) –
A Case Study of Ink Painting

SHENG HUNG

MPHIL

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2013

The Art of Irene Chou (Zhou Luyun, 1924 – 2011) –
A Case Study of Ink Painting

by
SHENG Hung

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy in Visual Studies

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2013

ABSTRACT

The Art of Irene Chou (Zhou Luyun, 1924 – 2011) –
A Case Study of Ink Painting

by

SHENG Hung

Master of Philosophy

Ink Painting was first initiated by Lui Shou Kwan (1919 – 1975) in the 1960s and it had a significant and remarkable influence on Hong Kong painters. It aimed to revitalize Chinese painting as a reaction largely triggered by the dominant trend of imitative practice of the Lingnan School in Hong Kong at the time. Lui stressed the importance of *gen* (根 root) and *shi* (適 adaption) and signaled many possibilities of ink painting as a new category. Gradually, a group of artists pursuing the same goal gathered and made the Ink Painting Movement possible. Irene Chou was one of the prominent and dedicated artists involved in the Ink Painting Movement. She demonstrated a lifelong exploration of art and the expression of her inner self to art.

This study attempts to analyze how Chou's art manifested the core values and concepts of Ink Painting. Born in Shanghai, Chou moved to Hong Kong in 1949. She did not commence painting until her mid-thirties when she studied with the second generation of the Lingnan School master Zhao Shaoang (1905 – 1998). Her artistic career began with imitation. However, after she met and was inspired by Lui in the mid 1960s she soon realized art was about self expression. Her art evolved from representation to abstraction and eventually developed into her own style which is very distinct from other Ink painters. After her stroke in 1991, she immigrated to Australia. Despite the unfamiliar environment and poor health, Chou did not surrender herself to these physical challenges. In contrast, her spirit elevated and she continued the exploration of self through her creations. By using Chou as a case study, the research aims not only a scrutiny of Chou's artistic pursuits and innovation, but also a juxtaposition of her pursuits among a few Ink painters of her time in order to have a better understanding of some crucial and complex concepts of Ink Painting.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

(Sheng Hung)

11 September 2013

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

The Art of Irene Chou (Zhou Luyun, 1924 – 2011) –
A Case Study of Ink Painting

by
SHENG Hung

Master of Philosophy

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Introduction

The thesis provides a perspective in analyzing the art of Irene Chou (周綠雲 Zhou Luyun 1924 – 2011) as a prominent Ink painter. It aims to provide a comprehensive study on the artistic evolution of Chou and her significance to Hong Kong art history, in particular serving as an example to understand Ink Painting (Xin shuimo 新水墨) advocated by Lui Shou Kwan (呂壽琨 Lu Shoukun 1919 – 1975) in the 1960s – 1970s.

Chou was a distinctive local painter, but to date there has not been a comprehensive study of her art. Most of the material related to Chou is short articles in catalogs, newspapers and periodicals etc. *Danqing chonger: Zhou Luyun chuan* (丹青寵兒：周綠雲傳 *The Biography of Irene Chou*) published in Brisbane in 2001¹ is useful in understanding the psychological aspect of Chou as it contains descriptions of many of her life incidents, such as her romances, marriage, and her relationships with her parents and children. Recently Lorena Sun Butcher's doctoral thesis focused on Chou's art in a biographical perspective.² Butcher also wrote an article to illustrate Chou's art titled "The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe: An Insight into Irene Chou's Art 1992-2002"³. The article mainly integrated quotes of Chou with Butcher's ideas, however, it does not provide a deep analysis on the paintings of Chou.

¹ Yixin and Yijie, *Danqing chonger: Zhou luyun chuan* (丹青寵兒：周綠雲傳 *The Biography of Irene Chou*) (Australia: Bridge U & Co. Pty. Ltd., 2001).

² Lorena Butcher, "I Am My Art; My Paintings Are Me": An Exploration of the Relationship Between the Art and Life of Irene Chou" (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2013).

³ Lorena Butcher, "The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe: An Insight into Irene Chou's Art 1992-2002," in *The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe*, -- (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2003).

Lau Kin Wai wrote a MPhil thesis in 1992 titled “Xianggang shuimohua yundong yanjiu” (香港水墨畫運動研究 Research on Hong Kong Ink Painting Movement).⁴ It is noteworthy that Lau included Chou as a distinctive Ink painter, but he excluded Chou in the common visual models that he created for Ink painters. This will be discussed in chapter IV. The respected art critic Nigel Cameron provided a similar comment that Chou’s art is so distinctive that it has never been easy to categorize.⁵ Chou is also mentioned in the introductory books about Hong Kong Art, such as Petra Hinterthur’s *Modern Art in Hong Kong* and Zhu Qi’s *Hong Kong Art History*. Neither publications deals with Chou’s art in detail. Hinterthur’s book was written in 1980s when Chou was yet to fully evolve her artistic style. Zhu only briefly touches upon her style according to chronological order.

The limited literary material about Chou and the records of her artworks are scattered throughout periodicals, catalogs and books. Chou created numerous pieces throughout her life, a number of which have never been formally recorded in any publication. Yet, there are some significant catalogs which concentrate on Chou’s works; *Zhou* in 1968 of her first solo exhibition⁶; *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou* focuses on painting before the mid-1980s; *The Collectors’ Choice: The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun* focuses between 1981 and 1994; *The Universe is My Heart My Heart is the Universe: The Art of Irene Chou* includes works between 1991 and 2002; *Life is a Many*

⁴ Kin Wai Lau, “Xianggang shuimohua yundong yanjiu” (香港水墨畫運動研究 Research on Hong Kong Ink Painting Movement) (MPhil thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1992).

⁵ Nigel Cameron, introduction to *Irene Chou & Hong Chi-fun Recent Paintings*, -- (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Land Property Company Limited, 1991), unpagued.

⁶ --, *Zhou* (周 Chou) (Hong Kong, 1968).

Splendoured Thing – Irene Chou is about her works during 2006 and 2007⁷. It is apparent that these catalogs are not comprehensive as they focused exclusively on a period of Chou's artistic evolution. The catalog *Universe of the Mind: Zhou Luyun (Irene Chou) a retrospective exhibition* is a more complete one that comprises Chou's early paintings until 2004. There are still gaps, however, and much is left unsaid, especially about the entire artistic evolution of Chou and its relationship to Hong Kong where her artistic career cultivated.

There is confusion created by publications, in particularly the dating of some of Chou's paintings. In the *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou* published in 1986, the paintings are divided into decades, such as 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and after 1980s (1980 – 1986). However, this is too vague for specific dating. To distinguish Chou's paintings before and after 1966 is important as it was the year Chou left the Lingnan School and studied with Lui. The dating in some publications is misleading sometimes, for example the year Chou learnt painting with Zhao Shaoang was not 1950⁸, but 1959 (later discussed in chapter II). It is noticed that in the catalog of *Collector's Choice: The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun*, a considerable amount of the dating in parentheses are approximations. Of over thirty plates in the catalog, the dates of eighteen plates are estimations based either on "stylistic grounds, previously published dates or owners' records".⁹ Accurate dating would be very useful and important, such

⁷ --, *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing – Irene Chou* (Hong Kong: Artland Printing Company Limited, 2007).

⁸ Irene Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," in *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, -- (Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, 1986), 22.

⁹ --, "Notes to the Viewer," in *Collector's Choice: The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun*, -- (Hong Kong: Casey Company Limited, 1995), 10.

as denoting the early achievement of Chou's artistic skills and the shifted attitude towards art after studying with Lui.

There are highly similar paintings entitled with different names in catalogs. Two assumptions could be made here, i) there are two separate paintings that greatly resemble each other, or ii) they are the same painting Chou altered and another title is given. For instance, *Heartbeat* (fig. 1) and *Breakthrough* (fig. 2) are apparently the same painting at first glance. Nevertheless, the seals used are different. If the seals are used to differentiate the paintings, the former is horizontally composed while the latter is vertical. Another set of examples are the images entitled *Story of Time, Space etc III* (fig. 3) in *Visions in Harmony*¹⁰ and *To be a Happy and Honest Old Woman* (fig. 4) in *Lo Shan Tang: Contemporary Chinese Paintings III: Migration*¹¹. If we pay attention to the lower right corner, despite the same seals and spheres, the numbers of tiny dots are different. There are red and black tiny dots along the calligraphic slope in *To be a Happy and Honest Old Woman* but not in the other.¹²

In studying the art of Chou, the concepts of Ink Painting advocated by Lui must be included. Chou became Lui's student in the mid-1960s. Lui had a subtle, but profound impact on her that caused a fundamental shift in her attitude towards art: from imitation to self expression. Chou then used art, painting in particular to reveal her inner self in abstract forms. Self expression

¹⁰ --, *Visions in harmony* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Asia Trust, c1990).

¹¹ --, *Lo Shan Tang: Contemporary Chinese Paintings III: Migration* (Hong Kong: Lo Shan Tang, 1990).

¹² Another set of examples are *External and Internal* in Hugh Moss, *The Experience of Art: Twentieth Century Chinese Paintings from the Shuisongshi Shanfang Collection* (Hong Kong: Andamans East International Ltd., c1983). and *Remembering of Mr. Lui* in --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*. Despite their great resemblance, the color tones are different: the former in blue and the latter in yellow which might because of the printing quality.

was one of the most important concepts in Ink Painting. Thus, in studying Chou, it is essential to examine what Lui referred to when he advocated Ink Painting.

Shuimohua jiang (水墨畫講 Discourses on Ink Painting)¹³, the series of “*Shuimohua jianglu* (水墨畫講錄 Record of Discourses on Ink Painting)” in *College Life* in 1967 and *Lu Shoukun shougao* (呂壽琨手稿 The Manuscripts of Lui Shou Kwan)¹⁴ are important materials to scrutinize for in-depth understanding of the idea Ink Painting. It is worth noting that in these titles Lui used the term “ink painting”, rather than “New Ink Painting”.

Apart from “New Ink Painting”, there are different names referring to the same concept introduced by Lui: “new Chinese ink painting” and “modern ink painting” are examples. The terminology is also a problem, depending on the focus of the author, for example, Chui Tze Hung who participated in the Ink Painting explained the concern of nationality if the word “Chinese” was included.¹⁵ Another important advocate of Ink Painting, Wucius Wong, pointed out that “ink painting” is widely used as a common term, sometimes as a “thesaurus of traditional Chinese painting”, and sometimes specifically meaning “experimentation of ink media”.¹⁶ The well-respected art historian Li Chu-tsing (Li Zhujin 李鑄晉 1920 –) once commented that the term “ink painting” is “problematic” as there are various interpretations of the term.¹⁷ Li

¹³ Shou Kwan Lui, *Shuimohua jiang* (水墨畫講 Discourses on Ink Painting) (Hong Kong, 1972).

¹⁴ Shou Kwan Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao* (呂壽琨手稿 The Manuscripts of Lui Shou Kwan) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Tse Hung Chui, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 15, 2012.

¹⁶ Wucius Wong, “Meaning of Ink Painting,” *The Perspective* 54 (1974): 40.

¹⁷ Chih-chin Li, ““Ink Painting” and “Modern Ink Painting,”” in *The Symposium on Modern*

reckoned “modern ink painting” should be used instead of “[traditional] ink painting”. The word “modern” is to indicate its new styles and its relationship with modernism in western art.¹⁸

Even though the term “New Ink Painting” is most commonly adopted by people referring to the concept of “ink painting” initiated by Lui¹⁹, there appears to be no text written by Lui, that has been found to have the adjective “new” used prior to ink painting. Rather he used “ink painting” or “modern Chinese painting”. It is speculated that “new” was added by others who were impressed by the advanced styles of Ink Painting.²⁰ Therefore the use of “new” prior to ink painting is ambiguous, even though it is widely used in publications of catalogs, journals and books.

“Ink Painting”, as used throughout this thesis, refers to Lui’s ideas and advocacy of Ink Painting in the 1960s and 1970s in Hong Kong. It is particularly important to notice that the term is used in a narrower sense and not in the broader sense of including all the paintings by the media of water and ink. The term “modern ink painting” was not adopted because the meaning of the word “modern” is changeable - what was once modern in the 1960s and 1970s is no longer modern today. However, Lui’s advocacy of Ink Painting was not confined to his era, he expected it to be a category without time constraint.²¹

Chinese Ink Painting: Conference Treatise, ed. Shusheng Chen (Taiwan: Taiwan Museum of Art, 1994), 12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ One of the examples is the retrospective exhibition entitled “Lui Shou Kwan: New Ink Painting” in 2003, organized by Hong Kong Museum of Art.

²⁰ --, *Hong Kong Artists: Collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art [Volume II]* (Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2000), 37.

²¹ It is noticed that in Lui’s writings, he used “ink painting” much more than “modern Chinese painting”. No written reason for this has yet been found. The author speculates that one of the

No absolute definition of the concept of Ink Painting has yet evolved. Lui also remarked that it is difficult to give a definition of “ink painting”, when he said,

“What is the definition of ink painting? The question is definitely not easy to answer, or not even a question that could be answered by anyone.”²²

Lui used the category of oil painting as an example of the difficulties in a definition. He claimed that it was not suitable to define oil painting by merely the use of oil as it can include the use of many other materials. From the example, Lui said,

“The meaning of a painting should not be limited by the rigid perspective of a media category – i.e. oil. We should have the same idea when we discuss the definition of ink painting.”²³

Wucius Wong who was Lui’s private student also played an important role in advocating the idea of Ink Painting. Lui and Wong held similar thoughts. In his article “Definition of ink painting” written in 1974, Wong claimed,

“If the name of ink painting is not entirely suitable, it is already the most suitable one for today. The term ink painting appears as many other modern terms – being a broad concept that it can no longer explained by the literal meaning.”²⁴

The conference treatise of “The Symposium on Modern Chinese Ink Painting” held in Taiwan in 1994 is an important reference on the thoughts of “modern ink painting” among Taiwanese and mainland China scholars.²⁵ It is apparent that most of the papers were written with a Taiwan and mainland

reasons might be the advantage of the flexibility of the term “ink painting”.

²² Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 6.

²³ Gufeng, “Lu Shoukun lun shuimohua (呂壽琨論水墨畫 Lui Shou Kwan on Ink Painting [An excerpt from lecture of Lui]),” *The Perspective* 27 (1972): 66.

²⁴ Wong, “Meaning of Ink Painting,” 42.

²⁵ Chen, ed., *The Symposium on Modern Chinese Ink Painting*.

China focus. Lui and the achievement of Hong Kong Ink painters were largely ignored.

It is important to stress that using the media of *shuimo* 水墨 (literally water and ink) to paint has been widely found among ancient painters, however, Lui was largely responsible for the emergence of the term “ink painting” towards the mid twentieth century. “Ink painting” itself was used to counter traditional Chinese painting, even though there is a relationship between them. Hence, “ink painting” was a particular concept Lui advocated. His concept of “ink painting” was different from the general use of the term, for example when “ink painting” is used in reference to ancient Chinese painting.

Apart from articles written by Lui himself, *Xianggang xiandai shuimohua wenxuan* (香港現代水墨畫文選 An Anthology of Hong Kong Modern Ink Painting) ²⁶ published in 2001 illustrates a wider perspective as it groups old articles into different aspects such as definition, association, and painters. Eva Man Kit Wah’s “Xianggang huihua meixue yu wenhua shenfen de fansi (1940 – 1980) (香港繪畫美學與文化身份的反思 The Reflection on Aesthetics and Cultural Identity of Hong Kong Painting)”²⁷ is a useful material to briefly understand Lui’s advocacy. The concept of Ink Painting is also discussed in books written about the development of Hong Kong art, for examples, Petra Hinterthür’s *Modern Art in Hong Kong* and Zhu Qi’s *Hong*

²⁶ Junyi Li, ed., *Xianggang xiandai shuimohua wenxuan* (香港現代水墨畫文選 An Anthology of Hong Kong Modern Ink Painting) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Modern Chinese Ink Painting Association, 2001), 163.

²⁷ Eva Kit Wah Man, “Xianggang huihua meixue yu wenhua shenfen de fansi (1940 – 1980) (香港繪畫美學與文化身份的反思 The Reflection on Aesthetics and Cultural Identity of Hong Kong Painting),” in *Sixing jiaohuidian - zhexue zai Xianggang* (思行交匯點 - 哲學在香港 Philosophy in Hong Kong) (Hong Kong: Qingwen, 1997), 205-37.

Kong Art History. They are just a general introduction to Hong Kong art history across the twentieth century. A useful reference on significant art groups related to the Ink Painting such as In Tao Association and the One Art group is found in Cheung Wai Yee's *A Research on Hong Kong Calligraphy and Painting Organization*. In academic studies, Lau's MPhil thesis, mentioned above, written in 1992 is an important reference as it appears to be the only academic thesis on the Ink Painting Movement. However, there are two theses about Lui Shou Kwan – *The Development of Lui Shoukuan's Art* by Flora Kay Chan²⁸ and *Lui Shou Kwan & Modern Ink Painting* by Eliza Lai Mei Lin²⁹. The former focuses on Lui's artistic achievement while the latter has not yet been examined by the author because of limited access.

In the following chapters, the thesis explores the content and evolution of Chou's art. While Chou's art manifested the advocacy of Lui she eventually was not bound by the teachings of Lui and became a very distinctive painter. The first chapter examines some concepts of Ink Painting initiated by Lui, and its relationship with traditional Chinese painting in order to understand the position of Ink Painting. The second chapter illustrates the early education Chou received from her family and metropolitan Shanghai in order to appreciate her liberal education from an early age. She then moved to Hong Kong, a British colony having a strong western influence. How did she start her painting career? Why did she shift from imitation to abstraction? What did the shift signify? Chapter III attempts to demonstrate Chou's innovation in

²⁸ Flora Kay Chan, "The Development of Lui Shoukuan's Art" (MPhil thesis, The University of Hong Kong, 1991).

²⁹ Mei Lin Lai, "Lui Shou Kwan & Modern Ink Painting" (PhD diss., The University of Sydney, 2011).

terms of content and techniques. What were the visual motifs Chou developed throughout the years? What was their meaning for her? Chapter IV compares Chou with her contemporaries and demonstrates the possible common features among them. It is not a goal of the thesis to provide a full evaluation of Ink Painting, but Chou does provide a case study through which to better understand the abstract qualities of the category of Ink Painting.

This thesis adopts Cantonese romanization or English names of Hong Kong-based artists as this format has generally been used by other publications. For examples, “Irene Chou” is preferred to “Zhou Luyun”; or “Lui Shou Kwan” to “Lu Shou Kun”. In the case of ancient masters and concepts, the *pinyin* system has been used, also for figures’ names when the Cantonese romanization could not be found. The date of birth and death of the artists is given the first time their names are mentioned. A glossary of the Chinese version of the artists’ names and *pinyin* is attached as an appendix.

Chapter I

Ink Painting advocated by Lui Shou Kwan

Reforming Chinese painting was a common goal among Chinese painters in the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻 1895 – 1953) and Lin Fengmian (林風眠 1900 – 1991) advocated total westernization; Huang Binhong (黃賓虹 1865 – 1955) and Qi Baishi (齊白石 1863 – 1957) wanted to revolutionize from within the Chinese painting tradition; Gao Jianfu (高劍父 1879 – 1951) who coined the term “New Chinese Painting” (Xin Guohua 新國畫) represented the Lingnan School³⁰ and advocated integration between Chinese and the Western art in Guangdong. In the second half of the twentieth century, there was the Ink Painting Movement in the 1960s led by Lui Shou Kwan which was also the first local art movement in Hong Kong. The art historian David Clarke stated, “In earlier phases of Hong Kong art’s engagement with the modern, ink painting had played a dominant role.”³¹ A group of painters, also Lui’s students at the Extramural Studies Department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), gathered to form the In Tao Art Association and the One Art Group in 1968 and 1970 respectively. Lui was a consultant to the groups. The two groups reinforced and widely spread the concept of Ink Painting which gradually became a “trend” at that time.³² Chou, with a distinguished and unique style of painting, was one of the active members and contributed greatly along with other contemporaries such as Laurence Tam (Tam Chi Sing 譚志成 1933 –

³⁰ Gao Qifeng (高奇峰 1889 – 1933) and Chen Shuren (陳樹人 1883 – 1948) were two other masters of the first generation of the Lingnan School.

³¹ David Clarke, “Hong Kong Art in the 1990s,” in *Someone else’s story – our footnotes: Contemporary Art of Hong Kong (1990 – 1999)*, ed. Grace Cheng, Long Tin Shum and Wai Lin Au (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2002), 12.

³² Wai Yee Cheung, *A Research on Hong Kong Calligraphy and Painting Organization* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999), 52.

2013) and Wucius Wong (Wang Wuxie 王無邪 1936 –). Irene Chou studied the courses of Lui in two successive years between 1966 and 1968.³³ She passionately joined the In Tao Association and was the second President in 1971. However, when the In Tao Association dissolved, she then became a member of the One Art Group in 1977. She was elected as the Vice President in 1983 and President in 1990. Chou became one of the close students of Lui. Lui even finished many of his typical Zen paintings at Chou's place at Victory Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Lui was the one who inspired her to establish her philosophy of painting. Chou explicitly expressed that Lui, as her teacher, had profound influences in shaping her attitude and views towards art.³⁴ Therefore, it is essential to scrutinize Lui's advocacy of Ink Painting in order to appreciate the artistic pursuits of Chou and her manifestation of Ink Painting.

Divided into two parts, this chapter firstly provides the context of Ink Painting itself, including its relationship to the history of Chinese painting and art scene at that time. The chapter also provides the background and motivations of the initiator, Lui Shou Kwan as well as an analysis of the concepts of Ink Painting. Some people tried to define Ink Painting by the type of media used - ink, brush, and Chinese paper. However, it will be argued in this thesis that Ink Painting is a fluid concept without boundaries built by formal qualities, but focuses on more abstract criteria. The abstract criteria refer to two concepts Lui pinpointed which are innovation and inner expression. Despite these ideas being broad, Lui generated a way of attaining the two. The concept of innovation, in terms of techniques and thoughts is explored with

³³ Laurence Tam, memorial article through email, July 10, 2011.

³⁴ --, Chou, "The Time in Which I was born," 22.

reference to *gen* (根, literally root) in order to achieve the state of *shi* (適, literally adaptation). *Gen* and *shi* are two Chinese characters which frequently appeared in Lui's advocacy. The examination of the concept of inner expression primarily was a rejection of the practice of mere imitation as a trend of learning Chinese painting, largely a response to the Lingnan School at that time. Hence, Lui advocated Ink Painting as a means to express oneself rather than pure resemblance of works of masters. This chapter seeks to review Ink Painting from the perspective of the pioneer Lui to highlight its core values. Surrounded by the imitation practices, with a prospect of seeing a diversified and prosperous painting scene, Lui offered an alternative - Ink Painting to revitalize Chinese painting in Hong Kong in the second half of twentieth century.

Relationship between Ink Painting and Chinese painting

Lui is not only widely renowned as an influential artist and art critic, but also a significant initiator and educator of Ink Painting in Hong Kong. As Sullivan puts it, Lui started to take a “leading place in the art world of Hong Kong” in the late 1960s.³⁵ Born in Guangdong in 1919, his father Lu Canming (呂燦銘 1892 – 1962) was a traditional painter who gave him strong ties with traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy and philosophy. In 1948 Lui moved to Hong Kong where he lived until he died in 1975. He worked as a full-time ferry inspector in the Hong Kong and Yaumati Ferry Company Limited until he quit the job in 1966. However, as early as 1951, Lui began to write publications

³⁵ Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 193.

about Chinese painting, especially on the concepts of it.³⁶ The focus of these concepts later paved the way for Lui's Ink Painting course in the mid-1960s. His early writings include articles entitled "Guohua de sixiang wenti (國畫的思想問題 The question of concepts in Chinese Painting)" in 1951³⁷ and a series of "Duli ziyou de juehui geren zhihui yishu (獨立自由的絕對個人智慧藝術 Independence and freedom are the absolute individual wisdom of art)" in 1961³⁸. Against the background of traditionalists and the Lingnan School of the 1950s, he promoted the concept of Ink Painting to ban mere imitation and apprenticeship. He was devoted to teaching ink painting courses at the Extramural Studies Department of the CUHK and the Architecture Faculty of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) between mid 1960s to early 1970s. Lui made a huge breakthrough at this time; however, he also attracted many attacks from the traditionalists. Even so, there were many artists who admired and followed Lui. His lectures at the Extramural Studies Department were described by his students, such as Chou and Laurence Tam, to be very popular and crowded to such an extent that not only were people standing in the classroom, but also the corridor.³⁹ His enthusiasm to revolutionize ink painting focused on content and abstract concepts that he believed to be more important than skills and techniques as the former comes before the latter.

Investigating Lui's advocacy provides us with a theoretical background to comprehend Ink Painting. This theoretical background also made the

³⁶ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 346.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Shou Kwan Lui, "Duli ziyou de juehui geren zhihui yishu (獨立自由的絕對個人智慧藝術 Independence and freedom are the absolute individual wisdom of art)," *Qianshuiwan*, February 17 – March 5, 1961, 3-10.

³⁹ Laurence Tam, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 16, 2012. See also Hilary Binks, "The Universe Within: Irene Chou," *Asian Art News* vol. 8, no.6 (1998): 35.

evaluation of other Ink painters possible. The investigation begins by addressing how Lui located Ink Painting in Chinese painting history. To describe the relationship between ink painting and Chinese painting, Lui used a metaphor between mother and son,

“Modern Chinese painting or ink painting, in principle, is a continuation of [traditional] Chinese painting. The two have ‘post-umbilical’ relationship.” Lui continues to explain, “...ink painting is a kind of Chinese painting. Thus the relationship, differences and similarities between the two can be taken as the condition of fetus and mother. Once the umbilical cord is severed, the fetus becomes an independent being. The mother–son relationship denotes a symbol of an independent life.”⁴⁰

By using the metaphorical relationship between fetus and mother, the former means modern Chinese painting or ink painting and the latter [traditional] Chinese painting. The two have a blood relationship and were two-in-one when the fetus was inside the mother’s body. After the fetus was born, it becomes an independent individual, one-into-two and it will grow and develop itself. The idea of putting ink painting back to the historical context of [traditional] Chinese painting is crucial in analyzing the former. As suggested by the art historian Wan Qingli, there are “three principles” for researching Chinese modern painting history. Wan proposed a) to look at Chinese painting history and evaluate Chinese painters from a Chinese (not western) and intrinsic (not extrinsic) context; b) to be aware that concepts or experiences of western modern art cannot be stiffly applied to Chinese modern art history and; c) to analyze art history from a human civilization macro point of view, beyond the perspectives of western or Chinese-centered.⁴¹ The first two principles were

⁴⁰ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 3.

⁴¹ Qingli Wan, ““Bu shi lushan zhenmianmu”: Zhongguo jin xiandai meishushi yanjiu zongheng guan (“不識廬山真面目”: 中國近現代美術史研究縱橫觀 A Comprehensive View of Research on Modern Chinese Art History,” in *Wan Qingli meishu wenji* (萬青力美術文集 Wan Qingli’s Articles on Art) (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2004), 275.

consistent with Lui's approach and provided the direction to analyze the development of Ink Painting in relation to traditional Chinese painting. The emergence of Ink Painting, as Lui stated, is a continuation of [traditional] Chinese painting. Hence it is important to look at the former within a Chinese and intrinsic context as suggested by Wan.

It would be no surprise if one gives a general comment of monochrome in response to the impression of traditional Chinese painting. Nevertheless, the fact is that color had never been absent from ancient Chinese painting. The mural paintings at Jiayuguan and Dunhuang created as early in the Wei and Jin Dynasties are vivid examples. Xie He (謝赫 active 5th C.), a Six Dynasties art critic stated that *liufa* (六法 Six Laws of Painting) included: colors should be applied according to its kind (Suitability to Type)⁴². Apart from that, capturing the essence of spirituality of the depicted (Spirit Resonance) is another law.⁴³ Gu Kaizhi (顧愷之 ca. 345 – 406) earlier in the Jin Dynasty also stressed the essence of spiritual expression of a painting in his influential *chuanshen lun* 傳神論 (theory of conveying spirit).⁴⁴ Xie's view on painting equates the importance of form and the abstract, the spirit in depicting an object.

The watershed of Chinese painting history shifting from color to ink was in the late Tang. The court manner blue-and-green *shanshui*, which was heavily colored and eye-catching, reached its peak in the prime-Tang period. For

⁴² Translation of the term is taken from W.R.B. Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1954), 4.

⁴³ The Six Laws of Painting also included: Bone Method, Correspondence to the Object, Division and Planning and Transmission by Copying. Translations of the terms are taken from Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting*, 4.

⁴⁴ Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1974), 44.

example, the father-and-son royal painters, Li Sixun (李思訓 651 – 716) and Li Zhaodao (李昭道 active ca. early 8th C.) were well-known for their blue-and-green style showing the grandeur and spectacular *shanshui* of the prime-Tang. Meanwhile, the Tang figure paintings depicted the royal ladies' daily lives in order to express the morality and elegance of being a lady with virtues. These paintings adopted uses of brilliant colors to illustrate the glory and splendor of the Tang Dynasty.

Yet, there was the emergence of a phrase “*shuimo*”, literally water and ink. Critics always attributed the beginning of the term *shuimo* to the prime-Tang poet-painter Wang Wei (王維 699 – 759). In response to the green-and-blue court manner, Wang claimed *shuimo* surpasses all [the styles]. Other contemporaries of Wang experimented with various wild methods and demonstrated the possibility of ink uses, such as spattering ink on silk, using worn-out brushes or dipping ink from the artist's braided hair.⁴⁵ It is noted that *shuimo* at that time did not mean a total refusal of color, but turning blue-and-green to light coloring.⁴⁶ *Lidai minghua ji* (歷代名畫記 Record of Famous Painters of Successive Dynasties), written by the scholar and connoisseur Zhang Yanyuan (張彥遠 ca. 813 – 879) in the ninth century hinted the practice of abandoning color. It stated that,

“For grasses and trees spread forth their glory without depending upon (hues derived from) cinnabar and jasper; clouds and snow whirl and float aloft and are white without waiting for ceruse (to make them so). Mountains are turquoise without needing (the color) “sky blue” and the phoenix is iridescent without the aid of the five colors. For this reason one

⁴⁵ James Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (Geneva: Skira; New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 28-9.

⁴⁶ Fuguan Xu, *Zhongguo yishu jingshen* (中國藝術精神 The Spirit of Chinese Art) (Taiwan: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1972), 257.

may be said to have fulfilled one's aim if one can furnish (a painting) with all the five colors by the management of ink (alone)."⁴⁷

Compared with the blue-and-green manner *shanshui*, it was a revolutionary idea to capture the flourishing mountain without using green or colors. It underlined the richness of ink which is not only the color black. There are different types of ink application, for examples, thick, wet, dry, over-night, and washes. The choice of application assists the creation of the feeling of light, depth, three dimensional senses, and even the abstract subjects such as wind. A good example is *Bamboo in Wind* by Li Fangying (李方膺 1696 – 1755) (fig. 5) which is purely monochrome. Ink was also considered as a variety of numerous colors in its different gradations of tones and subtlety. The twentieth century Chinese philosopher, Xu Fuguan speculated that pure *shuimo* appeared in the late Tang dynasty.⁴⁸ During the Song Dynasty, there was the emergence of literati and Chan (禪 Zen) tradition of Chinese painting. Both categories stressed spontaneity, abstract qualities and inner expression. The literati and Chan tradition appeared in diverse styles and subjects throughout Chinese painting history. It is important to note that neither the term of blue-and-green painting nor ink painting had an inferior implication in the Tang dynasty. However, ever since the emergence of the concept of literati painting, color was pinned down. The term “literati painting” was coined by the Song poet-painter literati Su Shi (蘇軾 1036 – 1101). He advocated the value of the spirituality of the depicted objects, rather than the representational features. From then on, the focus of Chinese painting shifted from a rather realistic one to a more abstract, conceptual and spiritual one in terms of form and color. The

⁴⁷ Translation taken from Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1954), 185.

⁴⁸ Xu, *Zhongguo yishu jingshen*, 257.

literati tradition greatly influenced the later painters in Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasty until the 20th century. The Four Yuan Masters are the representative literati painters. Late Ming and early Qing literati such as Bada Shenren (八大山人 1625 – 1705), Shitao (石濤 1642 – 1718) also took form as a vehicle to express their inner feelings. While that styles and subjects varied, ancient literati painters shared common values. James Cahill pointed out that,

“The theory of painting held by these scholar-artists (literati) reflected their Confucian background. Poetry and music, and later calligraphy, had long been treated in Confucian writings as vehicles for embodying one’s personal thought and feeling, for conveying to others something of one’s very nature...The quality of a painting, said the literati writers, reflects the personal quality of the artist; its expressive content derives from his mind, and has no necessary relationship to anything the artist or the viewer thinks or feels about the object represented. The value of the picture does not depend upon its likeness to anything in nature.”⁴⁹

There is a well-known example of Su using red paint to paint bamboo instead of ink. Condemned by his audiences that there was no red bamboo in reality, his defence was that there was no bamboo in monochrome either and that he was just expressing his inner self and temperament through the bamboo, rather than the particular exact details and representation of it. The mind and the psyche of the artist is the actual subject of the painting rather than the depicted object or scene. Confucianism was embedded in the literati painters’ mind as they were taught by the virtues stated in the Four Books and Five Classics. This common background built the shared belief and vision within the literati group. The concept of literati painting ceased in 1905 when the imperial examination was cancelled. Art historian Wan Qingli pinpointed that literati

⁴⁹ Cahill, *Chinese Painting*, 89-90.

painting became an “historical concept” and a tradition.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century, Lui adopted the emphasis of inner expression and abstract qualities of Chinese painting in order to develop the Ink Painting which will be analyzed in the rest of the chapter.

Concepts of Ink Painting

As previously mentioned, the term *shuimo* first appeared in the eighth century. Yet, the phrase *shuimo hua*, (literally water and ink painting, abbreviated to ink painting) was only discussed in the mid-twentieth century. According to Lui, the term “ink painting” was only coined in Hong Kong in 1947.⁵¹ In 1965, Lui started to teach ink painting courses at the Architecture Faculty and Extramural Studies Department of the HKU and also at the Department of Extramural Studies of the CUHK.⁵²

As a pioneer of *shuimo hua*, Lui’s advocacy and enthusiasm had aroused the interest of other contemporary artists who subsequently contributed to Ink Painting Movement. In considering the thoughts and features of Ink Painting, it is necessary to scrutinize one of the important anthologies of Lui’s lectures, *Discourses on Ink Painting*. The text concentrates on notes and course materials of Lui’s lectures published in 1972. This text generated a theoretical basis for the discussion of ink painting. By examining it, the followings attempt to foreground the key concepts of Ink Painting.

⁵⁰ Qingli Wan, ““Wenren hua”: yige lishi gainian de jieding (“文人畫”: 一個歷史概念的界定 “Literati Painting”: Definition of A Historical Concept,” in *Wanqingli meishu wenji*, 23.

⁵¹ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 95.

⁵² Ibid.

The concept of Ink Painting was mainly to give a novel perspective to the Chinese painting scene in Hong Kong after 1949. Lui criticized,

“The traditionalists and Lingnan School moved to Hong Kong after war, they influenced and gained high social status in the early stage. However, the trend of imitation without innovation was against the Way of painting, [their creations] could hardly be counted as works of art.”⁵³

He also negatively commented that the Qing dynasty was a “dark age” because many of the Qing literati painters totally missed the key philosophical ideas of literati and their work became mere duplications.⁵⁴ The judgment on the Lingnan School and Qing literati showed Lui’s vision and stance to ‘reinvent’ Chinese painting that he regarded as his responsibility as an artist. The alternative Lui suggested - ink painting - is not a style, but a categorical painting which distinguishes itself from other categories of paintings, for examples, oil, pastel, watercolor etc.⁵⁵

Apart from provocative thoughts, Lui stressed the attitude of being an artist – to be sincere and honest. He even claimed that this is the fundamental element in one’s life,

“The only effort for knowledge, personality and life lies in being sincere 誠.”⁵⁶

He explained that when we realize the essence of sincerity, “we can deceive ourselves or others no more.”⁵⁷ When artists have the highest sense of sincerity and honesty, the practice of mere imitation will not be popular; they

⁵³ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 7. Earlier in the twentieth century, other revolutionist such as Kang Youwei (康有為 1858 – 1927) also severely criticized the Orthodox School in the Qing Dynasty. See Youwei Kang, preface to *Wanmucaotang cang Zhongguo huamu* (萬木草堂藏中國畫目) (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1977), unpagued.

⁵⁵ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁷ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 458.

will go back to themselves rather than superficially imitating masters. He recalled people once asked him about his faith. They wondered how he could be so determined in holding his belief while others are deterred by the challenge. He said, “The reason is simple – faith comes from within. I do not care about the outcome or result but the interest to explore.”⁵⁸

Wucius Wong tried to define Ink Painting by media. He concluded that, “ink painting can include all creation done on paper, with brush and ink, both traditional and experimental.”⁵⁹ However, Lui did not reject other uses of media in his painting. Lui used color as well as ink. In fact, the use of color and ink was evident in much of Chinese painting history, in particular late Ming and Qing dynasty. Apparently, Lui encouraged his students to embrace different media in order to compare the practical characteristics of ink. Lui claimed media should not be a limitation to Ink Painting,

“People who do *shuimo* [painting], firstly have to know about *shuimo* [water and ink]. Secondly, they should know the effects and characteristics of other media apart from *shuimo*, such as oil, watercolor, woodblock, cloth and different paper. Thirdly, they need to explore the materials in their greatest possibilities,”⁶⁰ he continued by then, “they should see the limitation and then decided to abandon or not.”⁶¹

Lui had a comprehensive perception of the category Ink Painting in that he recognized it as part of the spectrum of the global art scene.⁶² His positivism and optimism was shown in his view of looking forward to a diversified and prosperous atmosphere of Ink Painting. There is no simple

⁵⁸ Ibid., 457.

⁵⁹ Wong, “Meaning of Ink Painting,” 42.

⁶⁰ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 86.

⁶¹ Ibid., 97.

⁶² Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 4.

definition of Ink Painting. Despite the broad international scope Lui anticipated, the essences of Ink Painting are innovation and inner expression. Lui highlighted this by a sentence, “Ink painting is a kind of painting that uses water and ink as self expression.”⁶³ In one of Lui’s manuscripts, he explicitly stated that, “the so-called *shuimo* [painting], the most fundamental thing is to separate it from the corrupted traditional Chinese painting that focuses on mere imitation and copying.”⁶⁴

He also declared that, “The standard of the Way of painting is innovation.”⁶⁵ Innovation does not only refer to one’s intensive exploration of thoughts and inner feelings, but also materials and techniques.⁶⁶ Lui used a wine metaphor to describe the proper attitude of an artist - one should acquire both eastern and western influences before integrating them. He said:

“The East has maotai while the West has brandy. If we want to merge, first we have to acquire both, but in a right sense. Without either one, there is no merge; have both but not in a right sense, the merge can only be superficial and faulty.”⁶⁷

To attain knowledge from the eastern world, it is crucial to investigate the history of Chinese painting. Even though Lui maintained a strong opposition towards the practice of mere imitation, he held ancient works in high regard as the foundation learning for ink painters. Lui stressed *linmo* (臨摹 imitation) as the first phase of his ink painting course.⁶⁸ *Lin* refers to copying by placing the original next to the paper while *mo* is the practice of exact copying by placing the paper above the original. Lui alleged that the main task throughout the

⁶³ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁴ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 85.

⁶⁵ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁸ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 130. See also Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 86. Lui considered *linmo* as a way of *rugen* (入根, literally into the root).

practice of *linmo* is to comprehend how the ancient painters painted for the sake of having a comprehensive understanding of the original painting including painting theories and techniques.⁶⁹ Further, he considered the learning process the *gen* of a Chinese painter is fundamental and necessary.⁷⁰ Despite Lui's severe criticism of the Lingnan's School mimetic practice of masters, it is clear that he as a modern painter agreed on the practice if a clear purpose was targeted. For the *gen* of Hong Kong Ink Painting, Lui referred to three aspects. Each aspect has numerous variables. First of all, *gen* can be seen as the origin/root of painting as a form of art/tradition. Lui included not only the origin of [traditional] Chinese paintings, but also features of modern art. Secondly, *gen* refers to the media *shuimo* – water and ink. He included not only Chinese traditional *bimo* 筆墨, but also innovative uses of brush and ink. The third aspect refers to the painter as an individual who has his/her own temperament and talent as an artist, embedded in a unique set of life experiences. The three aspects can be considered independently or as an interlacing dynamic whole. These cultural, artistic, personal variables work together to form the complex concept of *gen*. Lui did not give a definite description of the *gen* in his writings. The diverse nature of *gen* allows a wide range of possibilities for the development of Hong Kong Ink Painting. Lui seemed to have wanted to recognize the flexibility of variables in the creation of Ink Painting.⁷¹ Laurence Tam, as a former student of Lui and classmate of Chou, reminisced years later on what he learnt in the ink painting courses. His memories were vivid and entirely consistent with Lui's emphasis on *gen*, individuality and innovation. He recalled how Lui taught them to appreciate a

⁶⁹ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 118, 130.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 86.

⁷¹ Ibid., 17-8.

painting from various perspectives, such as the painter's biography, how the painting related to the Chinese painting history and also the aim of imitation practice of surpassing the ancient master.⁷² The practice of *linmo*, one of the learning methods, paves the road to experimentation of ink with individual exploration as an ultimate goal. Lui was not asking people to follow tradition, but to have their choice of utilizing the *gen* by getting to know it, then deciding whether to give up or integrate through the process of investigating the tradition. The key point is to acquire the *gen* in their best and most accurate sense; this condition will enable oneself to make the choice.⁷³ A similar philosophy also applies to Lui's attitude of viewing external influences. Lui regarded the emergence of western [non-figurative, non-representational] modern art a support and inspiration to Ink Painting as it, unlike the long history of Chinese painting, is not limited by forms and representation.⁷⁴ Lui had a depth of knowledge of Chinese art and its essences of spirituality and abstraction. In the Chinese context, these essences are conveyed by a form, such as bamboo, or orchid as a vehicle while the pure abstraction in the West expresses in pure visual languages such as lines, color and planes.

Even though Lui's writings focus largely on the intrinsic context of Chinese painting and philosophy, some western philosophers such as Charles Darwin, Francis Bacon, Herbert Read, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Rene Descartes were part of his studies.⁷⁵ These are proofs of Lui's open mindedness towards western influences and reflection on Chinese painting. In

⁷² Laurence Tam, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 16, 2012.

⁷³ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 138.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁵ Lui's discussion on the figures can be seen in Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 388-432.

1956, Lui created *Waves* (fig. 6) by Chinese ink and paper which resembled Turner's *Snowstorm-Steamboat off a Harbor's Mouth* (fig. 7). It was uncommon to depict natural disaster in Chinese tradition, his success in capturing the movement of the overwhelming waves at a dramatic moment by purely Chinese inerasable medium was notable. Lui, himself was aware that his lectures were more focused on the eastern world, especially Chinese painting. For more westernized ink painting, there were Wucius Wong, Hon Chi-fun (韓志勳 1922 -), Chui Tze Hung (徐子雄 1936 -) etc taking charge.⁷⁶ These artists had been to the West, such as the United States and attained a more comprehensive view of western modern art which was reveal in their art.

Ink painters also needed to be sensitive to the modern world and acquire from others, such as the modern western art. Lui was suggesting a comprehensive attitude of viewing a tradition, not based by cultural limitation. He stressed that only if the painter acquires *gen* comprehensively, the state of *shi* can be achieved. The painter will then have a solid ground to decide how she/he reacts to both aspects. The state of *shi* is fluid because it is determined by the particular cultural environment.⁷⁷ The Chinese character *shi* associates with *shiyng* (適應 adapt to) and *heshi* (合適 suitable for). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "adaptation" is "the action or process of adapting one thing to fit with another, or suit specified conditions".⁷⁸ It is not a concept frozen at Lui's era specifically, but a fluid concept. For example, what was once modern from the West in Lui's time is different from now, thus the idea of

⁷⁶ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 19.

⁷⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "adaptation," <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/2115?From=adaptation#eid> (accessed May 2, 2013).

shi embraces a rather flexible implication depending on one's surroundings.

Lui granted his students a great sense of freedom. He asked them “not to buy my catalogs and books ever”,⁷⁹ “not to follow my samples”,⁸⁰ “to ask questions that he could not answer”,⁸¹ even “not a must to create ink paintings”.⁸² More than that, Lui also suggested the idea of “*zong gen*” (總根, literally ultimate root) referred to the concept of oneself in terms of spirituality and thought.⁸³ The self concept is another core value to explain Lui's advocacy as mentioned above. Lui reflected that,

“The concept - expression of oneself is most lacking in the art development of Hong Kong up till now.”⁸⁴

This statement which was in response to the traditional mode of apprenticeship, also pointed out the essence of ink painting which is not superficially about the likeness, but one's inner thoughts. Thus, a painter should have the concept of “self” before making use of their techniques to achieve the expression of it.⁸⁵ The inner expression of different individuals vary, thus consistent with the flexibility of the state of *shi* as well. Different painters have different *gen* and ways to adopt or expand the various external impacts in order to convey the expression of their own individual self. With these perspectives in mind, one can perceive the category of Ink Painting as a world of dynamics and rich diversities. Ink painting was a new thought in the times Lui advocated, and a force to counter the apprenticeship of the Lingnan School and other imitation practices of masters. However, Lui's wide and pioneering point of view

⁷⁹ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 43.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 41.

⁸² Ibid., 137.

⁸³ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁴ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 344.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

provides us a fluid perspective to look at Ink Painting. One may argue that the meaning of ‘inner expression’ and ‘innovation’ are too broad to claim as features of Ink Painting. Nevertheless, Lui had suggested a method, process and attitude of achieving these goals of Ink Painting rather than stating what precisely innovation or inner expression equaled.

It is the *gen*, surroundings and exposures of different individuals that matter the *shi*. The variables of the *gen*, the surroundings and exposures of different individuals which influence the *shi*, together with the sincerity of the artists, opened up a great diversity of inner and artistic expression in the Ink Painting. Irene Chou is certainly a distinctive painter of the Ink Painting. Her artistic evolution and beliefs will be illustrated in the coming two chapters.

Chapter II

From a Woman to an Artist

Born in 1924 in Shanghai, Chou spent her childhood and youth in the most modern city in China at that time. She moved to Hong Kong in 1949 and later immigrated to Brisbane, Australia in 1992. Chou's residence in these three places marked significant periods of her life and her artistic pursuit. Chou's childhood years showed no indication of her being a painter. She started exploring painting only by chance. Yet, once the exploration began, she immersed in painting and living with her art. Ultimately, she established her unique style.

With regards to her artistic development, Chou first studied with Zhao Shaoang (趙少昂 1905 – 1998), one of the Lingnan School masters in Hong Kong in the post-1949 era. This was essential and fundamental for Chou in terms of the painting techniques she acquired. In the mid 1960s, Chou was one of the many students who took Lui's extramural courses at CUHK. From then, until the late 1980s, she was vigorously involved in the Hong Kong art scene, enthusiastically participating in the In Tao Association and the One Art Group. Chou developed a close relationship with Lui who greatly inspired her thinking. She gradually moved away from imitation and pursued abstraction instead. She internalized Lui's notion of art and manifested the core values of Ink Painting – innovation and abstract inner expression. This was in response to her own *gen* which led to her achieving the state of *shi*. This chapter focuses on the crucial background of Chou and stages of her personal and artistic development.

Early days in modern Shanghai

The first twenty four years of Chou's life were spent in Shanghai and had a profound influence on her as a person. This Shanghai period influenced her artistic evolution which she further developed in Hong Kong. Chou was born to revolutionary parents. Her father Zhou Nianxian (周蓮軒 1896 – 1982) and mother Jin Qichao (金其超 1901 – 1950) were influenced by the new tide of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. They were active participants in the New Culture Movement⁸⁶ which called for rejection of traditional customs and values. Chou described herself as 'ordinary', but her parents 'extraordinary',⁸⁷ despite her parents' relationship being full of tension. Both her parents were highly educated - her father was an amateur photographer and a lover of art and music while her mother was a professional calligrapher.⁸⁸ Her mother emphasized the liberation of women so much so that she named the second daughter after her surname, Jin rather than Chou (Zhou) according to the principle of "sexual equality".⁸⁹ This incident demonstrated the avant-garde and liberal spirit within Chou's family and Chou expressed that her mother brought her up through enthusiasm for new culture.⁹⁰

From childhood, Chou was nurtured in an art atmosphere because of her family background. Chou, by looking at her mother's practice of calligraphy, was not unfamiliar with Chinese media and acquired some elementary

⁸⁶ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 7.

⁸⁷ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 21.

⁸⁸ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 9.

⁸⁹ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

techniques of using brush and ink on paper.⁹¹ She also had a chance to learn violin and ballet.⁹² Neither of these artistic pursuits were common in China at that time. Chou was especially close to her father. As a young girl, she accompanied her father on field trips or when he gathered with his elite and artistic friends in the cultural arena. This was a great exposure in terms of thoughts and experience. Chou later mentioned that she learnt traditional Chinese painting with He Tianjian (賀天健 1890 – 1977) as he was a friend of her father.⁹³ These experiences with her parents were especially influential in cultivating her artistic sense in her early days.⁹⁴ According to Chou's son, Michael Yang, Chou visited her father by riding a bicycle across the streets in Shanghai after her parents' relationship deteriorated and they separated. Chou valued her childhood memories of her father and continued to have a strong relationship with him, despite infrequent contact after she moved to Hong Kong. The close attachment and devotion that existed between Chou and her father fostered her early artistic nourishment.

Apart from Chou's artistic upbringing and cultivation from her parents in her early years, the city of Shanghai allowed her to be exposed to western knowledge and influences. The first Chinese transliteration of the word "modern" appeared only in Shanghai – *modeng* 摩登, meaning "novel and/or fashionable" as stated in the influential Chinese dictionary *cihai* 辭海.⁹⁵ In the 1930s, Chinese and western culture intersected to create Shanghai as an

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 13.

⁹³ Irene Chou, "My Self-vindication," *Artist* 54 (1987): 8.

⁹⁴ Michael Yang, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August 24, 2012.

⁹⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930 – 1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

advanced city; it was also the economic and trade center of China. As a trade port and modern city, it invited all walks of life from around China and the world to *shili yangchang* 十里洋場, literally ten-mile-long foreign zone. It blossomed with the establishments of cinema, coffee houses, bookstores, dancing halls, racecourses, and department stores etc. Shanghai developed a very different ‘modern’ atmosphere from other cities.⁹⁶ Chou studied western knowledge in her secondary school, the British established “The Bureau of Engineering Affairs Girls’ Secondary School” in the British Concession. The principal and teachers were all females who had been abroad to America.⁹⁷ Except for Chinese and History, all subjects were delivered in English. Physical education and drawing were also core subjects. In the drawing class, not only was Chinese painting taught, but also western painting. It was here that Chou first had contact with western art.⁹⁸ In 1941, she was admitted to Shanghai’s Saint John University, a prestigious institution with strong western influences. Chou’s first ambition was to be a doctor, but she eventually graduated with an economics major and a sociology minor in 1945. St. John University was one of the earliest Christian schools in China. Others examples are Lingnan University and Cheeloo University. It was one of the top ranked universities that practiced English teaching and provided broad, liberal education.⁹⁹ The University promoted a western curriculum. It embraced the modern concept of sports and celebrated western festivals such as Easter and Halloween.¹⁰⁰ It only started to admit females in 1936¹⁰¹, thus Chou was one

⁹⁶ Yuezhi Xiong and Wu Zhou, ed., *History of St. John’s University* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2007), 282.

⁹⁷ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 27.

⁹⁸ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 22.

⁹⁹ Edward Yihua Xu, ed., *Shanghai St. John’s University (1879 – 1952)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2009), 83.

¹⁰⁰ Xiong and Zhou, ed., *History of St. John’s University*, 279-80.

of those early female elites of modern China. According to the major-minor system, Chou, as an economic major, was required to study other fields of knowledge such as philosophy, history, politics, sociology and mathematics.¹⁰² Such education provided her with a wide scope of knowledge. The University educated numerous political and cultural elites. The well-known modern writer Liu Yichang (劉以鬯 1918 –), director Evan Yang (Yang Yanqi, Yiwen) (楊彥岐 1920 – 1978) and poet Malang (馬朗 1933 –) were also graduates of the St. John University who moved to Hong Kong in the post-1949 era.

Chou's family and education background seemed to have shaped her unconventional liberal, broad-minded attitude which developed as she grew older. She worked as a reporter briefly for the Peace Daily (1946 – 1947). There she met Evan Yang who she married in 1947. Because of Yang's family connections and cultural friends circle, Chou became acquainted with intellectual figures such as writer Xuyu (徐訏 1908 – 1980) and philosopher Qian Mu (錢穆 1895 – 1990).

Chou worked in different companies unrelated to art both before and after she settled in Hong Kong. For example, she worked as a manager of the social welfare department of the Sino-American Hospital between 1947 and 1948. After that, she worked for a telephone company and later taught in a primary school.¹⁰³ She moved to Hong Kong in 1949 shortly after she gave birth to her eldest son Michael Yang in Taiwan.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 409.

¹⁰² Xu, ed., *Shanghai St. John's University (1879 – 1952)*, 297.

¹⁰³ --, "Biographical Sketch of Chou," in *Danqing chonger*, unpagged.

Chou and Yang began residence in Hong Kong in 1949. In the early 1950s, Chou worked and focused on her family. She worked in a dental clinic between 1951 and 1954. In his notebook, Yang wrote that there was script writing income for Chou in 1951.¹⁰⁴ Chou and her husband shared the same pseudonym and wrote for a column in the *Sing Tao Evening Post* for a short period of time.¹⁰⁵ Because of the political situation, there was an influx of mainland Chinese to Hong Kong in 1949. In the 1950s, most of these Chinese regarded themselves as passers-by, without a sense of belonging to the colonial city. They aimed at making a living and craved for a return to China, rather than eagerly staying in Hong Kong and making long term plans.¹⁰⁶ According to Yang's autobiography, he and Chou named their younger daughter *Jianle* (見樂) as some kind of nostalgia and remembrance of the mainland or desire for going back.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Yang admitted that the soil of Hong Kong had its own uniqueness that attracted these new immigrants. He, as a director in the film industry, found that Hong Kong was a "cultural desert", but the "freeness of air" was the thing he treasured most.¹⁰⁸ Yang's generalized comment echoed with Lui's belief. Lui held that the chief elements of Hong Kong were "freedom" and "openness", especially demonstrated in art development.¹⁰⁹ It was only with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s that these "passers-by" gradually altered their perspective and emotional view

¹⁰⁴ Pui Tak Lee, "Lengzhan shiqi youpai yingren zai Xianggang - yi Yiwen weili (冷戰時期右派影人在香港 - 以易文為例 Right Wing Film Industry Workers During Cold War Period in Hong Kong - Evan Yang as An Example)," in *Evan Yang's Autobiography*, Evan Yang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2009), 21-2.

¹⁰⁵ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 49.

¹⁰⁶ Kit Wai Ma, *TV, Film and Hong Kong Identity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2010), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Evan Yang, *Evan Yang's Autobiography* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2009), 77.

¹⁰⁸ Evan Yang, "Half Year in Hong Kong," *Yu zhou feng yikan* 宇宙風乙刊 44 (1941): 31.

¹⁰⁹ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 18, 23.

towards Hong Kong. They came to realize the fact that they had to settle down in Hong Kong as the tumultuous situation in China had not ceased.¹¹⁰ More significantly, the artists and authors in the cultural circle started to find their own identity in the Hong Kong context. The Ink Painting Movement can be regarded as one of the actions that they tried in response to their circumstances.

Art as imitation

Chou, without a conventional art education background, nor ambition to be an artist at first, started to paint by coincidence. Because of the successful career of Yang in the field of literature, newspapers and movies in the 1950s, the family of Chou and Yang became better off. From Yang's "Annual Earning Summary", it is recorded that his income had increased by over three times between 1951 and 1967, from \$HKD 21,743.5 to 75,200.¹¹¹ They bought a German Opel car in 1958¹¹² and moved in 1959 from Soares Road to a bigger apartment in Boundary Street.¹¹³ In 1959¹¹⁴ Chou, now in her mid-thirties, was introduced to Zhao Shaoang by a girl friend. One day when Chou was driving, her friend noticed her hands on the steering wheel and commented that

¹¹⁰ James Wong, "The Rise and Decline of Cantopop: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music (1949-1997)" (PhD diss., The University of Hong Kong, 2003), 62.

¹¹¹ Lee, "Lengzhan shiqi youpai yingren zai Xianggang - yi Yiwen weili," 22-3.

¹¹² Yang, *Evan Yang's Autobiography*, 82.

¹¹³ Ibid., 84. Michael Yang recalled the apartment in Boundary Street was larger and nicer in an interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, 26 August, 2012.

¹¹⁴ The attempt to re-examine Chou's commencement date of studying painting under Zhou was triggered by Lorena Butcher in an interview on 31 August, 2012. It is often refer to 1950 such as in Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 22. However, there are three reasons that the author argues that the year Chou started to paint was 1959. Firstly, the information was recorded in Yang, *Evan Yang's Autobiography*, 84. Secondly, it was written in --, "Irene Chow Yang [Biographical sketch in English]," in *To-day's Art* (5th issue) (Hong Kong: Lingnan yiyuan, 1966), 20. Thirdly, Michael Yang in an email on November 2, 2012 recalled his mother Chou commenced painting after they moved to the apartment in Boundary Street [1959 or after].

she should learn painting as she had a pair of artistic hands.¹¹⁵ Zhao and Yang Shanshen (楊善深 1913 – 2004) were key figures of the second generation of the Lingnan School in the post 1949 era in Hong Kong. When Chou learnt painting with Zhao, she made serious effort to mimic Zhao's paintings, so much so that she regarded her imitations as comparable to Zhao's original works.¹¹⁶ She also imitated masters of the Song and Yuan dynasty.¹¹⁷ At the age of 79 in 2003, Chou reminisced an anecdote, in a talk given at the Hong Kong Arts Center, of a friend who had mistaken her painting as Zhao's.¹¹⁸ It would seem that Chou was proud of her skill attainment. Chou's early works show the enormous influence of Zhao and the Lingnan style. Many of her works done between 1959 and 1966 illustrate her gifted artistic talents through her excellent mastering of the Lingnan style. With regard to her work in the Lingnan style, some of the dating of the work is misleading. For example, there is work of this type dated back to 1957 or 1958 which is impossible as she had not even started to paint.¹¹⁹ Her son, Michael Yang recalls that his mother did not do any known or significant Lingnan style work after studying with Lui.¹²⁰ Therefore, paintings without dating would have been created no later than 1966 presumably.

Zhao was known for his "lively, colorful and virtuoso effects in the Gao Qifeng manner" which is widely acclaimed by Hong Kong patrons and foreign

¹¹⁵ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 53.

¹¹⁶ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 23.

¹¹⁷ Chou, "My Self-vindication," 8.

¹¹⁸ Irene Chou, *Talk: Irene Chou: The Universe is My Heart*, VCD, (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2003).

¹¹⁹ --, *Universe of the Mind Zhou Luyun (Irene Chou): A Retrospective Exhibition* (Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, 2006), 29, 37. See also --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 30-47. These paintings dated "1950-1959" create the confusion of the dating.

¹²⁰ Michael Yang, e-mail message to author, December 29, 2012.

viewers.¹²¹ With the use of brilliant color and popular subject matter, the paintings of Zhao have an appealing visual effect. As art historian Li Chu-ting describes, the art of Zhao reflects the delight of life in our human world.¹²² He was skillful at capturing the liveliness and the vitality of living things such as flowers and birds by using vivid colors, sharp and angular expressive brushwork. Chou in her years of mimicking Zhao's style seized the skills of Lingnan School and the manner of using expressive brushwork. Chou in *Roses* (fig. 8) adopted the use of vivid pink petals, green pistils and bright yellow stamen with slight orange leaves. Brushstrokes for the branches are bold and explicit. The practice of bold and vibrant use of colors is in accord with the style of Zhao and the Lingnan School. Zhao did demonstrations for his followers. A book entitled *A Study of Chinese Paintings* exemplifies Zhao's steps and methods of depicting different plants, such as willows, bamboos, daffodils, roses, and loquats.¹²³ Similar subjects of roses, loquats, birds, cicadas are often found in Chou and her contemporaries' Lingnan style paintings. When comparing Chou's *Roses* and Zhao's sample of roses (fig. 9), it is recognized that the way of painting the roses was very similar— the green buds; red petals with water over them; tint of solid white in tilted brush to distinguish the layers between petals. Moreover, the orange and brown leaves work as a supporting role; the branches were painted with highly concentrated ink in a wet brush manner, then outlining the leaves and thorns. Chou recalled in 1980s, *Roses* was a painting that was not so much her own creation, but a

¹²¹ Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906 – 1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1988), 183.

¹²² Chu-ting Li, *Trends in Modern Chinese Painting: The C. A. Drenowatz Collection* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1979), 50.

¹²³ Images and descriptions can be found in Shaoang Zhao, *A Study of Chinese Paintings* (Taipei: Yishu tushu gongsi, 1990).

reproduction of the work of Zhao.¹²⁴ Her comment epitomized her belief about art between the late 1950s and early 1960s - art is about imitation. Chou's uses of elements, colors, composition, brush work and skills had clear references to Zhao.

To-day's Art, the catalogs of To-day's Chinese Art Association formed by a group of Zhao's students in Hong Kong, provide a glimpse of the circumstance and practice of the Lingnan School followers. It is discernible that the followers were trained with similar painting subjects, compositions and skills. Likeness and resemblance are found between Chou and other followers of the Lingnan School. For example, Au Hoh Nin's *Landscape* (fig. 10) exhibited in 1960¹²⁵ is very similar to *Landscape* (fig. 11, dated 1962) by Chou. Both compositions display a set of mountains at the lower right corner, a lake and boats in the foreground, and distant mountains as the background. The faint detail of the mountains without much texture was created with the washes effect. The use of washes is a significant feature of the Lingnan School to induce atmospheric effects. Chou rendered and applied the technique skilfully in *Landscape*. The sky is painted in orange washes. In between the mountains, rich gradation of ink washes manifests a thick layer of heavy fog in a flowing manner. The suggestion of mist and fog between the mountains generates a misty and humid mood. Together with the reddish and orange flowers, it creates a lively and beautiful sunset scene of mountains and water. The Lingnan School often fills the background with washes, rather than *liubai* 留白 (the use of leaving blank). Such sophisticated use of washes is

¹²⁴ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 30.

¹²⁵ --, *Jin hua* [Later To-day's Art] *Volume 1* (Hong Kong: Lingnan yiyuan, 1960), unpagged.

demonstrated by Zhao in his *Sunset at Lei-feng Pagoda* (fig. 12, dated 1955) where he employed ink washes to achieve a warm sunset scene in winter for the historical site. The gradations of orange and purple washes evoke a mild and quiet mood while the grey and green washes at the bottom highlight the rich variation of the branches and flowers in the foreground.

The radical examples of a striking resemblance among the Lingnan School pupils proved that imitation was a common approach of apprenticeship training following a master of the time. In the fifth issue of *To-day's Art* in 1965, Miss Theo Grewer exhibited *Monkey* (fig. 13) which is very similar to Zhao's *Monkeys* (fig. 14) in terms of composition and content. The arrangement of the monkey and the branches, the way of depiction of the moon and the technique of using washes are so similar that it can be assumed it is a close imitation of Zhao's work. In the sensible commentary of art historian Croizier, he regarded the flower and bird paintings of the Lingnan style as "standard", a large proportion of them are composed of "one bird, one branch, one rock, one flower".¹²⁶

A comparison of two fox paintings guides not only to the same observation, but also proves Chou's sophisticated use of brush and ink. In the catalog *To-day's Art* of 1967,¹²⁷ there is a painting entitled *Fox* (fig. 15 and 15a) by Miss Grewer which can easily be associated with Chou's *Fox* (fig. 16 and 16a, dated 1961¹²⁸) as the two foxes are noticeably from the same source.

¹²⁶ Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China*, 186.

¹²⁷ --, *To-day's Art Volume 6* (Hong Kong: Lingnan yiyuan, 1967), unpagued.

¹²⁸ *Fox* dated back to 1950 – 1959 in --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 33. According to the inscription by Zhao Shaoang in the painting, it was created in the Xinchou 辛丑[Year] which

Despite the different composition of the two paintings, placing the fox in the upper half in one and another in the lower part, the details of the two foxes, including profile body, gesture, the depiction of the four legs, the turning of the head and the curled tail are exactly the same, hinting that both images were probably copied from the same source, a Zhao painting. Despite being a copy from the teacher's work, Chou displayed considerable expertise with brush and ink. When comparing the foxes' eyes in Grewer's and Chou's work, the latter are apparently rendered by more assertive dotting of the brushwork that gives a more definite and bolder expression of a firmer gaze from the fox. Also, Chou's outlines of whiskers, legs and feet are more precise. If one looks at the front left leg of the foxes, Grewer's was drawn by a very thin and soft line making the gesture of the fox feeble while Chou's was delineated with press and turns of skilled brushwork, conveying a sense of energy and vigor by the strong and angular brushwork. Chou's mastery of brush and ink is demonstrated in the background as well, the deft touches of chrysanthemums and the life-like branches. Her explicit and expressive brushwork creates an impression of the strength of the branches, unlike Grewer's depiction which is relatively weak and fragile. As we can see, in approximately two years, between 1959 and 1961, the mature techniques of brush and ink Chou demonstrated her talent and hard work. In his autobiography Yang remarks Chou had "great improvement" in terms of painting in 1961.¹²⁹

In spite of the revolutionary goals of the first generation of the Lingnan School in the early twentieth century, it was no longer revolutionary or

was 1961.

¹²⁹ Yang, *Evan Yang's Autobiography*, 86.

innovative when it came to the third generation. Croizier criticized several annual exhibitions in the 1960s executed by the To-day's Chinese Art Association. He claimed that, the exhibits were surprisingly uniform and Zhao-like with only a handful of students' work being distinctive in their own way.¹³⁰ Croizier also claimed that very few of Zhao's students had made a breakthrough out of the teacher's style, or of Gao Qifeng's. Chou was not immune. During the days Chou studied with Zhao, she imitated his works and felt proud to attain a similar style of his. Her style of that period was conventional without much innovation and individuality. Nevertheless, the brilliant uses of brush and ink that Chou had acquired in Chinese painting demonstrated her talent, ability and familiarity with Chinese media. These became the foundation of her later artistic development as she advanced the methods and merged them into her art.

The above observations are revealing evidence that the mimetic practice of the Lingnan School was overwhelming in Hong Kong in the post 1949 era – and corresponds with Lui's major attack on the Lingnan School. As part of the process of shifting from an imitative painter to an individualistic artist, Chou had an enlightened moment. She was viewing her many Lingnan style paintings when she realized that no matter how well she painted, the highest level of what she could reach was what her teacher Zhao had achieved.¹³¹ She also realized that the joy of her satisfaction with her accomplishment of the Lingnan style was “short-lived”, “empty” and “ignorant” especially if she

¹³⁰ Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China*, 183.

¹³¹ Caroline Chiu, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 10, 2012.

continued to imitate Zhao's painting.¹³² Chou thought she could go beyond copying and do something different. This lit her passion and she was desperate for change and breakthrough. Chou, in the 1980s recalled,

“During the period in which I devoted myself to imitation, I never thought of discovering the “self” in the works; indeed I was completely ignorant of the fact that art means the expression of the self and one's creativity.”¹³³

Chou managed to listen to her inner call under the relatively freer and more diversified environment of Hong Kong in the 1960s, compared with that in Taiwan and Mainland China. The freer Hong Kong environment allowed the emergence of Lui's widespread concept of Ink Painting to counter the Lingnan School. As Laurence Tam expressed, if he and his contemporaries wanted to absorb new elements and thoughts, they would go to the lectures of Lui. The wave of Lui's novel teaching attracted students from a diversified range in terms of age and educational background. As described by Lui himself, the eldest student in his class was seventy six years old while the youngest was eighteen.¹³⁴ Other former students of the Lingnan School, such as Koo Mei (顧媚 1929 –), and Beatrice Ts'o (章家慧) also shifted to Ink Painting between the 1960s and 1970s. Tam even recalled that Chou, as a disciple of Zhao at the same time, was afraid of telling him that she was going to Lui's lectures.¹³⁵ This hesitation might hint at how artists were bound by the idea of traditional apprenticeship.

The wave of western modernism not only influenced the local visual art arena, but also the field of literature. There were periodicals and cultural pages

¹³² Binks, “The Universe Within: Irene Chou,” 35.

¹³³ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 23.

¹³⁴ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 371.

¹³⁵ Laurence Tam, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 16, 2012.

in the mid 1950s to 1960s introducing and promoting modern or avant-garde western literature. Early in 1956, *Wenyi xinchao* 文藝新潮 was launched; other examples are *Qianshuiwan* 淺水灣 in 1960 and *Hao wang jiao* 好望角 in 1963. Although these periodicals did not exist for long, the coherence and interaction between painters and writers demonstrated a shared goal of the two fields - absorbing the modern influence from the West. For example, Lui and Wucius Wong contributed many articles to some of the periodicals. Lui even designed the cover of *The Drunkard* which was an acclaimed stream-of-consciousness fiction by Liu Yichang who supported Lui's by writing in his novel that Lui should be approached to design the cover of the magazine.¹³⁶

***Gen and shi* of Chou**

Inspired by Lui's teaching, Chou believed sincerity is the soul of every artwork.¹³⁷ She took painting as a representation of herself. Her half-century artistic creativity after the mid-1960s had been a search to articulate her own understanding of life and universe. In regards to the reflection of self, she considered herself small and insignificant. She elucidated:

“... all I have come to understand is that there is something boundless and limitless which we call the universe, and that there is something small, extremely insignificant, which we call ‘I’.”¹³⁸

According to Lui, the *gen* of each individual varies, depending on the different upbringing, experiences, and social backgrounds of the individual. Chou grew

¹³⁶ Yichang Liu, *The Drunkard* (Hong Kong: Haibin tushu gongsi, 1963), 129. Two paintings of Chou based on the poems of the writer Xuyu illustrated her interaction with the literary field. Images can be found in Irene Chou, *Meng* (夢 Dream), *Ming Pao Monthly* 4, no. 4 (1969): 69. and Irene Chou, *Jiu zuo* (久坐 Contemplation), *Ming Pao Monthly* 4, no.6 (1969): 27.

¹³⁷ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 25.

¹³⁸ Irene Chou, “In My Own Words,” in *Collectors' Choice: The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun*, -- (Hong Kong: Casey Company Limited, 1995), 9.

up in Shanghai with liberal parents and received pioneer education with western modern influences. Noticeably, the *gen* of Chou was distinctly western compared with Lui, who came from a traditional Chinese background, even though they shared the same vision of revitalizing Chinese painting. Because of Chou's Shanghai experiences, she readily adapted to the westernized environment of Hong Kong, but equally significant, was her conscious search towards the history and philosophy of China as a Chinese painter. In her own words, Chou stated:

"I ... received [modern] education of the [early] twentieth century; and the blood flowing in my body is the tradition of my country."¹³⁹

As Lui explained there was no definite answer of *shi*,

"Today's ink painting [category] is like a little forest. Each tree in the forest has its own *gen* which cannot be duplicated nor generalized. Changes in the future depend on each tree's own state of *shi* in the larger specific cultural environment."¹⁴⁰

As Lui put it, *shi* refers to the adaptation of each individual artist in a larger specific cultural environment. The state of *shi*, the adaptation, is based on the *gen* acquired. Each artist has his or her own *gen*, and various potential directions to integrate external influences into their art in response to the circumstances to achieve *shi*. Therefore, the *gen* and *shi* of Chou varied and evolved in different stages of her life and artistic path. For example, the *shi* of Chou in facing the context and cultural environment of Hong Kong and Australia differed while it also differed when Chou encountered different incidents in life. As mentioned earlier, the *gen* is not merely an artistic, or cultural or personal concept, but a complex concept of all. The art of Chou in different stages will be discussed in the coming chapters. While Ink Painting as

¹³⁹ Irene Chou, "Wo cong xingqiri kaishi zuo hua (我從星期日開始作畫 I Commenced Painting on "Sunday")," *Lion Art* 23 (1973): 75.

¹⁴⁰ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 19.

a category is theoretically a continuation of [traditional] Chinese painting, there was no example or reference of what Ink Painting was for Chou and her contemporaries. In contrast, it was expected to evolve as the painters, for the sake of rebuilding a vital and lively art scene, embraced their different state of *shi*.

Even though Chou had never studied art overseas, she audited the extramural course of Kam Ka Lun (金嘉倫 1936 –) on western modern art at the Extramural Studies Department of the HKU in the 1960s.¹⁴¹ This shows Chou's intense interest and curiosity as an artist in western art. She was fascinated by the art reference books at the British Council Library in the old Gloucester Hotel and the American Consulate in Duddell Street.¹⁴² Both places were popular among contemporaries of Chou, such as Wuicun Wong and Hon Chi-fun. It is not surprising that Chou learnt about the modern western art movement. In her remnants (interviews, writings and paintings), Chou mentioned Henri Rousseau, Henry Moore, Salvador Dali, Edvard Munch, Wassily Kandinsky etc. All these names belong to western modernism that rejected naturalism, but were in favor of exploring subconscious, total abstraction and psychological intensity. Chou was impressed when she first saw the slides of works by Munch (1863 – 1944),¹⁴³ the Norwegian artist whose visual elements are so vividly blended that they utterly and explicably express his innermost feelings. The fear in the Munch classic, *The Scream* (fig. 17) confronts its audience by the swirling lines, disturbing and intense colors, distorted perspectives, and the skeleton-like face. Chou was also introduced to

¹⁴¹ Binks, "The Universe Within: Irene Chou," 36.

¹⁴² Ibid., 35.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 38.

American Abstract Expressionism, a strong wave of influence on Hong Kong artists in the 1960s, which widened her perspectives on painting tools and ideas of representation. When the Abstract Expressionism spread to Hong Kong, the influence was superficial because the post Second World War American ideology which informed the Abstract Expressionism was not adopted by the Hong Kong artists. Hong Kong artists largely relied on western catalogs, magazines, and albums to appreciate what they rarely had an opportunity to encounter; - genuine art pieces from the West. Yet, even from the reproductions, the visual impact of giving up representation and creating texture and volume on the canvas was strong and eye-opening for a Chinese artist.

Nevertheless, there was no conflict between learning from western modernism and Chinese tradition. Chou's teacher Lui did not totally ban the idea of copying practice from ancient masters but emphasized on knowing the reason and the essence of copying. Chou appreciated the abstract qualities of Chinese painting such as *liubai* and the quiet and serene mood. Chou claimed that she felt solid and substantial in the process of imitating works of the old masters.¹⁴⁴ For example, she said she learnt something substantial in copying her mother's calligraphy of ancient stone drums.¹⁴⁵ As artists in the context of the time and circumstances, it was actually common for Chou and her contemporaries to eagerly look into Chinese tradition. This search was obviously not only shared among Ink painters, but also by overseas Chinese painters and local sculptors at the time. Zao Wou-ki (趙無極 1920 – 2013), Cheung Yee (張義 1936 –), Kwong Yeu-ting (鄭耀鼎 1922 –) and Van Lau

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

(文樓 1933 –), and others, were also very interested in oracle bones, bronzes and other ancient artifacts in the 1960s.

Lui believed that only when an artist knows merits from both the tradition and the foreign can he/she select his/her choices in setting free from the tradition or merging the both through kinds of adaptation. Chou never tried to copy directly from the West; rather she digested the western thoughts and concepts, and linked them with Chinese tradition. Chou's experience with Chinese and western art influence is likely to have caused her to reflect on the pursuit of spiritual resonance and abstract expression beyond recognizable forms which had long been a tradition in Chinese painting.¹⁴⁶ This principle is consistent with the essence of Abstract Expressionism in spite of the latter's adoption of a pure non-figurative abstraction. The second reflection is likely to have been on the emphasis of individuality in western tradition which refers to one's own uniqueness. The idea of seeking the self and of being distinct has been a norm found in western art history while following and future developing the merits of ancient masters has long been a practice found in Chinese art history. By understanding both the tradition and the West, Chou exclaimed that she was not aware of her references when she created,

“The East, I feel, comes from inside; the West is all on the surface. When I sit at my working table I concentrate on my art and that is all [and there is] no Eastern and Western. Everything becomes one.”¹⁴⁷

Early experimentation and exploration

Chou had studied with Zhao for around seven years until she enrolled in

¹⁴⁶ Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith, *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Department of Asian Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 103.

¹⁴⁷ Binks, “The Universe Within: Irene Chou,” 36.

the course delivered by Lui in 1966. The teaching of Lui stimulated Chou to experiment and explore in terms of visual language, media and ideas. In 1968 after studying with Lui for two years, Chou held her first solo exhibition. The exhibition featured some fifty or sixty paintings.¹⁴⁸ Although Chou was a former Lingnan School student, her traditional paintings captured in the catalog and newspapers were not typical Lingnan School style, but some of the subjects and painting technique suggest either the Lingnan School or the literati tradition. It was evident from the exhibits in the 1968 solo exhibition that Chou had taken a significant step from her representational style of the Lingnan School towards an increasingly pure/semi-abstract form of art. The solo exhibition work provides a transitional image of Chou between the style of the Lingnan School and her own.

The following four works appeared in the exhibition. *Chickens* (fig. 18) a work of ink play, portrays the loveliness of chicks in different shades and tones of ink, without specific details and brilliant colors. *Garden* (fig. 19) is a work depicting broad leaves and loquats in snow. It is done in an expressive *xieyi* 寫意 way, rather than representational style; the snow is expressed in a splashy manner falling and hitting on the leaves. *Unite* (fig. 20) conveys a tranquil life dwelling in the nature – there are two rooftops on the left blended with the surrounding of trees. Ancient literati pursued the value of unification of man and nature. Temples and wooden huts are often found in *shanshui* 山水 painting. *Unite* demonstrates this inclusion. Chou also described *A Kite*¹⁴⁹ (fig.

¹⁴⁸ It was reported that “some 50” paintings were displayed in --, “Art Display by Director’s Wife,” *China Mail*, September 21, 1968, 9. But it was said to be “some 60” paintings in --, “Artist is in Search of An Identity,” *Hong Kong Standard*, September 29, 1968, 5.

¹⁴⁹ *A Kite* was also exhibited in Chou’s first solo exhibition in 1968. An image of *A Kite* with a caption “A Kite, painted by Irene Chou (exhibit on 8/F City Hall starting from [September]

21) as her first attempt of *xiehua* 寫畫 (literally, to “write” a painting), the expression clearly showed her interest in Chinese calligraphy and painting. The red string of the kite was “written” in a fluid sense across the paper diagonally.

Chou said,

“I began to feel that the brush and ink were effective tools in expressing my emotions. But it was no simple matter arriving at a good mastery of them; it required life-long training and practice. This work is my first “expressive” painting.”¹⁵⁰

Chou undoubtedly had a large number of Lingnan style paintings brilliantly displaying expertise of brush and ink and techniques, but those works were not found in the exhibition. For artists, paintings chosen to display in their first solo could be regarded as a statement. In the case of Chou, she seemed to be making a statement of getting rid of the Lingnan representational style and imitative practice. In fact, many of the works suggest her exploring and experimenting forms and media in searching a new way of painting.

Artworks such as *The Lines* (fig. 22), *The Chain* (fig. 23) and *Storm* (fig. 24) also appeared in the exhibition. These paintings can be appreciated as a kind of exploration of the visual elements - overlapping lines, colors and patterns to create layers and induce movement. *The Lines* as its title suggests the possible visual effects of lines resulting from different width of intersection and overlapping, pointing to different directions, building layers to form a rhythmic and dynamic space. It also experiments with colors, the ink background is merged with different tones of red, green and yellow, the gradual

21)” can be found in *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, September 20, 1968, 3-3. More images of the exhibited paintings can be found in Mianman, “Modern Art Painter: Miss Chou Hsien-yun,” *The Young Companion* 170 (1968): 19-20.

¹⁵⁰ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 40. The translation of *xiehua* in the catalog is ““expressive” painting”, the author translated it in a literal sense - to “write” a painting.

and subtle changes of color tones create a rich sense of space. *The Chain* displays an image of a dominant circle formed by repeated patterns of joined squares. They form a circle that encompasses splashes of red, yellow and green against the ink background. Some square patterns move inwards or outwards extending in various directions, creating a sense of movement with the color contrast of dark and green from the two sides. As for *Storm* (fig. 25), the whole image reminds one of the works of Kandinsky and Miro. It is filled with ancient Chinese pictorial characters of 雨,云,日,月 (literally wind, cloud, sun, moon) against a background composed of a subtle mix and match of colors. The lively and overlapping way of presenting the scattered characters creates layers, thus a sense of depth with a moving force. As we shall observe, these trials were an initial stage in Chou's investigating the effects and functions of visual language on a flat surface, and marked a significant footstep in the evolution of the art of Chou.

In 1968, *Trees* (fig. 26) and *Flowers* (fig. 27) were exhibited in the first In Tao Association exhibition. The In Tao Association was the first art group established by Lui's students in 1968. They not only organized exhibitions, but also art talks for public and the Sunday gatherings of painters. Both works of Chou also exemplified the impact of Lui's teaching on Chou's experimentation of the language of dots, lines and planes. In *Flowers*, Chou basically used various line patterns as a tool to fill in the surfaces of the leaves and lotus. She was conscious of flattening the lotus and used different intensity of line patterns to indicate the spatial relationship between the leaves and lotus. The subject stands out by the uses of different arrangements of line and tones of ink. Similarly in *Trees*, the dark leaves behind the fruit contrast the loquats in the

front. The loquats are depicted by the negative space. In these paintings, Chou was not demonstrating the use of brush and ink or depicting the essence of trees or flowers, but exploring the usage of lines and its relationship to forms, planes and space on a two dimensional surface.

The kind of experimentation on visual languages can also be found in other artists in the same exhibition who were also extramural class students of Lui. *Composition* (fig. 28) painted by Lee Wei On (李維安 1937 –) is dominated by bold and broad calligraphic strokes, executed in washes and splashes of wet ink. Ho Chung Wah (何重華 1949 –) exhibited *Composition (1)* (fig. 29) and *Composition (2)* (fig. 30), where she worked on different contrasting effects of the uses of lines and ink, broad and thin, light and dark, round and vertical. The overall impression of works in the first exhibition of In Tao Association was immature and raw. The art critic Lau Kin Wai, commented that most works were experimental exercises rather than well-constructed works.¹⁵¹

Early in 1957, *Guohua de yanjiu* (國畫的研究 Research on Chinese Painting) was written by Lui and published. In this book, he advocated the use of perspective of dots, lines and planes to analyze traditional Chinese painting. He clearly integrated the studies of visual elements in his extramural courses and provided an unconventional method of teaching ink painting by discarding imitation and provoking students to experiment visual language, such as “lines and dots practice”. This attempt is shown in a group of anonymous drawings

¹⁵¹ Lau, “Xianggang shuimohua yundong yanjiu”, 3-4.

considered as “practices of classmates in 1967” published in *Discourses on Ink Painting* (e.g. fig. 31, 32, and 33) in 1972. The ink paintings found were noticeably experimental works. Fig. 31 (157b) is an attempt to create composition and direction of movement by using a series of short lines. By using a pattern repetitively with various ink tones fig. 32 (160a) conveys a sense of rhythm and movement towards upper right. Fig. 33 (167d) is a play of ink in a splashy way, with layers by different ink tones, creating a sense of drama by dripping and expressive strokes. It was Lui’s focus in his extramural class that students should explore all kinds of possibilities of the media and visual language in their creation rather than merely copying a traditional painting and studying the *cun* 皴 methods (texture-strokes).

Chou’s determination to be an artist is seen in her endeavor to improve her sketching skills while she was at the same time experimenting with her media and visual language. The inspiration from nature stimulated Chou. She said the moon, the sun and the grass often dazzled her as if it was the first time she really knew about nature.¹⁵² The artist’s sensitivity towards subtle changes of surroundings affected the way she perceived things and matters. When she crossed the harbor from Kowloon to the Hong Kong Island, she was impressed that the sea never appeared the same – different color tones of the sea surface, fluctuations of waves and ripples, the smell of salt and the freshness of the water.¹⁵³ Among all the subjects in nature, trees seemed to be her favorite subject. She devoted a considerable amount of her time to sketch trees, trunks, and branches in the countryside and later developed them into some distinctive

¹⁵² Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 24.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

motifs integrated in her art. Chou recollected that she often accompanied her film director husband to work in the morning during the 1960s. They would travel to some quiet and secluded rural area. Then Chou would do sketching there for the entire day until Yang picked her up in the evening after he finished his work. She drew lots of trees, so much so that she claimed she had drawn “approximately ten thousand” sketches of trees.¹⁵⁴ She said she concentrated on sketching the trees, especially some close ups or trees as a whole within the close distance of the scenery around her.¹⁵⁵ Whether it was the cause or the effect, Chou established an intimate relationship with trees. She even expressed the tree as “a friend of mine”.¹⁵⁶ According to her ex-student Caroline Chiu, Chou in her teaching emphasized the importance of sketching and she regarded it the foundation that allowed an artist to be free to develop his/her art.¹⁵⁷ Chou realized this because of her earlier outing experiences with her husband where she sketched for many mornings and afternoons. Chou’s paintings scattered among different collectors, images from catalogs and old photographs are evidence that she had a great understanding of trees. Many of the delicate roots-like patterns found in her works relate to those complicated intertwining roots and branches in real life, hinting that these patterns developed from her meticulous and detailed sketches of trees.

The Tree (fig. 34, dated 1960s) is possibly one of her earlier works that she developed from her sketches of trees. It shows the complex structure of a

¹⁵⁴ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 50. An interesting remark here is the films of Yang are usually in an urban or indoor setting. For example: *Springtime Affairs*. This is consistent with his short stories as well. See Suk Han Wong, *Hong Kong Cinema and Literature: Writer, Film and Adaptation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), 69-95.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Caroline Chiu, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 10, 2012.

group of tree trunks and branches with some marks on the bark. Even though the upper part of the painting is dominated by accumulated ink covering the details, Chou carefully rendered the branches by layers. It resembles a genuine structure of trees creating a mysterious mood through the effect of ample uses of different tones of ink. There is a light green halo on the left of middle section infusing its vicinity from within and altering the branches and background color into greenish tones. The strenuous effort in sketching from real life allowed Chou to paint very delicate and fine roots-like patterns. It is noticeable in a work with an unknown title (fig. 35, undated)¹⁵⁸ in which Chou demonstrated her mature techniques of layering the roots-like patterns. The image displays two rather even upper and lower parts divided by curves. The upper part is covered largely by dark ink except for a circle in the central upper portion. Inside the circle is a leaf. It is noted that a drop of green from the leaf is at the edge of the circle and drifting towards the darkness. The lower part approaching the edges of the painting is increasingly condensed with extremely complicated and thorough roots-like patterns. By putting the intertwining roots-like pattern in different planes, they intersect and overlap to create a depth with a receding space suggesting a very complex tie. They are spun into an irregular web, with a string of light green leaves echoing the dominant green leaf above. The diminishing details from the left and the light effect on the right create a rich sense of visual space and successfully form a well composed landscape with an infinite sense of depth. There is a definite roots-like form that zigzags up from lower right corner to the upper part of the image, pointing to the area of dark ink in a ray of illuminated light. In term of skills, the

¹⁵⁸ The image was found in a box of pictures of Chou and her paintings given by Alicia Pun to the author.

detailed rendering requires close attention and skill to achieve; the mostly delicate and close-knitted roots-like patterns are scrupulously and carefully presented. Some of the roots-like patterns extend upwards; some are curvilinear and swirling; some are fading out or merging with the surrounding washes. The contrast and the linkage in the painting not only unites the two, but also provokes rich imagination.

In the works of the above, Chou mainly gave up other parts of the trees and kept the roots as a form to create layers of complexity and depth. In fact, she had drawn trees and tree roots to such an extent that she was absolutely familiar and intimate with them. Later the roots-like patterns evolved as her significant motif which was defined by the respectable art historian, Sullivan when he said Chou “had them [roots-patterns] in her heart”.¹⁵⁹

To appreciate the paintings of Chou at a deeper level, it is crucial to gain perspectives of her work from people who were around her in order to understand some of the hidden meanings of her forms. Yang, Chou’s husband, was definitely one of these key people to know. In the 1960s, Yang reached the peak of his director life. There were many rumors about him and film circle girlfriends. Those reports in the media annoyed Chou immensely.¹⁶⁰ Chou even attempted to commit suicide because of the pain she suffered from her husband’s disloyalty.¹⁶¹ Chou felt angry and disappointed even though Yang eventually returned to her after his career crisis in the 1970s. She admitted that there was “a sense of profound love and hatred tied with the same person

¹⁵⁹ Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-century China*, 197.

¹⁶⁰ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 69.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

[Yang]” deep inside her.¹⁶² It seemed to be an honest and complex sensation. Chou had an unforgettable and deep relationship with Yang. Chou was in her late seventies (23 years after Yang died) when she reminisced for a biography that her memories of Yang were still so vivid. The knotted web and profound complex roots-like patterns could be the visualization of her once unspeakable pain of her complex relationship with her husband.

Chou worked with other media such as acrylic, oil, glue and watercolor, created collages, prints and even illustration. With her first hand experience with different western media and creation methods, Chou had a clear appreciation and greater awareness of the possibilities and characteristics of Chinese media. She concluded that ink, paper and Chinese brush were the best media for her.¹⁶³ Thus, Chou’s choice of using Chinese media for her art was a decision made after a comprehensive and thorough search of various media.

Some of Chou’s works reflect her interest and curiosity in Chinese calligraphy and philosophy. This was apparent even in her early creations. *Longevity* (fig. 36) is a medley of motifs and Chinese characters. Pictorial print of fish, tortoise, and symbol of *taichi* 太極 are merged with ancient characters of 周, (surname of Chou) and 囍 (double happiness). Although the symbols appear to be loosely structured, the work hints an emphasis on the abstract thought of these symbols. Another example is a collage with calligraphic image titled *The Letter* (fig. 37). Chou composed the piece with the seal script written

¹⁶² Ibid., 105.

¹⁶³ Irene Chou, “Irene in Her Own Words,” in *Universe of the Mind: Zhou Luyun (Irene Chou) a Retrospective Exhibition*, -- (Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, 2006), 17.

by her close friend Tong Ding Yu (湯定宇 1912 – 1999).¹⁶⁴ *Luohan* (fig. 38) shows her early interest in Buddhism. The profile and frontal images of the luohan are situated in the brownish background with some scattered characters. Part of them indicated names of luohan in Chinese, such as 第七迦理迦尊者 (Karika). The succinct roots-like patterns intersect with other elements, thus creating different layers from the front to the back. More interestingly, Chou elongated the brown eyebrows of the luohan's frontal view and extended them outwards so that one side even coils up along the roots-like pattern. The two Chinese characters 眉毛 (eyebrows) is even found around the luohan. The subject of the painting indicated Chou's interest in philosophy, but the composition and arrangement also shows her playfulness towards the subject which she thought was "amusing".¹⁶⁵

From the teaching of Lui and her experimentation of media and visual languages, Chou began to rethink the fundamental meaning of painting and art. Lui helped her to establish her philosophy of painting. Chou explicitly stated that Lui, as her teacher, had profound influences in shaping her attitude and views towards art.¹⁶⁶ Lui emphasized that imitation of others is not what an artist should do. He encouraged Chou to explore the self and temperament from within to develop a style of her own.¹⁶⁷ Lui believed that Ink Painting was to express oneself through the medium of ink.¹⁶⁸ The advocacy deeply influenced and stimulated Chou which is reflected when she thought deeply about painting and believed it as a self-expression,

¹⁶⁴ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 122.

¹⁶⁵ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 42.

¹⁶⁶ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 22.

¹⁶⁷ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 71.

¹⁶⁸ Lui, *Shuimohua jiang*, 9.

“I begin to realize ‘painting’ is a self expression that pinpoints the time and space that I am situated, and most significantly my own thoughts.”¹⁶⁹

It is clear that in many ways Lui’s and Chou’s attitudes corresponded. Lui attempted to “create the path of what have not been achieved in Chinese painting in the past thousands years”; Chou regarded this as a motto that profoundly inspired her.¹⁷⁰ This was also the shared goal of many early twentieth century artists. Tam as a close painter friend of Chou in a memorial letter wrote that Chou was a faithful participant of Sunday gatherings among the In Tao Association painters. He even pointed out she was the one who “worked the hardest” as she painted in the Wah Yan Art Room from morning to five or six in the evening with only a lunch break.¹⁷¹

Art as narrative

At the beginning of understanding self expression, Chou started by creating narrative paintings to reflect the incidents happening in her life. Narrative here does not necessarily refer to realistic representation but traces or symbols that can be related to particular struggles or incidents happened to Chou’s life. Chou had three children, son Michael Yang and two daughters Julia and Catherine Yang who were all in their teenage years in the late 1960s. Looking back at Chou’s paintings of this era, they echoed her life, such as the struggle of being a responsible mother and a painter. Three paintings in particular reveal the inner struggle of Chou’s multi-role as a mother of three children, a wife of a successful film director and a passionate painter who had just started her career.

¹⁶⁹ Chou, “Wo cong xingqiri kaishi zuo hua,” 74.

¹⁷⁰ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 71.

¹⁷¹ Laurence Tam, memorial article through email, July 10, 2011.

The Hand (fig. 39) is a collage concerning her children. It was a means Chou used to pacify her children in a quarrel – her son and elder daughter often verbally fought with each other for fun, and they would come to their mother for settlement. However, Chou remembered the results were not always considered satisfactory by the children,

“My son would say that I was on his sister’s side and my daughter would say that I only believed her brother.”¹⁷²

To avoid a message of favoritism, she created this image what appears to be two red gloves placed palm-down with inscriptions arranged in a patterned square-like space. The inscription reads “both palm and dorsum of my hand are my flesh” which is a Chinese adage Chou applied to express the difficulty of making a decision in favor of either of the children as both of them were her love. The gloves were painted in red, a color symbolizing love and passion, but also anger and conflict which may indicate her complicated emotions.

The second work entitled *The Family* (fig. 40) was dedicated to Yang, Chou’s husband, to illustrate his financial and other burdens. The image evokes a sense of heaviness by displaying an endlessly overlapping hill-like pattern receding into the background, symbolizing the enormous load of Yang. Chou recalled the family situation at the time she painted the work and said:

“When the children gradually grew up, the expenditure on their education was formidable and my husband was the only one to bear it. It is not easy being a parent, especially nowadays.”¹⁷³

Even though there is a transparent sphere on top of the rocky shapes on the right with different rings of colors, mainly grey, slight red and orange circling

¹⁷² --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 38.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 54.

an illuminated center, the dark tones of ink is still dominant. The orange roots-like patterns grow from the bottom, crawling upwards in front of the hilly structure. The expanding hills and roots-structure convey an impression of growing, with a sense of weight and complexity implying the heavy burden on Yang.

Another work *The Fire*, (fig. 41) tells an analogy of painting – to paint was like a mountain fire. In Chou’s catalog, she explicitly explained the conceptual thoughts behind,

“I became slightly more mature in the sixties [1960s] and my love for painting reached a climax... As some of my children were then in the primary school, and some in the lower secondary forms, I had to play the mother’s role well by teaching them and offering them protection. I warned myself: painting was like a maintain [mountain] fire, never let it devour you.”¹⁷⁴

The dominant mountain-shape at the bottom appeared to be painted in a combination of wash and dot technique in orange tones which contrast with the intense dark ink dots-like mountain. Interlacing curve forms growing from the base look like burning, passionate, orange tongue of fire leaping which receding into the background. The flame symbolizing Chou’s uncontrolled increasing passion for painting. The vivid fiery curves consolidate with intensity of colors below a sun-like sphere shape at the corner which contrasts with the black smoke-like cloud form in the opposite corner. The issue of being a housewife and painter was often addressed by Chou herself and also by reporters between 1960s and 1970s. She claimed herself a “full-time housewife” and taking care of her kids and husband was her priority.¹⁷⁵ In a

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

¹⁷⁵ Qingyi Chen, “Zhou Luyun shuo tade zhengye shi zhufu (周綠雲說她的正業是主婦 Irene

news interview in 1974, Chou expressed that her paintings are “my struggles ... my love, my hatred, my marriage, my children.”¹⁷⁶

The abstract expression found in the works of the above can be related to particular matters or inner struggles Chou was confronting at that time. They were the narration of her life. As mentioned previously, Lui's teaching triggered Chou to not only experiment with different types of media and visual elements, but also to explore the meaning of painting as an inner expression. These paintings were Chou's attempts to explore the inner self through abstract expression. They may also be considered as narratives of her daily life, related to particular personal matters or struggles. By 1973, all three of her children were abroad, allowing her more time to develop her art. Her maturity in art had yet to evolve. When this maturity was attained, it surpassed a narration of personal life and incidents. Her later works are concerned more with a state of mind that is an abstract expression not grounded by any particular incidents, but rather a kind of contemplative emotion towards life.

A search for her personal visual language

From narration of inner self towards an abstract expression, Chou began to search for her own visual languages. Chou had an immense interest in the stone drum inscription style of calligraphy. She found the lines of the script “have an air of gracefulness, serenity, continuity of the rigor of life, and above all, unsurpassed sincerity.”¹⁷⁷ Chinese painting emphasizes the uses of lines.

Chou Sees Herself as a Full-time Housewife),” *The Star*, April 21, 1973, 7. See also Fernando Pereira, “Motherly Love is First on Her List,” *Hong Kong Standard*, September 16, 1968, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Carol Clewlow, “Painting the Picture on Women's Liberations,” *China Mail*, February 16, 1974, 9.

¹⁷⁷ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 25.

There is even a style called *baimiao* 白描 which relies on pure use of lines. Chou praised the *chuncaitiao* 尊菜條 by Wu Daozi (吳道子 active ca. 710 – 760) who was a well-known Tang painter for the openness and boldness of his lines that give “full expression to the forcefulness” of the painter.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Chou was aware of it not being hers and reflected:

“However, the lines of Wu Daozi were [were] not mine; I had to search for my own.”¹⁷⁹

According to Chou, *The First Line Work* (fig. 42, dated 1970s) was her earliest line work. The image is purely an arrangement of lines. There is a negative space of a circle created by ink washes in the centre. On top of it lies horizontal lines curving in a motion-like pattern. The gradual increase of the gradation of ink tones from above downwards comprises a rich range of ink tones. And as the curvature of the lines change, they induce a sense of motion. Chou reminisced that she painted it without much serious thought and planning,

“I drew the first curved line (now appearing on the top of the painting) with thin [light] ink on a paper, and then followed unconsciously this line to develop the whole picture by adding more ink until the lines looked concentrated and dark and filled the entire sheet of paper.”¹⁸⁰

After this ‘unintentional’ attempt, Chou created other linear works of similar line experiments such as *Composition III* and *IV* (fig. 43 and 44, dated 1970s). In *Composition III*, lines are arranged in a rope-like structure intertwining and coiling up with each other forming a sphere-like pattern, demonstrating various spacial possibilities. Nine egg-shape or sphere patterns are even integrated in *Composition IV* along with the use of lines, suggesting more of an abstract feeling.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 62.

Enigma Variations I, II, III, and IV (fig. 45, 46, 47 and 48, dated 1973) are a series of line works that demonstrate Chou's schematic search of lines. The series depicts the process of a sphere floating from the blank space in work I and then goes into the inner space between lines in the last work IV. With some ink washes and muted color as the background, Chou drew and combined various sets of lines in a condensed and formatted way. The curve lines run rhythmically, inducing a rich sense of rhythm, tension, extension and dynamism. Despite the variations, all four images contain a "V" or "invented-V" structure in the centre. As the sphere is enclosed by lines around it, this induces a sense of privacy and secrecy. The lines structure of each painting differently interacts with the sphere. The slender path in the inner space is flexible in *Enigma Variations III* (fig. 47) as the orange sphere at the lower center of the painting expands the space. In *Enigma Variations IV* (fig. 48), the compelling forces of curve lines pull the concentration to the focus of the pinkish sphere in the "private inner space" at the centre. The rhythms and vibrations of the lines in general create dynamic structures of which Chou said "gave expression to the fluctuation of my feelings towards life, love and the mystery of the universe"¹⁸¹.

In 1973 Chou contributed work to the exhibition of Contemporary Prints by Chinese Artists¹⁸² as she once practiced and taught lithography in the 1970s. In an interview that year related to her line works, Chou explained the Chinese title of two of *Zhong I and II* (鍾 I and 鍾 II). She explicitly said *Zhong* meant total concentration,

¹⁸¹ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 25.

¹⁸² Chou did not produce many prints, an example *Concentration No. 5* can be found in --, *Contemporary Prints by Chinese Artists* (Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1973), 9.

“The character of *zhong* 鍾 is not the character of a clock, *zhong* 鐘, but the *zhong* of *yijian zhongqing* (一見鍾情, love at first sight) which means concentration and focus.”¹⁸³

Therefore, Chou’s style of rhythmic lines has a particular abstract meaning to her that reflects a mood that she expressed towards life. This schematic search of her own lines is impressive and structured compared with the lines exploration exhibited in her first solo in 1968. The painting process as illustrated demands full concentration and focal attention to the image depicted. With such dedicated concentration, one can imagine Chou had to be absorbed in her painting process. In regard to the interpretation of her series of works created in this period, Chou described that “encompassing in the lines both my inner world [world] and the outer objective world.”¹⁸⁴

While Chou began her journey of artistic expression in the Lingnan School, her search for her inner expression began with Lui’s teachings that became one of her most important goals of her artistic life. Conflict caused by her intense marriage subtly motivated her to create. It was also because the tension created by the demand of a still largely traditional motherhood role that she only had more free time to develop her art in the 1970s. At this time, Chou experimented with different visual language and media in an attempt to develop her own. She was still exploring how to express her inner self. Her “self-expressions” of this period are considered as narratives in response to her personal incidents.

¹⁸³ Chen, “Zhou Luyun shuo tade zhengye shi zhufu,” 7.

¹⁸⁴ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 25.

Chapter III

Inner Expression and Innovation of Chou

It was not until the mid-1970s that Chou's strong desire to express her inner self was triggered by the death of Lui and her husband Yang. Chou shifted her previous exploration of lines into ink due to these traumatic losses. It is also because of the death of Yang that she was no longer bound by the role of housewife and wife. This state of freedom enabled her to be fully devoted to the development of her art.

Along Chou's artistic evolution, she constantly explored her own visual language to express her abstract inner self. Lui noted that the inner expression of an individual is according to one's temperament, *gen* and the state of *shi*. The works of Chou are so distinctive that they dramatically stand apart from her contemporary Ink painters. She invented some personal signatures, such as the roots-like pattern, her style of lines, spheres, "impact structural stroke", blob-splash, and *queyue cun* [a vortex-like pattern]. This chapter elucidates Chou's innovative achievements in terms of content and techniques, which subtly echo the advocacy of Lui's Ink Painting.

Art as inner expression

It is difficult to 'prove' what is meant by inner self expression. Although Lui stressed much on inner expression, he did not define it but suggested the way to achieve it – *gen* and the state of *shi*. Throughout Lui's writings, he proposed that the effect of attaining inner self expression is through a process of searching *gen*, including responding to other influences at a given time. It is

also crucial to know that expressing one's utmost self is a very abstract state of mind which is not easy to achieve. Chou expressed that she [in 1960s] "was confused of how to express herself" until she had inspiration from the stone drum inscription style.¹⁸⁵ According to Lui, the attitude of being sincere and true to himself/herself is important as an artist. The ultimate pursuit of being individual and innovative is not from aiming for a set target, but rather achieved through a serious search of exploring materials, techniques, concepts and oneself. Lui's advocacy focused on concepts and ideas, rather than any visual style. In the construction of his ink painting course, Lui divided the course content into two parts – knowledge of technical skills and concepts of painting. He clearly stated that the first part was the foundation of the second. The style of expression relies on one's conceptual thoughts; the decision regarding the use of materials and techniques are based on the needs of the style of expression.¹⁸⁶

"Dark" paintings

The deaths of Lui and Yang in 1975 and 1978 respectively, appeared to have significant impacts on Chou's creative being. For Chou, the 1970s was a decade of grief. Dark tones of ink became the compelling language for her to express her state of mind. The profuse and intensive use of ink was so distinctive in Chou's works in the 1970s that she coined the term "dark" painting (piled ink paintings of this period).

The whole art scene was shocked by the premature death of Lui, at the age

¹⁸⁵ Chou, "My Self-vindication," 8.

¹⁸⁶ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 38-9.

of 56. As a disciple and close friend of Lui, Chou was particularly depressed by the news. She recorded her grief in *Remembering Mr. Lui* (fig. 49, dated 1970s), a work dedicated by her to Lui, her mentor and close companion. The work visualizes the emotional state of Chou after Lui's death. The use of formal language in this work evokes a deep sense of sincerity and solemnity. Concentrated ink with gradual gradation occupies four fifths of the painting. The work is heavy and rich. This is attained by the careful rendering of layers of thin ink on both sides of the Chinese paper repeatedly.¹⁸⁷ The richness of layering of ink accumulation induces a substantial and affluent but not static effect. The heavy use of ink encircles an embryo-like sphere at the centre of the painting. It consists of a placental structure in form of some root-like patterns on the top, a fluid-like structure in the middle, and a self-illuminated sphere with complicated branch-like patterns being enveloped in the innermost centre. The glowing effect of the centre, the fluidity of the middle layer, and the life-inducing placental structure creates a rich sense of imagination, movement and growth. These roots-like structure situated in the vast darkness suggest, as described by Chou herself, "pressure too great to be borne" for the painter and her contemporaries.¹⁸⁸ There is a brighter zone occupying the upper one-fifth. The ink washes above the sphere are increasingly lighter. The fading washes end in an exuberant tail-like extension that dashes from the right to the left, then coils backwards penetrates into the brighter zone. The tail of the extension branches out in orderly and uncluttered roots-like patterns reaching towards the right where there is a tiny red round seal of the artist sitting on one of the thin branches near the edge. The spherical shape of the seal echoes with the

¹⁸⁷ Chou, "The Time in Which I was Born," 26.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

embryo-like sphere despite the contrast of their sizes. Given the close friendship between Chou and Lui, the dedicative title and the seal of Chou, the two spheres might serve as a metaphor of the spiritual connection between the two artists who were then separated by two different worlds.

The large scale coverage of rich and piled ink also appears in the series of *My Inner World*. As the title suggests, the series was possibly a reflection of Chou's inner self. Despite the abundant use of piled ink in *My Inner World I* (fig. 50, dated 1970s) and *My Inner World II* (fig. 51 and 51a, dated 1976), the dominance of the 'black' does not evoke a feeling of stagnancy. Instead, the two paintings manifest a great sense of mobility, radiance and fluidity. In terms of the layout of the ink, *My Inner World I* is the reverse of *My Inner World II*. In the former, the ink covers the top five sixths of the painting. It is easy to miss the subtle thin grey line in the middle of painting which is almost disguised or swallowed by the ink. The rest of the one sixth area at the bottom is a bright zone depicting a whitish ground filled with intersecting roots-like patterns. In the middle of the ground extends a self-illuminated sphere covered with sprawling roots-like patterns as if it is growing out of the ground from the right to left. Its flow of patterns suggests a rolling and spinning motion, extending into the receding space of the dark zone. Other than the white glowing sphere, there is a similar glowing blue sphere in a smaller size. It lies on the whitish ground by itself. The glowing white in the spheres' centre suggests a kind of 'self-illumination' from within, a possible symbol of a self-motivated internal power. In *My Inner World II*, a circle is located in the upper right corner illuminated by an extreme light source that is so harsh that it

illuminates the cluster of roots-like patterns extending from its nearby to the left. The density and complexity of the intervening cluster is suffocating. Colors of black, blue, orange, and red are subtly blended creating a wide range of color tones among the cluster. There is a pouring structure of red fluid from the bottom of the knotty roots-like cluster. It gets thinner and thinner and eventually becomes a barely visible reddish thin line. There is a layer of textural effect surrounding the reddish line as if the layer is a protection of it. The thin line connects to the flow of some lively, tiny, yellowish dots which surrounds a small blank heap at the very end of the image (fig. 51b). The empty space lightens up the image and echoes with the illuminated area above. It unites the two spaces, connecting bottom to the top. The reddish line not only separates the painting into left and right, but also contrasts with the ample use of ink. The massive loading of ink on either side of the extremely thin, red line evokes an unbearable sense of pressure. The image could be taken as a visualization of the emotional state of the painter. The volume of the large inked area evokes a somber and gloomy feeling, while the connection of the two lighted areas eases the tension and induces a positive feeling. The blank space in the bottom is crucial as it reduces a sense of isolation and lightens a candle of hope.

Fusion (fig. 52, dated 1977) was painted a year before Chou's husband Yang passed away. Three fourths of the image is occupied by horizontal layers of ink with a gradual increase of tones as the layers descend. A thin layer of blank space is left on top of the layers. Above it is a symbol of an eye structured by roots-like patterns which branch out and converge with one and

other. In the centre of the eye is form of swirling, delicate roots-like patterns encircling an inner circle of shades. There is a branch crawling out of the eye and goes downwards. It consists of three finger-like structures in a gesture of a scratch that resembles a skeleton hand. A minute volume of red is generated in the middle of the eye, subtly coloring the descending scratch. It is like an elongated red tear drop. The tear drop seems to be strikingly frozen as it stops in the midst of ink layers. The feeble skeleton hand-like structure can be easily associated with death and desperation. These “dark” paintings are worthy of study as they are significantly distinct from Chou’s earlier works. The massive uses of ink, the repeated use of the roots-like patterns, and the complexity of her motifs could be a visualization of the intense sorrow and pain Chou experienced because of the deaths of Lui and Yang. Chou once said that these piled ink paintings were “attempts at discovering the self”. They also “served well” in expressing her emotions”.¹⁸⁹

The process of layering of ink and the depiction of roots-like structures and thin lines demand great attention in execution. The meticulous details require full concentration and engagement. Chou was probably absorbed in the painting process. Such state can be regarded as concept of flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi referred to flow as an “optimal experience”. It was a feeling “when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness”.¹⁹⁰ Chou regarded herself luckier than her mother as her emotion towards her often unsatisfactory marriage could be released through painting. She expressed her regret at not encouraging her

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997),110.

mother to write more when she was upset by her marriage.¹⁹¹ Chou's painting experience led her to believe that the process of creation would have eased the suffering of her mother. It would seem that Chou's life experience, such as her marriage and her relationship with her parents, and the pain and anguish she had gone through had indirectly led to her enthusiasm and dedication to art in which she could immerse herself without reservation. It is possible that Chou had eased and transferred her emotions to the paintings through the creation process.

Meanwhile, Chou simultaneously attempted to explore new techniques in seeking her own visual language. The *Impact* series is another signature of Chou. In contrast to the piled ink series, the *Impact* series is expressed in a much lighter and playful way (details will be discussed later). In the 1980s, Chou reflected and cast some doubt on the contrast of her works,

“I did not know what caused me to try two entirely different kinds of paintings almost simultaneously. I also did not know which one of the two represented my real ‘self’.”¹⁹²

This reflection demonstrated her awareness of genuine inner self expression. Chou realized that there were people who did not appreciate her dark paintings because they are too dark.¹⁹³ She did not compromise her style because of audiences' reaction but rather affirmed the using of the media to express herself. Such attitude is reminiscent of Lin Fengmian's belief that “art is about emotion”.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 93.

¹⁹² Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 27.

¹⁹³ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 76.

¹⁹⁴ Fengmian Lin, *Lin Fengmian's Art Essays* ed. by Zhupu (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 22.

Chou was seriously ill before and after the death of Yang. During this time, she once had a fever for six months.¹⁹⁵ In her own words, the paintings before and after her husband died were “mostly bleak, somber and suffocating,”¹⁹⁶ which reflected her complex mental state of grief, sorrow, and anxiety. Chou reflected if her marriage had not been that unhappy, she might not have started painting and become an artist. Thus the misery of her unpleasant marriage in return brought her luck.¹⁹⁷ It is fair to say that painting or creation was a way out for her. Matisse created collages rather than painting when his vision deteriorated, Chou used him as an example of being able to put aside the suffering and fear to be absorbed in creation.¹⁹⁸ Although the paintings of Chou were closely linked to her emotion and life, they were no longer a direct narration of her life incidents. Rather, they were purely an abstract expression of her emotional state. The dark paintings are the best illustration of such. As she moved on, she searched for other ways to express her different state of mind.

Moment of breakthrough

After the death of her husband, Chou began to live by herself and insisted on living alone for the rest of her life, except a short period with her son's family when she first arrived in Brisbane in 1992. Even when she lived in the nursing home in 2007, she requested a single room as she wanted to paint and be independent. In 1980s, she turned her place at Victory Road into a home studio by painting her bunk bed, fan, door and fridge in red (pl. 1, 2 and 3). The

¹⁹⁵ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 27.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Irene Chou, “Fengmian jieshao (封面介绍 About the Cover),” *Current Literature* 38 (1969): 101.

act was possibly a gesture of her liberation from grief and frustration. This period of breaking free utterly reversed the elements of her paintings. The depression caused by the death of her husband seemed to have turned into a positive force of gaining freedom and leading her art into another exploration era.

Breakthrough (fig. 2), exhibited in the One Art Group show in 1979, alludes to the artistic struggles Chou had. It is symbolic if we put it into the time frame of Chou's artistic evolution. As its title suggests, the image calls for a change. The image shows layers of roots-like patterns encasing a sphere which is breaking dramatically into two halves. The left half lifts up and tilts in forms of roots-like patterns and explodes more energetically compared with the right half. The roots-like patterns splash freely and integrate into the saturated area of ink above. At the centre where the halves split are lines in a grey tone extending upwards and ascend until they diffuse into the ink washes at the top of the painting. However, the roots-like patterns from both sides have no direct contact; a very narrow but clear gap remains in between the two hemispheres. The sparkling uprising gesture suggests a strong sense of eruption of an inner force. The break of the sphere implies a new vigorous move. *Break Through I* (fig. 53, ca 1979) and *Breakout II* (fig. 54, ca 1979)¹⁹⁹ also depict a sphere enveloped by intricate roots-like patterns in a burst and sense of liberation. The latter is a quieter and less explosive version of the former which has more complicated layers of roots-like patterns. Yet *Breakthrough* illustrates a complete detachment without any contact with the two halves. Spheres encased

¹⁹⁹ The same painting is entitled *External and Internal* in --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 75.

by roots-like patterns were frequently adopted in Chou's paintings in the 1970s, such as *Remembering of Mr. Lui* (fig. 49), *My Inner World I* (fig. 50), *Fusion* (fig. 52), and *Concentration 004* (fig. 55). The eruption of the spheres in *Breakthrough* hints at a gesture of liberation of Chou that signaled the coming shift of her painting style.

In the 1980s, Chou had an obvious turn in her works. Large areas of void and the use of red within the compelling splashes of ink became common. Her paintings no longer contained not only meticulous details, but also broad and bold ink calligraphic strokes. Chou in 1986 described,

“The latest breakthrough in my painting was the refinement I made on a completed work [after bold use of brush and ink]. Using broad strokes was indeed very exciting, but there was still much room for consummation. Facing a picture, looking closely at it, thinking thoroughly, I had the feeling that I was having a dialogue with the picture which, if in a good mood, would respond to my ideas or would slowly guide my inspiration. After completing such a picture, I would be in full agreement with the remark by Mr. Lu Xiangshan, a philosopher of the Song dynasty, that “The universe is my heart”.²⁰⁰

The above quote supports with the description of Michael Yang, son of Chou, when he recalled that his mother spent a lot of time sitting at the table, staring at her paintings. This was a way his mother ‘communicated’ with her works, to see what to add or improve, or to meditate on future creation.²⁰¹

The practice of using bold sweeping strokes followed by delicate refinement applies to Chou's later works in many ways. *Hermit* (fig. 56, dated 1980s) was regarded by Chou as her “self-portrait”²⁰² and best described the status of her recovery – self sustainable state of mind recovering from the loss

²⁰⁰ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 28.

²⁰¹ Michael Yang, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2012.

²⁰² --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 106.

and absence of her husband. According to her own words,

“In the picture, I seem to be in an elevated position, elevated in its literal sense. After my husband had died and my children gone abroad. I lived alone on the sixth floor of an old building in which there was no elevator. Every time I returned home, I had to negotiate many flights of steps, as though climbing a high mountain, before I got to my own apartment. After opening the door with keys, I would then take a little rest, draw a long breath, sip some tea and listen to the music. I was completely free and could experience the pleasure and serenity a hermit enjoyed.”²⁰³

Apart from the washes at the bottom and the upper part, the large area in between is left empty. In the center of the image, a long and bold curvilinear stroke tips at the top and gets wider and lighter as it strikes down. The deft touch of the tip is subtly connected with the land-like structure in the upper right. The layers of washes and ink on top created a land-like structure by some branching out roots-like patterns where an inky dotted sphere sits besides an orange plant. As Chou in the above description explained the “T” in the painting is “elevated”, it is likely that the dotted sphere represents her. At the bottom left lies a bigger inky sphere with roots-like patterns swirling, spreading out. The similar spherical and inky structure echoes with the small sphere on the upper right corner. Their major difference is the employment of roots-like patterns and dots respectively.

Innovation for expression

Ever since Chou started to use painting as inner expression, she never stopped exploring how best to express her inner world. It is clear that Chou developed her own visual language and signatures which kept evolving until the last stage of her life. The signatures mentioned so far are roots-like patterns

²⁰³ Ibid.

and her own style of lines and spheres. She also invented the “impact structural stroke”, blob-splashes and *queyuen cun*. In the following, each of these will be summarized or discussed in detail, including the way they evolved and their meaning for Chou.

Roots-like patterns

As mentioned previously, the roots-like patterns first appeared as a complex structure in the sketching of trees in the 1960s, such as those in *The Tree* (fig. 34), *Tree 1* (fig. 57) and *Tree 2* (fig. 58). In particular the work with an unknown title (fig. 35) creates an intricately landscape constructed by numerous layers of roots-like patterns. The roots-like patterns often became delicate and well-structured forming into different shapes in the 1970s. They were used to encase spheres or shaped into a form of an eye as in *Fusion* (fig. 52). In explaining the reason of her favoring the painting of trees, Chou elaborated that,

“The death of my husband and best friend was a tremendous hit to me in the 1970s. I frequently had severe headache, thus X-rays is used for the diagnosis of doctor. When I looked at those X-rays images, those were like vital images of tree branches in all kinds of gestures that is life – my life.”²⁰⁴

Hence, the delicate roots-like patterns [the density and complexity are much more like roots rather than branches] is triggered by the image of her own blood vessels and nerves that had an intimacy with herself. In the 1980s, the delicate roots-like patterns became a free flowing structure such as shown in *Self Portrait* (fig. 59, dated 1984) and *Mid-winter – Spring II* (fig. 60, dated

²⁰⁴ Lorena Sun Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 21.

1980s). In *Infinity Landscape III* (fig. 61, dated 1987), the roots-like patterns sometimes extended from a bold stroke (fig. 61a), and sometimes were hidden under the ink layer (fig. 61b). Chou once expressed that the meticulous roots-like patterns “were in full accord with my dream-like fantasy and rhythm, gave me a certain amount of satisfaction”²⁰⁵. The abstract qualities and satisfaction she attained were consistent with the optimum effect she achieved by piled ink in the 1970s.

The roots-like patterns underwent a significant simplified evolution in the late 1990s. They evolved from roots-like to ‘branch-like’ suggesting a sense of growth or sprouting. It appears as an independent red sprout in the *Silk Painting I* (fig. 62, dated 1998) and it also appears in the string of blue sprouts in *The Universe Lies Within I* (fig. 63, dated 1996).²⁰⁶ Moreover, the patterns suggest a plant-like structure in *My Heart is the Universe III* (fig. 64, dated 2002) and *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing No.02* (fig. 65, dated 2006). The red and green flat circles are often added with a tail-like feature on the top where some branches-like patterns spread. When this head-tail motif is colored red, it is cherry-like. The spheres encased by the roots-like patterns occasionally appeared in the 2000s. *Life as a Many Splendoured Thing #5* (fig. 66), exhibited in Chou’s last solo exhibition in 2007, is an example in which she preserved her excellence and delicacy in skills, but in a more simplified and pictorial form. The roots-like patterns are presented in a clear extension of path, unlike the infinite and mysterious mood evoked in the work with an unknown title (fig. 35). The roots-like patterns evolved from a mysteriously

²⁰⁵ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 26.

²⁰⁶ Similar observation can be seen in Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 15.

complex and knotted structure to a more abstract simpler pictorial form.

Lines

The use of lines can be seen as evidence of Chou's serious search for her own style. The series of *Enigma Variations I, II, III, and IV* (fig. 45, 46, 47 and 48) best demonstrates her endeavor in this aspect. Later, the lines do not dominate the whole painting, but are integrated with other of her motifs, such as the roots-like patterns and the "impact structural stroke". This integration is seen in *Movement I* (fig. 67, dated 1980s), Chou claimed the "impact structural stroke" as "an attempt to express the rhythm and melody of my heart".²⁰⁷ She explained that,

"The work was completed by first using the impact structural stroke ... to arrive at the required rhythm, followed by giving manifestation to the lines I had conceived and finally by capturing a desirable melody."²⁰⁸

In terms of composition, the lines subtly merge and extend from the ink splashes of the "impact structural stroke" into a swirl that ends up with roots-like patterns (fig. 67a) which is also a merge of spontaneity and delicate rendering. Later, the lines are more liberated in that they stretch out into different directions. For example, in *Life is but a Dream IV* (fig. 68, dated 2000) and *The Universe is My Mind 6* (fig. 69, dated 2002), the lines are much more colorful in red, green and gold while the arrangement is not orderly but diversified. The lines, as Chou explained in her two line works *Zhong I & II*, are an inner abstract expression of total concentration²⁰⁹; they generate a sense of movement, rhythm and melody. The multi-direction of lines creates a stronger sense of dynamic in her later work when the lines are more

²⁰⁷ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 96.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Chen, "Zhou Luyun shuo tade zhengye shi zhufu," 7.

free-flowing. *The Universe is My Mind I* (fig. 70, dated 2002) appears as an upside-down image of *Composition IV* (fig. 44), a line work Chou did in the 1970s. The former is reminiscent of the latter in terms of the use of lines. Chou's later works often displayed traces of her earlier paintings but rendered in a total different sense. It is noted that the lines in *The Universe is My Mind I* do not cross from one paper edge to another, rather they ease at the edge of a calligraphic curve stroke. What is novel and obvious here is the placement of the circles suggests a freer sense compared with *Composition IV* as some of them are half bound, and some of them are not bound by lines. Unlike *Composition IV*, there is only a pointed circle lands on the top line and are presented without boundaries.

Spheres/circles

Spherical shapes evolve throughout the oeuvre of Chou, from the intricate to the simplified. In the 1970s, the spheres were mostly intertwined by complicated layers of roots-like patterns, such as the spheres in *Remembering of Mr. Lui* (fig. 49), *My Inner World I* (fig. 50), and *Concentration 004* (fig. 56). Later in the 1980s, the spheres have a shift of rendering by dots. In *4:30 A.M.* (fig. 71, dated 1980s) and *First of the Sun* (fig. 72, dated 1991) as examples, the spheres are rendered by plentiful dots so creating the suggestion of a light source on its surface. The spheres appeared to be more colorful, red, orange, green, and purple etc, compared to the ones in 1970s. Chou once said of the dotted spheres,

“I use the finest Chinese brush one would use for regular script in small characters when I do the dots, putting each dot on one at a time. They are hard on my eyes. As you know I suffer from double vision and I am also getting cataracts on my eyes. I need to concentrate so hard. When I do

those dots, I practically forget myself as if my whole being has gone into these spheres.”²¹⁰

Chou also expressed that she wanted to convey the thought of total concentration, but had not successfully found a way.²¹¹ Eventually she created the dotted spheres to represent the “condensation of serenity in heart”.²¹² Chou transformed the dotted spheres into plain circles, without highlights or gradation of tones in the mid-1990s. The plain circles were commonly adopted in Chou’s late paintings; green and red are the most common colors. Other colors such as yellow and blue also appear in *The Universe Lies Within II* (fig. 73, dated 1997) and gold in *My Heart is the Universe I* (fig. 74, dated 2002). The sphere developed to its simplest form, - a plane. To explain the shift, Chou said,

“I am using solid colored discs a lot more than the spheres now partly to conserve my eyesight but partly because I feel that since my painting is abstract anyway why make these spheres three dimensional.”²¹³

The liberation of the spheres’ details illustrates the focus on the essence of inner abstraction in her art. Chou expressed that,

“... Therefore perspective in the sense of making the two dimensional surface look three dimensional is not my concern. I am more concerned with depicting the fourth dimension, which we know is time of course, but I am also attempting to depict the fifth, the sixth, and other dimensions where there really is no visual equivalent. ... I am concerned with portraying depth in my painting. ... It is symbolic depth, the different layers of life and living, the kind of depth from one’s heart and mind.”²¹⁴

The “depth” of the painting is not bound by the representation as it has no

²¹⁰ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 15.

²¹¹ Ibid., 21.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 15.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

visual resemblance. Thus, for Chou the simplest form of spheres still hold their abstract expression that she mentioned in an interview in 1999 in which she said that spheres represented her “inner self”.²¹⁵

Impact structural stroke

The “impact structural stroke” [a technique of rendering ink splashes on a wet surface] first emerged in Chou’s paintings in the mid-1970s, in a playful and spontaneous way. It appeared soon after her initial work with piled ink. The “impact structural stroke” was used by Chou as more of a leisure activity than the piled ink paintings which were an expression of her grief. The two paintings entitled *Impact* (fig. 75 and 76) were exhibited in the One Art Group annual show in 1977. The two images demonstrate the primary use of the “impact structural stroke”. Both of them are dominated by a circular pattern of ink splashes, rendered by a bold semi-circular stroke on the watery painting surface. The explosive effect is achieved by overlapping different layers and gradations of ink inducing a sense of variation and movement. The attempted effect in *Impact* (fig. 76) resembles the techniques of Lui’s Zen paintings on watery surface, such as *Zen #T-94* (fig. 77 and 77a, dated 1970) and *Zen #T-95* (fig. 78, dated 1970). The bubbling effects at the bottom of *Impact* evoke a great sense of similarity to Lui’s *Zen #T-94*. Both of them attain rich layers of ink tones ranging from faded washes to concentrated ink.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chou painted a number of works exploring the “impact structural stroke”. Most of these works were for the

²¹⁵ David Bentley, “Talking point,” *The Courier Mail*, May 29, 1999, W2.

purpose of leisure or practices. Chou consistently tested the effect by repeatedly painting with similar composition and color. Both uses of “impact structural stroke” in *Impact I* (fig. 79, dated 1981) and *Impact* (fig. 80, undated) were still immature, yet having a vigorous and energetic scattered ink drops effect against the yellow pigment. The two images resemble each other, even the voids in between the yellow are similar. The ink splashes expand from the concentrated dark ink in the middle; the attempt on *Impact* has a more saturated effect. Nevertheless, both patterns of ink spots are random that go in different directions. The horizontal broad brush in *Impact I* gives a firm ground for the explosion while *Impact* is landed with ink washes only so the sense is lighter and floating. Another series of images having very similar composition and attempt is *Impact I* (fig. 81), *Impact II* (fig. 82), and *Impact III* (fig. 83). A circular void is constantly left at the bottom of each painting encompassed by ink splashes that occupy three quarters of the paper. However, the three images evoke different dynamics. For example, *Impact I* created a directed force to the upper right corner while *Impact II* evokes an overall splashing mood. *Untitled* (fig. 84) also has a similar composition, but it distinctively shows three layers of rising ink splashes. The three layers are distinguished by two implied curves. The highest of the three layers has less ink density and implies an upward force in its creation.

Chou’s considerable endeavors to experiment the effects of the “impact structural stroke” are evidenced in her constant attempts exhibited in her works. Chou was exploring sense of movement and the visual effects of ink uses with different degrees of water. She would wet parts of the paper, dip a broad brush

in damp ink and splash the ink over the paper. The effects would be achieved by bouncing or hitting the brush against an area of the paper, her wrist or other certain objects.²¹⁶ It is a practice full of variations as the effect achieved is extremely diverse when ink gets in touch with the paper by the different degrees of force and direction. She might also cover an area she did not want to be affected (pl. 4). As her technique matured, Chou could master the “impact structural stroke” in a deliberate flow. She applied it with an idea in mind. Once the painting process started, she would splash, dip and scattered the ink in a spontaneous way according to her inner feeling. She explained:

“[The ‘impact’ motif] Bearing a close resemblance to the ancient technique of splash-ink, the impact structural stroke was not executed in conformity to an original plan, nor did it take shape step by step; it was, instead, motivated by a preconceived idea which was later directed by the emotion, which in turn manifested itself, at a rapid rate, on the paper.”²¹⁷

It was only until 1982 that Chou realized the “impact structural stroke” was a textural effect, and she started to ask herself the question of “how to integrate it in her paintings”.²¹⁸ Thus, she incorporated the “impact structural stroke” with other motifs in the 1980s. There are examples such as *Birth* (fig. 85, dated 1983), and the series of *Movement I, II, and III* (fig. 68, 87, and 88, dated 1980s). In *Movement II* (fig. 86), there is a watery, red pattern of a diamond-like shape against a sea of ink splashes. The ink splatters form different paths and directions. For instance the splashes in the upper right are denser and more concentrated, having a multiple craze-like effect while they are sparser and scattered in the upper left with an explosive effect towards the

²¹⁶ Petra Hinterthur, *Modern Art in Hong Kong: Asian Art Library*. ed. Nina Corazzo (Hong Kong: Myer Pub. Ltd, c1985), 99.

²¹⁷ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 28.

²¹⁸ Chou, “My Self-vindication,” *Artist* 54 (1987): 8.

right and above. The image generates a dynamic outburst scene with an atmospheric feel. As Chou puts it, the paintings are about her “own ideas” including her “hope and emotional fantasies”. The “impact structural stroke” intensifies and enhances the impact.²¹⁹ Similarly, two red patches condense in the middle surrounded by ink splashes and dots in *Movement III* (fig. 87). The splashes of ink have no single direction, but flow in various paths. In areas with more water application, the ink spots dissolve and overlap, causing an illusion of having multiple shadows that create a sense of dynamic movement. The splashes could be divided into different sets done in order, the purposeful direction of each contribute to the unity of the painting.

Genesis (fig. 88, dated 1980s) is a larger and more sophisticated work in that it depicts seven teardrop-like patterns surrounded by the massive use of the “impact structural stroke” suggesting a compelling scene which induces a strong sense of vitality and explosion. It evokes an atmospheric feel to describe the “beginning of the earth”.²²⁰ Actually, Chou controlled the technique to an extent in that she kept a thin border following the shape of every teardrop-like pattern, so to make each one stand out in the dominating flow of dynamic ink splashes. Chou generated explosive, forward forces of ink by manipulating the brush and strike. The effects can be scrutinized in any part of the close ups. For example, the lower right corner with the red and orange dotted spheres in pair with the teardrop-like patterns (fig. 88a). The closest layer of ink splashes which surround and develop from the blank borders explode in all kinds of ways on a much more watery surface compared with the further layer of

²¹⁹ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 98.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

splashes on the left of the red sphere. Part of it has a downward intention bleeding into the moist scattered dots developed from the left while other part of the ink splashes have an upward movement. With this small part captured, the matured mastery of the technique is well-illustrated by the contrasts between wet and dry, sparse and dense, upward and downward movement, spontaneity and deliberation. It was only achieved by many experiments and practices, as Chou in 1987 admitted,

“Impact structural stroke is comparatively difficult to control. It took me almost ten years to get the sense of control and manipulation.”²²¹

Tsang Mun Wah who was the framer for Chou once witnessed the process of her applying the “impact structural stroke” in the late 1980s. He remembers her exhaustion after the demonstration.²²² This indicated the demand of energy and force in executing the dynamic effects, as well as Chou’s devotion and involvement in the painting process. Chou said the technique was “to hit the ink on the watery paper surface forcefully”.²²³ She also described,

“When the spirits were high and the rhythm was appropriate, unexpectedly good results [of Impact structural stroke] would be produced. After the emotion was given full expression after a day’s work, I would enjoy immense pleasure. The impact structural stroke, which produced immediate effects when the process of painting was still going on, was very abstract and highly rhythmic in its appearance and inner form.”²²⁴

The impressive signature not only creates a very rhythmical, dynamic and forceful effect generating a strong visual impact, but it can also serve as an

²²¹ Chou, “My Self-vindication,” 8. Chou also integrated the technique with different texture, such as satin in *Life is but a Dream II* (fig. 104, dated 1999). The effect is not as explosive as on paper because of the glossy texture of satin. Yet it captures the rapidity of ink movement if we focus above the cell-like substances, the dynamic is squeezed by the tension from two sides, generating a force in between them.

²²² Mun Wah Tsang, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 20, 2012.

²²³ Chou, “My Self-vindication,” 8.

²²⁴ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 28.

emotional outlet for Chou. Of all Chou's techniques, the "impact structural stroke" is sometimes adopted by other artists as well. For example, it is often employed by Chan Shing Kau (1952 –) who in a local television programme *Shuimo zhuanqi* (水墨傳奇 The Legend of Ink Painting)²²⁵ demonstrated a few techniques which included his so called "impact structural stroke" by hitting a cylinder and spraying water on the paper surface from a sprinkling can. The technique often appears in his series of *Mountain, River, Dream*. The bottom part of *Meng de shenghua II* (夢的昇華 II Revelation of Dream II) (fig. 89, dated 2006) by Chan strongly resembles the method which creates an explosive force from below the grey-tone. It creates a contrast with the rest of the static image. The ink splashes do not motivate and integrate the other elements in the picture; rather it seems to be a layer added on top. Another artist Ha Bik Chuen (夏碧泉 1925 – 2009) rendered similar technique of ink splashes. *The Wonderful Universe* (fig. 90, dated 2003) is likely an attempt of the effect of ink splashes to create a dynamic and vital background. The ink splashes were made all over the paper when it was wet, however, they were evenly scattered without a strong sense of a specific direction. With no contrast of wet and dry, dense and sparse, the painting of Ha does not create the great sense of movement or dynamism as those found in Chou's works. Even though an artist might have his/her exclusive reason for the technique, Chou's constant exploration of the technique was to achieve an atmospheric feel. The visual evidence shows that Chou used the knowledge of application of water, ink and force and her effective control of it to guide and merge the ink flow in different tracks with a directive purpose.

²²⁵ --, *Shuimo zhuanqi* (水墨傳奇 The Legend of Ink Painting), DVD, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Cable Television Ltd., 2009).

Blob-splashes²²⁶

The ink blob-splash is another visual signature of Chou that she developed in the 1980s²²⁷ as displayed in *Infinity Landscape II* (fig. 91). However, it only appeared frequently in her works after she suffered her stroke²²⁸ around the mid-1990s. The technique is to thrash the brush with a high concentration of ink on the paper.²²⁹ As a matter of fact, bold calligraphic strokes are not particularly new in Chou's works. They were evident in *Hermit* (fig. 57), *Soliloquy* (fig. 92) and *A Sunday Afternoon* (fig. 93) in the 1980s. The ink blob-splash is distinct because of the emotional release accompanied by the application of ink strokes with vigorous force. The action involves explosive vigor and excitement. The effect is different from making a more restrained sweeping stroke. According to Chou,

“My bottled up emotions are released in these thick ink blob-splashes. When I thrash my brush onto the paper to make that blob-splash, ink splattering everywhere, onto my face, my hands, and on the walls, all my emotions are flushed out of my system at that instant.”²³⁰

The walls and furniture at Chou's place (pl. 5) were the best proof for her description of blob-splashes as they were all ‘decorated’ by myriad of ink or color splatters. The description also illustrates what techniques meant to her – as a way to express her inner emotions. She claimed that,

“I can assure you that I could not have painted such explosive blob-splashes if I did not have emotions that need to find expression. After I have done these thick ink blob-splash many times, it becomes yet another technique in my repertoire. I am so grateful that I have such an outlet. It restores my emotional balance. After all, I am only human.

²²⁶ Name adopted from Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 11.

²²⁷ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 20.

²²⁸ Ibid., 11.

²²⁹ Ibid., 20.

²³⁰ Ibid., 11.

I can bear only so much pain. When I thrash own my brush like this, the relief of pain is instantaneous.”²³¹

The uses of thick ink blob-splashes, for examples, are found in *My First Australian Landscape* (fig. 94, dated 1995), *The Universe V* (fig. 95, dated 1997) and *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing No.02* (fig. 66, dated 2006). In the 2000s, there are red and green blob-splashes, such as some of the works in the series of *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing* (fig. 96, 97 and 98).

***Queyue cun*²³² (vortex-like pattern)²³³**

The *queyue cun* is a vortex-like pattern created by layers of colorful, short and dense curve brushstrokes in a repetitively circular motion which appears to radiate in a three dimensional effect towards a person viewing the painting. This creates a feeling of being absorbed into the painting. This motif primarily had been developed since the early 1990s, such as in *The Creation Trilogy* [a series of three]. One of them (fig. 99) depicts a vortex with blue, purple and black broad calligraphic strokes with some more delicate circular stokes in the middle of the vortex. Another painting (fig. 100) using thin malachite curve lines on top of the bold sweeping strokes can be regarded as the prototype of *queyue cun*. However, it was not until *Vortex* (fig. 101) and *Yin Yang* (fig. 102, dated 1991) shown in the exhibition of *Art Works of Ten Female Arists '91* that the clear hint of a colorful vortex-like pattern is illustrated.

The dominant vortex in the middle of *Vortex* (fig. 101) is structured by the

²³¹ Ibid., 12.

²³² Name adopted from Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 127.

²³³ The term is used by the author to describe the form of *queyue cun*.

bold and forceful strokes sweeping across the paper surface. Short strokes in yellow, red and blue are stressed on the left side of the vortex, and expand towards the other small vortex where a dotted sphere floats inside. A more completed form of the motif is shown in *Yin Yang* (fig. 102). A vortex-like pattern located on the left is rendered by colorful short strokes which is comparatively more angular and layered than the right vortex which has circular calligraphic strokes. The vortex-like space is fully developed in the late 1990s, as illustrated in paintings such as *Thunder and Lightning* (fig. 103, dated 1998), *Life is but a Dream II* (fig. 104, dated 1999), *Mind of the Cosmo* (fig. 105, dated 2006). It is a much more intense and vivid circular motif in terms of layers and colors compared with the previous trials. The concentration of the colorful short strokes demand considerable time to produce and is achieved by many layers of topping up.²³⁴

Alicia Pun, Chou's biographer, recalled the moment in an interview when Chou asked her to suggest a name for the motif – she named it *queyue cun* 雀躍皴 [literally means excited, animated] because Chou expressed that the motif represents a “joyful mind”.²³⁵ It generates a sense of the dynamic with colors and density. As a late motif of Chou, the application of vivid colors is dramatically contrasted with other of her motifs that are mostly evolved from ink (or with very limited rendering of colors). However, as mentioned above, there was a tendency of Chou to use more colors for her motifs in her later works such as the roots-like patterns, lines and spheres in particular. In an article written in 2002 by Lorena Butcher, who was a close friend of Chou,

²³⁴ William Lam, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, 3 September, 2012. Lam also recalled painting the thin colorful strokes by the edges of credit cards with Chou.

²³⁵ Alicia Pun, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August 28, 2012.

reported that Chou once said:

“Color is a wonderful thing for humans and life. Recently, I found that there is a need in my inner world that I have to use color in order to be contended.”²³⁶

If we still remember the need of the artist to use black to express herself in the 1970s, the shift of a need to use more and more colors in the 1990s and 2000s is revealing and symbolic in understanding Chou’s state of mind in her later years.

Using technique as a way to express

Each of Chou’s motifs means something particular in regard to her abstract expression. Artistic achievement requires technique, but in the case of Chou – it seems that it is the actual act of using the techniques that allow her the intense release of emotion and expression of self. She reminisced as follow in 1980s,

“In 1974, ... a string of problems happened to me, including the bad health of my husband; the faulty marriage; the not-so-well condition of my health; the education of my children etc. It was my need to use black to express myself.”²³⁷

The “dark” paintings in this period are significant and Chou describes,

“Piled ink painting [“dark” painting in 1970s] is much more than a patch of dark ink; it requires a systematic display of structured layers, fullness and depth. It was my most satisfying mode of expression.”²³⁸

She explained that it is a tool for her to express herself,

“Technique is very important. It has everything to do with how well one can express oneself. I do feel that as far as technique is concerned I have reached the stage where I can express myself more fluently than

²³⁶ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 23.

²³⁷ Chou, “My Self-vindication,” 8.

²³⁸ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 26.

ever before. Maybe that's why the images are getting more and more "me". But I cannot say that I have reached the stage that expressing myself has become very easy nor can I say I am totally satisfied with how I express myself. I feel that I possess the technique to express myself now."²³⁹

As Chou stated, technique is so closely related to one's expression that it does not stand for its own value. Thus, Chou regarded all her experimentation and exploration of techniques were a search for a better way to express herself. This attitude can be compared with other painters, who are very innovative in techniques, such as Liu Guosong (劉國松 1932 –).

Liu is a Taiwan based renowned artist of "Modern Ink Painting" who settled down in Hong Kong in the early 1970s. In his teaching, Liu encourages his students to innovate and experiment with new techniques. Both Chou and Liu created paintings regarding 'universe'. Liu is well-known for his painting of astronomical phenomenon such as *Eclipse* (fig. 106, dated 1971). Chou also created a painting entitled *The Eclipse* (fig. 107, dated 1980s). While these two paintings have the same theme, the reason and the way they illustrate the eclipse are dramatically different. The comparison below attempts to demonstrate the different attitudes towards using techniques.

Chou created *The Eclipse* (fig. 107) because she was influenced by what she read about eclipse description in literature and photographic books.²⁴⁰ Liu created a series of "space paintings" in late 1960s and early 1970s. These paintings were inspired by the American astronaut who landed on the moon in 1969, Liu's paintings include *Eclipse* (fig. 106), the series of *Which is earth?*,

²³⁹ Butcher, "The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe," 17.

²⁴⁰ --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 122.

Metamorphosis of the Moon, and the series of *Metamorphosis of the Sun*. Liu was stimulated by the astronomical achievement in human history shared by most people in the world at that time. His works have a focus on the depiction of the astronomical phenomenon in a representational way. Chou was not exactly triggered by a particular incident, but had an utmost thought and tried to use all kinds of ways to express her thoughts and feelings towards eclipse. Unless one is aware of the title *The Eclipse*, it is hard to associate the image with solar eclipse.

In Chou's painting, she applied ink over half of the painting, vague round patterns merged with the washes below, with a focal light falling on the area. Two broad dry strokes draw the attention to the four colorful spheres underneath, from left to right, black, dark violet, cool red and light orange on a shaded horizontal line. The left stroke forcefully covers part of the dark violet sphere while the other escapes and is isolated by the broad slab. Chou did not aim at depicting the scene of a total, an annular, or a partial eclipse, but the feeling of excitement when she imagined a solar eclipse. In contrast, Liu is rather direct and explicit in representing the phenomenon. He obviously separated the composition of *Eclipse* into a vast curve land and a blue space, putting the full moon with a ring around in the middle, five various stages of lunar eclipse extend from both sides as mirror images. The land in an arc is rendered by angular shapes and washes with his well-known fibre technique of pulling out the coarse fibers on the paper surface, so creating white fabric lines scattered to illustrate the texture and structure of land. The techniques of the two artists tend to serve different purpose. Chou depicted an image full of

imagination while Liu clearly captures the process of lunar eclipse above the vast hemispheric land.

Liu in the 2000s continued another series of “space paintings” in response to the astronomical advancements of China, such as the successful launch of “Shenzhou V” and “Shenzhou VI”.²⁴¹ With the straightforward title and collage of *Launch* (fig. 108, dated 2005) and *Announcement* (fig. 109, dated 2005), it is difficult to miss the depiction of rocket and astronauts respectively. Both of the works are constructed with an arc indicating the land and circular patterns symbolizing planets. The composition resembles his earlier “space paintings, such as *Metamorphosis of the Sun, No.9* (fig. 110, dated 1971). In these paintings Liu is even more direct with particular collaged images. *Announcement* includes four elements from bottom to top which are the arc, a small circle, a much larger circle and a photograph of two astronauts in the cabin of “Shenzhou VI” reporting back to earth. The arc and two circles are said to symbolize earth, moon and sun.²⁴² By placing the photograph above all these planets indicated the high regard in which Liu held the space flight. He kept his signature of angular shapes patterns and fibre technique in depicting the land, with a more subtle use of color. The message of the painting is more inclined to narrative even though it overall creates a strong visual impact.

Apart from the fibre rubbing technique, Liu has many other well-known techniques such as “water rubbing” technique. He experiments and develops

²⁴¹ Chun Yi Lee, “Universe in the Mind: Liu Guosong’s Art and Thoughts (Translation by Eva Wen),” in *Universe in the Mind: Liu Guosong’s Art and Thoughts*, ed. Chun Tong Yueng (Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery, University of Hong Kong, 2009), 96.

²⁴² Ibid.

novel techniques to depict the textures of mountains, water, and land throughout his artistic career. He innovates with special handmade paper entitled “Liu Guosong paper”. Liu emphasizes or gives high priority to techniques. The Taiwanese art historian Wang Hsiu-Hsiung says that Lui’s artistic career can be regarded as “striving history of inventing and innovating new techniques”.²⁴³

Liu stresses the principle of “first be different and then refine”.²⁴⁴ He encourages his students to experiment and invent special techniques, to be “unique from the norm” before “practice it repeatedly until it becomes good”.²⁴⁵ One of his subverted advocacies is to discard the Chinese brush and the use of the central brush, which is the core tool and value of traditional Chinese painting respectively. It is quite obvious that according to Liu, being different is the key to creation, as a cause and the motivation of a creation process. This contrasts with Lui’s advocacy that being different is the outcome of an artist’s sincerity in a creation process. Moreover, Lui clearly distinguished the difference of having painting concepts from having techniques. Techniques does not necessary imply concepts. He further elaborated that having techniques is better than a display of techniques.²⁴⁶

The symphony of expression and innovation

The earnest attitude of Chou is demonstrated by her persistent experiments with her techniques which evolved and gradually become very

²⁴³ Hsiu Hsiung Wang, *Discussion of the Historical Development of Taiwan’s Art* (Taipei: Guoli lishi bowuguan, 1995), 216.

²⁴⁴ Translation of the notion is taken from Lee, “Universe in the Mind,” 86.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Lui, *Lu Shoukun shougao*, 86.

familiar to her. They were integrated into her works in all kind of ways. Painting and art played such a crucial role in the life of Chou that she once expressed that, “I am my art; my paintings are me.”²⁴⁷ She developed her strong interests in meditation and Buddhism in the late-1980s and these influenced her profoundly after her stroke in December 1991. She immigrated to Brisbane, Australia where her son practiced as a doctor in 1992. She could not walk well and mostly relied on the wheelchair. Such tremendous change in her health condition affected her creation. She created some small pieces right after her stroke, however, she was ashamed of mentioning them as they were not good ones.²⁴⁸

Chou led a simple and tranquil life without television and computer. She acquired a radio in the 1980s. In Brisbane, she had a habit of practicing meditation early every morning for between one and a half and three hours. Chou said making herself concentrated was the useful thing before she began to paint and meditation would help her to achieve this.²⁴⁹ Meditation was leisure for Chou in the 1960s. In the late 1980s, an artist friend Zhao Haitien introduced her to a Beijing qigong master who managed to ease Chou’s severe back pain.²⁵⁰ According to Zhao, the key to practicing *qigong* are *hong* (空 emptiness) and *song* (鬆 relaxation).²⁵¹ Even though the experience was exclusive to Chou and other practitioners, the basic idea of it is to regulate one’s breathing and relax one’s body. Chou concentrated and aimed at achieving the “state of thoughtlessness” that she admitted was difficult or even

²⁴⁷ Chou, “Irene in Her Own Words,” 19.

²⁴⁸ Lorena Butcher, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August 31, 2012.

²⁴⁹ Binks, “The Universe Within,” 36- 8.

²⁵⁰ --, “Biographical Sketch of Chou,” unpagued.

²⁵¹ Zhao Hai Tien, interview by author, Hong Kong, February 21, 2013.

impossible to attain.²⁵² Still, she had a spiritual experience practicing, “I would feel a certain life-force which is so overwhelmingly powerful,” Chou described that *qigong* had deepened her exposure, “and so much larger than life itself that it must be connected with the Act of Creation.”²⁵³

In 1999, Chou moved to the southern suburbs of Brisbane from the north suburbs and part of the reason was because her Buddhist friends were living there²⁵⁴. At Chou’s place, one could see both a statue of Buddha and a cross.²⁵⁵ She had been a Catholic since the 1960s, yet it was not a conflict for her to learn Buddhism. She could be picked up by either Roman Catholic or Buddhist friends going to church or temple during weekends. By eliminating the boundary between religions, she encouraged her Catholic son to read sutras and she could recite some of the sutras.²⁵⁶ Her interest in different religions helped her in enriching her philosophical knowledge, therefore inspiring her painting.²⁵⁷

Apart from the colorful *queyue cun* which evolved in the late 1990s, the color change of other motifs also contributed to the shift in Chou’s art. Even though ink was still part of her work, color became an element that might occupy large areas in the background of her later works. There was always a medley of all kinds of her motifs, usually more than three. One of the best

²⁵² Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 11.

²⁵³ Irene Chou, An unpublished letter in January 1992, “The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun – An Overview”, quoted in--, *Collector’s Choice: The Cosmic Vision of Zhou Luyun* (Hong Kong: Casey Company Limited, 1995), 6.

²⁵⁴ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 17.

²⁵⁵ Michael Yang, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August 26, 2012. See also Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 17.

²⁵⁶ Christopher Leung, Cindy Sim, Lorena Butcher and Michael Yang, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August, 2012.

²⁵⁷ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 17.

examples is a work currently displayed in the ADC building in Brisbane, Australia (the title is unknown to the author)²⁵⁸ (fig. 111, dated 2001). This painting was chosen for the cover of *The Biography of Chou*.

The image is a combination of ink blob-splash, *queyue cun*, evolved roots-like patterns, “impact structural stroke”, plain circles, dots, and her style of lines. The bold, vital ink blob-splash located at the lower right stresses the weight of the image. The diagonal rays of dark green extend rapidly towards its lower left corner. The head of the expressive splash points to the small houses in red silhouette located on a green horizontal line. The ink pigments also spread to the left and merge with the “impact structural stroke” above. The latter creates dynamic ink splashes around the single, red branches-like pattern in a circular green stroke. The circular golden lines merge and interact with the ink splashes from above. The ink splashes spread out in all direction, forming a loose circular pattern that corresponds with the other two spheres on the right in the yellowish background. The three circular patterns generate a parabola in the painting. A sphere with a red periphery is filled with many tiny dots scattered in its center where three branches-like patterns unite with each other in a row. Next to it, the round shape of a colorful and vortex-like pattern creates a sense of depth falling on the thick blob-splash. In the lower right corner of the latter lies three discs lifting on a green horizontal line where above them, uplifted ink, plain circle with a flower-like pattern is placed on the red horizontal line that touches the red seal. These plain circles could be

²⁵⁸ It is currently displayed with another painting in the ADC building, 215 Adelaide Street Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. No captions were found in the building. However, the other painting is included and entitled *Here is My Heart III* (fig. 112) in --, *The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe*, 92.

regarded as a distant reflection of the plain circles on the left of the “impact structural stroke” motif where they are raised above a barely seen ink line. The elements stand independently, but, subtly link up with the rest and hold a balance. Considering the emotional experience of Chou in applying the techniques, each of the motifs are unique to her. Both the blob-splash and the “impact structural stroke” are indicative of her emotional release while the more refined motifs such as the lines and the vortex-like pattern mean total concentration and joyfulness respectively. The mixture of the motifs is like a symphony of the inner self of Chou that forms by diverse elements as an integral whole.

Here is My Heart III (fig. 112, dated 2001), *Meditations* (fig. 113, dated 2003) and *In Celebration of Being 80* (fig. 114, dated 2004) are other examples that show a medley of clear motifs. The medley of the motifs are not conflicting but balancing with each other. It is not necessary that every one of Chou’s motifs are included in the image, but every motif represents Chou herself.

The bold use of green and red is another significant move of Chou and this is best demonstrated in her last solo exhibition “Life is a many splendoured thing – Irene Chou” in 2007 at the Sacred Heart Centre, Runcorn, Brisbane. One of Chou’s most representative works is *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing No.08* (fig. 115, dated 2006) which she painted at the age of 82. It is a large work of 100cm x 211cm. Chou separated the canvas into two almost equal sections and filled the right section with red. A circle with green and red dots is

surrounded by the red, an ink blob-splash forcefully thrashes onto the canvas, a bold calligraphic stroke spreads all over the surface. Its kinetic energy creates rhythm by thrashing the intense and overlapping twists and turns. One special thing in this work is that Chou had added some very personal touches. Below the dotted green sphere, she collaged a photo in a round shape which is an image of Chou's mother. The four-line Chinese adage inscription reads from the left to the right, "The sunlight is bright; parents' love is great; gentlemen's forbearance is strong; a person who lacks moral cultivation is arrogant".²⁵⁹ The second line of the inscription hints at her immense gratitude to her parents. She also stamped her seal *Zhou* [her surname] at the opposite diagonal corner of her mother's image. In the other section of the canvas, there are three small plain circles and one bigger, in green and red. Green is the literal meaning of the second character of Chou's Chinese name – *lu* 綠.

Chou's gratefulness in her senior years, to her parents, especially her mother was interesting as Chou and her mother had a tense and often unsatisfactory relationship. In *The Biography of Chou*, she reminisces about her parents' quarrels over different issues involving the two daughters. Each parent spoiled a different daughter.²⁶⁰ Thus, the family established a gap between two groups – Chou and her father versus her mother and younger sister.²⁶¹ Even so, Chou, hoped that her mother would cultivate her writings as a distraction from the sadness caused by her husband. It was a dilemma and conflict between love and hate. The memories Chou had of her parents were

²⁵⁹ The four-line Chinese adage inscription reads from the left to the right: "太陽光大 父母恩大 君子量大 小人氣大".

²⁶⁰ Yixin and Yijie, *Dan qing chonger*, 30.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

still vivid at the age of 77. After so many years, Chou made a tribute to her mother in the painting that hints at Chou's then attitude to life. Chou said.

"I am freer because my world has become bigger and more spacious. I am no longer [longer] restrained in the "me" world but have come into the "universe" world."²⁶²

Having discussed the artistic evolution of Chou, it demonstrates that her concepts of art profoundly correspond with Lui's, and her art manifested the cores of Ink Painting – inner expression and innovation. Chou was innovative in a sense that she truly unfolded her innermost expressions and temperament. Her paintings reflect this and are unique to her. She gradually established her own distinguished motifs and techniques that are remarkable among other contemporaries. Throughout her artistic evolution, Chou did not compromise even though there were people who disliked her "dark" paintings. She did not compromise her paintings even though they were initially rejected in Brisbane. Chou explored her own visual language and established motifs unique to her, each of them representing and revealing her inner self. Her innovation in content and technique was remarkable and this makes her a prominent and contributive painter in the Ink Painting Movement.

²⁶² Butcher, "The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe," 13.

Chapter IV

Chou as a Case Study of Ink Painting

Chou is acclaimed as a renowned Ink painter, without an explanation of how and why. The unique style of her art deterred Lau Kin Wai from including her in his common visual model of analyzing Ink painters.²⁶³ This chapter argues the direction of defining the common features of Ink Painting should emphasize concepts rather than styles. Comparison between Chou and her contemporaries will be drawn, namely Wucius Wong, Hon Chi Fun and Laurence Tam to elucidate the concepts they shared and their varied individual artistic qualities. If Chou was a prominent painter in the Ink Painting Movement, why has her style not been included in Lau's model? What is the indication behind his categorization?

Common visual models of Lau

Lau stated that it was impossible to have a model that fits every painter of the Ink Painting Movement²⁶⁴, he particularly excluded three of them, Chou, Lui Shou Kwan and Liu Guosong in his analysis for different reasons. Apparently, Lau's models targeted mainly landscape painting which was a dominant subject among Ink painters. In his analysis of these paintings, Lau found five features commonly adopted by painters of this group: paint distant rather than close up; paint forest rather than tree; paint landscape rather than figure; emphasize on dots rather than lines with clear structure; merge graphic design concepts into ink painting.²⁶⁵ In case of Chou, Lau admitted that her paintings were difficult to classify. Her paintings do not correspond to the

²⁶³ Lau, "Xianggang shuimohua yundong yanjiu" 5-2.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 5-1.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 5-3-8.

common visual models; and if Chou was included in the models, her work would counter them.²⁶⁶

Lau also stated that the painters who participated in Ink Painting Movement, unlike the tendency that a School had, did not have the intention to build a consensus of the style, but on uniqueness of individuality.²⁶⁷ He also believed that a Movement should have some collective goals and values to pursue as a group²⁶⁸ and his model focuses on formal similarities between Ink painters. I concur that there were shared goals and pursuits among participants involved in the movement. Based on the examination of Lui's advocacy on Ink Painting, the argument here tends to suggest that the pursuit was not about visual similarities, but on concepts for creation. These concepts may not be readily apparent just by looking at the artworks. The Ink painters sought individuality with the ambition of creating a new trend of Chinese painting while a common visual model might serve as a reference for a systemic formal analysis of the Movement. Lui certainly did not incline towards imitation or visual similarities. His vision of Ink Painting was a diversified and dynamic category found on a pursuit of self liberation and innovation based on sincerity and honesty of the artists.

Chou's unique and distinctive style of art made her a significant Ink painter. Chou never ceased experimentation, both in terms of thoughts and skills throughout her artistic life. She was not limited by using only the media with which she felt familiar. When she was in Brisbane, even though she had

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 5-2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 5-1.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

physical constraint limited by her stroke, she would ask her family or friends to get painting materials for her without any criteria. She used to buy materials before having any ideas of how to use them. She did not set a boundary of what to use, she even used the poster color that her grandchildren used. She had been using a wide range of materials such as rice paper, hemp paper, satin, silk, canvas, board, ming paper²⁶⁹, and all kinds of pigments. It is therefore not surprising to know that she completed a series of board and satin painting in her mid-seventies²⁷⁰, or attempted canvas again in her early eighties.

Self expression in response to *gen* and *shi*

To recapitulate, Chou attained a release of inner emotions through the painting process. Despite having an idea in mind when she applied the “impact structural stroke”, she neither followed steps, nor had a particular plan, but responded to her painting flow.²⁷¹ For Chou, the creative process was a spontaneous release of emotions without much rational thinking. The comparison between Chou and Wucius Wong pinpoint their different emphasis on emotion and rationality respectively in the creation process. Wong is a crucial contributor to Ink Painting Movement, not only as an artist but as a writer. Wong’s style of painting, as noted by Lau resonates with his listed common visual models the most²⁷² while Chou’s style was certainly different

²⁶⁹ Ming paper is a kind of paper Chinese burns for their ancestors.

²⁷⁰ Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 17. Chou started the series of board painting because the color seeped through the silk when she was painting on the board table; the satin series began Chou realized that the satin does not match with the board mounting, so she worked on it.

²⁷¹ Refer to --, *Chinese Painting by Irene Chou*, 28. Another example recalled by Sandra Walters in an interview by author: *A Sunday Afternoon* (fig. 93) was at first upside down when Chou employed the broad stroke, but then she reversed the painting and completed it. This example showed that Chou might not have a fixed idea in mind, but rather flexible depended on the effects and creation process.

²⁷² Lau, “*Xianggang shuimohua yundong yanjiu*”, 5-2.

from those included by Lau's model. However, it is the opinion that the two artists are consistent in terms of some key concepts of art which profoundly echo with Lui's teaching.

Like Chou, Wong, often addresses the issue of 'self'. The searching of 'self' for Wong is not about liberation of emotion, as he claims he does not prefer a strong expression of emotion, such as being depressive and explosive, as this is too far away from his character.²⁷³ When he describes the period between 1975 and 1984 [the time he taught at the Department of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic] he reflected and said,

“During this time I was focused on trying to better understand myself by tracing back to my Eastern origins. And I had many questions to answer: Who am I? What have I in common with other people and in what ways am I different from them? ...”

Both artists achieved their state of *shi* and attempted to revolutionize ink painting by searching and responding to their own *gen*. Because of his thought of not having sufficient knowledge of Chinese painting, Wong had studied with Lui as a private student in 1958 for two years. He copied works of many masters such as Dong Yuan (董源 active ca. 937 - 976), Wu Daozi and Bada Shenren to attain Chinese brushwork technique under Lui's guidance.²⁷⁴ He admired Chinese ancient masters, such as Northern Song painter Fan Kuan (范寬 active ca. 1023 - 1031) whose monumental *shanshui* paintings are well-respected.²⁷⁵ In contrast to Chou, Wong had direct exposure in the West

²⁷³ Wai-lim Yip, *Yu dangdai yishujia de duihua: Zhongguo xiandaihua de shengcheng* (與當代藝術家的對話: 中國現代畫的生成 Conversations with Nine Artists: The Becoming of Chinese Painting) (Taipei: Dongda tushu gufen youxiangongsi, 1987), 166.

²⁷⁴ Wucius Wong, “Searching for Identity: 1956 – 1964,” in *At the East-West Crossroads: The Art of Wucius Wong*, -- (Hong Kong: The Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2006), 31.

²⁷⁵ Wucius Wong, “Tracing Back to the Source: 1975 – 1984,” in *At the East-West Crossroads*,

as he had been to the United States to study art between 1961 and 1965 and immigrated there between 1984 and 1996. He clearly expresses that the “four cornerstones” in his art are literature, design, the Chinese aesthetic and tradition, Western modernism.²⁷⁶ Wong particularly admires design as he thinks this rationale is lacking in Chinese culture. He studied at The Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio. The design classes developed his “reasoning skills” and “lateral thinking”.²⁷⁷ Basic forms such as squares, triangles and rectangles as well as implied horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines are always found in Wong’s paintings indicating his systemic allocation and analytical organization of geometric forms. Wong said,

“My theorization has a lot to do with systematic thinking and very little to do with emotion and intuition. This is because I prefer to tackle the principles in precise and concrete terms with maximum objectivity and minimum ambiguity.”²⁷⁸

Most of his paintings, from establishing ideas to accomplishment, from draft to enlargement of draft are careful manipulation and seldom involves improvisation.²⁷⁹ *Cloud Harmony No.1* (fig. 116, dated 1978) demonstrates how Wong depicts traditional style landscape with a clear hint of rational visual thinking. It is an image of blending a mountain landscape in a structure of grids. It equally divides the painting surface into two vertical and four horizontal segments, forming eight identical squares. The static geometric patterns of grids are largely influenced by the systemic design approach from the West,

77.

²⁷⁶ Yip, *Yu dangdai yishujia de duihua*, 154. Wong explained, “The emotional content came from literature; design provided the structural and rhythmic order; tradition established the inner spirit, and modernism guided all these explorations.” in Wong, “Searching for Identity,”

32.

²⁷⁷ Wong, “Searching for Identity,” 32.

²⁷⁸ Wucius Wong, *Principles of Form and Design* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), 42.

²⁷⁹ Yip, *Yu dangdai yishujia de duihua*, 154.

giving a sense of rigidity and solidness of the mountains. Wong once expressed that the great concentration applied to best painting led himself to being immersed into the painting - “I am mountains; mountains are me”.²⁸⁰ The mist and clouds in between the mountains suggest mobility contrasting the solemnity of the mountains. In an interview by a local important writer and scholar Leung Ping Kwan (also known as Yesi, 也斯) (1949 – 2013) in 2009, Wong described, “I paint mountains because of cloud and water.”²⁸¹ Their fluidity enables them not to belong to a particular space at a particular time. He associated such features to his feeling of identity especially in the years before the handover of Hong Kong in 1997.²⁸²

Despite the very distinctive visual presentation, both Chou and Wong paid considerable attention to their inner expression in their creativity. It is noticeable that the two artists had different temperaments; they grew up in different backgrounds and had different encounters with the influences of western modernism. Certainly, the state of *shi* was achieved in different ways because of these variables.

Alternatives in media

Oil and acrylic on canvas are often used by Wucius Wong as well. Lui encouraged his students to explore other media in order to better know the uniqueness of different media. By doing so, an artist could also find the media

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 159.

²⁸¹ Ping Kwan Leung and Pak Shing Tse, ““Zai huajia zhizhong wo jue de ziji shi ge wenren” - Wang Wuxie fangtanlu (“在畫家之中,我覺得自己是個文人” - 王無邪訪談錄 I think I Am a Literatus Among Painters – Interview with Wucius Wong),” *Hong Kong Literary Monthly* 311 (2010), 89.

²⁸² Ibid., 90.

that is best for him/her which can be watercolor, oil, or something else. Wong, encouraged by Lui [in the 1960s], continued his experiment with the use of watercolors and Chinese ink on absorbent paper in his own way.²⁸³ It is not surprising that in the art development of Wong and Chou, media other than ink was usually adopted. The core of Ink Painting rests on the concept of being innovative under the state of *shi* without clear-cut restriction on media even though *shuimo* is the main focus in Lui's teaching.

Hon Chi-fun²⁸⁴, who is also a painter looking exploring his inner self is a useful example to elaborate the condition. He has a wide exposure in America, South America and Europe. He has a strong tie with Chinese values. His numerous works are oil, acrylic on canvas or prints or serigraphy, however, his concepts of art adhere to Lui's in searching his own 'self'. He started his artistic path by sketching, later he reflected that these works were just exercises, but did not reflect "him".²⁸⁵ Hon gradually realized abstract thoughts such as aspirations and ideas can be included in paintings, and that by including them in his painting he could even release his depressive emotions.²⁸⁶ Painting, as he describes, is a way to "rescue" him.²⁸⁷ Hon considers his art a "delivery".

"Delivery" is a sacred offer of one's utmost self and passion."²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Wong, "Searching for Identity," 31.

²⁸⁴ Hon Chi Fun met Lui in 1963 in his first solo exhibition at Chatham Galleries. They were members of Modern Literature and Art Association. Hon was not his student, but they soon became close friends. Hon has been to New York in the 1960s and travelled to Europe and South America several times that granted him a first-hand experience in the West.

²⁸⁵ Chi Fun Hon, *Modern Art in a Colony: Narrated by Hon Chi-Fun at the Millennium* (Ontario, Canada: York University York Centre for Asian Research; [Hong Kong] : Hong Kong Institute of Education, 2008), 81.

²⁸⁶ Hon, *Modern Art in a Colony*, 81.

²⁸⁷ Hon, *Modern Art in a Colony*, 103.

²⁸⁸ Yan Chi Choi, "His Unending Journey (translated version)," in *Space and Passion: The Art of Hon Chi-Fun*, ed. Yan Chi Choi (Hong Kong: Choi Yan Chi, 2000), 46.

The circle is a constant signature of Hon, a dramatically different representation to Chou's circles but both of them focus on the abstract meanings. The circle in Hon's works evolved in different stages. In the 1960s, Hon integrated the Chinese character 我 (literally me) into his circles, within, above, below or else²⁸⁹, such as *A Profound Message* (fig. 117, dated 1968). Although he claimed that the character of "me" might not equal to him as an author, he admitted that "me" as a basic unit of things. In his mature paintings of circles, they blend subtly with light and color. Hon regards his works are "all very personal"²⁹⁰ and the circle to him, is his "icon",

"The circle is me; my form of existence, the thing I worship. It embodies the contemporary environment and space. It is the perfection I'm after."²⁹¹

Hon's works also demonstrate expertise in spray-guns and serigraphy. His serigraphs such as *Frozen Blue* (fig. 118, dated 1971) and *Beyond Space* (fig. 119, dated 1978) are very precise works that the artist finished by "only one single decisive pass" in the printing process.²⁹² Despite different media, Hon and Chou's ideas of art have many similarities in terms of the concentration in process, dedication to art as an exploration and expression of inner self, and unification with the works.

Consistency with Lui

Another painter Laurence Tam who was the first President of the In Tao Art Association in 1968 was also profoundly inspired by Lui. In an interview

²⁸⁹ Eva Man, "Hon Chi-fun's work being MODERN and ORIENTAL re-pondered (translated version)," in *Space and Passion*, 82.

²⁹⁰ Hon Chi-fun, "My Own Story (translated version)," *Space and Passion*, 18.

²⁹¹ Man, "Hon Chi-fun's work being MODERN and ORIENTAL re-pondered," 82.

²⁹² Hon Chi-fun, "My Way with Serigraphy," in *Space and Passion*, 203.

conducted in 2012, at the age of 79, Tam vividly talked about the teachings and visions of Lui. He recalled the times the members of the In Tao Art Association gathered every Sunday to paint in the art room of Kowloon Wah Yan College. They observed each other and rejected to paint what the other painted. Thus, each of the members has his/her own style.²⁹³ The career of Tam focused more on art education and curatorial profession. Nevertheless, the influence of Lui can be seen in the Tam's art teaching at Kowloon Wah Yan College in the mid-1960s to early 1970s. He abandoned the conventional way of imitation to learn Chinese painting, rather he taught dots, lines and planes by Chinese brush and ink focusing students' creativity, individuality and innovation.

These artists inspired by Lui were not aware of themselves as Ink painters at the time when the concept of Ink Painting itself was still evolving.²⁹⁴ Their emphasis on innovation and their different styles prove that Lui did not intend to form a School, but rather to advocate creation should explore all kind of possibilities.²⁹⁵ The memories of the artists indicate that they were all grateful to Lui because of his provoking thoughts and stimulation. Wong stated that,

“I am indebted to Master Lui for his illumination of concepts and methods of various schools, his deep knowledge of traditional theories, his broad vision and open-mindedness, and his searching spirit. Particularly, his emphasis on the unique qualities of the Chinese painting media, and his insistence on originality and individual freedom in artistic creation made an indelible impression on me.”²⁹⁶

Similarly, Hon expressed that he learnt much from Lui's views on “classic

²⁹³ Laurence Tam, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 16, 2012.

²⁹⁴ Laurence Tam, interview by author, Hong Kong, August 16, 2012.

²⁹⁵ Hoi Chiu Tang, “Hong Kong Creativity: Contemporary Ink-painting,” in *Contemporary Hong Kong Ink Painting Exhibition 2006*, ed. Shing Kau Chan (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Modern Chinese Ink Painting Association, 2006), unpagged.

²⁹⁶ Wong, “Searching for Identity,” 31-2.

masters, on himself and his theories”.²⁹⁷ More importantly, he describes Lui’s art concepts in an interview by Phoebe Wong. The quote is not only a description of Lui’s advocacy but also the pursuit of Hon himself.²⁹⁸ Hon said,

“Lui advocated self expression, so he emphasized artistic expression and creation about self. However, this expression of self is not only about emotional or spiritual, but also as a development and establishment of inner self as an integral whole of a person.”²⁹⁹

Chou also expressed that Lui had a profound influence on her attitude.³⁰⁰ From these recollections about Lui, the thoughts embedded in the artists’ mind are the concepts of “originality”, “individual freedom”, “self expression” and “attitude”. It indicates the influence of Lui as an initiator and educator of Ink Painting, a thought provoking concept in his time to counter the imitation practice of the Lingnan School. Lui’s advocacy was widespread whether to his course students, private students or painter friends. This advocacy can also be found among the members of the In Tao Association and the One Art Group which were formed by Lui’s extramural course students. As well as Chou and Laurence Tam, there were many other members of the two art groups who were active members showing the philosophy of Ink Painting such as Ng Yiu-chung (吳耀忠 1935 –), Cheng Wai-kwok (鄭維國 1920 –).

Lui’s initiative served as stimulation to the artists of Hong Kong of his time. It does not mean that he advocated the definite direction of the artists, but he advocated a way to think and perceive Ink Painting and art in general. The

²⁹⁷ Hon, “My Own Story (translated version),” 22.

²⁹⁸ Chi Fun Hon, *Interview: Hon Chi Fun (Series 2)*, DVD, interview by Phoebe Wong (Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive, 2004).

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Chou, “The Time in Which I was Born,” 22.

core reason of advocating Ink Painting was to counter the imitation apprenticeship of the Lingnan School. Thus it has a strong emphasis on innovation and inner expression. The Ink Painting recognizes that each artist is unique and that their expression of the inner self will therefore be unique. This is a belief generally shared by the artists, even though it may not be easy to examine one's inner expression. Chou, Wong and Hon merge Chinese tradition and western influences in order to attain their own state of *shi* while the innovative techniques in their art are ways to express themselves. The consistent attitude is the common feature of Ink painters, rather than visual similarities or techniques. The Ink Painting is supposed to be a category accommodating all kind of styles.

Conclusion

This thesis not only analyzes the distinctive artistic style of Irene Chou as an artist, but also her philosophy of art which reflects Lui's advocacy of Ink Painting. When Chou's half century of artistic development is considered, it is evident that there was a dramatic stylistic shift from her early imitative painting such as *Fox* (fig. 16) and her late works such as the one currently displayed in the ADC building (fig. 111). Although Chou started to paint by chance, she became a pioneer of executing the concepts of Ink Painting. It appeared that Chou's desire to continue painting was largely prompted by her satisfaction that she had at last found a way to express herself.

In 1966, Chou became Lui's student. It was then she adopted a detached attitude towards imitation and gave up the Lingnan style. She was encouraged by Lui to seek her inner self expression with honesty and sincerity. Each of the motifs she developed in her art contributed to her expression of inner self. Creativity was the strongest drive in Chou's life. She never ceased her creations even when facing adverse circumstances, such as her health condition. At the age of 68, Chou immigrated to Brisbane, Australia after a stroke and re-established her artistic career. It was extremely hard at the beginning as she was not active or known in the Australian art scene. None of her paintings were sold in the first exhibition at Philip Bacon Galleries, which was one of the most prestigious galleries in Brisbane.³⁰¹ She did not compromise even in this situation to produce what may have been more saleable works. Chou expressed how important creativity meant to her in the preface of her biography when she

³⁰¹ Lorena Butcher, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, August 31, 2012.

was 77,

“I would like to live forever only if I still have the artistic ability to create my own art.”³⁰²

Chou described everything she experienced as “floating clouds” such as happiness, anger, sadness, conflict in relationships and hardship in the war. She regarded these as transient. These transient “clouds” were in contrast to her regard for her paintings which she considered as eternal. She said: “there is only one thing that stays in my heart and captivates my forever love – that is my painting”.³⁰³ It is apparent that art was her life. In an interview with Hilary Binks, Chou agreed that her painting originated as an expression of her emotion.³⁰⁴ The urge to express herself was largely related to her life incidents, such as the separation with her parents, the tension with her mother, the intense relationship with her husband and his traumatic death. She expressed that,

“... But I feel that there is no need for landscape painting. ... The most important thing is that we have a heart. The heart can be big. My expression of this is through abstract painting.”³⁰⁵

Chou’s paintings of *My Inner World* and *Trial and Tribulation* were exhibited under the category of “Mountain and Water – the Immutable Landscape” (山與水：永恆的風景) in the exhibition entitled “Hong Kong Cityscapes – Ink Painting in Transition” in 2003.³⁰⁶ It is noted that even the content of Chou’s art includes traces of natural substances such as the roots-like patterns - it is not about landscape, but her inner self.

³⁰² Irene Chou, preface to *Dan qing chonger*, by Yixin and Yijie, unpagued.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Binks, “The Universe Within,” 37.

³⁰⁵ Binks, “The Universe Within,” 37.

³⁰⁶ Mei Lin Lai, “Some Thoughts on Looking at “Hong Kong Cityscapes - Ink Painting in Transition,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2003*, ed. Harold Mok and Kurt Chan (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 172.

Chou achieved her state of *shi* as a Chinese brought up in early twentieth Shanghai and an educated woman living in Hong Kong in the 1960s. Chou focused on taking care of her family. At this time, she was always reported as “Evan Yang’s wife” in articles concerning her. She then evolved as a modern Chinese female and an international artist. Her achievement as an artist was also closely related to the much larger context of Hong Kong in the post-1949 era. One of the aims of this thesis is to use Chou as a case study to better understand Lui’s concept of Ink Painting. As far as Chou’s art is concerned, there are still some interesting issues not addressed by this thesis such as the sexual expression and gender issue in her art³⁰⁷, also her market concern as a professional artist³⁰⁸.

It is indisputable that Lui’s teaching influenced Chou as an artist. Lui’s advocacy of Ink Painting had widely stimulated the artists in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s. Ink Painting evolved as a concept in response to the Chinese tradition and western influences in Hong Kong in the mid-twentieth century. It is worth noticing that Ink Painting is a fluid concept. Lui’s advocacy created countless possibilities depending on different *gen*, state of *shi* and inner

³⁰⁷ These issues have been mentioned in some articles such as Fred Hong, “Chouxian zaxing lijie zaixin - kan Zhou Luyun de hua (抽象在形 理解在心 - 看周綠雲的畫 Appreciating Irene Chou’s Painting),” *Ming Pao Monthly* 39, no. 2 (2004): 88. In an interview with Lorena Butcher by author, she also pointed out the issue of sex in Chou’s paintings. As a matter of fact, Chou never denied and admitted herself “depicting sex in a Chinese way” in Binks, “The Universe Within: Irene Chou,” 36. She also said sex was just like the contrast concept of *yin* and *yang* which were part of the universe in Butcher, “The Universe is My Heart; My Heart is the Universe,” 18.

³⁰⁸ After moving to Brisbane, Australia, Chou had to think of different ways to re-establish her artistic career. Michael Yang recalled that Chou even took her paintings to the shopping malls to see if there were any shops interested in her works. When she came home without much success, she asked her son Yang whether she should alter her style to fit the market. Michael Yang, interview by author, Brisbane, Queensland, 26 August, 2012. This incident reflects Chou’s struggle between her will and the potential market. This is also a struggle of many other professional painters. Throughout the thesis, the best/ most representational paintings of Chou’s were chosen for discussion.

expression of individuals. Through the exploration of the Ink Painting, this thesis provides an alternative to the common visual models suggested by Lau Kin Wai to categorize Ink painters.

In the 1960s, Hong Kong was a fertile artistic environment compared to mainland China and Taiwan where there was less creative freedom because of political and social considerations. Both Laurence Tam and Wucius Wong agreed that the soil of Hong Kong was beneficial for the development of Ink Painting. Taiwan did have a development of “modern ink painting” advocated by Liu Guosong, but he came to Hong Kong to further develop his artistic and teaching career in 1971. The freedom available in Hong Kong allowed Lui’s advocacy of Ink Painting to influence local artist such as Chou, Laurence Tam and Wucius Wong.

In Lui’s own writing, he frequently used the two terms “ink painting” and “modern Chinese painting”, but rarely, if not totally none, used “New Ink Painting”. There are other issues not able to be addressed by the thesis. What are the differences between the Ink Painting advocated by Lui and “modern ink painting”? How did Hong Kong’s development of ink painting in the second half of the twentieth century influence the development of ink painting in mainland China? What is the position of Hong Kong in the global context of ink painting development?

Chou was a significant artist of the Ink Painting Movement in Hong Kong in the 1960s – 1980s. The social context of Chou’s life provides insights as to

how upbringing and life incidents can influence artistic opportunities and creativity. The concept of Ink Painting provided the initial stimulus to her expression of her inner self and her subsequent evolution as an artist. The development of her motifs and stylistic innovation and technique were her own. Lui's advocacy opened the door for her. She walked through it, set her own path, and became an independent female artist. Chou acknowledged that her painting was an expression of herself. Her painting was also the most vital element of her life. She said, "I am my art, my paintings are me."³⁰⁹ The thesis attempts to position Chou into the wider context of Hong Kong art history by proposing her art as a case study for the Ink Painting.³¹⁰ It is felt that further research is needed to assign her to her rightful place in Hong Kong art history.

³⁰⁹ Chou, "Irene in Her Own Words," 19.

³¹⁰ The case study of Irene Chou can be discussed in the much larger context of Chinese painting. The thesis focuses on the Hong Kong context to stress the relationship between Chou and Ink Painting. However, in order to see an even more comprehensive picture of Chinese painting, the significance of the advocacy of Ink Painting and the categorization of Chou in the Chinese context are subjects to further investigate.

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Bada Shanren 八大山人(1626-1705)

baimiao 白描

bimo 筆墨

Chan 禪

Chen Shuren 陳樹人 (1883 – 1948)

chuanshen lun 傳神論

chuncaai tiao 尊菜條

cihai 辭海

cun 皴

Dong Yuan 董源 (active ca. 937 - 976)

Fan Kuan 范寬 (active ca. 1023 - 1031)

Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879 – 1951)

Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889 – 1933)

gen 根

Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 345 – 406)

Hao wang jiao 好望角

heshi 合適

He Tianjian 賀天健 (1890 – 1977)

hong 空

Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 (1865 – 1955)

Irene Chou, Zhou Luyun 周綠雲 (1924 – 2011)

Jianle 見樂

Jin Qichao 金其超 (1901 – 1950)

Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858 – 1927)

Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記

Li Chu-tsing, Li Zhujin 李鑄晉 (1920 –)

Li Fangying 李方膺 (1695-1755)

Li Sixun 李思訓 (651 – 716)
Li Zhaodao 李昭道 (active ca. early 8th C.)
Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900 – 1991)
linmo 臨摹
liubai 留白
liufa 六法
Liu Guosong 劉國松 (1932 –)
Liu Yichang 劉以鬯 (1918 –)
lu 綠
Lu Canming 呂燦銘 (1892 – 1962)
Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 (1139 – 1193)
Lui Shou Kwan, Lu Shoukun 呂壽琨 (1919 – 1975)

Malang 馬朗 (1933 –)
maotai 茅台
modeng 摩登

Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863 – 1957)
qigong 氣功
Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895 – 1990)
Qianshuiwan 淺水灣
queyue cun 雀躍皴

rugen 入根

shanshui 山水
shen 神
shi 適
shili yangchang 十里洋場
shiying 適應
Shitao 石濤 (1642 – 1718)
shuimo 水墨
shuimo hua 水墨畫
song 鬆
Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036 – 1101)

taichi 太極

Wan Qingli 萬青力 (1945 –)
Wang Wei 王維 (699 – 759)
Wenyi xinchao 文藝新潮
Wu Daozi 吳道子 (active ca. 710 – 760)

Xie He 謝赫 (active 5th C.)
xiehua 寫畫
xieyi 寫意
Xin Guohua 新國畫
Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895 – 1953)
Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903 – 1982)
Xuyu 徐訐 (1908 – 1980)

Yang Shanshen 楊善深 (1913 – 2004)
yijian zhongqing 一見鍾情

Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 813 – 879)
Zhao Shaoang 趙少昂 (1905 – 1998)
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fig. 2 *Breakthrough* ca. 1979
Reprinted from: *One Art Group* 1979

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 Photo taken by author

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 Photo taken by author

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Photo taken by author

fig. 54 *Breakout II* ca. 1979

fig. 55 *Concentration 004* ca. 1974
Collected by Hong Kong Museum of Art
Photo taken by author

fig. 56 *Hermit* 1980s

fig. 57 *Tree 1* ca. 1970

fig. 58 *Tree 2* ca. 1970

fig. 59 *Self Portrait* ca. 1984

fig. 60 *Mid-winter -- Spring II 1980s*

fig. 61 *Infinity Landscape III* 1987

fig. 61a *Infinity Landscape III* (detail) 1987

fig. 61b *Infinity Landscape III* (detail) 1987

fig. 62 *Silk Painting I* 1998

fig. 63 *The Universe Lies Within I* 1996

fig. 64 *My Heart is the Universe III* 2002

fig. 65 *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing No.02 2006*

fig. 66 *Life as a Many Splendoured Thing #5* ca. 2007

fig. 67 *Movement I* 1980s

fig. 67a *Movement I* (detail) 1980s

fig. 68 *Life is but a Dream IV* 2000

fig. 69 *The Universe is My Mind 6* 2002

fig. 70 *The Universe is My Mind 1* 2002

fig. 71 *4:30 A.M.* (detail) 1980s

fig. 72 *First of the Sun* (detail) 1991

fig. 73 *The Universe Lies Within II* 1997

fig. 74 *My Heart is the Universe I* 2002

fig. 75 *Impact* 力 ca. 1977

fig. 76 *Impact* 氣 ca. 1977

fig. 77 Lui Shou Kwan *Zen #T-94* 1970

fig. 77a Lui Shou Kwan *Zen #T-94* (detail) 1970

fig. 78 Lui Shou Kwan *Zen #T-95* 1970

fig. 79 *Impact I* 1981

fig. 80 *Impact* N.D.

fig. 81 *Impact I* 1978

fig. 82 *Impact II*

fig. 83 *Impact III* 1978

fig. 84 *Untitled* 1978

fig. 85 *Birth* 1983

fig. 86 *Movement II* 1980s

fig. 87 *Movement III* 1980s

fig. 88 *Genesis* 1980s

fig. 88a *Genesis* (detail) 1980s

fig. 89 Chan Shing Kau
Meng de shenghua II
 (夢的昇華 II *Revelation of Dream II*)
 2006

fig. 90 Ha Bik Chuen
The Wonderful Universe 2003

fig. 91 *Infinity Landscape II* 1980s

fig. 92 *Soliloquy* 1980s

fig. 93 *A Sunday Afternoon* 1986

fig. 94 *My First Australian Landscape* 1995

fig. 95 *The Universe V* 1997

fig. 96 , 97 and 98 a series of *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing* ca. 2007

fig. 99 and 100 a series of *The Creation Trilogy* 1990

fig. 101 *Vortex* 1991

fig. 102 *Yin Yang* 1991

fig. 103 *Thunder and Lightning* (detail) 1998

fig. 104 *Life is but a Dream II* 1999

fig. 105 *Mind of the Cosmo* 2006

fig. 106 Liu Guosong *Eclipse* 1971

fig. 107 *The Eclipse* 1980s

fig. 108 Liu Guosong *Launch* 2005

fig. 109 Liu Guosong *Announcement* 2005

fig. 110 Liu Guosong *Metamorphosis of the Sun, No.9* 1971

fig. 111 Currently displayed in the ADC building in Brisbane, Australia
(The title is unknown to the author) 2001

fig. 112 *Here is My Heart III* 2001

fig. 113 *Meditations* 2003

fig. 114 *In Celebration of Being 80* 2004

fig. 115 *Life is a Many Splendoured Thing No.08 2006*

fig. 116 Wucius Wong *Cloud Harmony No.1* 1978

fig. 117 Hon Chi Fun *A Profound Message* 1968

fig. 118 Hon Chi Fun *Frozen Blue* 1971

fig. 119 Hon Chi Fun *Beyond Space* 1978

pl. 1 Chou and her friend in front of her red bunk bed 1980s

pl. 2 Red door at Chou's place in Hong Kong ca. 1986
Photo taken by Michael Yang

pl. 3 Red fridge and fan at Chou's place in Hong Kong ca. 1986
Photo taken by Michael Yang

pl. 4 Circular shapes Chou used to cover the areas she did not want to be affected
2000s

Photo taken by Michael Yang

pl. 5 Myriad of ink and color splatters on the walls and furniture at Chou's place in
Australia 2000s

Photo taken by Michael Yang