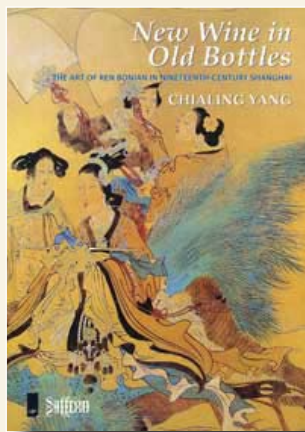


NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

The Art of Ren Bonian in Nineteenth-Century Shanghai

YANG CHIALING

Ren Yi, the self-styled Bonian (1840-1895), is rightly considered as one of the most prolific painters in late nineteenth century Shanghai. Like many of his contemporaries, the life of Ren Bonian was much entangled with social and economic change in the international city where new and old, local and foreign intermingled at that time. This book poses three broad questions: what was the relationship between the changes in late Qing Shanghai society and artistic directions? What role do Ren Bonian's figure paintings play in the social relations of power, including those of class and gender? How do these help us to understand the artistic trends in Shanghai at that time?



With equal attention given to history and art history, the book explains the interrelationship of Ren Bonian and the cultural circumstances defined by his urban environment in the treaty port, from the first Opium War (1839-1842) to the First Sino-Japanese War (1895-1896). Two key themes recur throughout the book: firstly, Shanghai's location in China's first phase of modernity and, secondly, the city's transformation by social change and cultural pluralism. In taking Ren Bonian as a key exemplar, the book explores the degree to which a traditional Chinese artist chose to adapt and adopt a new role as modern-day man in a changing society, and the extent to which he accepted or refused foreign conventions. In viewing Ren's art in the context of nineteenth-century Shanghai, his work thus becomes a source not only of information about his education and class, but also about the 'situation' of the artist. The situations that had reinforced the popular appeal of Ren's art in his times are consequently what defined the Shanghai School and its modernity.

Yang Chialing received a BA and MA from the National Taiwan University and Warwick University respectively, and a PhD at the University of London (SOAS). Currently she is a Lecturer of Art History at the University of Sussex. Dr Yang also lectures on the British Museum courses in Chinese Painting and has contributed to publications on modern Chinese art.

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