Chua Ek Kay
Low, Sze Wee

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CHUA EK KAY

BEING AND BECOMING AN ARTIST

Over the past few decades, whenever I work on an art piece, tradition and innovation often alternate and intermingle. At times they would be in opposition and at others they would be integrated as one. This complicated relationship and its complexity can be hard to understand.¹

In the above quote, Chua Ek Kay revealed with unflinching honesty, the struggles and anxieties he had faced throughout his artistic journey. He had meditated upon many aspects of his practice, including the concepts of being and becoming, and this self-reflexivity is evident in both his artistic and literary endeavours.

What does it mean to "be" an artist? Apart from knowing what and how to create, an openness to different perspectives is critical. Artists also have to think about for whom they are producing art. Hence, Ek Kay’s considered approach in developing his career played an important role in his early success.
的胸襟也是关键性的。艺术家还必须思考“为谁创作”的问题。由此观之，蔡逸溪的自画发展予以考量而采取的特定进程，可说对他早年的成功扮演了重要的角色。

就“塑成”的方面，我们要问：一个人如何“成为”艺术家？成为艺术家的过程，往往被视为一条直线递进的道路，当中的失败或焦虑鲜少被人提及。蔡逸溪的情况则不然；他作品中的模糊性与模棱两可，显示了他一路走来面对了多少内在矛盾与挣扎。

引言

蔡逸溪出生于1947年，自小便在中华艺术与文化方面打下了必要的根基。自七岁起，他的父亲便教他学书法。这方面的基础，后来在求学时期以及向本地书法家非正式求教的日子里得到加深。成年后的蔡逸溪从1975至1987年间向我国第一代水墨画家范曾学习绘画。在蔡逸溪看来，范昌魁是他所有导师之中对他影响最深的一位。范昌魁是王个簃（1897-1988）的弟子，学的是崇尚文人画传统的海派绘画风格，喜爱畅快的写意与精确的工笔画法。在中华文人传统中，绘画的笔触如同诗按转折的书迹，同样被视为个人风格的凝结；当下的意趣，轻描淡写的技艺，比苦心经营更受重视；而且首要的一点是：捕捉描绘对象的精神比达到形式更为重要。此外，文人画家也讲求在每一幅作品中成就诗、画、书三者的结合，欲使诗润画意，画面图像和题款书迹共同发挥作用，传达画家的思想感情，这原则为蔡逸溪所尊奉于心；他醉心于石涛（1642-1707）与黄宾虹（1885-1955）等过往宗师的画艺与遗留文献，而在这两位大师正面提提倡与此相类的取向好尚。

蔡逸溪与中华艺术渊源深厚，但是他对西方艺术也颇为了解。虽然有不少人把此后的源头追溯到他在1990年代的正式学习，他其实早在中学时期便已接触过水彩画和木炭画。自1988年成为全职画家之后，蔡逸溪在寻求开创新技法、新画法的过程中发现了自己知识上的若干空白。有鉴于自己对西方艺术的某些方面（如透视画法）缺乏技术知识，他遂决定于1989年修读拉萨尔－新航艺术学院的绘画高级文凭课程。他在拉萨尔学习了水墨写生，学会运用油彩、胶彩、粉彩等西式媒介。于此期间，他对藏库宁和安生克非尔等画家，还有其某些艺术风潮

How does one “become” an artist? The process of becoming an artist is often seen as a linear path of progression, with little mention of disappointments or anxieties. In contrast, the ambiguities and ambivalences in Ek Kay’s works reveal the internal contradictions and struggles he faced along the way.

Introduction

Born in 1947, Ek Kay received an essential grounding in Chinese art and culture from a young age. From the age of seven, he was taught calligraphy by his father. This foundation was later reinforced in school as well as in informal lessons with local calligraphers over the years. As an adult, Ek Kay studied painting under the first-generation ink artist Fan Chang Tien from 1975 to 1987. Ek Kay considered Fan to have had the greatest influence on him among all his mentors. A student of Wang Geyi (1897-1988), Fan trained in the Shanghai School style of painting which emphasised the literati painting tradition, and he preferred the swift xieyi (writing the idea) style over the detailed gongbi (meticulous brush) style. Within the literati tradition, brushwork in painting, similar to brushwork in calligraphy, was believed to express a person’s moral character. Spontaneity or effortless skill was valued over laborsious re-creation.

And above all, capturing the spirit of the subject was more important than achieving likeness of form. Literati artists also sought to integrate poetry, painting and writing in each work, such that poetic imagery, pictorial form and calligraphy worked together to express the artist’s thoughts and emotions. These principles were taken to heart by Ek Kay, who was drawn to the art and writings of past masters like Shitao (1642-1707) and Huang Binhong (1865-1955), both of whom promoted similar values.

In addition to his background in Chinese art, Ek Kay also had a good understanding of Western art. While many have traced this to his formal studies in the 1990s, Ek Kay had already been exposed to watercolour painting and charcoal drawing in his secondary school years. After becoming a full-time artist in 1988, Ek Kay discovered gaps in his knowledge while he was struggling to invent new techniques and approaches to his paintings.

Since he lacked technical knowledge in certain aspects of Western art such as perspective drawing, he decided to enrol in an advanced diploma course in painting at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts (Lasalle) in 1989. At Lasalle, he studied studio drawing and learned to use Western media such as oils, acrylics and pastels. During that time, he was fascinated by artists such as Willem de Kooning and Anselm Kiefer, and art movements such as Surrealism. He also became bolder in his use of materials, as seen from his incorporation of gold acrylic in his ink paintings.

After graduating in 1990, Ek Kay felt that he had yet to reach the end of his schooling and as he had found the Lasalle stint to be helpful, he decided to further his studies and undergo formal training at a university. In 1993, he enrolled in the University of Tasmania. Ek Kay chose a Western art school because he already had a good foundation in xieyi painting and was not interested in other Chinese painting traditions. He was also drawn to art movements such as American Abstract Expressionism and European Figurative Expressionism, and he sought a better understanding of Western art theories, in particular postmodernism. Lastly, he felt that a stint in the West would allow him to gain a sense of perspective with regard
to his practice.\textsuperscript{15} In Tasmania, Ek Kay studied basic modes of contemporary art, including installation and performance art, and signed up for modules on professional practice and curation.\textsuperscript{16} Apart from his art history classes, Ek Kay found the modules on art theories, particularly postmodernism, helpful.\textsuperscript{17} After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1994, Ek Kay continued to pursue a master’s degree at the University of Western Sydney where he delved deeper into philosophical subjects such as post-structuralism.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Being an Artist}

Mastering the techniques employed in Chinese and Western art provides an artist with the tools to produce works in those traditions. In Ek Kay’s case, this bicultural combination facilitated an important mindset of openness to new or different viewpoints. This would have important implications for his art practice.

\textit{Openness to Different Viewpoints}

Throughout his life, Ek Kay was encouraged to think beyond the narrow confines of his own culture and worldview. Although the switch to Catholic High School with its bilingual curriculum was difficult for him initially, it exposed him to a wider range of cultural interests and activities than would have been possible in a Chinese school. For instance, Ek Kay was able to study Western classical music and become a member of the school orchestra and brass band.\textsuperscript{19}

In the 1970s and 1980s, due to his experimental approach to ink painting, Ek Kay had faced some resistance from the local Chinese painting community. Hence, when he became a student in Lasalle in the late 1980s, he enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in school where diversity was valued and students were free to explore different ways of art-making. At Lasalle, he was not made to feel as though he was betraying or discarding venerable traditions.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, in Australia, where his lecturers encouraged freedom in artistic expression, Ek Kay developed the confidence to work with various media such as oils, acrylic and even mud! He also encountered a greater diversity of artists who worked with various media and styles. Ek Kay found that his fellow students had differing definitions of art. Art could be in the form of a painting, but could also be a found object or an installation. These experiences expanded Ek Kay’s horizons and led to a greater respect for diverse perspectives by allowing him to appreciate different art forms more objectively. As Ek Kay recalled, “My studies in Australia provided me a greater scope and a wider perspective of my own as well as other artists’ works. I became more objective, not as subjective as before. I was able to understand not only my work better but also other kinds of work.”\textsuperscript{22}

Hence, this openness to different ideas and new approaches stood him in good stead during his travels. For him, these trips were not so much about on-site painting. Rather, they were opportunities to absorb new sights and perspectives that he would normally not have encountered. The former ranged from the appearance to the atmosphere of different landscapes, while the latter included alternative visual representations. For instance, this was how he had created his painting \textit{Monsoon: Wind Blows from the Indian Ocean}, after a trip to Java.

（如超现实主义）大感兴趣，并且在材料的运用上显得更为大胆，乃至于水墨画中用上金色胶泥。\textsuperscript{11} 在1990年毕业之后，蔡逸溪觉得自己的在校学习尚未完，因为觉得在拉萨尔的学习虽有帮助，他又决定深造，到大学正式进修。\textsuperscript{12} 于是，1993年，他入学于塔斯马尼亚大学。\textsuperscript{13} 蔡逸溪之所以选择一所西方的艺术学校，是因为他的绘画绘画已打下由坚实的基础。对中华绘画的其他传统不感兴趣。再者，他被美国抽象表现主义及欧洲具象表现主义等艺术风潮所吸引，想更好地了解西方艺术理论，特别是后现代主义。\textsuperscript{14} 最后，他还觉得留学西方将会让他能够更恰当地看待本身的创作。\textsuperscript{15} 在塔斯马尼亚，蔡逸溪不仅研究了当代艺术的一些基本概念（包括装置艺术与行为艺术），也修了专业创作与展览方面的课程单元。\textsuperscript{16} 除了艺术史的课以外，他觉得研讨艺术理论（特别是后现代主义）的单元对他也多有帮助。\textsuperscript{17} 他于1984年获得美术学士学位，继而以硕士学位为目标就读雪梨大学，在那里进一步研究哲学课题（如后结构主义之类）。\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{作为艺术家}

一个艺术家掌握了中西艺术的技法，等于是获取了适当的工具，得以展开属于中西艺术传统的创作。在蔡逸溪身上，这样的双文化组合催生了一种重要心态，即对各种崭新或者不同观点保持开放。这对他的艺术创作具有重大的意义。

包容不同观点的开放胸襟

在蔡逸溪的一生中，总是有一些际遇鼓励他拓展思维，超越自身文化与世界观的狭隘性。当年他转入公教中学，面对学校里多国语言课程内容，起初是感到吃力的；但那里的环境跟单纯的华校相比，终究让他有机会接触到更多元的文化兴趣与活动。举例而言，蔡逸溪正是在此得以学习西方古典音乐，并且加入学校的交响乐队及管乐乐队。\textsuperscript{19}

在1970及80年代，蔡逸溪由于探索实验性水墨画画的潮流，受到本地水墨画界一定的排斥。相比之下，他1980年代后期就学于拉萨尔的时候，校内的气氛比较轻松，重视多元性，学生们也有探索各种不同创作方式的自由——这一切都使他乐在其中。拉萨尔的环境不曾使他觉得自己仿佛背叛或者抛弃了尊贵
的传说。同样地，在澳洲期间，他的讲师们
鼓励创作上的自由表现，使得蔡逸溪培养出
运用多种不同媒介——如油彩、胶彩，甚至是
泥土——的自信。在那里，他遇到了更多元化
的、游刃于各种媒介与风格的艺术同好，他发
现同学们对艺术的定义各有不同。艺术品的形
式，可以是一幅画、一个现成物件，或者一件
装置。这些经历开拓了蔡逸溪的视野，使他得
以更客观地欣赏各种艺术形式。从而懂得对不
同的视角更怀尊重。据蔡逸溪回忆：“在澳洲
念书，让我自己和其他艺术家的创作扩大了
涵盖面，张开了视野。我觉得更客观，不像以
前那么主观；对于自己的艺术，还有其他类型的
创作，得以获得更全面的了解。”21

如此包容不同理念和新领域的胸襟，终究使
他在游历之际大有所得。对他而言，一次次的
远游，重点不在于写生，而是在于借机吸
收平时难得一遇的新景物、新视角。所谓新
景物，包含不同风景的外相与氛围；所谓新
视角，则包含另类的视觉呈现方式。举例来
言，在去了一趟爪哇之后，他是这样把《印度
洋掀起的季候风》画出来的：“我摘取了（爪哇）
这些庙宇浮雕，加以重新组合，
创造新的画面布局。我还借用的尺度人将物体
四面同时展现的构图方式，使观画者有如俯瞰
其上兼看四面观之，我这么做，是因为看到了
印度尼西亚与印度文化之间的联系。”22

从澳洲内地广袤的荒野，到烟雨朦胧的江南
水乡，再到加德满都的拥挤街道，蔡逸溪敢
于描绘多种互为迥异的题材，因而必须时时
反思及调整自己的画法，由于每个地方有它的
特点和特定氛围，蔡逸溪无法依赖自己经
过时间考验的老方法，而必须敢于接受不一
样的观看与绘画的方式。如此的无所执着，
正与他大为欣赏的清初画家石涛的理论相应。
石涛曾高举“无法之法，乃为至法”的旗帜，
以求抗衡正统技法的趋于僵化，换言之，在他
看来，画家一旦掌握了传统，就必须要超越之。
23无独有偶，这也与范昌乾的教学思路有
所相通。范昌乾把写实绘画的基本功传授予学
生之后，总是鼓励他们自行探索。故此，他的
学生——其中包括赖瑞龙、陈有焕、陈有勇、
陈克湛等诸位画家——往往都各自在日后逐渐
发展出独树一帜的画风。24

经过考量的事业进路

管理学理论家彼得·德鲁克提醒我们：“历史
上大有成就的人物，无论是拿破仑型、达芬

“我创造了一个新的格式由这些邮政碑文（in Java）
和重新组合它们在新格式。我也有从印度
的构成技术，描绘所有四面的物体； assurance
you are looking down as well as around it. This is because I saw the connection
between Indonesian and Indian culture.”22

As Ek Kay grappled with widely different subjects such as the stark expanse
of the Australian outback, the rain-drenched water villages of Jiangnan, and
the crowded streets of Kathmandu, he had to constantly re-think and adjust
his painting approach. Since each place had its specific characteristics and
atmosphere, Ek Kay could not rely on tried-and-tested means, but had to be
open to different ways of seeing and painting. This was consistent with the
theories of early Qing artist Shitao whom Ek Kay much admired. Shitao
had advocated “the method of no method” as a means of countering the deadening
effect of orthodox techniques. In other words, once an artist had mastered the
tradition, he needed to transcend it.23 This was also consistent with Fan Chang
Tien’s approach. The latter taught the basics of xieyi painting to his students,
but thereafter, encouraged them to explore on their own. Hence, his students
who included artists such as Nai Swee Leng, Tan Oe Pang, Tan Joo Jong and
Chen Kezhan, tended to develop very distinctive styles over time.24

Considered Approach

As the management theorist Peter F. Drucker reminds us, “History’s great
achievers – a Napoleon, a da Vinci, a Mozart – have always managed themselves.
That, in large measure, is what makes them great achievers.”25 In general, most
writings about art tend to idealise art as a form of personal expression free
from material considerations. However, it is becoming increasingly recognised
that artists do not work in a vacuum.26 Apart from knowing what and how to
create, they also have to think about for whom they are producing art.27
Over the years, Ek Kay was often lauded as a “bridge between Asian and
Western art” in creating works that combined “the richness of the Chinese
sensibility with elements of Western aesthetics.”28 While his foundation in both
Chinese and Western art was certainly crucial, Ek Kay’s ability to translate
it into a successful practice was not a given. Many factors had to come into
play, one of which being the considered approach he took over the span of his
career. He was acutely aware of the complex relationships between aesthetic
goals, changing circumstances and diverse audiences, and he worked to
balance them.

Chua Ek Kay’s life story is a remarkable one. In a relatively short span of two
decades, he enjoyed a level of critical and commercial acclaim that few had
achieved in Singapore.29 The success of his first show in 1988 gave him the
confidence to become a full-time artist. Three years later, his painting My Haunt
won the Grand Prize in the 10th UOB Painting of the Year Competition in 1991.
To date, it is the most established art competition in Singapore, and it was
the first time that a Chinese ink painting had won the prestigious award.
In 1998, his painting Dream of Borobudur won the Juror’s Choice at the regional
art competition, Philip Morris ASEAN Art Awards. A year later, he was awarded
the Cultural Medallion, Singapore’s highest national honour for local artists.
Commercial success accompanied critical acclaim for his works. Besides having
his works collected by institutions and individuals, Ek Kay also received many major public and private commissions in the 2000s. However, the difficulties which Ek Kay faced along the way were less well known. Being the eldest in a large family with six younger siblings, Ek Kay had to work immediately after graduating from Catholic High School in 1967. For the next twenty years, he took up various occupations which included running a restaurant, and separate stints with a property developer, a colour separation factory and a garment factory. When the last closed down in 1985 due to the economic recession, Ek Kay left for Hong Kong in search of business opportunities, but lost all his money within a year.

After Ek Kay returned to Singapore in 1987, he decided to hold his first exhibition in 1988. By then, he was already 41 years old. Having worked for two decades in various jobs, he would have attained a certain level of ability in prioritising tasks, managing staff and budgets, while working with people from different walks of life. These skills stood him in good stead during the organisation of the 1988 show. For Ek Kay, the show’s outcome would decide if he should become a full-time artist and thus, he made every effort to increase his presence in the art world though the exhibition. This was important if he hoped to attract the attention of collectors and institutions. Consequently, Ek Kay selected a range of works that demonstrated his proficiency in all aspects of xieyi painting. These comprised calligraphy in different scripts, classical poetry, seal carving and ink painting. For the last, he included traditional genres such as the flower-and-bird paintings and mountain-and-river landscapes, as well as more unconventional subjects such as local street scenes and unusual still life compositions. Ek Kay did not display works that were too similar to the style of his mentor Fan Chang Tien as he wanted the show to reflect his personal artistic direction. The strategy worked. The show was well attended, with supporters sending more than a hundred congratulatory bouquets. Sales of about twenty works amounted to some $20,000, which was a considerable feat for an artist holding his first show. Participating in the UOB Painting of the Year Competition in the early 1990s was another way of making his works more widely known. After winning the grand prize in 1991, Ek Kay’s paintings began to be included in nationallevel exhibitions. During this period, the National Museum Art Gallery also started to collect his works, including Blue Window.

Such a considered approach in managing his career and practice was further refined by his studies in Australia later on. Ek Kay recalled, “The course [in Sydney] also provided a study on how to adopt the right attitude to become a professional artist. Firstly, it is the last, secondly, the writing and thirdly [.] the approach. It provided the practical knowledge of handling exhibitions which is a requirement if you are to be a professional artist.” After returning from Australia, Ek Kay spent one year preparing for his second solo show Colours of Infinity in 1997. Apart from announcing his return, he felt that it was important for the show to illustrate what he had learnt over the past few years and how his art had developed since then. Hence, the key works from his graduation show, Song of Cicada, Journey to a Snowy Mountain, and Lotus Pond: Becoming and Being, were showcased in that exhibition. At the same time, he also included some street scenes since his collectors were more familiar with such works. Following the same logic, Ek Kay was disinclined to display his Singapore street scene paintings in his exhibition at the Shanghai
各式各样的人士打交道，他应当已能是修炼出一定的能力，这些技能在他1988年举办展览时便是人有所用。对蔡逸溪而言，这个个展的成败将决定自己是否应当成为全职画家；故此，他竭力藉此自我彰显于艺坛。若要争取到收藏家和机构的注意，这一点是非常重要的。为此，蔡逸溪在选择展品时，着意于展现他在写意绘画各个方面的功力。展品的种类上是涵盖不同书体的书法作品、古典诗歌、篆刻以及水墨绘画。在水墨方面，他既有传统的花鸟画、山水画之类，又也写了一些题材上比较异于常例的作品，如土等街景画以及不常见的静物画。蔡逸溪并没有展出与导师范昌乾风格太过相近的作品，因为他希望展览能够反映出他个人的创作方向。结果，他的策略是成功的，展览的参观人数金居可观，支持者所送上的祝贺花束超过一百束。卖出的作品约有二十件，取得大约两万元的收益，以首次展出的画家而言算是了不起的成就。1990年代早期参加大华银行全国绘画比赛亦是提高知名度的途径之一。在1991年赢得该项比赛的全场最佳作品奖之后，蔡逸溪的画作便开始获选入国家画院的展览。1996年期间，国家博物馆艺术画廊也开始收藏他的作品，如《蓝色窗洞》。

在自身事业与创作的管理上如此思而后行的精明，后来经留学澳洲之后愈趋细致。据蔡逸溪回忆：”[在悉尼]的课业有教导如何采取正确的态度来成为职业画家。所涉及的方面，其一为语言，其二为书写，其三为切入角度，当中传授了关于处理画展的实用知识——那是作为一个职业画家所必须掌握的。…“从澳洲回国以后，蔡逸溪花了一年的时间筹备将1997年举行的第二届《永恒之采》，他觉得，这回的展览不仅是宣告自己的回归，更重要的话：它必须展示过去几年来的学习成果和创作上的发展方向。故此，他毕业作品展中的重头之一——《弹歌》、《冬猎》和《荷变》——均是此展出。与此同时，他却也将一些素画选入画展，缘因关注他的收藏家对这类画作比较熟悉。蔡逸溪依此推想，在他2005年上海美术馆的画展中才会不愿展出他的新加坡街景画——因为本地的观众对所描绘的景物并不熟悉。为了那一次的画展，他决定绘长沙的新水乡，缘因水乡在中国是较受欢迎的题材。画出来的成果，就是他的《水乡系列》。此外，由于上海美术馆的展览空间比较宽敞，天花板比较高，蔡逸溪便把作品画得比平常大，以求加强视觉冲击力。为了筹备这一展览，他花了大约三年的时间，并且到水乡探访了几回。…

Art Museum in 2005, because local audiences would have been unfamiliar with the subject. Hence, he decided to paint the water villages near Shanghai since it was a popular theme in China. This was his Water Village series. In addition, as the museum had large exhibition halls with high ceilings, Ek Kay produced paintings which were larger than usual in order to create a greater visual impact. He then spent about three years preparing for the show and making several visits to said water villages. All of the above, revealed in Ek Kay’s oral history interview in 2007, provide insight into how he had tried to balance competing or complementary interests. Far from working in a vacuum, he was acutely attuned to the impact of his exhibitions, the circulation of his works, and the reception of his works by different audiences.

Becoming an Artist

Ek Kay’s development as an artist may be traced through his works. Throughout his career, Ek Kay painted many different subjects, using a variety of approaches. However, he returned constantly to two enduring themes: street scenes and nature, working primarily in ink on paper. His passion for both themes arose in markedly different circumstances. However, these works reveal the tensions and ambiguities he must have felt as he reconciled his experiences as a Chinese-educated artist living and working in an urbanising cosmopolitan city-state in the latter half of the 20th century.
Street Scenes: Transforming Shanshui

Ek Kay started to paint local street scenes in the mid-1980s.45 Whilst under Fan’s mentorship from the late 1970s to early 1980s, his subjects were largely confined to the traditional xieyi painting genres of “flowers-and-birds” (huainao) and “mountains-and-rivers” (shanshui) (fig. 1).

However, Ek Kay experienced an epiphany during his one-year stay in Hong Kong in 1986 when he travelled to various scenic spots in China to paint the local landscapes. During those trips, he met some Chinese artists who often spent months, rather than days, at a particular location. They highlighted that he could only get a true grasp of the landscape if he spent sufficient time there. Profoundly struck by what they said, Ek Kay began to consider what and why he was painting.46 If he continued to paint Chinese landscapes after returning to Singapore, he could only observe them from a distance, by referring to photographs and books.47 At the same time, he was keen to create works that were “beyond tradition,” and “innovative.”48 Eventually, he concluded that it was important to find a subject which had personal resonance for his audience and him.49 This would turn out to be the city in which he grew up. He once remarked, “There are no mountains and rivers in contemporary Singapore. I painted the landscape of our Singapore city, which for me, held truer meaning and significance rather than imaginary mountainscapes.”49

The city centre and its old shophouses held many memories for Ek Kay. His family had lived in a two-storey shophouse along Upper Serangoon Road.50 Ek Kay was familiar with the nooks and crannies of the city because his father and uncle used to work in businesses located at Tan Quee Lan Street and Middle Road respectively.51 As his family could not afford to buy him a bicycle then, experiencing the city on foot must have left a deep impression on the young Ek Kay.52 In the 1960s, he had spent six years studying at Catholic High School, which was located then at Queen Street. Later on, Ek Kay managed a restaurant at High Street Centre.53 Hence, his connection with the historic commercial centre of Singapore from the 1950s to the late 1970s, before urban redevelopment took off in the 1980s, was a long and enduring one.

By focusing on local streets and shophouses, Ek Kay was excited by the possibilities of transforming Chinese landscape painting to create a “localised shanshui.”54 Using the traditional method of composing such pictures, Ek Kay treated high-rise buildings as mountains, and shophouses as gentle hills. Parked cars, lamp posts and electric wires were used as compositional elements, just as how trees and rocks were added to traditional landscape paintings. Conventionally, painters used a shifting perspective to convey depth in a painting. This was done by building up elements progressively, from nearby rocks and rivers at the bottom edge of a hanging scroll, to distant mountains and clouds at the top of the scroll. Likewise, in his paintings, Ek Kay placed objects like bicycles in the near distance, and then built up the composition by adding elements like shophouses and lamp posts.55 In painting street scenes, Ek Kay also kept in mind the xieyi ideal of capturing the spirit rather than the form of the subject.56 He would first observe the streets closely, and note down their distinctive characteristics by making occasional quick sketches or taking photographs.57 Having digested what he saw, heard, felt and even smelt,
he would then seek to distil his impressions in his studio, by simplifying the myriad details to their basic essences. The challenge was in deciding what to delete, what to retain, and which areas to emphasise over others.\(^8\) This was different from the approach taken by earlier predecessors such as Lim Tze Peng who had started painting local street scenes from the 1970s. Eager to capture the rapidly vanishing urban life of Chinatown, Lim preferred to work in front of his subject and complete each painting on-site. Lim’s keen interest in documenting Singapore’s architectural heritage meant that he usually adopted a single fixed-point perspective with detailed line work in order to quickly record down his visual impressions (fig. 2).

For the next twenty years, Ek Kay worked devotedly on a series of local street scenes and developed his work in multiple directions. For him, the series was not just about a new subject matter. It also allowed him to explore new ways of expression.\(^9\) For instance, in some paintings dating from the late 1980s, he used the square format as opposed to the more conventional vertical or horizontal scroll format for landscape painting. In such works, Ek Kay often adopted the Western single-point perspective, by drawing the viewer’s eye to a fixed focus in the painting, through a receding road or back alley.\(^9\) He also subverted the conventional treatment of negative and positive space in Chinese ink painting. Ink was traditionally used to depict tangible static elements like mountains and trees, whilst the unpainted paper surfaces suggested fluid transient elements like rivers and clouds. Due to the use of shifting perspective, there is also no fixed light source in a Chinese landscape painting, and hence, no clear sense of light and shade. However, in Ek Kay’s street scene paintings, he often broke with convention by using the unpainted paper surface to suggest reflected light on walls, and ink to depict cast shadows or darkened interiors beyond windows and doors. In this way, the sense of drama and ambiguity of such scenes were heightened.\(^{10}\)
Over the years, Ek Kay’s style changed. In the earlier works, there was more emphasis on line work to delineate recognisable architectural and urban features, so as to suggest a sense of place. In his works from the late 1990s onwards, such as Catholic High School Old Campus Grounds I & III, the brushwork became bolder and looser. Less attention was focused on conveying a sense of depth through visual clues such as roofs and windows. Instead, Ek Kay concentrated on the expressiveness of his brushwork: light and feathery, or dense and wet. His strokes tended to extend across the entire paper surface, creating an overall composition that could be quietly contemplative, or pulsating with energy.

Above all, Ek Kay wanted to capture a “sense of history” through his paintings. As an artist, Ek Kay had witnessed a period of Singapore’s history when its very physical fabric was undergoing rapid change. Hence, when revisiting these shophouses in various states of disrepair or transformation in the 1980s, Ek Kay was confronted by an acute sense of loss. Therefore, he sought to convey the “passing of time, and a sense of melancholy” in his paintings. This resonated with his poetic sensibilities. As he had seen how the city had grown, thrived and declined over time, his impressions of these streets were “tinged with regret, sadness, nostalgia and uncertainty.” This was how he described his sense of the passing of time: “Its days of glory are over. Its environment is now surrounded by many tall buildings. One day, these streets and their shophouses will be demolished, and even their occupants will have to move. Even if the buildings are reconstructed or renovated, they will not be able to reflect their original social context and content.”

Nature: Reflections of Self

The street scene series aside, Ek Kay often looked to nature as a point of reference when creating his works. Nature has always played an important role in the culture of China. For instance, within the ancient Taoist tradition, the universe was seen as a living entity in flux. All aspects of nature were regarded as being alive with a cosmic force (qi). In Taoism, the world was conceived as two complementary polarities (yin and yang), acting in constant dynamic equilibrium. Yin represented the receptive (female) force of nature while yang was the creative (male) aspect. By extension, yin and yang also stood for the dualities of darkness and light, coolness and warmth, negativity and positivity, non-existence and existence, and so on. These constantly interacted with each other, giving rise to the shifts in nature, as seen in the changing seasons, and the endless movement of light, water, wind and clouds. Hence, to travel through a landscape of running streams, moving clouds and shifting light was to experience nature’s life forces at work. The fourth-century artist Zong Bing was one of the first to discuss the significance of landscape painting for moral cultivation. He regarded all forms of nature as visible manifestations of the Tao or cosmic vitality. Hence, a painter needed to capture the spirit or cosmic vitality, and not just the form, of his subject. In that way, even when man could no longer wander about the mountains, he could look at landscape paintings and still be in accord with the Tao. Hence, nature has long been used as a subject by Chinese ink painters, be it landscape or flora and fauna. Ek Kay was no exception. Amongst his early works, there are indeed such paintings, reminiscent of the range painted by his mentor Fan Chang Tien (fig. 3). For xiyei

dichotomy, it was common practice in the past to use the technique of willow tablets to create a more realistic and immersive effect.

In the past, landscapes were often depicted in a more interpretative manner. The use of willow tablets was common, and artists would often combine this technique with other methods to create a more realistic and immersive effect.

To achieve this effect, artists would often use a combination of techniques, such as the use of willow tablets to create a more realistic and immersive effect. This would be combined with other methods, such as the use of ink and brush to create a more dynamic and expressive effect.

Overall, Ek Kay’s style was characterized by a sense of history and a deep appreciation for the natural world. His works often captured the essence of Singapore’s past, and his ability to convey a sense of place through his brushwork was a testament to his artistic skill.
（雄性）的力量，“阳”则代表创造性（雄性）的一面。阴阳两极的意涵无尽延伸，包罗了一系列的对立，如光明、冷暖、正负、有无等等。阴阳之间不断地互动，产生出天地间的种种变化，形塑四季交替，以及光线、水流、风云之类从不休止的动态。故此，一个人行动于自然环境之中，有时溪水潺潺、白云舒卷、光景移易，即是体验大自然的生机运转。公元四世纪的画家宗炳，是最早论及山水画在道德修养上之意义的人。他把自然界的各种形态看成是“道”或者宇宙生机的显于肉眼的体现。故此，画家之于入画对象，须要捕捉的是精神，是贯穿天地的生命力，而不仅仅是形相。“若能得此一点，人即不复画此画卷，尚可传此山水画，保全与道为一的境界。”中国水墨画画久以来之所以爱画自然物像——或为山水，或为动植物——于是也就不难理解。蔡逸溪也不例外。在她早期的创作中，确实就已经有这方面的画作，题材范围与其师父范宽近似（图3）。对象范宽这样的写意画家而言，莲、竹、鸟、鱼都是备受喜爱的题材。对此，我们首先必须了解的一点是：每一种动植物都有它的象征意义。举凡而言，莲花因为出淤泥而不染，被视为纯洁的象征；竹子之所以被人看重，则是因为它耐得住逆境，能够历经寒冬而常青。故此，题材的选择应当是大有可以利用的，因为它反映了画家的价值观或者志向。其二，像竹子之类的题材即使已被人画过无数次，也并不影响当下的再一次描绘，因为“画成什么样子”比“画了什么”更受到重视。画中的笔墨竟然被视为画家之个人性情与道德修养的体现，那即便是一幅花鸟画，也足以昭显画家的性格。

在1970及80年代，蔡逸溪在很大程度上始终不曾脱离上述的文化框架；只有在1990年代留学澳洲，才使其重新评估自己与自然界的关系。塔斯马尼亚风景的静谧之美，引领她更贴近自然。在创作中，他开始更加注意作为入画对象的自然界本身。”17 当年，他从宿舍前往大学校园时，经常都会经过一处荷塘。”17 因为澳洲地形独特的缘故，当地的荷花竟有异于别处所见。据他回忆：“澳洲的荷……是天和地之间一道自然之线。澳洲的天空是蔚蓝的，地的沙土是泥黄的。而荷在背光之下，尽是水墨的破碎笔划，纵横交错，全都是笔少，但确是墨的联想。加上水的反射，在任何角度上，都是一幅幅抽象之景。这种景致，很难确定这是东方抑或西方。我似乎看到东西方无碍的一种语境。这是我开拓东西方求同的一道文化艺术家像范，例如莲、竹、鸟、鱼等，都备受喜爱。题材的选择应当是大有利用的，因为它反映了画家的价值观或者志向。其二，像竹子之类的题材即使已被人画过无数次，也并不影响当下的再一次描绘，因为“画成什么样子”比“画了什么”更受到重视。画中的笔墨竟然被视为画家之个人性情与道德修养的体现，那即使是一幅花鸟画，也足以昭显画家的性格。

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artists like Fan, subjects such as lotuses, bamboos, birds and fishes were much favoured. Firstly, each plant or animal had a symbolic significance. For instance, the lotus was regarded as a symbol of purity because its flowers rise above the muddy waters. The bamboo was valued for its ability to withstand adversity since it remained evergreen through winter. Hence, the choice of subject matter became a personal one since it reflected the values or aspirations of the artist. Secondly, it did not matter that a subject like the bamboo was painted very often because it was the manner in which it was painted that was viewed as being more important. Since brushwork was regarded as a reflection of an artist's temperament and moral cultivation, even a flower-and-bird painting could serve as testament of an artist's personality.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Ek Kay was still working very much within the aforementioned framework. However, his stint in Australia in the 1990s led to a re-evaluation of his relationship with nature. The quiet beauty of Tasmania's
landscape drew Ek Kay closer to nature. He began to focus more on nature as a subject in his art-making. In particular, there was a lotus pond which he often passed on his way to the university from his hostel. Due to Australia’s unique terrain, the lotuses were different from those which he had encountered elsewhere. He recalled, “The ones in Australia drew the line between heaven and earth. The Australian skies were a clear blue, and the sand an earthy yellow. Backlit, the lotuses were so many broken brushstrokes of ink, crossing in a careless manner that reminded me of an ink painting. On top of that, the reflection of the water allowed one to view an abstract image at any angle. I could not make out if such a scene was in the East or the West, and I began to see a setting that crossed the boundary that separated the East and West. This propelled me in my search for a cultural archway that meets between the East and the West... I was free to express the world of the lotus in my mind without any of the restrictions of the East or the West, unfettered by abstraction or realism.”

During that period, Ek Kay was studying postmodern theories. Seeing the lotus pond with its constantly shifting shadows and reflections must have reminded him of post-structuralism, which emphasises the instability and ambiguity of meanings and categories, and rejects claims to objectivity and fixed binary oppositions. The lotus series allowed Ek Kay to express certain contemporary ideas using ink painting techniques without worrying about whether the works would be considered as Western or Chinese art. As he recalled, “The lotus series began as an attempt at a new approach to contemporary art study without abandoning my traditional training. I didn’t want to just conveniently use Western mediums to express new concepts. So I challenged myself to work within the traditional Chinese constraints and see how successful I am in using conventional techniques to express a contemporary concept.”

As exemplified by works such as An Intimate Space of Stillness, he sought to depict the lotus in different ways, by cutting or breaking up the flowers into distorted fragments, and then re-assembling them in new and unexpected configurations. Hence, an act of seeming destruction produced new creations, energies and rhythms. As Ek Kay put it, “At another level, I am re-assembling these fragmented parts. Using this space, I re-compose the ink and brushwork to produce a painting full of musical rhythms.”

Apart from fragmentation, Ek Kay’s treatment of the lotus also differed from traditional depictions. For instance, his mentor Fan often painted a close-up view of leaves and flowers, rendering them with forceful brushwork, and extolling the plant’s virtues with an appropriate inscription. However, Ek Kay moved away from the depiction of the individual lotus by focusing on its environment – the lotus pond. This was a natural development since he was re-assembling different parts of the lotus in new spatial arrangements. As a site, the lotus pond was perpetually filled with life and death, growth and decay, beginnings and endings, reality and fiction. As a subject, it encompassed time and space. Hence, the lotus pond represented to Ek Kay a micro-cosmos with innumerable possibilities. Since the lotus was found in many places around the world, it was neither location nor culture-specific. Therefore, Ek Kay had more leeway to use the subject for personal expression without worrying about his audience’s level of familiarity. In the end, the series developed to the

在那时，蔡逸溪正在研读现代理论。看到荷塘中不断变化的光影映像，必使他联想到后结构主义——这套理论强调的是意涵与范畴的不稳定性及模糊性，对任何形式的客观性及固定二元对立的肯定均不接受。一系列的意象，让蔡逸溪有机会运用水墨技法来考察某些当代理念，而无须顾虑作品是否会被归类为西式或者中华艺术品。据他回忆：“荷塘系列，起初是要在不抛弃传统功底的前提下，尝试新的画法，形诸当代艺术试验。我不愿意贪图方便地直接借用西方媒介来表现新概念，所以就挑战自己，局限于传统中华法度，看看用常规技法来表现当代概念能有多成功。”

正如《空寂》一类的画作所显示，蔡逸溪为了采用不一样的方式来描绘荷花，不惜把花的形象切割成分裂成扭曲的碎片，继而重新组合成入画意趣的新布局。看似毁灭性的举动，遂产生新创造、能量与韵律。据蔡逸溪所言：“我在另一个层次就是把这些分解出来的这些部分再重组合并。那么我用这个空间……把这些墨笔重新组合起来，成为具有这个音乐性的这种旋律，这样的一个创作。”

除了切割碎裂之外，蔡逸溪对荷花的处理方式还有其他异于传统之处。他的导师是画作其将的花叶符号，并且配以适当的题句，赞颂荷花的品德；蔡逸溪则脱离了这种典型，不再着眼于单独的荷花，而是聚焦于其环境（即荷塘的整体）。本来他已是在切割荷花，把它的一部分重新组合成新的空间排列，往下走出这一步可谓自然不过。作为一个场域，荷塘永远充满着生与死、成长与腐朽、起始与终结、真实与映像。作为入画的物象，它包含着时间与空间。于是，对蔡逸溪而言，荷塘代表了充满无数可能的小宇宙。”荷花普遍生长于世界多个国家，没有属于特定地域或文化的特殊性。为此，蔡逸溪有更多自由，可以尽情将此作为个人抒发的题材而无需担心观众不够熟悉。荷花系统发展到最后，实际上已演变为荷塘之象。由此产生出来的，是较为玄虚的荷塘系列；蔡逸溪于此将荷塘简约为一些稀疏的精简线条，结果比荷花的原有形象本身更能唤起“纯本”的感觉。”

如此的天人合一，实际上与画僧石涛凸显
“国画”的理论相通。根据石涛的说法，“国画者，众有之本，万象之根”；所谓的“国画”，本于中国古代关于天地化育的观念，是绘画万有的根本，是一切图象的基础。空气的纸张代表宇宙无形无相的太初状态；画下国画，即是无中生有，是把存在的塑成过程转化为动作。其实，画自然物象，也促使蔡逸溪追寻内在的自我，重新界定自己和宗教、精神修行之间的关系——特别是佛教，以及其申明万法无常、众生轮回的信条。他的解说是：“佛教对我的创作的影响，在于思想内涵，以及我对形神关系的理解。（‘神’指的是入画物象之‘神韵’。）在形与神这两个对立面之间，必须取得一种平衡。我作画仿佛是走出一个圆形的轨迹，我开始的时候非常严谨，针对我的题材四处收集信息和参考资料，建立特定的风格。再往下走，我却变得更随心所欲，不再受限于自己的发现或者过去的成就，类似佛家思想的无我无相的极端。无论如何，先前显得重要的事物，至此已不再重要。”

Not East nor West

蔡逸溪的街景系列和自然物象系列缘起于不同的境遇。前者的根源在新加坡，是因为蔡逸溪借助本土题材，寻求为中华水墨画注入新生命而形成的，后者则可说是缘起于澳洲，是因为画家欲求通过水墨表现西方哲学观念而形成。实际上，画家本人把这两个系列视为同时展开却又泾渭分明的脉络：他因而不得不同“自己分割……同时在两条路这样的脚步进行”。话虽如此，两个系列之间却还是有重要的相似性。蔡逸溪在两者之中都注重“神圣于形”的写意取向，同时又不拒绝新画法、新技法的融入。更重要的是：这两个系列，都可视为画家呈现着两可性的内在自我的映像。在街景画中，蔡逸溪多用沉郁的浓重，间以淡色渲染；画面以黑白为主，鲜少画出人物。画中散发着强烈的疏离感，至他那些意涵模糊或所谓“片段式”的花卉，画家认为是反映着后现代境况，而主导着后现代境况的，同样也是一种“疏离感”。蔡逸溪正是藉此“在作品之中注入这个时代的精神”。

在蔡逸溪所处的千禧年之际，那确实正是当前的时代精神。蔡逸溪接受的是传统式的教养，从中培养出对中华诗词与书法的喜爱，他研习海派绘画，熟知它的体制。他的生长之地新加坡，虽然是人口以华族居多的城市国家，在1965年独立以后却是一直以英语
study in Australia. However, this meant that he was not easily categorised as being either Chinese or Western in his thinking, or traditional or modern in his outlook. In fact, Ek Kay’s situation reflected the general alienation felt by the Chinese-educated population in Singapore from the 1960s onwards as government language and education policies veered towards the English medium.\(^{44}\)

Inevitably, Ek Kay’s artistic journey was a lonely one. He had consciously sought to bridge and transcend Chinese and Western art, but this meant that he would belong to neither realm.\(^{45}\) For instance, although he had been a member of the Hwa Hun Art Society (an organisation started by Fan’s students) since the 1970s, he did not ask them to help to organise his show in 1988 because he knew that some members did not approve of his more unconventional paintings. Indeed, after the show opened, there was criticism by some who questioned if he had strayed too far from traditional Chinese painting.\(^{46}\) In the contemporary art scene which embraced more Western-oriented practices such as installations and performances, Ek Kay’s unconventional approach found greater acceptance, but his feelings of unease remained. For instance, in Australia, Ek Kay felt he could only share the “image” (superficial appearance) but not the “text” (meaning or ideas) behind his paintings with his non-Asian audience.\(^{47}\) Likewise in Singapore, he was often the only ink practitioner in contemporary art exhibitions or publications.\(^{48}\) Important early commentators in Singapore who appreciated his art included individuals like Albert Gillissen, T.K. Sabapathy and Constance Sheares. Although knowledgeable about Chinese art, they were not fluent in Mandarin.

This ambivalence is made apparent in Ek Kay’s oral history interview in 2007 where wide-ranging topics were discussed in English and Mandarin. In some parts, the questions and answers were entirely composed in either language. In others, though the questions were posed in English, Ek Kay would reply in English, Mandarin, or even a combination of both. The entire transcript reads awkwardly, but this constant switching back and forth between languages, as both interviewer and interviewee sought to examine Ek Kay’s life and practice, is revelatory and emblematic of the challenges that confronted an artist who saw the strengths of Chinese and Western art while struggling to transcend them at the same time.

Being and Becoming: An Artist at His Most Personal

In terms of East-West interactions, Ek Kay very much identified with Nanyang art, an art development in Singapore from the 1930s to 1960s, commonly known for “integrating traditional Chinese art forms, and strong influence from the School of Paris, which is then applied to local or Southeast Asian subject matter.”\(^{49}\) In various analyses of early Nanyang art practitioners such as Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Chen Chong Swee, the artists were lauded for their “familiarity with both Eastern and Western idioms of expression,” “happy blend of the East and West,” and “fusion of a Chinese artistic heritage with Western scientific technique in creating realistic images of a local environment” respectively.\(^{50}\) In addition, the early Nanyang artists saw no insurmountable contradiction between Western and Chinese art, and

作为主要工作语言。蔡逸溪在成长中学得了较强的双语能力，以至于能够用英文书写，并且到澳洲留学。这其实意味着他在思想上不易归类为单纯的中或西式，其观点也不易归类为单纯的传统式或现代式。事实上，蔡逸溪的处境反映了我国受华文教育的民众自1960年代以来广泛的疏离感。这份疏离感，乃是随着我国政府语言与教育政策倾向以英文作为媒介语，渐渐凝聚而成。\(^{51}\)

无可避免的，蔡逸溪的艺术道路是孤独的。他有意识地追求沟通中西艺术并超越两者之分，但如此一来他也就不属于任何一方。\(^{52}\) 以下事例，可资证明：他虽然从1970年代以来便已是（由中央的学生所创立的）华翰书画研究会的会员，1988年举办个展时却不曾请该组织帮忙——因为他知道当中有些会员并不认可他那些比较异于常例的画作。在上述展览开幕后，也确实有其他人提出了批评，质疑他对于他是否偏离了传统中国水墨画。\(^{53}\) 在当代艺术界，较为面向西方的创作门类（如装置艺术与行为艺术）是受到欢迎的，蔡逸溪的非常规路线在这一领域也比较容易被人接受；但即使如此，他的心中的不安依然未能释然。举例而言，蔡逸溪觉得自己在水墨能够与当地的非裔观众分享画中之“象”，而无法传达象外之“言”。\(^{54}\) 同样的，在加利福尼亚，如凡当代艺术的展览或刊物，他都总是其中唯一的一位水墨画家。\(^{55}\) 早期欣赏其创作的本地评论者有艾伯特·吉利森、沙巴喇蒂和康斯坦斯·斯蒂尔等人；他们几位虽然对中华艺术所知甚多，却精通华语。

如此模棱两可的处境，更间接显现在蔡逸溪2007年的口述历史访谈的语言形态。当年的访谈，以英语和华语讨论了涵盖面甚广的课题。其中有一部分的问答，用的是纯粹是英语或者华语；有的部分则不然——问题以英语提出，蔡逸溪回答时却是用英语、华语，或者混合双语。整个访谈记录读起来并不顺畅；在访者和受访者力图审视蔡逸溪的生平与创作之际，如此不断往返于双语之间可谓大有揭示性与象征性。我们从中看到的是一个艺术家长在特定情况下所面对的挑战——具体而言，就是他看到了中西艺术各自的优点，同时又奋力追求超越两者，因而面对的种种艰难。

既成与塑造：一个画家最切身的感受

从东西方互动这一点来说，蔡逸溪在很大程
度上自觉与南洋画派共融。该画派兴于1930至60年代的新加坡，其广为人知的特点是“融合了中华传统艺术形式，深受巴黎画派的影响，并又将此影响化用于属于本土或东南亚地区的题材”。人们对诸如钟锦文、陈文希、陈宗瑞等早期南洋画家时，惯于赞扬他们“对东西方的表现手法深有了解”，成就了“可喜的东西交融”，“融汇中华之艺术传承与西方合乎科学之技法，构成本土环境的写实图像”。这些南洋画家不认为中西艺术之间有什么不可克服的矛盾，而且经常将西方艺术联系他们本身对写意之传统和美学的理解。（比如刘抗就曾如此断言： “近代东西洋美术，已呈异途同归的征象……有一‘新兴艺术之父’称号的塞尚氏，感于印象派和点彩派主张过于科学化及分析化……乎是一反向来西洋艺术家客观描写的态度，接受东洋画家自以主观的表扬”。）他们在艺术上对两大文化的融合或整合，往往获得正面的呈现。其中的过程背后经过多少焦虑、矛盾、失望和疑惑，方才归结到各自最终的形式解决办法，却是鲜有讨论。

20世纪早期和中期的现代主义艺术话语，无疑是以针对美学问题寻求形式上的解决办法为前提；但蔡逸溪更多的是他本身所处时代的产物。艺评界对他的作品并非只有品味的肯定而已，举例而言，在1992年，沙巴父子就曾经把《黄门一和二》（图4）视为一幅有问题的作品，他认为画中“图像与外在世界的关系不明确；右画画面片留自有何功用，也始终没有获得一以贯之的确定或明晰。”其实，到了20世纪后期，当代画家已变得更具自我反思性，倾向于提出问题、凸显模糊性和张力，多于给出确定的答案。由此观之，蔡逸溪的作品暗示着碎片化与疏离状态，实有显著的揭示意义。鉴于他创作时期的社会历史背景，这种状态是可以理解的。据沙巴父子观察，新加坡独立后的现代化政策在1970及80年代打乱了本地固有的、以社会及家庭关系为本的错综网络。这种冲击带来了一种“分离，具体身分分被隐没，及疏离的感觉”，导致青年艺术家在创作上着力探讨了“自我与社会、文化及环境状况之关系的问题”。“早期南洋画家展现了东西融合的可能性，而蔡逸溪的作品，却是暴露了必须在两端之间做出选择的艺术家所面对的复杂状况与张力。（所谓两端，指的是“当代表现与传统美学这两端”）”蔡逸溪最切身的感受的凭，实莫过于此。

often related Western art to their understanding of the xieyi tradition and aesthetics. For instance, Liu Kang held that the “arts of East and West seem to be converging…” Cézanne, who is referred to as the father of modern art, rejected scientific and analytical tendencies of Impressionism and Pointillism. He discarded the desire for objective depiction pursued by the Western artists and instead embraced the subjective expression of the Eastern artists.”

Often, the artistic synthesis or integration of two cultures was presented positively. The anxieties, contradictions, disappointments and doubts behind the processes leading to their final formal solutions were seldom discussed.

Whilst the modernist art discourse of the early and mid-20th century was premised on seeking formal solutions to aesthetic issues, Ek Kay was more a product of his times. Critical reception to his works has not always been uniformly affirmative. For instance, in 1992, T.K. Sabapathy observed Yellow Door 1 & 2 (fig. 4) as a problematic work where “the relationship between image and world is uncertain; the functions of the expanse of white surface in the right hand scroll is not consistently determined or clear throughout.” By the late 20th century, contemporary artists were more self-reflexive, and preferred to pose questions and highlight ambiguities and tensions, rather than offer definitive answers. Seen in that light, Ek Kay’s works are markedly revelatory, with their suggestions of fragmentation and alienation. This is understandable given the socio-historical context of the period of his practice. Sabapathy observed that Singapore’s post-independence modernisation policies in the 1970s and 1980s had disrupted existing intricate networks that were based upon social and familial relationships. This caused “a sense of separateness, anonymity and estrangement” which led young artists to create works that examined “questions regarding the self in relation to social, cultural and environmental conditions.”

Whilst the early Nanyang artists presented the possibilities of an East-West synthesis, Ek Kay’s works lay bare the complexities and tensions which confronted artists who had to choose between the “two extremes of contemporary expression and traditional aesthetics.” This is Ek Kay at his most personal.
REFERENCES

2. Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 1, National Archives of Singapore, 22 January 2007.
3. As a child, Ek Kay took lessons from Chua Tim Huang, a calligrapher from their hometown. This was later reinforced in school, where students had to write with the Chinese brush. In Catholic High School, Ek Kay learnt classical Chinese from his teacher Liu Hwee Choon and classical Chinese poetry from Bay Chong Hwang, who belonged to the Xin Sheng Poets Society, a society which Ek Kay joined in 1975. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 1, 22 January 2007. Chu served as a committee member of the society in 1976. Refer to A Selection of Chu Ek Kay's Chinese Brush Paintings and Calligraphy (Singapore: Chua Ek Kay, 1988), unpagedinated. Chu's widow shared that around the same time, Ek Kay learnt calligraphy from a retired teacher Liu Ming Chen. Liu taught Ek Kay every Saturday afternoon from 1976 to 1979 until the farmer migrated to USA. See Yeoh Tzuchyi, "A Dreamer in Search of His Path: Reminiscences of Chu Ek Kay's Life", 55, published in this book. In the early 1980s, Ek Kay became acquainted with the noted poet and calligrapher Pan Shou and the latter used to gather with his students at Ek Kay's house to give lessons on how to write classical poetry. (Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, Paintings by Chu Ek Kay: Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific [accused by Bank of America in 2008] (Singapore: Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, 2000), 121.)
4. During the period, Ek Kay met Fan's other students such as Ting Chor Eng, Tan Chor Pung and Tan Shwee Aik, and had the opportunity to learn from them. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of Fan's students used to gather at Ek Kay's home every Saturday afternoon to practise and paint together. In 1986, Ek Kay left for Hong Kong and Fan passed away in 1987. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reels 2 and 3, 22 January 2007.
6. The Shanghai School refers to a group of artists who became prominent in Shanghai in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their works utilised rich colours, bold calligraphic strokes, lively compositions, and textured accessible subjects such as birds and flowers, or themes drawn from mythology, history or popular fiction. One of its best-known artists was Wu Changshuo (1844-1927). Wu created works that are characterised by his bold and confident brushwork, by applying his knowledge of calligraphy and seal carving to his paintings, and combining this with calligraphic inscriptions that lent an archaic flavour to his works. Wang Geyi was a student of Wu's. Literary painting is also known as "scholar's painting."
7. In Catholic High School, Ek Kay learnt watercolour painting from Shui Tsin Sing (1944-1997) and Li Mingjing and later also took private lessons on charcoal drawing to prepare for his O-level examinations. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 2, 22 January 2007. After graduation, he continued to read books on Western art. This was noted by the Australian academic Albert Gillisien who had written about Ek Kay's growing interest in Western art in the 1980s, in particular, movements such as Impressionism and Fauvism, and artists such as Picasso, Roussseau and Chirico. See Albert Gillisien, Foreword to A Selection of Chu Ek Kay's Chinese Brush Paintings and Calligraphy, by Chu Ek Kay (Singapore: Chua Ek Kay, 1988), unpagedinated. In 1980, Ek Kay met the artist Kang Siong Loo who had just returned from France. They became good friends and for the next few years, would spend their weekends discussing Chinese and Western art. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 6, 29 January 2007.

注释

1. 朱琦编录《蔡逸溪口述历史访谈》，第2卷，页80。
2. 蔡逸溪《蔡逸溪口述历史访谈》，第3卷，新加坡国家档案馆，2007年1月22日。
6. 海派（海上画派）指的是从19世纪末至20世纪初活跃于上海的一些画家，他们的作品色彩丰富，笔法奔放，构图复杂，笔下所绘为花鸟一类平易的题材，或取材于神话、历史或通俗小说，海派最有名的画家之一是吴昌硕（1844-1927），其作品特点为笔墨自信的笔墨，融入画中的书法和画意，海派画作古意盎然的抒情，主集是吴昌硕的弟子。文人画家亦称为士人画。
8. 蔡逸溪《蔡逸溪口述历史访谈》，第4卷，2007年1月29日。

Ek Kay mentioned his lecturer Tan Chee Seng as an inspirational figure because his studio drawing classes were very open in approach, thereby allowing Ek Kay to create art in any medium he chose. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 6, 29 January 2007.

Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 34.

ibid., 124.

Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 8, 5 February 2007.

Ek Kay admired American Abstract Expressionists like Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 13, 12 February 2007. In the same interview, Ek Kay noted his interest in European Figurative Expressionism. Refer to Reel 8, 5 February 2007.

Chua Ek Kay, Oral History interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 8, 5 February 2007.

Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 124.

Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 8, 5 February 2007.

He also had many helpful conversations on contemporary art and conceptual art with Sydney-based Singapore artist Cheo Chai-Hiang who was his second supervisor at the time. See Chua, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 9, 5 February 2007.

Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 2, 22 January 2007.

Chua Ek Kay, Oral History interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 8, 5 February 2007.

Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 46.

ibid., 62.

ibid., 88.


This is also evident from the practice of earlier local artists like Chen Wen Hsi. For instance, when Chen was running an art gallery in the 1970s and 1980s, he always produced some small paintings which he referred to as "amusing knick-knacks." These could be sold more easily at affordable prices since he was conscious of having to sell enough works to cover the costs of running his gallery. (Interview by author with Marjorie Chu on 27 January 2011.)

According to the scholar of Chinese art Chen Wen Hsi, the self-portraits of artists have a special place in the Chinese artistic tradition. In the 19th century, when Chinese artists began to produce self-portraits, they were often commissioned by wealthy patrons who wanted to own a likeness of the artist. (Chen Wen Hsi, "Self-Portrait in Chinese Art," in Art and Identity in China, ed. by James Cahill and Wang Jie (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000).)

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28 Arts Awards Booklet for Cultural Medallion (Singapore: National Arts Council, 1999), unpaginated.

29 His first solo exhibition was in 1988, and he passed away in 2008.

30 Ek Kay’s most prominent commission were the artworks for the Clarke Quay Mass Rapid Transit Station in 2003. He was also the first Singaporean artist to be invited to Singapore Tyler Print Institute’s (STPI) Visiting Artists Programme in 2002, and the first to be invited back again in 2007. The STPI is a government-supported print and papermaking workshop which holds residencies for visiting artists to create artworks for sale.


33 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 3, 22 January 2007.

34 Examples of such still life include The Old Legend and Instrument. See Chua Ek Kay, A Selection of Chua Ek Kay’s Chinese Brush Paintings and Calligraphy (Singapore: Chua Ek Kay, 1988), unpaginated.

35 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 4, 29 January 2007.

36 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 7, 29 January 2007.

37 Many buyers were relatives and friends. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 3, 22 January 2007.

38 In 1991, his works were part of high-profile group exhibitions such as the ASEAN Art Exhibition, and a travelling show in the United States of America, Many in One: 25 Years of Art from Singapore, which were organised by the National Arts Council and the National Museum Art Gallery respectively.

39 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 125.

40 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 10, 5 February 2007.

41 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 11, 5 February 2007.

42 It is also worth examining Ek Kay’s relationships with art historians and curators like T.K. Sabapathy and Kwok Kian Chow to learn more about how they shaped his practice from theoretical and historical perspectives.

43 For instance, Ek Kay also produced the Archipelago and Water Village series.

44 Ek Kay’s interest in street scenes in the 1980s was partly motivated by Hwa Huin Art Society members such as Choon Keng Seng, Tan Siew Aik, and Tan Joo Jeng who were also searching for new directions in art. They were particularly interested in the artist Huang Binhong who had advocated the need to paint outdoors in order to produce Chinese landscape paintings. From 1980 to 1986, this group often went on sketching trips together. See Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 4, 29 January 2007; Zhou Qi, “Cai You tonyliu,” [Chua Ek Kay’s Thoughts on Art], Q(10) 90.

45 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel 4, 29 January 2007.

46 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 32.

29 他在1988年举行首次个展，2008年逝世。

30 蔡逸滨最突出的委约项目是2003年克拉码头地铁站的艺术摆设。此外，在本地艺术界当中，蔡逸滨更是受邀参加新加坡泰勒画院（STPI）访问艺术家计划的第一位（时值2002年），也是获得再次邀请的第一位（时值2007年）。新加坡泰勒画院是受官方支持的一所版画与制纸作坊，时有邀请访问艺术家驻店，创作供出售的艺术品。

31 杨少娜（一个追梦者的求索路——追忆蔡逸滨生平），页75。

32 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第3卷，2007年1月21日；杨少娜（一个追梦者的求索路——追忆蔡逸滨生平），页61。

33 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第3卷，2007年1月22日。

34 比如《古典传奇》和《乐舞》即属于此类作品集。（参见蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨书画展作品选集》（新加坡：蔡逸滨，1988），无页数。）

35 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第4卷，2007年1月21日。

36 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第7卷，2007年1月29日。

37 有不少买主变为蔡逸滨的亲友。（参见蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第3卷，2007年1月22日。）

38 1991年，蔡逸滨的作品参加了一些备受瞩目的群体展，如东财美术馆，以及在美国巡展的“艺术一堂：新加坡25年艺术回顾”展览。后者分别为国家艺术理事会及国家博物馆艺术画廊所主办。

39 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 125.

40 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第10卷，2007年2月5日。

41 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第11卷，2007年2月5日。

42 蔡逸滨与新加坡艺术家萧盛强及画家吉人的关系，也是值得探究的。我们从中可深入了解到这些人如何从理论和历史的角度出发而影响了他的创作。

43 举例而言，蔡逸滨画过《群岛系列》，也画过《水乡系列》。

44 蔡逸滨在1980年代对街景产生兴趣，在一定程度上是因为受到庄耿文、陈绍昌、陈文光等华裔书道研究会的会员所影响。他们几位设计师也正在探索新的创作方向，而且对“画山水非到户外写生不可”这一画家黄宾虹特别感兴趣。从1980到1986年，他们经常结伴出游，足迹所至。（见蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第3卷，2007年1月29日；朱凌编录《蔡逸滨谈艺录》，第十卷，页89。）

45 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第4卷，2007年1月29日。

46 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 32.

47 蔡逸滨《蔡逸滨口述历史访谈》，第4卷，2007年1月29日。

Ek Kay felt that he was familiar with the form, cultural significance and historical background of the streets of Singapore. Hence, he had always been emotionally invested in such paintings. See Chua Ek Kay, *Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay*, Reel 11, 5 February 2007.

See Chua's interview with Lindy Poh in *Along the River Banks: Chua Ek Kay*, exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Tyler Print Institute, 2007), unpaginated.

Chua Ek Kay, *Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay*, Reel 1, 22 January 2007.

Ibid.

Chua recalled, "When I was a kid, I had always wanted a bicycle. But we were too poor to have one at that time." See *Barefoot and in the Blood* by Chua Ek Kay, exh. cat. (Singapore: Ernst & Young, 2007), 11.


Ibid.


Interview with Kwak Kian Cheow in *Being & Becoming Chua Ek Kay*, DVD, Directed by Jacqueline Smith, United Kingdom: Second Avenue Productions, 2013.


Ibid.

Ibid. Trans. Low Sze Wee.

Yin originally meant the shady side of the hill or the valley; Yang originally meant the sunny side of the hill or its peak.


69 Zang Bing stated, “If truth lies in the satisfaction of both eye and mind, then a picture well-executed will also correspond with visual experience and be in accord with the mind. That correspondence will stir the spirit, and when the spirit soars, truth will be achieved.” See Michael Sullivan, The Birth of Landscape Painting in China (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962), 103.

70 Ibid., 102.

71 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 8, 5 February 2007.


73 Zhu Qi, “Cai Yixun tonylia,” [Chua Ek Kay’s Thoughts on Art]; (Q. SI) 85. Trans. Low Sze Wee.

74 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 74.

75 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 14, 12 February 2007. Trans. Low Sze Wee.

76 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 14, 12 February 2007.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.


80 Ibid., 138.

81 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 8, 5 February 2007.

82 Merrill Lynch International Private Client Group Asia Pacific, op. cit., 17-8.

83 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 10, 5 February 2007. Extract translated from Chinese by the author.

84 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 10, 5 February 2007.

85 Chua Ek Kay, Oral History Interview with Chua Ek Kay, Reel: 15, 12 February 2007.


87 Ek Kay once said, “I want to share this wonderful world of the arts with different races and cultures in Singapore and be a bridge in this multicultural society that connects Western and Eastern art and enables cross-cultural interaction and exchange." [Chua Ek Kay’s Thoughts on Art]; (Q. SI) 94. Trans. Low Sze Wee.


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