

Here, There — Where Are We?

By Dai Zhikang

I happened to see an old story about the Chinese contemporary art on Southern Weekly. It was about 30 years ago when the China Art Academy (Also known as Zhejiang Art Academy) re-started to recruit students after the Cultural Revolution. In order to buy some contemporary art books from abroad to broaden the visions of the students, the academy sold its car to cover the cost. It is said that many well-established Chinese artists and scholars today such as Huang Yongping, Xu Jiang, Wang Guangyi and Zhang Peili benefited from those books. But can those foreign books be regarded as the origin of Chinese contemporary art? Will the development of Chinese contemporary art be malnourished because it merely relied on imported ideas?

The Chinese contemporary art has witnessed the emergence of avant-garde art at Yuan Mingyuan village, the boom of contemporary art at 798 Warehouse and Song Zhuang artist's village at the beginning of this century. We are brought to a new start now: the newly founded Heavenly Peace (Tian-an) Time Contemporary Art Centre is supposed to be a new art space to present the core of Chinese contemporary art. But why is it located on the site of the earlier American Embassy?

We have arrived at the point where we are now funding contemporary art. Our next challenge is to translate the power of contemporary art to the day to day lives of all people.

As the old saying goes “The Yellow River diverts its course once every thirty years”. According to our ancestors' saying, we should be certain about our course because we have tested each stepping stone when crossing the river for the past thirty years. Now with mud on our feet we are forced to ask ourselves is this where we wanted to be?

Water streaming down from the magic snow mountain has been made dirty by our progress. It's difficult to see where we come from or where we are going. The stepping stones along the way have disappeared.

When you arrive at the marshland by the edge of the river, and, if you have brought three stepping stones with you from the river, you may be able to make a path. Maybe you will find your way through.