

My Love Affair with China and its Animation

PART 1

Early Education

When did it all begin, this love affair? I suppose it began when I was an undergraduate student at Cornell University. Because my dad and his seven brothers were all involved in the medical profession, it had been assumed that I would go in that direction as well.

And in fact I had been working in the pathology lab of my dad's hospital during the summers off from high school, and I entered Cornell as a 'pre-med' student. But it had never been what I, myself, had wanted, and I always continued my private practice of drawing, painting, singing and creative writing.



My parents, Dr. Max and Jeannette Ehrlich.

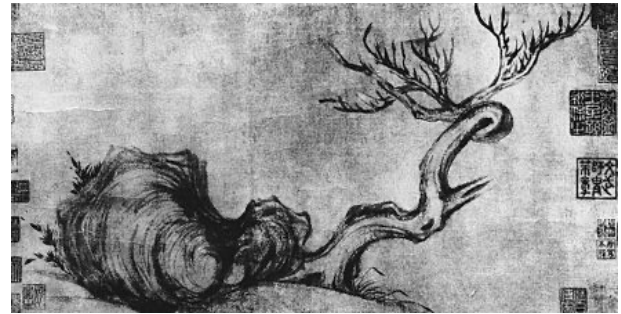


Baby David liked looking at pictures, even on the toilet.

At Cornell, still aiming for some kind of a normal American lifestyle, I soon drifted out of pre-med and into government and international relations. I became fascinated with a relatively new branch of study called Asian Studies and focused first upon India, learning Hindi, Sanskrit and Indian philosophy, and finally, China, taking a bunch of courses in Chinese history, politics, philosophy, literature and art. I came to love the landscape paintings of the Sung dynasty, especially the ink-brush paintings of the Literati artists like Su Tungpo and Mi Fu, and I wrote a paper on Mi Fu's singular ink blot technique as related psychologically to his rather secluded life style.



Mi Fu's work.



Wood and Rock, by Su Shih (Su Tungpo)

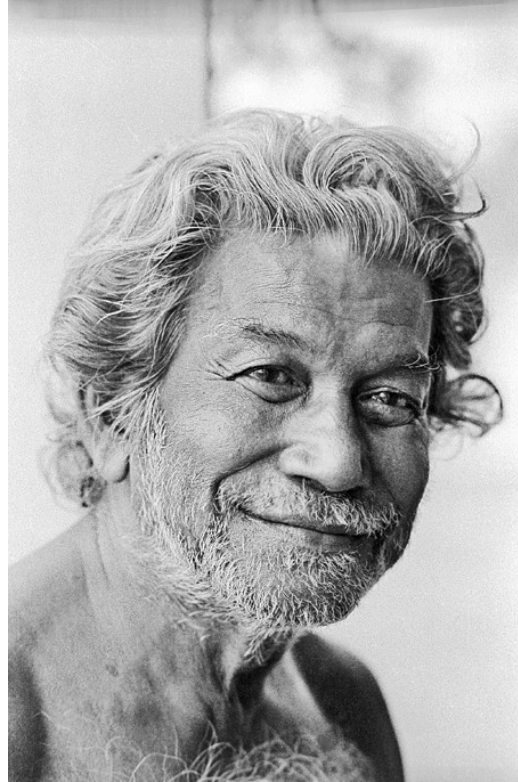
For my graduating thesis in government, I researched the techniques of Chinese Thought Reform as derived from the historical traditions of Ch'an Buddhism. Graduating early, I went on to Yale University for their intensive course in Chinese while continuing to develop my 'hobbies' of drawing and sculpture. Not quite knowing what I should do next, I applied for a bunch of travel grants and PhD programs, figuring I'd take whatever was offered. As it turned out, I was accepted by a good law school, offered a fellowship in Chinese Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, and given a Fulbright Fellowship to study philosophy in India for a year. Given my family background the most logical thing to do would have been to go to law school, but the sheer romantic prospect of a year in India, far away from all my usual environments, proved too compelling. I accepted it, thinking it would also bring me within range of China, with whom the U.S. still had no diplomatic relations in 1963.

A Year in India

So there I was in Madras, in the conservative south of India, presumably studying Indian philosophy at the university. My focus changed to Abhinavagupta's aesthetics, and then what better way experientially to understand aesthetic reasoning than actually to practice the arts that had formed the foundation of the theory. So I soon changed over to the study of drawing and sculpture at the Madras School of Fine Arts, traveling up and down the east coast, sketching the magnificent sculptures that had been carved into the walls of the temples. I stopped for a few weeks to study with Ramkinkar, a sculptor whose work I had loved, who was teaching at Shantiniketan near Calcutta. It was Ramkinkar, in one of our talks, who said to me that I was an artist and that not to do what I was meant to do was against the spirit of the universe. Well, I didn't need much more than this, but how could I mold a life as an artist back in the U.S.? As I had done the year before, I sent out applications to a bunch of schools with MA /MFA programs in drawing, sculpture, and creative writing, figuring that I would go where I was accepted and get the credentials to teach.



David feeding a temple monkey in India 1963.



Ramkinkar.

Post-graduate Education

The University of California at Berkeley took me as an MA student of both sculpture and playwriting, so I signed on. But before heading there, I first stopped in Hong Kong and tried everything I could to get into China if only for a day or so. Finally giving up, I went on to Kyoto, Japan for four months and studied sumi-e with master Tokuriku. I had wanted to try to use the brush as Su Tungpo had done so many years ago. In four months, hundreds of inked cherry blossoms later, I was ready to move finally to bamboo but had to leave for California and the next era of my life.

At Berkeley, I studied drama, wrote plays, took sculpture courses and even acted in the theater performance of "Passage to India", playing Aziz with the Indian accent I had learned in India.



David as Aziz in *Passage to India*

I had wanted to integrate sculpture with theater performance, as Picasso had done with his play, “Desire Caught by the Tail”, but California was not Paris, and my professors told me that I was not Picasso and that I’d be happier making films than producing theater. So with one MA done, I was off to the MFA program in Film at Columbia University in New York. At Columbia, I found that it was quite difficult to direct human beings, and that I should rather be directing sculptures and drawings. This meant, finally, that I should try animation, but I did not yet feel ready for that. So from 1967 to 1973, I lived in a tiny apartment in New York, drawing, painting, sculpting, writing, all as separate art forms. I finally tried a series of experiments putting the arts together in multi-media shows, but I kept feeling something was missing.



David integrated images with and through the grain of the wood.



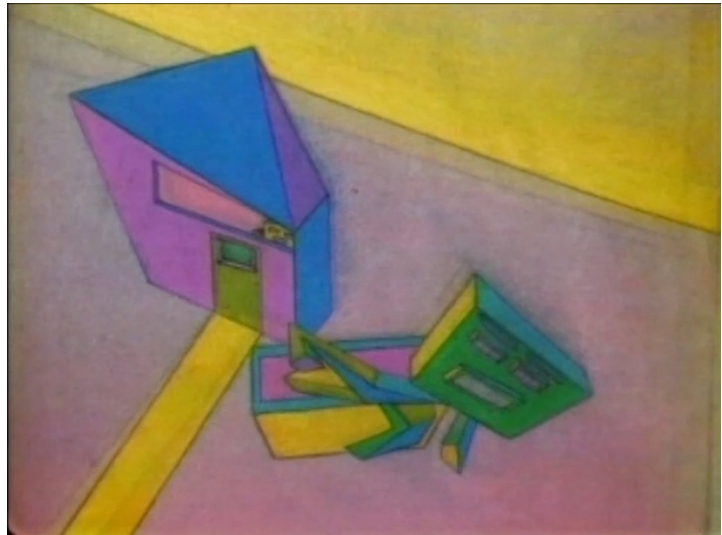
The finished wood-grain painting in 1973.

My Beginnings in Animation

In the summer of 1974, I was working as an art therapist with a group of psychologists in Linz, Austria, doing my drawings privately, taking trains around Europe to visit art museums whenever I had breaks. I began working on a pad of tracing paper, starting from the back page, and going forward, improving the drawing gradually as I moved forward. When I finished the 50-sheet pad, I kept staring at the drawings, and it occurred to me that it might be interesting to film them with my little 8-mm camera, one after the other, and see how the short little animation might look. When I got back to New York in August, I did just that and was amazed at how great it looked, and how smooth the animation was. I was hooked. I had found a way to integrate my drawings, painting, dance, music, even drama to some extent. I became an independent animator.



David drawing **ROBOT** animation in 1976.



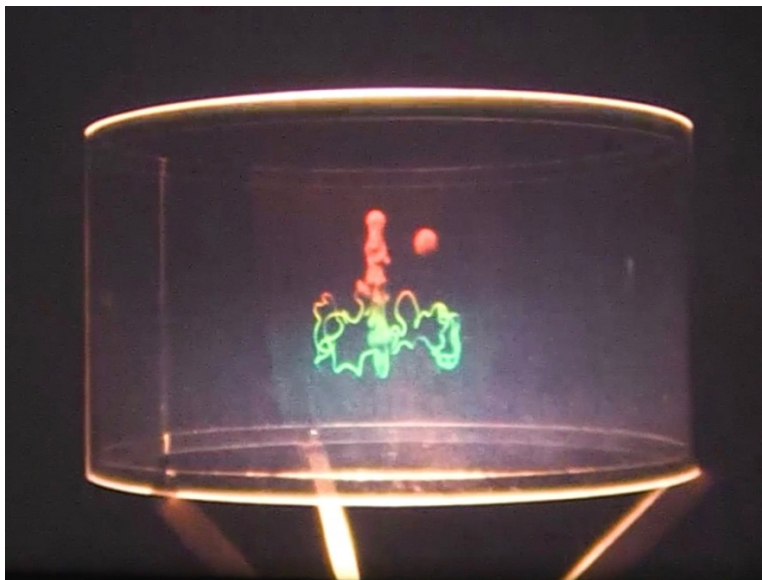
One picture from **ROBOT**.

I joined a group of young independent animators who met each month at George Griffin's loft in New York to screen our work. And I joined the New York branch of ASIFA, the International Association of Film Animators. And I began to send my animated shorts to animation festivals, in the U.S. and then, in Europe. As a sculptor, I became interested in integrating sculpture with movement and transformation, and in 1978, with a grant, I made my first animated hologram, *Oedipus Rex*, of a 3D transforming sculpture.

In 1979, summoning all my courage, I flew over to Europe to festivals in Krakow, Poland and Annecy, France, both of which had selected one of my animations, *Vermont Etude, No.2* for screening. And I brought along my hologram to exhibit. There I met some of the animators from around the world who became my dear friends, and I suddenly felt that I had become part of a wonderful international family. I kept sending my new films to European festivals and I kept going there in the summers. I gradually became active in ASIFA and found ways of bringing my friends to the U.S. to tour schools and museums screening their nation's animation and also teaching animation workshops for children, something I had begun to do, myself, in the 1970s and 80s. This brings me, at last, to the Zagreb Animation Festival in 1982.



David on the train to the Annecy Festival
in 1979.



Oedipus Rex, a 360 degree hologram, the animated hologram
I took with me on that train to Annecy in 1979.

PART 2

A Da



David Ehrlich, A Da and their Danish colleague Evan Kallerman in 1984

I had gotten to the Zagreb Festival a day early and was eating breakfast in their big dining hall that was completely empty except for a table at the other side of the room where a little group of Chinese were sitting and drinking tea. Now I had not used the Chinese that I had learned at Yale in all the previous 20 years, but this seemed to be the first time that Chinese

animators had been permitted to come to a festival in the west, and I wanted to try to communicate in whatever clumsy way that I could. I got up, walked over to their table, smiled and bowed my head slightly and spoke the two Chinese words that I knew would come out reasonably well, “Ni hau”. They all laughed and stood up to greet me. I said, “Wo bushuo junghuo hau’ (I don’t speak good Chinese). I don’t know if they could understand me, but they began speaking Chinese that went beyond me. After a few moments, I smiled, said “zaijian”, bowed and walked out. As I had gotten just outside the dining room, I heard foot steps walking quickly after me. I turned to see one of the Chinese coming to me with the biggest smile I had ever seen. Breathless, he said, “hello, I am A Da. I speak English, but don’t tell the others, China still a little funny.”



David Ehrlich and A Da at the 1982 Zagreb Animation Festival

From that moment on, and for the next 5 years, this man became my dearest friend. Between his broken English (which he had learned as a child in the Peter Pan School in Shanghai) and my poor Chinese, when we were away from the others, we spoke excitedly about Su Tungpo, Mi Fu, Wang Yangming, about what it was like for him and his family, and it was as if I was back 20 years ago, again in the China that I loved. And when I saw his two films at Zagreb, “Three Monks” that he had directed and “Monkeys Fish the Moon” that he had art directed, the first two Chinese animations I had ever seen, I felt that this was great Chinese art and that this man could lead me through the passage way into modern Chinese thinking and feeling.

We talked about teaching animation to children, something A Da had never thought possible, and I suggested that we do workshops together, having children first learn and then animate some of the Chinese characters that still looked like their original meaning. We arranged a workshop with my friend, Nicole Salomon, at her AAA studio in Annecy in 1983, and A Da was also invited to be on the Annecy Animation Festival Jury. And for the following year, in fall of 1984, I arranged for us to give a children's workshop together in Vermont as well as a screening tour through the northeast of Shanghai animation.



A Da and David Ehrlich at Nicole Salomon's AAA studio in Annecy, France, 1983

When he came to the U.S., I first introduced him to my parents in New Jersey. A Da mentioned that his father had graduated from the University of Michigan. My father smiled, went into the other room and brought back an old University of Michigan year book to show us a photo of himself and 10 pages, later, a photo of A Da's father. They had both graduated only one year apart, though they had never met each other there.

Then in Vermont, A Da and I worked together teaching elementary school children how to animate the Chinese character for a man staying in his boat during a storm at sea and return to his family. A Da would rely on the movements of his fingers on the desk to show the children how to animate a walk, step by step. And when he felt the children growing tired or bored

he would stop them with a laugh and tell them stories of his cats back in China, whispering to me, "Cats are the same all over the world, just like children."





A Da and David Ehrlich teaching elementary school children together in Vermont in 1984

I would take A Da to schools and universities throughout Vermont and the northeast where he would joke about how he was a difficult student, wanting only to draw cartoons during his math and science classes. Then he would talk about his work at the Shanghai Animation Studio, and the friends who worked with him there and how he missed them. At that point, we would screen the films from the studio that he had brought with him: “Monkeys Fish the Moon”, “Three Monks”, “Where’s Mama”, and “Buffalo Boy and Flute”. The children loved the films and would ask A Da lots of questions about how they had been done. A Da truly enjoyed answering, punctuating his simple explanations with vigorous hand movements and laughter.



Monkeys Fish the Moon, 1981



Three Monks, 1980



Where's Mama, 1960



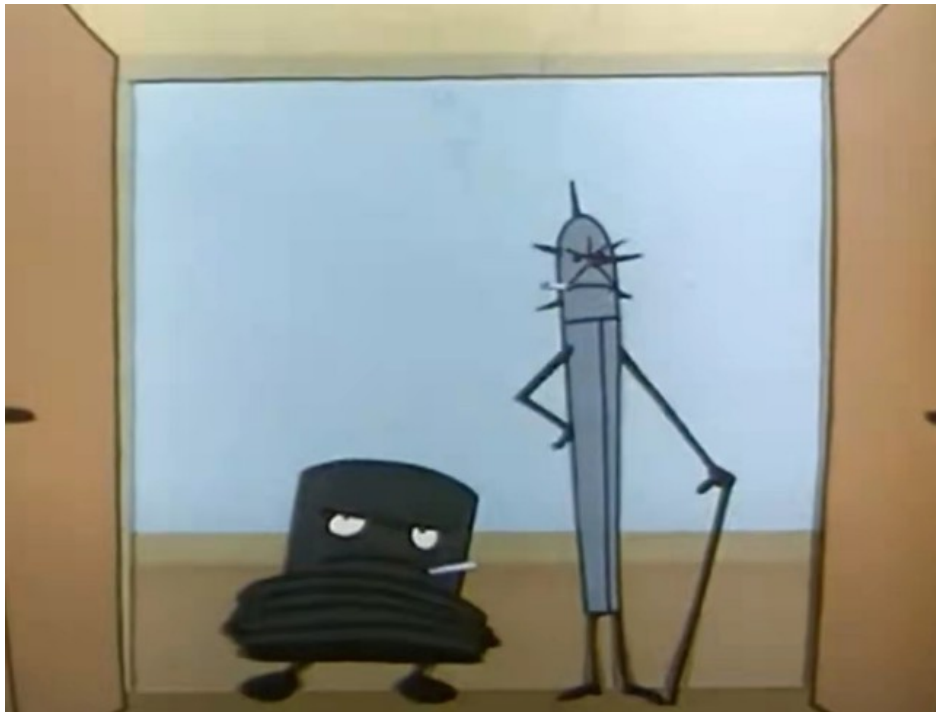
Buffalo Boy and Flute, 1963

On our long drives around the area and at dinner in the evening, A Da and I would talk about his dreams for the future...the future films he wanted to make, the future for the studio, for his friends, his family, and for China. His life had been difficult in many ways. Coming from a westernized family, he was especially stigmatized during the Cultural Revolution, sent to the farming area of Anhui province to learn from the peasants. Cleaning pig styes and carrying large sacks of grain on his back, he nevertheless always found time, under his mosquito net in bed at night, to keep sketching, sketching what he thought, felt, and what he had seen around him. In fact, his sketches of the harvest dance the peasants did were adapted into the dance of the monkeys when they thought they had actually captured the moon in "Monkeys Fish the Moon".



The dancing monkeys in *Monkeys Fish the Moon*, 1981

And A Da's caricatures of the Gang of Four, done secretly under his mosquito net, found their way into his 1978 animation, "One Night in an Art Gallery", co-directed with Lin Wenxiao.



One Night in an Art Gallery, 1978

It was this film, and its public release two years after the fall of the Gang of Four, that more than anything else, communicated to the Chinese people that the nightmare of the Cultural Revolution had indeed ended. And it was in 1978 that Lin Wenxiao and her husband, Yan Dingxian, had told me that they were finally permitted to dance again in the studio.

Of those films that A Da showed in 1984 throughout the northeast, my personal favorites were the two ink-brush animations, "Where's Mama" and "Buffalo Boy and Flute". I couldn't understand how they were done without the ink lines vibrating when animated. A Da said it was a secret and that no artist, in Japan or anywhere, could do that successfully. He kept praising his mentor, Te Wei, for all his work on those films. A Da never mentioned to me that it was himself, working with the studio cameraman, who had developed the secret technique for ink-brush animation. It was only two months after A Da's death, in 1987, that his wife received an official statement, bound within one of those red silk folders, attributing the development of the ink-brush animation technique, to A Da and the cameraman.

In 1986, the animated film "*36 Characters*", directed by A Da, won an important award at the Zagreb Animation Festival. With his mother Lily Yen ZEE's help, A Da wrote the following English article about how this film was born, which was published in the 1987 edition of ANIMAFILM, the ASIFA periodical newsletter.

THE 36 CHINESE CHARACTERS

It was in 1982 that I first attended the Zagreb Festival and there met so many animators from all parts of the world and made so many friends. After four years I was thrilled to have the chance to attend the Zagreb festival again. It was a great joy for me to meet my old friends, and moreover, to be honored with an award for my new film, *The 36 Chinese Characters*.

I would like to tell you something about how the film came into being. First, allow me to take this opportunity to thank my friend, David Ehrlich who originally suggested to me that I make a film using Chinese characters. Four years ago at Zagreb, David had shown me a film which he had made with children using a few pictographic Chinese characters that he knew. He had said to me, *Why don't you make a film with more Chinese characters; it would be interesting.* I gave the idea much thought for though I read and wrote Chinese characters every day, I had never imagined that they could form the content of a film.

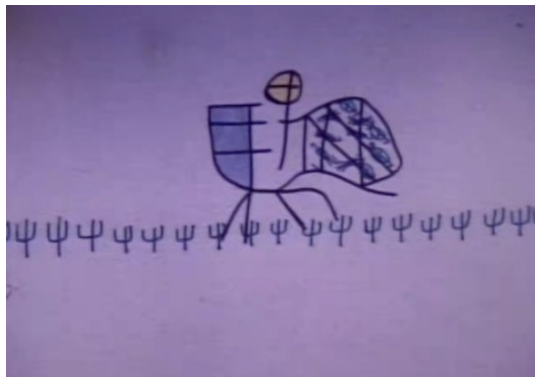
The following year, 1983, after the Annecy festival invited me to be a member of the Jury, Nicole Salomon and David Ehrlich asked me to conduct a workshop with the Annecy children before the festival. I thought that would be a good chance to try out David's suggestions about the Chinese characters, so I started to work on it and for almost a week I could not sleep or eat well. I collected all the pictographic characters that I knew and made pictures with them. However it was difficult to make the characters come to life and to relate a story with them. Finally, one morning, a bright idea came to my mind, and I selected 24 characters from which to create a story.

So David, Francine Leger, Nicole Salomon and I all worked with twenty-three children in Annecy and made a four minute animated short called *One Day in China*. The film enriches children with knowledge about the origin of Chinese characters, which were really not too difficult to learn, as they are like pictures. We showed the film during the Annecy festival and it earned favorable comments for its educational value.

After this experiment, I was so encouraged that I believed I could make a good professional film based on this foundation. As soon as I came back to Shanghai, I spoke to Mr. Teh Wei, head of our animation studio of my idea and he gave me warm support.

In the process of making the film, I checked all the characters I used with several Chinese calligraphers. Looking up these words, I confirmed that they really were pictographic characters. (Not every Chinese character actually originated with a picture.) Finally, I chose 36 characters to make a ten minute story. When the storyboard had been made, more difficulties arose. Some of the characters could move only in one direction, such as Horse, Elephant, etc., because if you point it in the other direction on its other side, the entire meaning of the character would change. After half a year, I finally finished the film with the help of my colleagues.

I was very glad that our studio decided to send this film back to the Zagreb Festival, where the idea had originated four years before, and equally pleased that David Ehrlich also attended the festival. You can imagine how happy we were to see our dreams come true.



The animated film One Day in China made in Annecy, 1983

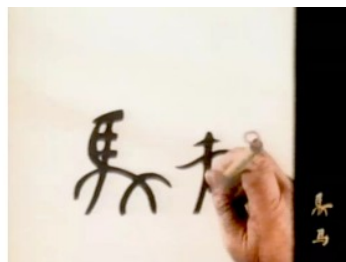
Analysis: Several questions arise. Why should the leaders wait 27 years since the release of “Where’s Mama”, to attribute the remarkable technique to A Da? Why make the attribution at all? Is it coincidental that the attribution is made only after A Da’s death? As in most socialist studios, credit for a work is given to the director and to the team as a whole, not to individuals within the team. *Let’s look at the historical situation in 1959*, at the time that Vice-President Chen Yi, heroic general of the LONG MARCH and a respected amateur artist in his own right, came to visit the Shanghai Animation Studio and spoke with Te Wei, head of the studio. This was two years after the start of the Back to the Roots Campaign in which artists, writers, AND ANIMATORS were encouraged to throw off the influence of foreign cultures and return to the basics of Chinese traditions. The Shanghai studio was already bringing into animation, traditional puppets, cut-paper, and folded paper. Chen Yi suggested that the studio create animation using the ink-brush technique of his favorite Qing painter, Qi Baishi, who had died two years before.

Te Wei called a meeting of his artists and gave them the assignment to find a way to animate ink-brush art without vibration. Only A Da, working with the studio cameraman, returned with a possible solution. So Te Wei told him to go ahead and develop the technique through a series of experiments. A Da was 26 years old at the time, and to be clear here, his background was exactly the opposite of the “Back to the Roots” model. His father had graduated the University of Michigan, in business, his mother was a leader of the YWCA of Shanghai, a western association, and A Da himself, had once been educated at the American-influenced Peter Pan School. Though A Da, as an artist, had always been fascinated with all varieties of Chinese folk art, the outward appearance of his family was such as to cause him to remain in the background, and for Te Wei, almost as a means of protecting A Da, to reinforce that position.

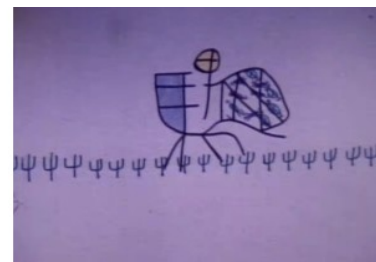
The question then remains, why award the attribution after A Da's death at all? For the answer to that, we can look at what was happening in China and at the studio by 1987. A Da had been the first Chinese animator elected to the prestigious international ASIFA Board in 1985, and it was precisely because of his English ability and semi-westernized identity. Shanghai animation was introduced to Americans because of A Da's tour along the east coast, and A Da's radio and TV interviews upon his return to Shanghai in 1984 gave the Chinese people the beginnings of the feeling that they were part of the world. Finally, in 1986 at the Zagreb Festival, A Da's [36 Characters](#), evolved from the works we had done with children in France and the US, was awarded a top prize.



[36 Characters](#)



[36 Characters](#)



[One Day in China](#)
made in Annecy

It was at Zagreb that I was organizing participation in my first international collaboration, "Academy Leader Variations", and I gained ASIFA approval for it, under the banner of UNESCO, which made it possible for the Shanghai animators to join a project that was, in essence, an American-engineered project. A Da was at Zagreb with Lin Wenxiao, wife of Yan Dingxian who had taken over from Te Wei as head of the studio. And both A Da and Lin agreed to lobby Yan and the cadre for participation in the project. All went extremely well, and the completed film won the prize at Cannes in 1987 for Short Film, bringing great honor to the Shanghai Studio as well as the recognition that collaboration with the west could be a positive experience for China. So not only did all of this give credibility to China's exposure to the world, but it set in motion everything that was to lead up to China's first international Animation Festival in the fall of 1988, in effect China's "Coming Out Party". Going back to our original questions about the attribution, what better way to show China's international openness and arrival on the world scene than to honor the artist from the Peter Pan School who helped to bring it all to pass.



Frames created by A Da in the 1987 film *Academy Leader Variations*, the last work by A Da in his lifetime.

In January of 1987, after A Da was on the train from Shanghai to Beijing to begin teaching a class at the Beijing Film Academy, he had a stroke and lost consciousness. He was taken to the hospital in Beijing and he regained consciousness for just the few moments the doctor stood over him reading his chart. The doctor looked up from the chart, looked down at A Da and said, "Oh, you're A Da who made *Three Monks Carry Water*." A Da smiled gently and answered, "But, I can no longer carry the water...", and then he closed his eyes and softly passed away. His sister, Jeannette, wrote me afterwards that there were hundreds of mourners at A Da's funeral, and that she saw Te Wei , in the corner, weeping.



PART 3

My Beginnings in China in 1988: Shanghai and the International Animation Festival

I was asked by Yan Dingxian, director of the First Shanghai International Animation Festival, to serve on the Selection Committee with my old friend, Georges Schwizgebel (Switzerland), Shinich Suzuki (Japan), Qian Yunda and Zhang Songlin (both from the Shanghai Animation Film Studio). Not only was this a great honor for me, but finally after so many years, I would go to China. The selection was to take place in July, and the festival would be in October, and by hook or crook, I had every intention of staying in Shanghai for the intervening 3 1/2 months. Both Yan Dingxian and I had recently been elected to the ASIFA Executive Board from our respective nations, and I took as my responsibility to do all that I could to help the festival organizers make their festival a resounding international success. I was also in the process of organizing my next international collaboration, between Jewish and Muslim animators from around the world, and I had already secured the participation of Wang Shuchen, a wonderful Chinese Muslim director working at the Shanghai Studio whom I had met at Annecy in 1987. My stay in Shanghai would provide a fine opportunity for Wang and I to work together on the project. As if all this were not enough, before he had died, A Da had written me that he wished that his son, Xu Chang (Charles Zee) might teach animation workshops for children in Shanghai as A Da and I had done in France and the U.S. Charles, then 26, had been trained as a moulder of scroll paintings, so I would first need to teach him basic concepts of animation appropriate for children.

Before heading for China, I took an intensive Chinese Language course at Dartmouth College and made sure I also learned three Chinese songs to sing. I figured that if no one in Shanghai could understand my Chinese speaking, I could at least sing them a song to honor their culture. Off I went. Of course, planes were delayed, connections missed, and I spent a night trying to sleep on a bench at the Beijing Airport. As I woke in the morning, I saw I was surrounded by some children staring curiously at this foreigner. I sat up, smiled at them and began singing one of the songs, about the grasslands in Mongolia, "The Unfallen Sun Rose Up on the Prairie" The children laughed, began clapping their hands to the rhythm, and soon some men and women came over and began singing with me. This was thirty-four years ago, when a foreigner was a rare thing, especially one singing "Lan Lan de Tian Shang." As I remember back to that morning in the airport, I choke up. This was my beginning, my entrance at last through the gates to the China of my dreams.

When I landed in Shanghai, Ms. Xu, the studio assistant who spoke English, was waiting for me with a big sign that read, DAVID!. She took me to a waiting car and we drove to a big apartment building. Leaving my bags in the car, we took the elevator up to the 8th floor, where I could smell what seemed like hundreds of dishes that made my head spin. We headed to the source, where the apartment door was open. Ms. Xu yelled out, "da wei lai le", and both Yan Dingxian and Lin Wenxiao came to greet us, speaking Chinese that of course I could not understand, but with smiles of warmth and embrace that I will always remember to this day. And we ate-...and ate. Lin had known about my strange vegan habits from our time together with A Da in Zagreb in 1986, and she had spent the whole day and probably also the evening before, creating the multitude of wonderful vegan dishes.

After stuffing myself, Ms. Xu took me to the first class hotel. I tried to sleep, but I was too excited. At around 5 am, I got dressed and went outside to walk around the area. And walk, and walk. Shanghai was already bustling at that hour, with hundreds of bicycles maneuvering in and out of each other on the roads and every once in a while a bus would come through, stopping every few blocks for people to get on and off. I loved the smells of all the rice cakes and dumplings sizzling at the stalls along the road, and I liked smiling back at all the folks staring at me as I walked past. I was tempted to start singing again, but restrained my enthusiasm and figured I'd have plenty of time for that.

I got back to the hotel by 8am, in time for breakfast, and then the scheduled informal meeting of the Selection Committee. Georges Schwizgebel was my old dear friend. He had also become A Da's friend at Zagreb in '82, and his Chinese, learned both in Geneva and in a special class in Shanghai, was far more eloquent than mine. To top it off, Georges had married lovely Yaping, whom he had met in Shanghai, and had a little son, Louis. Georges was a great animator, whose films were already at that time winning awards at festivals throughout the world. Shinich Suzuki was an animation director from Tokyo. I had never seen his films before, but Georges praised his work and the three of us began a little triumvirate who would meet for a drink after a day of watching a hundred films. Qian Yunda was a really interesting director who had been sent to Prague in the early 60s to "intern" with the great Czech puppet animator, Jiri Trnka. It was around the time that Kihachiro Kawamoto, the Japanese puppet animator, had also been sent to learn from Trnka. So it was a wonderful coincidence that Kawamoto had been just staying at the Shanghai Studio while directing his new film, "Shooting the Unshot", as a Shanghai Studio production, for he and Qian enjoyed speaking with one another in the Czech they had remembered from 25 years before. Finally, there was Zhang Songlin, an older director and scriptwriter who was somehow connected to the power structure of the studio.

As the Selection screenings began, I was chosen as Committee president, and Yan Dingxian sat with us in his role of Studio head. And there were also three lovely translators of English and Japanese. The screenings were well-organized, and our discussions about the films integrated our personal views on the merits of each film with our honest appraisals of whether a Chinese audience quite new to animation could appreciate the more difficult works. As an example, the Quay Brothers' "Street of Crocodiles" gained high scores from Georges, Shinich and myself, as all of us thought it a masterpiece. Qian Yunda also valued it but was ambivalent about the audience comprehension. Zhang, clearly taking a nonverbal cue from Yan Dingxian, strongly argued against it. Georges and I brought Qian over to our side, but in compromise with Zhang, we worked out a special position for the film in the festival screening that would not interfere with the appreciation of the surrounding works. And so it went. As it turned out, we selected more films from the US, the Soviet Union and China than from other countries. At the time, it was not surprising that work from the US and the Soviet Union were favored, but I believe we chose 8 films from the Shanghai Studio, which was remarkable given that other festivals had been including perhaps just one or two from China.



Shinichi Suzuki, Georges Schwizgebel, Qian Yunda, Zhang Songlin, (David behind).



Selection Committee and helpers, female translators

Analysis: The Shanghai Studio began planning for this Festival in 1985 and in fact A Da was instructed to announce its 1988 date to the ASIFA Executive Board at the Zagreb meetings in June of 1986. In conjunction with the festival, the Studio leaders as well as the Ministry wanted to showcase the best work being done at the studio and to increase the chances that as much of it as possible would be selected for competition and in fact would win prizes. So beginning early in 1986, several directors were taken off the usual educational and propaganda films and encouraged to create works that were more "adult" in nature, even experimental to some extent. First, Kawamoto was brought over from Japan to direct the Shanghai puppet animators in a traditional Chinese story of a famed archer. Te Wei's last ink-brush animation had been "Buffalo Boy and Flute" in 1963. Because the technique was so time-consuming, very little had been done further with it in those 25 years. But for this festival, Te Wei, joined by some of his best colleagues, set about to create a third ink-brush film, one that would solve the limitations of the first two and would create, finally, perfection.



Shooting the Unshot, Kihachiro Kawamoto

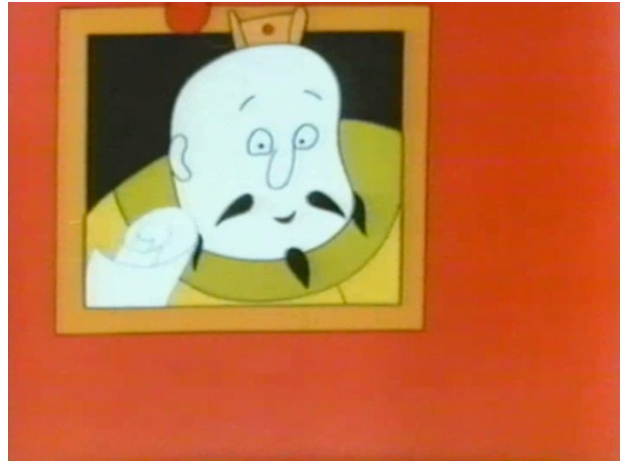


Feeling from Mountain and Water, Te Wei

Hu Jinqing was given free rein to develop two cut-paper animations, both taken from nature. Wang Shuchen was taken off children's work and encouraged to direct a story he liked, "Selecting Beauty", a very mature adult film about the hypocrisy of choosing a bride on the basis of physical beauty.



Mantis Stalks the Cicada, Hu Jinqing

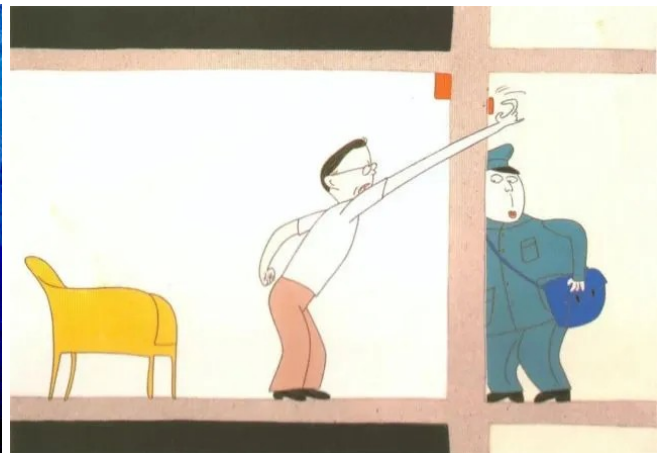


Selecting Beauty, Wang Shuchen

Fang Runnan, a director unknown in the west, spent a year directing "Fishdish", a very unique experimental work integrating ink-brush painting, sculpture and ceramics. As it turned out, Te Wei's "Feeling from Mountains and Water" won the Grand Prize from the Jury led by John Halas. Kawamoto's "Shooting the Unshot" won the equivalent of third prize, Hu Jinqing's "Mantis Stalks Cicada" won a prize for technique, and Fang's "Fishdish" won the prize for Best Experimental film. The New Doorbell by A Da was awarded a special certificate in the name of "in memory of the late Chinese animator A Da who made contributions to international animation". Not a bad showing for the Shanghai Animation Studio.



Fish Dish, Fang Runnan



The New Doorbell, A Da

The festival proved to be a successful, well-deserved, coming out party for China. It invited the 22 member ASIFA Executive Board to have its meetings at the festival. This meant that some of the most respected directors from around the world would be present at this event and would speak and write about its success. It meant that China would no longer be seen as a secretive, enclosed society but as one that was open and inviting to the world.

As President of the Selection Committee, it became my duty to give a presentation of the results before a meeting of the press and the cultural attaches from all the 12 nations whose works had been chosen. It was expected that I would give my speech in English and that a Ministry translator would give a simultaneous translation. But I told Yan Dingxian

that the least I could do was to give it in Chinese. Yan shuddered noticeably, and he said one of those “maybes” that really meant a very tactful “no, please don’t.” It was agreed that I’d write the beginning in my simple Chinese and present it to him the next day. I worked all that night on the first 3 minutes and presented it to him the next morning. Then he looked at me with a blank expression and told Ms. Xu to tell me he couldn’t understand anything I had said. I left his office feeling dejected. I saw Ms. Xu and Ms. Cai, another translator, deep in discussion while looking at me now and then. After a while, Cai turned to me and said she wanted to help me with my speech, not only with the correcting of my writing, but with my pronunciation. And that is exactly what she did, step by step so that by the end of the week I gave Yan a ten minute speech written in English and Chinese, and I presented the first 5 minutes of the speech in a Chinese pronunciation that he could fully understand. I was ready for the Press Conference., which turned out to be successful. I used all I had learned about international relations as an undergraduate to get the US and Soviet attaches to have a drink and joke together, to get the East German and French attaches to discuss the finer points of Goethe’s poetry, and to make Yan finally relax that my Chinese would not make him and all of China lose its face. It was all televised on CCTV, and for a week or so, wherever I walked in Shanghai, people seemed to know me and smiled at me. And still-...I hadn’t sung one of those songs yet in Shanghai.

It’s customary that when a festival invited the ASIFA Executive Board that EVERY Board member would be invited. A problem arose for the Shanghai Festival that we were told we could not invite the Israeli Board member, Yitzhak Yoresh, because China had no diplomatic relations with Israel. I told Jin Guoping, assisting Yan Dingxian with Festival administration, that denying Yoresh an invitation would mean the entire Board would not come. He gritted his teeth and said, “Let me try”, and he turned to go back to his little office and the telephone. Now, I don’t know exactly what he did or who he called in the next three days, but he finally came up to me smiling, saying, “ the whole Board is invited. Tell Yoresh to go to the Swiss Embassy for his visa. When I faxed Yoresh to tell him the good news, he faxed back a visual shout of victory, saying this was a historic moment between Israel and China, and in fact it was just that. Whatever magic Jin Guoping managed to do, affected China’s relations with Israel for the years to come.

When I had first come to Shanghai, I stopped at the US Embassy to “sign in”. I had a good discussion with Bill Palmer, the cultural attache, and he seemed proud that an American was chosen as President of the Festival Selection Committee. Later at the Press Conference, I got him drinking with the Soviet attache. So, a few weeks after the Press Conference, I stopped in again to chat with Bill, told him about the prestigious 22 Board members from around the world who had been invited. He thought it would be a great political gesture for the Embassy to hold a reception for the ASIFA Board and the Festival leaders, and he immediately called his leader who enthusiastically agreed. Then I casually slipped in that one of the Board members was Noori Zarrinkelk, who represented Iran. Bill’s usual radiant smile dropped, and he said, “David, we have no diplomatic relations with Iran. This man cannot enter our offices.” I answered, as gently as I could, “Yes, I understand, but you see, if he cannot be invited, then we must cancel the Reception. We had the same issue with the Israeli Board member, unable to come to the Festival. But they saw how important this was and THE CHINESE made a cultural exception and invited

him.” Bill kept staring at me, and I thought I saw how many calculations were going on in his head. He asked me to leave his office and go into another room to have some tea. An hour later he came to me and said, “David, we can accept the Iranian into our Reception with all the others. Understand that he will be watched throughout the time he is here. And please let the Festival leaders know that we are pleased that they have made it possible for the Israeli to be invited and that we are pleased to invite ALL Board members to our Reception.” As it turned out, Zarrinkelk didn’t get to the Festival and so did not cause a stir at the Embassy. The Reception in the end proved to be a great source of delight for all the Board members and the festival staff.

Now I come to all the other things I wanted to do in China. First I had to persuade Yan that I would be a nice foreigner and would not get into any trouble in those intervening 3 months, in fact that I would help them administer the preparations for the festival. Firstly, I happily accepted the tiny room on the third floor with a bed, desk and desk chair. The sink and toilet were down the hall, shared with staff during the day, but otherwise quite private in the evening. As I moved in, I began to notice a lot of little red spots along the wall. Yes, I found that Shanghai mosquitos seem to be larger and hungrier than mosquitos anywhere else in the world. Kawamoto had been staying in that room while working on “Shooting the Unshot” and I had wondered how he had felt, as a conscientious Buddhist, waking up in the middle of the night and smashing them against the wall. When I met him again at the festival and asked about them, he smiled and said, “David, there are limits-...and sometimes I prayed for them.”



Kawamoto and me, with Chang Guangxi behind us, at the Festival.

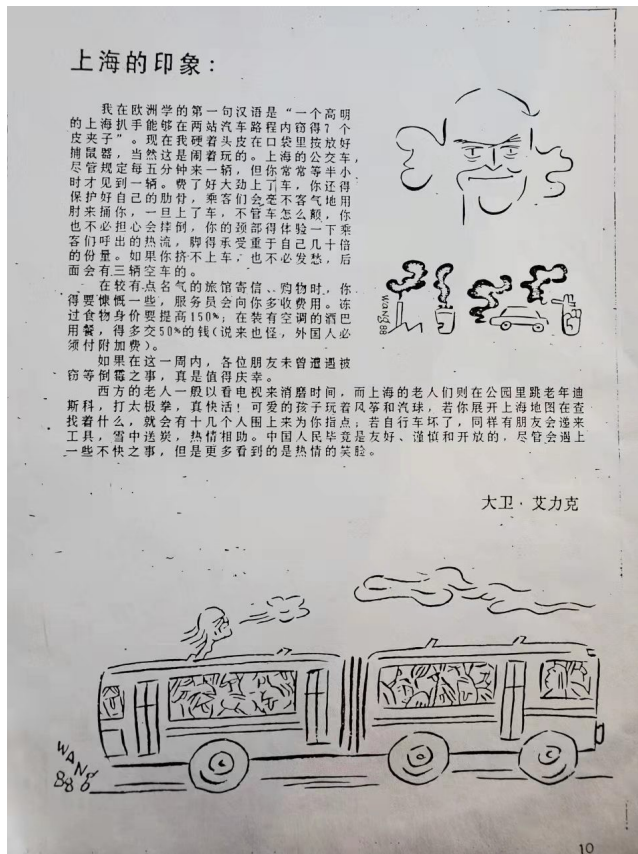
As soon as I could after the Selection, I arranged to reconnect with Jeannette, A Da’s sister, and then to meet A Da’s mother, Lily, and his son, Charles. Lily treated me as A Da’s brother and gave me a small tray A Da had used as a little boy. Her English was excellent and we had long talks about A Da, and China. Charles was 26 when I met him. He was a tall, good-looking young man with a pretty wife and a little son named James. He seemed excited to begin working on children’s workshops with me, and he and his aunt, Jeannette, set about finding the right schools in which to begin. Charles gave me the use of a very old bike, saying I wouldn’t need a lock because no one would ever want to steal something so old and rusted. So now I had a room and a bike.

To facilitate my work with Wang Shuchen on the Muslim/Jew collaboration, Yan let me work at an empty desk in the little studio room where Wang and QianYunda were working. They gave me a pegbar, a bunch of punched paper and some pencils.



At Shanghai Animation Studio dance party, Hu Jinqing, Disco Champion of Shanghai, showed me a few moves. It was October 14, a month before the festival. Actually the party was for my birthday.

Things were coming together. Charles and I began 3 workshops, each meeting once each week, at Yanan Middle school, at YiBaiWanBao, and at an elementary school whose name escapes me. Wang and I enjoyed working together on the collaboration, and for an hour or two every morning I'd stop in the studio office to help the staff with festival letters in English and other preparations. Things were working so well that I began to write little pieces for the Shinmin Evening News in Shanghai. Sometimes Wang would do a little cartoon drawing to humorously illustrate what I had written about.



Wang Shuchen's illustration of one of my pieces for the Shinmin News.

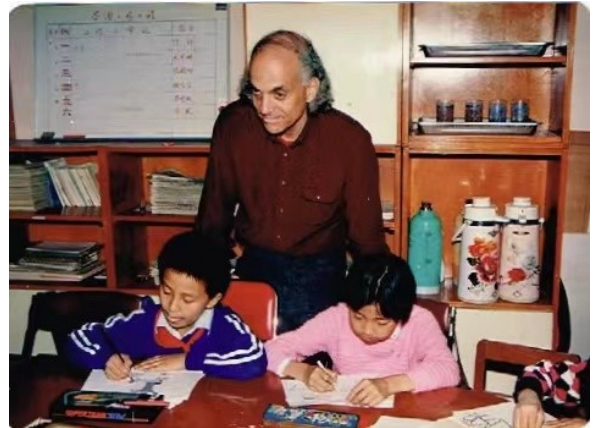


Wang Shuchen

Of course everything I would write would need to pass through the eyes of Yan or Jin Guoping or the cadre before getting to Shinmin, who probably had their own censors as well. As far as I could tell, because I was honestly in love with everything about China at that time, almost everything I wanted to write about was in praise of some aspect of China. I say “almost”, because I did hit one snag, one little article that was stopped at the studio. The day before, on my bike, I saw a bus stopped in the middle of the road. Men and women got off and stayed there to help the driver push the bus to the side of the road where it wouldn't be in the way of bikes and cars. Watching this, I was deeply moved, thinking that if it had happened in New York, people would have angrily gotten off, probably even so much as kicking the tires of the bus and shouting at the driver. Something about all these lovely people working together, without being asked to do so, represented China at its best for me. My piece was stopped ...because the cadre and Yan both felt it reflected not so much how good the people were, but because it told the readers that this nation was not capable of making a bus that didn't break down. Well in 34 years, I'm sure that China now makes the greatest buses in the world, but if one did break down, would the Chinese NOW all get together to push it to the side?

YiBaiWanBao was the “Newspaper of the One Million “ children of Shanghai. There were a few adult administrators, but otherwise all organizing, writing, editing and publishing of the weekly news was done by children as young as 4 up to 13. On their 14th birthday they would no longer be a child and have to leave (retire). This was a most unique and

beautifully run operation and everything about it fascinated me. Charles and I began spending our Saturdays there, meeting with 13 children who wanted to learn animation, children as young as Lily, who was 6 years old and who loved to draw. After just a few Saturdays, all the children had quickly learned the basics of animation and were beginning to organize themselves into a mini-studio set on producing a work for the upcoming Shanghai Animation Festival. They independently came up with the idea of a few Chinese children going up in a plane and then parachuting into various nations and meeting the local children.. They did some research to come up with the most recognizable landmarks and aspects of each nation so that as a child landed somewhere, the audience would know immediately where it was (Statue of Liberty for the U.S., the Coliseum for Italy).



The children were working on *A Friendly Flying* at YiBaiWanBao in '88.

Each animator was responsible for landing in a different nation, and all did a great job. The Shanghai Animation Studio came through by filming all the drawings at their animation stand, and A Da's music composer, Jin Fuzai, created the music for the film. The work was shown at the festival along with professional children's animation at a special screening for children. And within a few weeks after the festival, the film was featured in a new series on CCTV that showed [animation made by children at these workshops](#).



Picture from *A Friendly Flying*



The 13 children with me.

Analysis: Why was this workshop so successful, so much more successful than workshops in other countries? Well, it's true that these children had chosen to try animation and had chosen to commit their free Saturdays to it. And I suspect that because of the years spent

perfecting the drawing of Chinese characters, children in China develop instinctual visual memory and facility. But there is something more. Each of the 13 children would come on Saturday with a mother or father, and that parent would sit in the back of the room for all the hours on Saturday that their child was working on the drawings and discussing the project with the other children. This was a total family commitment, and I knew that when I gave the children assignments at the end of each Saturday, the parents were listening and taking the assignments as their own as much as for the children. In my workshops in Vermont and throughout Europe I had never encountered a situation at all like this. The last 34 years of China's rapid development have resulted in excellent nursery schools and private after-school classes in art, science, even golf, all costing over 5000RMB a month. Parents work amazingly hard to be able to afford such schools for their children. But nowhere in visiting these schools have I seen parents actually sitting in at the classes. They may drop the children off and pick them up, going about their own lives in between. I think back all these years and am nostalgic for what has been lost.

And now back to the Shanghai Studio, my home for those 3 ½ months. A Da had previously told me about two of his colleagues he had held in dearest regard, Chang Guangxi and Hu Yihong, and I was very happy to get to know them. All the female assistants seemed to be swooning over Chang and telling me how warm and kind a man he was. He had co-directed "Butterfly Spring" with A Da two years previously, but for some reason the studio leaders had not released the film either to international festivals or to the Chinese public. When A Da had returned from Zagreb in 1986 and had persuaded the studio leaders to participate in my "Academy Leader Variations" ASIFA co-production, A Da had invited Chang to contribute a variation. As it turned out, Chang's segment, of a pig (in the Year of the Pig) turning the tables on the leader, became the hit of every festival at which the film played, and with good reason. So it was an honor and a great pleasure to meet him finally in Shanghai. Through the last 30 years since that time, Chang has become one of my close friends in China, and we have shared many a stage at Chinese festivals discussing the history of Shanghai animation.

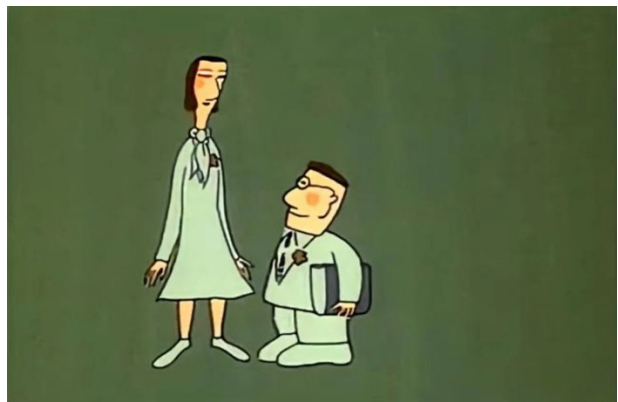


Chang Guangxi.

Hu Yihong had been in the “Fifth Generation” class at the Beijing Film Academy, studying animation and graduating in 1982 to go on to the Shanghai Animation Studio. She had become one of A Da’s friends and proteges working as an assistant on his films beginning in 1983. By 1988, she was ready to propose her own film to the leaders, an experimental animation very different from other work being done at the studio. She showed me the storyboard, and I encouraged her to fight for it. Yan Dingxian, the studio leader, thought it was not appropriate for the studio and was about to reject it. But I noticed Yan’s wife, Lin Wenxiao, chatting with Ms. Xu and mentioning Hu’s name, and when Lin had left I asked Ms. Xu what it was about. She paused and then told me that Lin believed in Hu and her work and was going to argue for it with her husband. Two days later, Hu came to me in the office, smiling broadly, and telling me that she was allowed to go ahead with her proposal. I don’t think she ever knew that Lin had fought for her, but to me, it seemed natural after Lin had chosen to lobby her husband previously for the studio’s participation in my “Academy Leader Variation”. I wonder, through all those years, to what other studio contributions Lin was able to steer her husband. And this got me thinking about the special role of Chinese women who may be, on the surface, secondary to their husbands, but in reality, leading them in significant directions.



HuYihong and PengXiaolian.



Hu Yihong's experimental work "The Tall Woman and Short Husband," finally approved by Yan Dingxian.

By the time of the festival, the children's workshops had been so successful that A Da's sister, Jeannette, proposed an "A Da Animation Center", funded through a grant from the Overseas Chinese Association and run by Charles. We organized a big reception for the opening, and some of the greatest Shanghai animators attended and lent their name to the Center. The Center had a lifespan of over twenty years. Whenever I was to come to Shanghai in future years, I would let Charles know, and we would plan a special workshop at one of the schools that had become affiliated with the Center. Animation made by Shanghai's children were featured on CCTV and were a source of pride for the children, their parents and the people of Shanghai. Within a few years Charles became an ASIFA member, and his Center was recognized and included in ASIFA'S International Workshop Group. Every year, when the group produced a compilation of animation by children around the world, Charles' students would be represented by beautiful work. A Da would have been so happy to have seen all this.

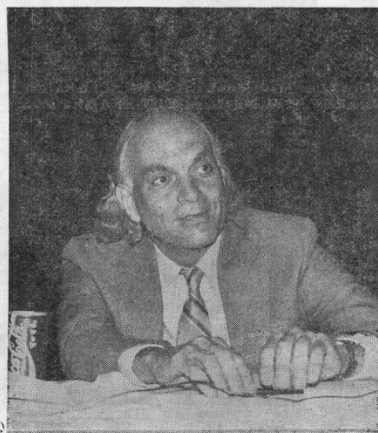


Gerben Schermer, David, Wan Laiming, Georges Schwizgebel
at the opening party for A Da Animation Center

It was not immediately apparent to me, until the end of my stay in 1988 that the Shanghai Studio was about to undergo great changes. The first festival, as I wrote, was indeed a 'Coming Out Party' for Chinese animation, but it was in part, also a coming-out to a market economy. The studio was told by the Ministry that it must gradually give up its dependence upon government subsidies and move forward to make a profit from commercial work in the international market. Within a few years, this would also be a tremendous adjustment for the animation studios in the Soviet Union and throughout the socialist nations of East Europe. In the case of the Shanghai Animation Studio, the experience of the past forty years was to be jettisoned with a whole new set of rules to be put in place, None of these great Shanghai artists had ever experienced, to any serious extent, adapting their concepts and artistic styles to the international commercial market. Most of them, in their 50s and 60s, felt at a loss as to what to do. And when I said good-bye to them after the festival, and they told me of the coming changes, they told me not with excitement, but with a deep sadness.

第一届上海国际动画电影节将取得巨大成功

初选评委主席大卫·艾力克在第三次新闻发布会上的发言



大卫·艾力克在新闻发布会上

多年来，我一直赞美中国的动画片，因为他们非常注重传统艺术。尤其，当今不少国家在制作低劣的商业片时，中国的同行们却采用传统中国画或民间艺术的风格和形式努力发展自己的动画片。我在法国的安纳西、南斯拉夫的萨格拉布已经结交了许多中国同行朋友。令人高兴的是在这次11月份即将由中国美术电影工作者举行的动画片电影节上，我又要再次见到他们。我感到十分荣幸被大家选为初选评委会主席。我相信这次在中国举办的首届动画电影节将获得圆满成功，并且希望它将成为以后其它电影节楷模。

评委会由五人组成，他们来自不同的国家，即美国、瑞士、日本和中国。他们有截然不同的文化和政治背景。但是，令人惊讶的是在计算选票时，评委们对上映的一些影片，特别是影片丰富的想象力、精湛的技术及思想内涵方面，大家的意见却又几乎是少有一致。对评委来说唯一遗憾的是，由于名额有限，不可能把所有的优秀作品都收入参赛中。

这里要感谢在严定宪先生领导下的组织委员会，他们从大量的影片中，选出好的影片来。来自世界各地的286部动画片送这次电影节，其中不少都是颇有质量的。应该说第一次举办电影节就得到各国的动画片导演与制片厂的如此热烈反应是很罕见的。当然罗，反之给我们的初选工作增加了难度。因为我们要给那些众口难调的影片说“由于参赛影片名额有限”，实在不是一件好事。因此，在此，我们想谈谈评委的第二轮工作就是评选赛外放映的影片。我们的宗旨是挑选些与参赛影片同样高质量而有趣的影片奉献给观众。事实上，可能由于种种原因，就连我们自己也觉得难以解释。这些影片往往作为参赛片更合适一些，这是毫无疑问的。

初选结果，选出52部影片作为参赛片，26部影片作为赛外放映片。这里要说明的是，参赛片和赛外放映片都具有很高的艺术质量。在参赛片中，北美和欧洲各12部，东欧和亚洲各14部。赛外放映片有6部来自北美，7部来自西欧，7部来自东欧，6部来自亚洲，评选出来的78部影片，有24部影片，即三分之一是由妇女执导的。

中国有32部影片送电影节，有8部影片入选，其中有不少是第一次上映，我想这些影片将在世界主要电影节获奖。《不射之射》是由上海美影厂制作，日本木偶大师川喜八郎导演的水木偶片。它将是观众喜爱的影片。特伟的新片《山水情》运用了《牧笛》所用的同样优美的水墨画技巧。由胡建庆、王树忱和林文肖导演的优秀影片和其它一些没有入选的片子使中国在这次电影节上成为最强的动画国之一。

美国在40部送片的影片中有7部影片入选参赛，

参赛数位于第二位。在26部赛外放映影片中有5部来自美国，美国的动画家一半以上是妇女，大多数是独立制片人，不是制片厂雇员，他们倾向于探索和发展新的技术和想法。艾米·克拉维兹的《陷阱》，莎拉·佩蒂的《魔法时间的前奏曲》和玛丽·佩奇的《天堂》，这些影片向我们展示了画师们在动画方面的工作（用动画的艺术创作了在艺术画廊里往往能找到的美和情趣。）

5部入选参赛的加拿大影片中，有欢闹风格的影片，他们是由考特·巴克导演的《猫回家》和阿里森·斯诺登和大卫·菲纳导演的《乔治和罗丝玛丽》。非常严肃的、用诗写成的影片《夜天使》是由加拿大艺术家贾斯·德洛恩和捷克木偶导演莱蒂斯夫·帕贾的合作作品。加拿大国家电影局对大多数报名参赛的影片给予了很大支持，所以这次电影节组织一个特别节目放映加拿大国家电影局过去几年的优秀影片是非常恰当的。

来自日本的4部影片向我们展示了试验性技术的广阔范围。古川夕夕向我们呈送了两部影片，《爵士乐》是用计算机制作的，《直接动画》是直接画在胶片上的。同一个艺术家创作了一部要求很高很复杂技术的影片，而另一部片只用最简单的动画技法，甚至不用摄影机。

美国有三部影片被入选。其中两部已在一些主要的电影节上获奖，但评委感到影片质量如此高，中国观众不应该失去这个机会。《鳄鱼鱼》由奈尔兄弟导演，是一部很难理解的影片，片长20分钟。观众可能感到不舒服，但技术的娴熟、精致的细节足以能克服第一次观看这部奇怪形式影片所产生的困惑感。由比德·劳德和大卫·斯波克斯通导演的《巴比伦》表现了泥塑动画技术的一种鉴赏。讲了一个有道德和政治主题的故事。

这次匈牙利选送了很有竞争力的影片，遗憾的是由于考虑到时间，我们只选了两部参赛，2部赛外放映，《重新开始》和《齐诺和新闻》，这两部影片由斯导演弗兰克·察科导演，展现了高超、完美的技术。影片在形式上是很美的，在概念上具有很高的独创性。作为赛外放映，彼德·斯佐博斯拉的影片表现了高质量的匈牙利传统艺术。

捷克巴维尔·考茨基的两部影片入选了比赛，《履历表》和《眼睛不能看见的》，他的绘画风格新颖完美，他的想象力贯穿了人类知识的广度，他是目前世界上最杰出、最年轻的动画家之一。

两部波兰片入选参赛，一部极妙的儿童动画片，由艾莉娜·考特斯卡用稻草制成，片名为《稻草的故事》。另一部是很严肃的成人动画片《蜘蛛》由扎奇达拉恩·库特拉和弗朗西斯科·彼德导演。

南斯拉夫给我们送来了令人愉快的喜剧片《两种生活》由波里维奇·多佛尼克维奇导演，他是南斯拉夫动画大师，是萨格拉布动画电影节很有威望的导演。另一部影片是《最后一站》由表现最强视觉效果的动画家派沃·斯塔特特导演。

瑞士影片有克劳德·劳埃特的《观察力的疑问》，具有改变视觉角度的非常精美的画面。《偷月亮的小男孩》是由艾内斯特和吉瑟勒·安斯基这对夫妇导演的，他们运用试验性的技术用沙来制作动画片。

杰出的荷兰动画家保尔·德里选送上他最近佳作《作者》，运用了他非常奇妙的，但很有感染力的风格。另一位荷兰动画家休伯特·邓·德拉克用水木偶片讲述了一个讽刺社会批评的故事。

参赛影片中，罗马尼亚、丹麦、比利时、法国、挪威、民主德国、澳大利亚和意大利都各有优秀影片入选参赛。

苏联选送的7部影片中有4部入选。在国

际电影上，苏联影片总有很强的竞争力。所以这次也不例外。莫斯科制片厂的《马丁科》是一个民间故事，运用了优美的动画技巧，由爱德华·那扎罗夫导演。《维克多·塔西》由高利·巴丁导演，他运用了试验技术，用钢丝来制作影片，讲述了有关恐惧、毁灭的寓言。苏联制片厂的另两部出色影片是《草地上的早餐》，该片获萨格拉布电影节大奖，由布里特·比昂导演。此片是我们长期以来所看过影片中最有社会讽刺力的影片。《战争》是以自然主义风格表现的物体动画片。此片由年青的雷奥·伏尔默导演。

初选委员会感到对中国的作品应该十分负责，这些作品的风格、技术各异，具有很高的质量，有许多优秀作品是为儿童制作的，但我想成人也会喜欢的。有的是教育片；有的是社会评论片；有的是故事；有的是笑话。有些影片形式简单，但很美，耐看，就像夕阳西下的山水画那些美。他们有如世界上那么多种类众多的影片，这就是我感到中国人喜欢动画艺术类的深度和广度。

现在我想说一些有关电影节组委会的事，他们太谦虚不提到他们自己，但是我仍然必须说，评选进行得非常顺利。虽然有大量的电影需要进口，以及国际影片的运送和通讯上有麻烦，电影节的全休人员尽快地解决了这些问题，并从未耽误送交给我们评选委员会。屏幕和计算机列表的工作非常出色。这个非常专业化的组织在评选结束后，马上与制片商和电影厂取得联系。从来也没发生过（这里我所指的是许多其它电影节出现过）的一些不愉快的经历，从来也没有。一个电影节工作组如此快的在评选后的几天之内发出了他们邀请信，而通常这项工作需要2—4星期，有的甚至需要6—8星期。

也许根据事实可说，这是“第一届”电影节，那些组织者，尤其是秘书长严定宪先生，他们明智、开放地从其它电影节的情报中吸取经验，事实上，这个工作组对世界各地制作的动画片的同行们的需求和感觉是极为敏感的。但这里的确有前所未有的感情，那就是对所有艺术家如同兄弟和朋友般的关心，并以同样的感情关心中国观众。中国观众去看这些电影和一些动画片作者相遇，亲身感受这种新的艺术形式的广度。这不是作为一个大的商业经营的电影节，象戛纳和最近的安纳西电影节。这是一次艺术的电影节，这样的艺术享受是一种艺术家和艺术家之间的艺术分享；观众对艺术家艺术成果享受以及艺术家从观众那里获得的艺术分享，有一种人类的感受和关心。对于那些举办了很多次但从没有象我们这次学到这么多东西的电影节，我们希望这次电影节能对它们有所影响。

有时我们可以这样说，一个电影节吸收了他们的民族特性。在这短短的几个星期，我清楚地认识到，由于中国人民和动画片爱好者以及世界各地的动画片电影工作者的努力，第一届上海国际动画电影节将取得巨大成功。这次电影节，正如中国人民的本身，就将是一个美好的、优秀的，具有巨大热情和相互关怀的电影节。我祝贺在中国举办并开展这次活动，并对我在初选评委所担任的尽管是微小的角色感到荣幸。



專刊

上海市電影局主辦

The newspaper about my speech.

PART 4

Transition of Chinese Animation to the Market Economy

With the founding in 1949 of the People's Republic of China, the small group of artists who were to study and create China's animation were given the mandate to make animation FOR CHILDREN that was both educational and entertaining. From that point on, whoever was fortunate enough to join the state-supported animation studio in Shanghai was trained in animation that was to educate children in socialist values. The studio operated within the 'planned economy' of the government.

Each year, the total output of animation had been fixed between 300 and 400 minutes. The studio was paid a fixed amount sufficient for its continued production, and films were then distributed by the China Film Corporation at a fixed price. To be very clear, the animators were artists, with all the talents, dedication and love of their art as artists anywhere in the world. And when these artists were encouraged to strike out in new paths of children's animation, and when these films reached a receptive international audience, with film festival awards, this was a great honor for the government and the people of China. So, as in all socialist studios, every year a certain proportion of the animation produced at the Shanghai Animation Studio for children were earmarked as 'international version'. These films would be non-verbal, so that dubbing or sub-titles would be unnecessary, and they would be less obviously political. Moreover, greater time and attention would be placed upon technical experimentation such as animation of cut-paper, folded paper and ink-brush animation, as has been mentioned. This was certainly taken to the extreme in the case of those works earmarked for the 1988 International Animation Festival.

At times of political turmoil, the Ministry would usually insist upon the production of animation that more obviously towed the government political line. In more relaxed times, the production of children's animation could be more flexible, with a greater focus upon graphic beauty and experimentation. There was nevertheless a great socialist consistency in all aspects of human life. Though salaries were quite low, the studio cafeteria was available at no charge for all workers; there was an in-house medical and dental unit that was equally available to all; there were simple living quarters available to all who needed them. For those artists who could accept the limitations in salary, in genre, in what it meant to educate children in a socialist system, life as an animator could be quite good. Yes, there were periods of distress during the Reform Movement of the early 60s and then the Cultural Revolution from '66 to '76, but with the exception of Te Wei and Wang Shuchen, the animators were not criticized to the extent that were creative writers whose words were seen of much greater threat to the Party.

This management method was challenged in the 1980s when the production of Chinese animation fell further and further behind the demands of the market. American and Japanese animation began to enter the gap and to occupy a significant position on Chinese television. At the same time, because of the rising costs of animation production in the west, companies in the U.S., Japan and Europe diverted an increasing amount of the less creative intermediate stages of production, like inking and painting, to the Asian countries with their cheaper labor. Many of the most talented Chinese animators left their work at

the Shanghai Animation Studio for more lucrative commercial work in the western-financed companies that began to dot the eastern coast of China from Shanghai south to Hong Kong. These developments occurred simultaneously with the general economic moves towards a market economy that began in the early 1980s in China.

Given all this, perhaps we can more empathize with the Shanghai animators when they were informed in '88 that state support of the studio would be gradually cut down within a few years and that they were to turn to the international market for their survival. With the lessening of central control and financing of the Shanghai Studio by the Chinese government, this studio had to branch out from educational and artistic animation to more commercially viable work that could bring in the financing so necessary to its continued survival, and many well-trained animators at the studio began to work primarily in the intermediate stages of production, not in the creation of original work. The Chinese government would continue to give the studio a payment for 300-400 minutes of animation each year that covered about 70% of all its costs, the other 30% to be made up by work for foreign companies. In ten years, by 1998, the studio was to report only 30% of its costs from the government subsidy. To facilitate the search and production of commercial work, in 1991 the Shanghai Studio joined with Yick Lee of Hong Kong to form the Shanghai Yilimei Animation Company, LTD. as its commercial arm. Jin Guoping, who had previously done his magic in 1988 to secure the visa for our Israeli ASIFA Board member, became Vice General Manager of Yilimei.

The purest example of the difficulties that ensued was at the Annecy Animation Festival in June of 1991. A section of the festival was reserved for animation studios throughout the world. Each studio rented a small booth at which they would display and offer their films for distribution and future production and co-production. As I walked through the huge room, I passed booth after booth, each filled with sales representatives screening their productions for buyers on VCRs. When I came to the Shanghai Studio booth I was happy to see two of the studio assistants that I liked, but I realized that they spoke neither French nor a passable English, and that they had hung along the inside wall of the booth beautifully framed cels from some of the studio's films. While other studios were busy working up distribution and co-production deals worth tens of thousands of dollars, these two were hoping just to sell a few of the framed cels to cover the \$300 rental of the booth. I didn't quite know how to help, so I bought two of the framed cels and brought several of my colleagues to the booth so it might look busier than it was. When I think about it, of course, in the difficult transition from socialist to market economy, no one had set up for the studio, evening courses, lectures or seminars on how to market or sell a product. They were to learn by painful experience, and painful it certainly was. The studio had to learn how to compete not only with studios from other Asian countries, but also with local studios working for foreign companies, and to compete with these while it had to pay attention to its ORIGINAL purpose of educating children. This meant that there was very little time or funding with which to develop artistic animation, the kind that might compete at international festivals and, in fact, stimulate more of the commercial work from foreign companies. To make matters worse, Some of the best animators from the Shanghai Animation Studio, frustrated with the changes at the studio, began to move away to those commercial studios that could pay them higher wages for piecemeal work.

Clearly, the more 'pieces' a worker produces, the greater the income, BUT as a worker works faster to increase that production, quality is necessarily lowered. This became true not only at all those commercial studios but, unfortunately, to some extent, also at the Shanghai Animation Studio, a studio that for so many years had stood firm for the quality of the art form.

Returning now to the close of the 1988 Shanghai International Animation Festival, which for all practical purposes was seen as a great success by all the foreign animators and press who had attended, it was announced publicly that the second festival would be held in the fall of 1990. However, for various reasons, the second festival was later put forward to 1992, and in a district of Shanghai that was quite isolated.

The Second Shanghai International Animation Festival

The 1992 Shanghai Animation Festival was a much more subdued festival than was the 1988 event, and there were not as many foreigners present. I was in the final stages of completing "Genghis Khan", a US-Mongolian co-production with my Mongolian colleague, Miagmar Sodnompilin, and he came with his two assistants so we could work together in the hotel room. To help us, I also asked two of our young students, 10 and 13 years old, from the A Da Animation Center to do some paid coloring. At the festival, I finally had the chance to meet Mochinaga, the Japanese pioneer of puppet animation who was one of the original founders of the Shanghai Animation Studio.



Mochinaga, Fang Ming was teaching in 1985
in Beijing Film Academy

His final animation was selected for competition, and in fact it was awarded one of the prizes.



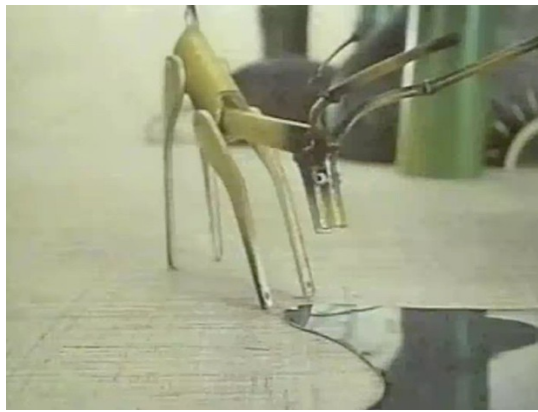
a puppet animation directed by Fang Ming

Most of my friends from the Studio in 1988 were there, except Wang Shuchen, who had passed away the previous year. So we all had warm discussions, and of course the chance for all of us to sing together. This time, just two of the Shanghai Studio films were awarded prizes: Ma Kexuan's "12 Mosquitoes and 5 Men", a perfectly executed educational animation,



Ma Kexuan's *12 Mosquitoes and 5 Men*, 1992

and "Deer and Bull" by Zou Qin, a very creative puppet animation with the characters and scenery made from strips of bent bamboo.



Deer and Bull by Zou Qin 1990

Zou Qin was in fact one of the young animators at the studio who had previously left for one of the commercial studios in Shenzhen, and a higher wage. But he had found the work unfulfilling and had returned to the Shanghai Animation Studio with the hope that at least there, he might have more of a chance for creative work. The festival turned out to be a quiet, nondramatic event, one that was probably exactly what was desired by the leaders after the dramatic events of 1989. No mention was made of a third edition of the festival, and we all said good-bye, feeling that we had come to the end of a beautiful era.

POST-FESTIVAL

While in Shanghai in 1994, I had the chance to stop in the Shanghai Animation Studio to see my old friends again. Hu Jinqing was working on a commercial series about a group of Calabash Brothers, Jin Guoping was in charge of the studio's outreach to foreign studios and seemed to be learning how to handle it all, and Hu Yihong was developing her own TV series.



Calabash Brothers 1986



Hu Yihong *Lotus Princess* 1992

This was six years after their confused reaction to knowing of the change to a market economy, and the ones I met this time seemed to be going forward, doing their best to adapt to this new situation. Jin Guoping took over from Yan Dingxian as China's representative on ASIFA's Executive Board, improved his English and began coming to Board meetings at festivals. He also used those opportunities to develop more of an understanding of the commercial market and to make the business connections that could be of value to the Studio. Indeed, perhaps due to his relative youth, compared to the other studio leaders, Jin Guoping had more of the potential to adapt to and learn the steps that had to be taken for the studio to enter the world market.



Jin Guoping

In 1993, I had written an article for the ASIFA News about Te Wei, his work, and how he had guided the Shanghai Animation Studio for so many years. The ASIFA Executive Board in 1995 chose Te Wei to receive ASIFA's prestigious ASIFA Award for his life's work, the first ASIFA Award ever given to a Chinese animator. He was presented with the award at the 1995 Annecy International Animation Festival. In honor of Te Wei's award, I wrote a piece for the festival Catalogue entitled, "Te Wei: A Study in Courage", that focused upon his years during the Cultural Revolution.



Te Wei and Georges Schwizgebel holding Te Wei's "1995 Special ASIFA Award for Life's Work" at the 1995 Annecy Animation Festival.
([Appendix: Te Wei article](#))

In 1995, when I was teaching at the University of Hawaii, I invited Hu Jinqing to screen a retrospective of his films and present a speech about the studio. As it turned out, because of a health problem he was unable to come, but he sent the films and a translated commentary which included, "In the next ten years, our studio hopes to match its usual production of artistic films with the developing production of commercial work."

At a 1997 Conference celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Shanghai Animation Studio, Te Wei presented a paper that included, "Our studio has won many prizes and national and international competitions; and we have been respected within the animated film profession throughout the world. However this is not enough. We must take our product and enter the world market to fight for it and win." In my opinion, Te Wei, was not saying that the studio should change the nature of the product, but that the studio must continue to make quality animation but this time should fight for its acceptance at home and abroad. In an interview I did with him in 1992, he had said, "Because of the rising prices of goods, we think it normal to pay attention to money, also because our income is very low. and the expenses for filmmaking are high. So we are supposed to have a studio that makes those kinds of commercial films. Our studio still made our films, but then we found out that the less important ones became the important ones. Because I am now an advisor, not director of the studio, it would not be proper for me to interfere about this. Some of the main film directors share the same opinion with me, and some of them will leave."

In a series of articles written for NEW FILM (Beijing) in 1997, Chang Guangxi, Hu Yihong, Qian Yunda, Zhou Keqin, and Te Wei all argued for the need to understand the changing demands of the audience and the world market. Chang Guangxi, who was to become the new leader of the Shanghai Animation Studio, wrote that the studio in its work should focus upon five areas:

1. Plot- any animated film must tell a good story.
2. Characters-the leading character must be someone with whom the audience can relate.
3. Use of new cutting-edge audio-visual techniques.
4. An updated concept of 'rhythm' that accelerates the pace of the plot.
5. Readjustment of the relationship of content and form so that it might suit an audience more international in outlook.

In fact, Chang's 1999 feature animation "Magic Lotus Lantern", followed each of these points quite successfully, and the film did quite well at both festivals and in theatrical distribution in Asia. It had an exciting storyline, a very sympathetic main character, DOLBY digital sound, an accelerated rhythm, and all in the style of a western animated musical. It was not yet at the level of Disney's "Mulan", in terms of story and all the characters, but it was certainly a jump towards it, in the sense of marketability, from what the studio had previously been doing.



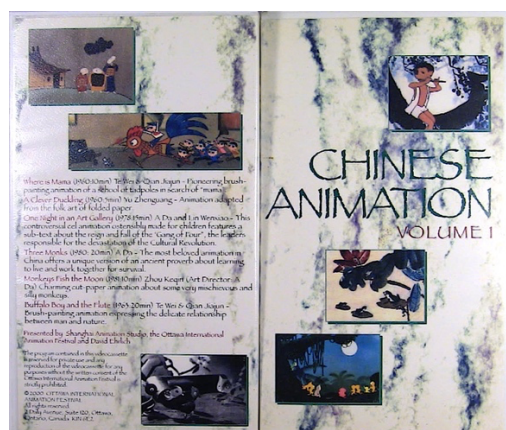
Chang Guangxi *Magic Lotus Lantern* 1999

I was particularly impressed with the dynamic rhythm of the ritual dancing which seemed to me to be an integration of native dancing throughout the various cultures of the world.

PART 5

International Promotion of the Shanghai Animation

In 2000, I wanted to memorialize all the wonderful work that had been done at the Shanghai Animation Studio, especially now that the transition to the market economy had compelled so many changes in the nature and quality of the work being done there. I persuaded Chris and Kelly Robinson, leaders of the Ottawa Animation Festival, to hold a retrospective of 16 of the greatest works from the studio and to feature it also in a two volume set of VHS tapes to be distributed commercially in North America.



**The VHS tape I organized with the Studio
and Ottawa Animation Festival**

Contracts were signed between the studio, the Ottawa Festival and myself, with the studio and the Festival each sharing 50% of net profits. I introduced the retrospective in an article for the festival catalogue, "The Birth of Animation in the People's Republic of China," and spoke before the screening of my time with my studio colleagues. The high point of the show for me was suddenly meeting Ms Xu again there after all those years. She had emigrated to Canada soon after the 1988 Shanghai Animation Festival and had been working as an international adviser with a studio in Ottawa.

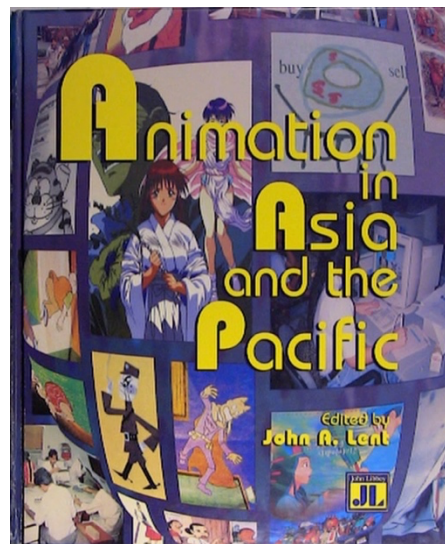
Thirteen of the sixteen works in the retrospective were from 1988 and before. Then the two works in competition at the 1992 festival, "Deer and Bull" by Zou Qin, and "Cat and Rat" by Hu Jinqing. As the final work in the VHS compilation, I chose Hu Jinqing's 2-minute animation from 1998, "Snow Fox".



Hu Jinqing Snow Fox 1998

My reasons for that final choice were two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to honor Hu's long career at the studio in persisting to create personal artistic animation taken from nature, especially with a work done as late as 1998 when the studio's animation had otherwise veered towards more commercial work. As for my other reason, "Snow Fox" ends with the brutal death of both the mother fox and her offspring, due to the commercial greed of the hunters who kill for the fur. In those six years, between 1992 and 1998, is this film a statement as well, of what the economic changes have wrought to animation?

My colleague John Lent, who was teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia, was also a fan of Shanghai Animation, and in 1999 he had asked me to co-write a chapter on the history of Chinese animation for his forthcoming book, "Animation in Asia and the Pacific."



"Animation in Asian and the Pacific"

I used the opportunity to include interviews with Te Wei and Yan Dingxian about their lives and work during the Cultural Revolution that I had recorded in 1988 and 1992. The book, published in 2001, supported the videos distributed by the Ottawa Animation Festival and is still in print to this day.



I wrote the chapter on Chinese Animation for John Lent's book on "Animation in Asian and the Pacific"

ASIFA

I've mentioned ASIFA a number of times in this writing and at this point feel I should explain a bit more of my connection to it. ASIFA is an international Association of animators originally chartered in France in 1960, with national groups then springing up throughout the world. I first joined ASIFA-East, the group in New York City, and as I began going to animation festivals in Europe I also became a member of the International ASIFA. Because I had begun teaching animation workshops to children in Vermont schools in the late 1970s, when Nicole Salomon, a French workshop leader and an officer of ASIFA, organized the first ASIFA International Workshop Committee at the 1982 Zagreb Festival, I took A Da to the first meeting of the Committee and we both committed to take an active role.



First meeting of ASIFA's Workshop Committee at Zagreb Animation Festival, 1982, with David and A Da

The initial results were the workshops in both Annecy (1983) and Vermont (1984) that A Da and I did together. When A Da was in Vermont in '84, we worked out a plan for at least 12 of the Shanghai animators to join ASIFA, thereby creating China's first national ASIFA group, called ASIFA-China. The annual membership fee, in "hard currency", would be difficult for the Shanghai animators to pay, so we worked out a plan for the studio to give me cels from their films to sell so that I could use the proceeds to cover their ASIFA fees. This worked out for the next 15 years. At the ASIFA Board meeting at the 1985 Annecy Festival, ASIFA-China was approved as a new national group. And at the elections for the 22 Board members, which occurred every three years, I nominated A Da who was elected as China's first ASIFA Executive Board member. After A Da's death, at the 1988 Board elections at Zagreb, Yan Dingxian was elected as China's Board member, an office he continued to hold for two terms until Jin Guoping was elected in 1994.



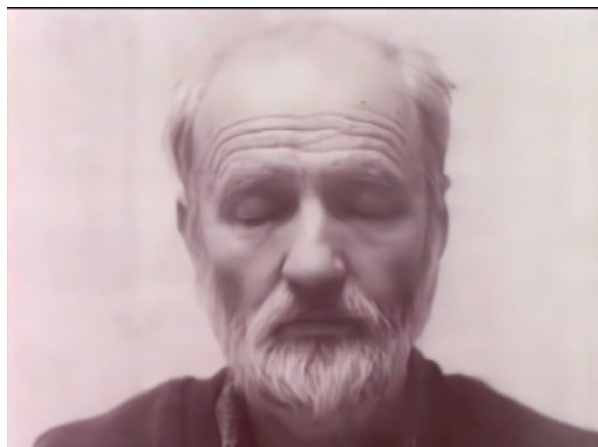
ASIFA Executive Board meetings, 1994 at Hiroshima International Animation Festival.

Jin Guoping served two terms until 2000 at which point he told me that he would not run again and that ASIFA-China had become inactive, a result of the transition to the market economy. I must backtrack a bit to explain the ongoing situation for me, personally. From 1982 onward, I had become very active in the ASIFA Workshop Committee, inviting animators from around the world to come to Vermont as A Da had, to lead workshops with me and to give screenings up and down our East Coast of their own and their nation's animation. I was always particularly enamored with work from socialist countries, so my secondary motivation was to open American audiences to what was happening in the part of the world often closed to Americans. And, in fact, this aspect of bringing together both artists and audiences from east and west during a time of the "Cold War" was what attracted me most to ASIFA, which was chartered under UNESCO. This then resurrected and tied into my original impulses to study Government and International Relations as an undergraduate. And so by 1985, after working on my first co-production with Adrian Petringenaru from Romania, in addition to my work with ASIFA's Workshop Committee, Adrian and I successfully proposed a new ASIFA Committee on International Cooperation. I might add that in 1985, China's most positive diplomatic relations with the socialist nations of East Europe were with Romania. So when I nominated A Da as Board member on behalf of the US, Adrian quickly seconded the nomination showing that this was an east-west nomination. This then led to my organizing ASIFA's first "ASIFA-Presente" collaboration, "Academy Leader Variations", with artists from the US, Poland, Switzerland and China.



Academy Leader Variations
Chinese title of and Chang Guangxi's section

In 1988, after the success of that film, I put in motion the second ASIFA-Presente collaboration, *Animated Self-Portraits*, with artists from the US, Japan, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Estonia, USSR.

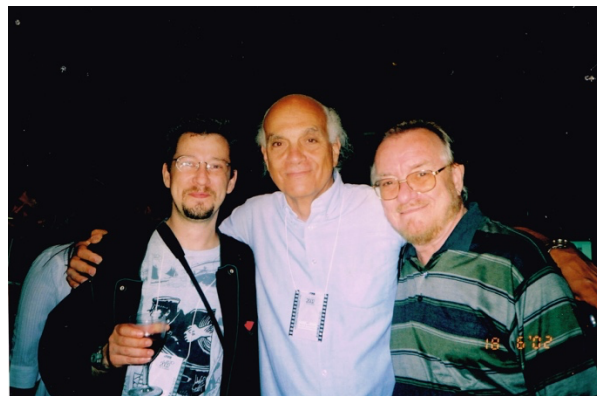
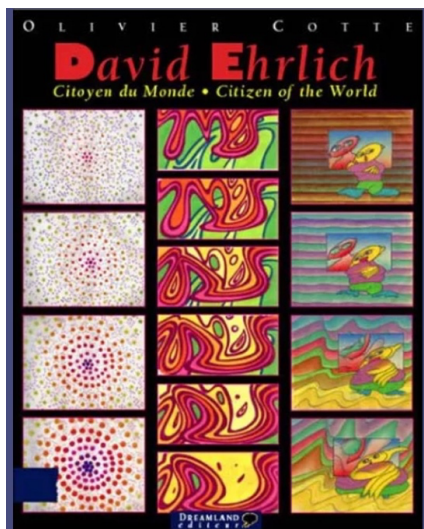


Jan Svankmajer's self-portrait in Animated Self-Portraits, 1989

I also ran for the ASIFA Executive Board myself that year and continued on the Board for 12 years, becoming Vice-President for six of those years, finally resigning in 2000. To be perfectly honest, my enthusiasm for ASIFA began to wane by 1994, when so many of my friends from China and the former socialist countries became more focused on commercial work than on the artistic work that had so fascinated me. ASIFA's most important initial mandate had been to bring east and west together, and it was this that had motivated me to work so hard on ASIFA for so many years without pay. But I was naively unprepared for the result of that international coming together, that artistic animation throughout the world would have to make the transition to the market. Through the late 1990s, I tried to adapt to what was happening by connecting artists from the east whose work I treasured with commercial studios in L.A. But though these folks seemed happy with the results, my heart was not really into this kind of helping. And so in 2000 I decided to do whatever I could at least to remind the world of the beautiful work created at the Shanghai Animation Studio up until 1988. The result was the VHS tapes and retrospective at the Ottawa Animation Festival, the chapter in John Lent's book on Asian animation, and some of the articles I continued to write about the studio's work.

My Future with Chinese Animation Festivals and Animation Schools

2002 was a big year in my own life at 60 years of age. I was presented at the Zagreb Animation Festival with the annual ASIFA Award for all my personal work and work for ASIFA, the same award also presented to Te Wei seven years before. A book on my life and work, by Olivier Cotte was published in Paris, and I was invited to the Ottawa Animation Festival as Honorary President, the first time a non-Canadian was given that honor.



Zagreb Animation Festival, 2002, with Olivier Cotte (left), author of the 2002 book on Ehrlich's work, and Bordo Dovnikovic, ASIFA Secretary-General (right).

I was satisfied with what was behind me, but unsure of what was ahead. I hoped I would keep making one artistic animated short each year, and that I would continue to teach my classes at Dartmouth College that I had begun teaching in 1993. Beyond that, my love of

international work seemed to be coming to an end. I continued to be invited to serve on Juries of international festivals or given retrospectives, but these were moments during the year with nothing continuous as I had with my ASIFA work. Animation festivals began to spring up in Hangzhou, Jilin, Changsha and then Xiamen, and I would be invited to give various presentations. I was grateful for the chance to return to China and to see my old friends again, but it was clear to me that these festivals were commercial vehicles, not at all focused upon screening serious Chinese work to audiences of artists and young people who would most benefit.

I gradually lost interest in the work being done in China's studios, but became quite fascinated with the amateur Flash animation being developed throughout China by young Chinese individuals. I found the new website, flashempire.com.cn that featured this work and I began to have hope for the renewal of creative animation in China. The work was generally amateurish on a technical level, but exciting in the ideas and juxtapositions of images produced. A young scholar in Hong Kong, Weihua Wu, was writing his thesis on the "Shanke Revolution" in Flash animation, and asked me to be a reader. I accepted and was then privy both to his research and to a multitude of Flash works. I began to compare what had begun in China around 2000 with what I had experienced in New York in the mid-1970s. At this point, I'd like to offer one of the papers I presented at the Jilin Forum in 2005: *Independent Animation in the U.S. and its implications for Independent Animation in China*.

Since moving from painting to animation in 1975, I, like so many of my American colleagues, have been producing, directing and animating my animated shorts independent from studios or government sponsorship. Working alone on my personal films, after a day of earning money at survival jobs like teaching or commercial work, I have been able to create my personal films in the image true to what I intended. Similarly, as producer, I maintained complete and effective control of festival entries, distribution and exhibition of my works. Not only has independent animation been a source of great fulfillment to me and my colleagues, but it has often done well at film festivals internationally, leading to modest but solid TV programming and DVD distribution. Moreover, and this is what I consider very important, it is the passion and originality of much of American independent animation that has directly and indirectly inspired much of the most successful and economically profitable feature animations such as the recent "Coraline" and "Cloudy in the Sky With Meatballs".

In 1988, while I was living at the Shanghai Animation Studio and helping them with their first animation festival, I gave a series of workshops to their young animators in which I naively tried to encourage them to attempt their own independent work. I say "naively" because the means of animation production, the film stock, the camera stand, the laboratories were all owned by the State Studio. Moreover, the classical studio tradition developed by Disney and then Soyuzmultfilm in Moscow reinforced the notion that to make even a short 5 minute animation, one needed a large crew of in-betweeners, inkers, and opaquers. In 1988, my encouragement was wrong and even counter-productive.

Then ten years later, as young Chinese scholar, Weihua Wu reported so thoroughly in his PhD Thesis, an increasing number of young Chinese artists had access to computers and FLASH software. This resulted in the "Shanke" phenomenon in which thousands of highly original Flash animations began to circulate, most notably on the website, flashempire.com. Still a bit amateurish in technical terms, these shorts were not immediately acceptable to international animation festivals and could not initially find an economically lucrative market. But this was clearly a strong beginning for independent animation in China, not unlike the beginning in the 70's of independent animation in the U.S. with technically imperfect 16mm film.

Since that time, thanks to the support of the Chinese government, there has been a miraculous proliferation of animation schools in China which have been graduating thousands of young animators every year. With excellent facilities and instructors, these young people are highly skilled technically and have swelled the ranks of the studios in eastern China. Most of their work so far has been dedicated to outsourced material, and clearly this is a burgeoning industry in China. On the other hand, this segment has not been balanced by the creation of much original content. I have visited a number of these schools in the last six years, have lectured and spoken with students. The problem with the lack of original thinking and creativity that could lead to original content is not due to any deficiency on the students' part. It is, in my opinion, due to the educational overemphasis upon the kind of cooperative technical learning and commercial goal orientation that may be quite adequate for a career as a studio worker but is insufficient for the thinking that is necessary for the production of original content.

Especially at this time of inexpensive computers and software, it is possible for an individual artist to design and create a highly original animated short entirely alone. This should be one of the course options of every animation department in every school. Not only would the graduates then have the ability and choice of going on to create independent animation, but, more importantly, they would then have reinforced the patterns of creative thinking that would serve them well as a worker in a studio that wishes to create original content.

Whenever I was invited to speak at one of the Chinese festivals, I would use the opportunity to argue for more creativity and originality in script and characters in student work, and I began to plan the next stage of my life in China. I would retire from my Dartmouth teaching job in 2009, but in 2005, I would first begin looking at what was being taught at the new animation schools popping up across China and find the best way to move from Dartmouth to one of these schools by 2010.

The Wuhan International Animation Forum of 2006

In 2005, at the festival in Hangzhou, I happened to meet Duan Jia, a professor at the Beijing Film Academy whose animation, "Lotus" had just won first prize in a national competition.



Lotus 2006 by Duan Jia

It was a beautiful film, non-narrative with an expressionist feel somewhat in the genre of the semi-abstract first section of Disney's "Fantasia" influenced by Oskar Fischinger. We spent time talking about education in China and about the commercialization of Chinese animation festivals like the one in Hangzhou. We continued talking over long emails and we came up with what we both felt would be an ideal festival, one more like a Forum.



Duan Jia

She would bring together the greatest animators from the Shanghai Animation Studio, and I would bring together with them, some of the greatest animators from Europe and the US. This time, the two groups would be integrated with multiple student translators, an experience quite different at other Chinese festivals where the groups separated by language would remain separate in every other way.



2006 International Animation Artists Salon in Wuhan

Moreover, the screenings and panels would be held at a large university and would be open and strongly advertised to students. Duan Jia worked very hard to find an appropriate venue, Wuhan University, and sufficient funding for travel and hospitality for all the animators invited. This, in fact, was the product of what both of us felt a festival or forum in China should be, and the 2006 Wuhan Forum turned out to be a great success in every way.

Beijing Film Academy, 2007

In 2007, Duan Jia had me invited to the Beijing Film Academy to teach several classes for a semester. This gave me the time and a chance to really understand the issues of animation education in China, and Duan Jia arranged a lecture tour for me of other schools in China: Gulangyu Art College, Xiamen University, CUC and Tsinghua University in Beijing. While teaching at BFA that semester, I truly enjoyed my students, and I encouraged one very supportive group to form an independent studio when they graduated. Years later, they are still surviving and doing interesting AND self-supporting commercial work. One student went on to CAFA for postgraduate work in Experimental Art, another went to Paris for postgraduate work at Gobelins. One stayed at BFA for her postgraduate work and is presently teaching there. I continue to stay in contact with all of them and sometimes invite one or two of them to be a guest speaker in my classes elsewhere.

Appendix Articles

Animation Festivals: Part One

Animation Festivals: Part Two

Animation Festivals: Part Three

PART 6

FURTHER TEACHING POSITIONS

Gulangyu Art College, 2008 and 2010

One of the schools that I visited at that time was Gulangyu Art College, affiliated with Fuzhou University, 4-5 hours away. It was next to a lovely beach on one side, and a natural forest on the other. Classes would sometimes be held outside.

The teachers were all serious practicing artists themselves, and even the Dean was a committed sculptor whose wonderful work dotted the island. When I finished at BFA, I wrote the Dean asking whether they might invite me to teach there in 2008 for two weeks, at no pay. He answered, "Of course", and I flew over in late August after my retrospective show at the Hiroshima Animation Festival in Japan. It was an ideal situation for me before I would have to get back to Dartmouth to begin my fall classes. I was given a class of 22 students who had not yet taken an actual animation course, and I started them on flipbooks, progressing quickly to drawing animation on white paper, colored with color pencils. In two weeks, the work was wonderful, and on my last day, I sat with the Dean and a few of the teachers and proposed that when I retired from Dartmouth in December of 2009 that I begin, fulltime at Gulangyu, in spring of 2010. I said that I did not expect payment but would appreciate hospitality while there. All was worked out, I returned to Dartmouth for a year, retired, and was happily back at Gulangyu by the end of spring festival, 2010. The sculptor had since retired as Dean, and a fine painter took his place. I chose my best student from the year before as my assistant and began the classes. I was feeling excited at how wonderfully everything had worked out for the next era of my life, for I was back in China, again, at a beautiful spot, with great students.



Gulangyu Art and Design College and the *Gulangyu Animated Ad*

Unfortunately this was not to be. Within a month I began to notice subtle changes. Another dock was being constructed by the water very close to the college's hotel; some of the small cafes and stores behind the college that had catered to the students began to close down; finally a new man who was not an artist came to replace the painter as Dean. I decided to take two of the younger teachers who could speak English well out for a drink. After a few more drinks, I asked them directly if something big were going on. They both paused, looked at each other, then at me. One of them handed me another drink as he said, "We're sorry, David. The new Dean has made arrangements to move our art college to Xiamen, and all these college dorms and classrooms will be

turned into a resort.” My heart sank. That weekend, I asked them if they could take the ferry over to Xiamen with me and drive me over to the site for the Art College. We did just that, and they took me to what seemed a dustbowl with no trees or grass and what looked to be a huge concrete building being constructed.

Communication University of China (CUC), 2010

When I came back to Gulangyu, I immediately emailed Lu Shengyang, my old friend teaching at CUC, told him the story and asked whether CUC would be interested in my teaching there. He answered, “Sure”, immediately, and the next week I flew off to Beijing to meet with Lu, Wang Lei and Dean Liao. It was agreed that I would begin in the fall of 2010, would teach a large Animation History lecture course, a smaller course on creativity, and that I could mentor 8 students in their graduation projects. I had one week to choose those 8 students, and I was given Dayong (Zhiyong Li) as my assistant.



CUC ANIMA

I had never met Dayong before, but I recognized his name from my work on the Jury of the 2007 Hangzhou Animation Festival. His *Kungfu Bunny #2* was screened, and I recognized the style from other Flash work posted on the web.



Dayong's *Kungfu Bunny* animation

On the one hand, this young man's work was remarkably creative and free, in my opinion, by one of the best new Shanke Flash animators then working. But on the other hand, I had made a point in my speeches and jury discussions until then of arguing against the overbearing influence of Japanese anime on Chinese animation and the need for young Chinese animators to find their own way. So in good conscience, how could I vote an award for an animation so heavily influenced by *Tom and Jerry* from the U.S. I voted against an award for the film, giving my reasons, and the film did not get the award. In the room next door, there was another Jury deciding prizes for a separate category, and my old friend, Chang Guangxi was one of the jurors. During a break, he met me out in the hall, and in his slow, deliberate English asked me how *Kungfu Bunny* did. I told him exactly how I felt about it, and he seemed disappointed. Only later did I find out that Dayong had been his protege up in Jilin where Chang was working at the Academy of Art, and that they had become good friends.

So now, Dayong was to be my assistant. First, I told him as honestly as I could what had occurred in the Jury that time at Hangzhou. Dayong laughed and said, "Well, I hope my *Kungfu Bunny, No.3* is better and more Chinese than *Tom and Jerry*." And yes, when I watched *No.3*, each of the times I watched it again and again, I thought the work was magnificent and miles past anything done either in L.A. or Tokyo. And so, I was given an ideal assistant and a future dear friend, who called me grandpa. Dayong agreed with my way of choosing those 8. It was announced to the third year students that anyone who wanted to work with the American and Dayong should come to the classroom for an introductory workshop, and that we were to accept only those students who agreed to do their graduation project individually.. Over 30 came, and we started them all on drawing exercises that led to short creative animations. We worked them hard, and they were still taking their other classes at the same time. So after a few days, about ten had to give up, and at the end of the week, we chose 9 from the remaining 20. I flew back to Gulangyu at the end of the week to finish the semester there, spent the summer in Vermont teaching a summer course at Dartmouth, and returned to CUC in the fall. Over the summer, our 9 students kept sending us storyboards to review so by the fall, when we began to meet the group together for our weekly critique of work, most of the 9 had some measure of control

over what it was they were going to do. I found that this structure was different from what was usually done in China. For me it seemed so natural that Chinese students working on their individual projects could nevertheless gain a tremendous amount from comments on their process by their peers as much as by their mentors. And so it went throughout the year. Everyone completed their work well in time for the show, and several of the films went on to win prizes at Chinese animation festivals. I am still in contact with several of those students, and I know that three of them worked at Dayong's JJoy Studio after their graduation.



CUC Class 2011

Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT), 2011

Lu Shengyang's daughter, Yaya, and my postgrad student, Luo Shiyu, were teaching at BIFT, and they arranged for me to teach courses in animation history and drawing animation while I was still at CUC and to assist me there. It was at BIFT's other campus on the outskirts of Beijing, and I would take the bus there each week with Wu Xiaoxi, the postgrad student at CAFA, who was to translate for me. We had 25 students who took both courses, and it was honestly, a lot of fun. The students had not studied animation previously, so they were open to new forms and excited to see their drawings come to life when shot. This excitement motivated them to work hard on their drawings throughout the week until our class, and the results were quite good.



Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT), 2011 Animated Xmas cards

Their final project, an animated *Christmas*, was truly original and technically proficient.



Hangzhou Normal University

Hangzhou Normal University, 2012

One of my old friends from the Shanghai Animation Studio, Wang Gang, had been teaching animation at Tongji University in Shanghai. He applied for and got the position of Dean of Animation at a rather new department at Hangzhou Normal University.

The school was positioned as a school to train teachers, and in fact the great Jack Ma of Alibaba had gotten a degree there as an English teacher. It was a great job for Wang Gang, with a lot of freedom and room to grow, and he asked me to join him there, starting in spring of 2011. The school offered me a generous salary, hotel room, and round trip flights back to Beijing at the end of each week to continue my CUC classes. I'd always liked and respected Wang Gang, and the teachers were young, and committed to doing the best job they could with their students. The General Secretary of the Party was a wonderful woman who would go through the dorms at night to ask if anyone needed anything or had any problem they'd like to talk about. This was, in effect, an ideal house-mother. I was still young enough at 70 to go out onto the basketball court near my hotel at 6am and play pickup games with whoever else walked in, and within a month enough word got out that I had plenty of action before my 8am class.

I taught classes in English conversation, in animation history and in beginning drawing animation. Some students were more talented than others, of course, but ALL my students worked very hard between my classes and I was gratified at how much work they were able to do over the week, and how fast these beginning animators developed. I got a pass for the share-bikes and would ride all over Hangzhou, to West Lake, to the Garden in the north of the city, to the various business districts and markets to shop for fresh fruit and vegetables and my special Muslim area where I could get the only bread that I as a vegan could eat. I was happy there, enjoyed my classes, my colleagues, and I continued into the fall term of 2011, still also flying back and forth to Beijing for CUC classes, but this time I set them up as every two weeks. Unfortunately changes were soon to occur in the fall. Animation was to lose its independence and be subsumed under the visual arts department, Wang Gang was to lose the Dean position and become a regular professor, and the courses were to be changed and limited. Moreover, the department was to be moved to an area near the airport, away from my hotel, the basketball courts, the student dorms, and the excitement existing within a large university. I tried my best to look on the positive side, but as I had previously done with Gulangyu, I chose not to return in the spring of 2012, hugged everyone good-bye, and moved back to Beijing, taking on more courses at CUC. (2nd CUC anim)

My Chinese Blog



David's blog (removed after 10 years and 80,000 'hits')

Once installed in Beijing, I began a blog and hired Wu Xiaoxi, my translator from BIFT, to translate my posts into Chinese. I stayed away from politics and wrote about animation, education, food, basketball, and where appropriate, made cross-cultural comparisons. I've included some of these in the APPENDIX. Wu Xiaoxi also translated my entire "Creativity Book" and installed it in various postings on the blog.

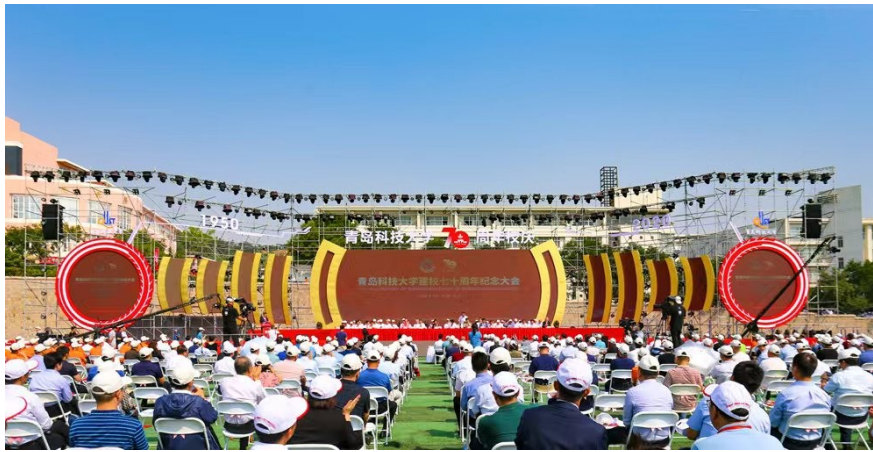
“Boy Meets Girl” International Collaboration



Boy Meets Girl, 2012

In 2011, several of my CUC postgraduates had been doing such good work that I decided to try another international collaboration, this time between students in China and those in the Czech Republic. Of course this meant primarily my students from CUC and students from my friends, Michaela Pavlatova and Pavel Koutsky from FAMU in Prague. I did the animated titles in English, Chinese and Czech, and because my friends got only a single FAMU student to participate, they each also contributed one segment. On the Chinese side, my two best former students from Gulangyu, Tippi and Susan, co-directed a beautiful segment, the rest done by CUC postgrads. Because the collaboration mixed students and their teachers, we found out quickly, when it was released in 2012, that it could not fit into the usual film festival categories, and it was usually turned down. Finally I told my student, Luo Shiyu, co-director of the best segment, to pull it from the collaboration, add title and credits, and submit it, on its own, to festivals. In that way, the film did extraordinarily well at festivals, winning a number of awards.

Qingdao University of Science and Technology (QUST), 2014



Qingdao University of Science & Technology

Towards the end of 2013, another old friend, Wang Shuibo, told me about a new animation program in Qingdao, and that he had recommended me to them as Guest Professor who could start my own studio with students that I could choose from the program. Shuibo and I met with the school's leaders, including the new, very creative Dean Yang. We discussed my requirements, all seemed agreeable, and I began after Spring Festival in 2014. As I had done previously at CUC, in Qingdao I first met with over 30 interested students and gave them some assignments in drawing and drawing animation, gradually winnowing the number down to the 15 I felt could develop well.



Qingdao University of Science Technology (QUST) animation

In the year I worked with them, they created some beautiful work. It was wonderful for the students to have their own special studio with their own equipment, separate from the rest of the school, and for us to have two lovely, talented teaching assistants, Wu XiaoXi and Shan Juan. After the year, I hugged everyone good-bye and returned to my CUC family.

The Southwest University of Nationalities (SWUN), 2014

Through the years of my weibo postings, I spent a great deal of writing on the problems with Chinese animation festivals and my suggestions for improving them. One of my loyal weibo readers was Zhou Zhou, who was chair of the animation program at SWUN, the Southwest University of the Nationalities in Chengdu.

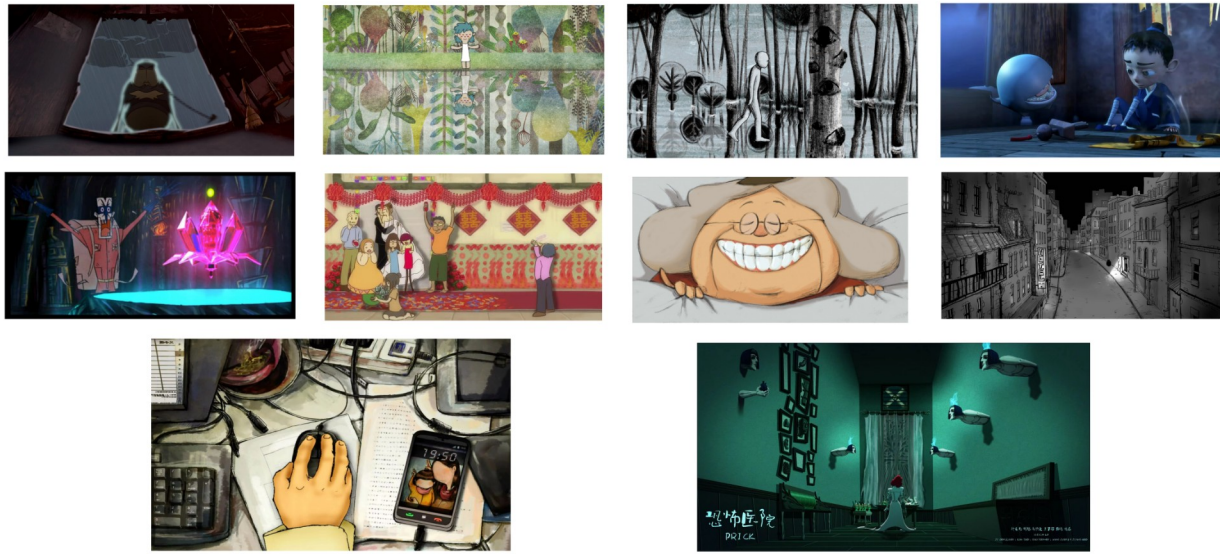


David and student in class outside at Southwest University of Nationalities

When he founded the school's *56 Moon Animation Festival*, he followed my suggestions to limit it to only three days and to focus it on animation students and their work, with a minimum of commercialization, cosplays and all the other circus activities having nothing to do with animation. He invited me to their 2014 event to make a presentation, and I brought two of my recent CUC graduates to screen and discuss the process of making their award-winning graduation works. I was so impressed by the integrity and seriousness of the festival and of Zhou Zhou, himself, that I agreed to come to the school the following fall of 2015 to teach several classes and to help with festival preparations. The work completed in my classes there over the following three autumns was extremely good, and in fact, the animated ads done in 2017 by first-year students who had never before done animation was so good that I posted it on my weibo for animation students throughout China to enjoy. (https://www.weibo.com/animationdavid?source=blog&is_all=1) Along with CUC, this school in Chengdu has become another home for me, and Zhou Zhou has become as much my brother as have Wang Lei, Song Ge and Dayong at CUC.

Poznan ANIMATOR 2014 Festival, Poland

I love the student animated shorts created in schools throughout China, and in fact, when the Poznan Animation Festival in Poland asked me to put together two programs of Chinese Animation for its 2014 festival, *Chinese Student Animation* and *Chinese Independent Animation*, I had a difficult time choosing only 90 minutes from the many more hours of student work I would have liked to choose. I've included my Program Notes for the 90 minute student show in Poznan.



Graduation Animation shown at ANIMATOR, Poznan Animation Festival in 2014.

RECENT CHINESE GRADUATION ANIMATION

Until twelve years ago, the Beijing Film Academy would have been the only school in China teaching professional animation techniques. Otherwise, an aspiring animator would take an entry level job or internship in a local studio, working his way up as he learned. In many cases, not only would such a position yield no salary, but in fact would entail the young animator paying a monthly fee to the studio director for that "opportunity". Around that time, the Chinese Ministry looked at the economic boom in Taiwan and South Korea caused by the proliferation of animation work out-sourced from the west and made a firm decision to support the founding of animation programs in universities and art academies throughout China. Programs began to spring up, not only in large universities in Beijing and Shanghai, but in smaller schools as far from the center as those in Xiamen, Jilin, Chengdu, Xi'an and Dalian. Sometimes, small commercial studios would arise around a school, absorbing many of the graduates, as has happened in Jilin, for example, but more often, graduates of schools outside the large cities would relocate to Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, hoping to find work in the many studios there.

The graduation films, done in the fourth year of study, must serve as portfolio pieces of perfected technique that will gain the student a good job, and in fact, many schools proudly host a large graduation show of completed work to which local studio and TV leaders are invited. It's also the case that some schools encourage a number of their students to create graduation works that are not only displays of technique but are also, more significantly, original works of art. I've chosen a program of some of the best of these works. A large number of works come from Communications U of China in Beijing, because that school, more than any other school, has been committed to fostering originality in animated shorts. The programs in Tsinghua University (Beijing), in Dalian and in Xi'an are rather new, but it's remarkable how quickly the artistic level of work there has risen.

- 1) *Anifun* (2013 : 38") Liu Shengying, Tang Mengjiao, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 2) *No Thief* (2013 : 5'40") Du Yulong & Tang Weiwei, Communication U of China, Nanjing
- 3) *Future Camera* (2013 : 6'14") Li Tianze, Design School of Dalian Nationalities University
- 4) *Watcher* (2013 : 9'31") Xiong Mingya, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts
- 5) *The Journey for Us* (2013 : 8'58") Huang Wenrui & Yuhanyang, Xi'an Academy of Fine Art
- 6) *Miss Sexy Apple* (2013 : 5'36") Wu Jingtong & Liang Zhicong, Tsinghua University
- 7) *The Last 15 Minutes* (2013 : 3'50") Xiong Shuyu, Tsinghua University
- 8) *Horror Hospital* (2013 : 4'20") Ji Dongjian, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 9) *The Elevator* (2013 : 6'53") Wang Ruoshan, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 10) *Trista* (2013 : 10'11") Deng Raoyi, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 11) *Face* (2012 : 7'33") Zhang Tongyue, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 12) *The Temple* (2013 : 6'36") Huang Xinting, Communication U of China, Beijing
- 13) *My Cellphone and I* (2013 : 8'06") Wu Xiaoxi, Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing

Total: 90 minutes

I had a quite different issue in selecting 90 minutes of animation created by Chinese independent animators. There were simply not very many of high caliber from which to choose. I tried to get at the reasons for this in my program notes which I include below.

RECENT CHINESE INDEPENDENT ANIMATION

Once an animation student in China graduates, what chance will he have to make an independent film? Entry-level jobs average 4000rmb (US\$700) each month. Rent for a small one bedroom apartment plus utilities and internet will average 5000rmb. Taking roommates will bring down that cost, but then the apartment may be too cramped for work on a film. In any case, entry-level jobs require the animator to continue commercial work in the studio well into the evening hours. Let's assume that the animator is determined enough actually to complete a short animation. Many festivals refuse to accept online entries. For the Chinese animator to mail a simple DVD, he must often fill out a special form at the post office and have it signed by an official. Sending via FEDEX or DHL can cost close to 300rmb. Let's say the work is selected. Annecy, for example, will accept ONLY DCP, and the cost of conversion to DCP is 3000rmb, almost a month's salary. Perhaps one's short is selected somewhere and a DCP or less expensive format is sent for screening. The cost of a round-trip from Beijing to a European festival will be 7000-10,000rmb. Only the most dedicated animator will complete a film and go to the trouble of submitting it to a western festival, but one has also to come from a relatively wealthy family or have a sponsor to afford the trip. We hope that this exposure at ANIMATOR may lead to further screening opportunities at other international festivals and that in time, more animators may find the funds to experience a serious animation festival.

The first four films are made by animators from Chengdu who found time to complete personal films after graduating from schools there. After graduating from CUC with "Face", shown in the student program, Zhang Tongyue completed "Shadow Master" at night, while working at a small Beijing studio. Dmitry Geller came to Jilin Academy of Art from Moscow for a six-month workshop to direct this film with the students. LeiLei has been making films

and traveling to festivals for a number of years and is well-known in and out of China. Zhiyong Li (Vincent) became known a few years ago with a prize at Annecy for "Kungfu Bunny No.3". That gained him funding for his popular internet series from which I've chosen a segment. Sun Zongqing, one of the mentors in the old Shanghai Animation Studio, has returned to the animated brush-painting technique, here animating a painting done by her mother. SunXun is the most well-known independent animator in China, and I've chosen a remarkable work he produced, directed by his colleague, Tang Bohua.

- 1) Fishing (2013 : 8'12") Qi Ran*
- 2) Human Samples (2013 : 2'25") Wang Rui & Mao Zeyang*
- 3) Paradise (2013 : 10') Huyan*
- 4) Who Killed the Pig (2013 : 10'49") Cao Zhongyuan*
- 5) Shadow Master (2014 : 6'50") Zhang Tongyue*
- 6) I Saw Mice Burying a Cat (2011 : 5'49") Dmitry Geller*
- 7) Big Hands O Big Hands (2012 : 6') Lei Lei*
- 8) Kungfu Bunny: Nightmare Adventure (2014 : 7'36") Zhiyong Li*
- 9) Interesting (2014 : 3'37") Sun Zongqing*
- 10) The Country of Summer Insects (2013 : 16'40") Tang Bohua*

Total: 80 minutes

I then brought up a discussion of these issues on my blog in 2015:

"What happens to all these young animators after they graduate and go out into the world? Why do they stop their personal artistic work, limiting themselves only to the more commercial work being stamped out in all the many studios? Yes, if someone comes from a wealthy family who will support him, he can spend his time making his personal films, go from festival to festival around the world, and forge a successful career as a Chinese independent animator. And that's fine. But what about all the rest of these talented artists without such family support? Is their only solution to plug away at commercial studio work all day, hoping to spend an exhausted hour at night trying to continue a personal animation? How can such a highly developed Socialist country permit a situation to exist in which only the wealthy few are responsible for the development of the artistic genre of animation in China? A few months after the festival, when it became clear to me that there would not be adequate government support for independent work and that CCTV and BTV limited themselves to animation for children, I wrote a letter to the businessman I most respect in China, Jack Ma. I asked him to lead China's business leaders in coming together to create and sponsor a kind of Animation Commission that would review proposals for independent animation work and grant support to those with the greatest potential. I never received an answer, so I include a new letter and its translation below in the hopes that as my readers tweet back and forth, it may somehow reach Jack Ma. As I leave China to return to my home in the Vermont woods, I hope that something may begin here that can give renewed hope to all the young animation artists coming out of China's universities, a hope that they too can now play a role in the revolutionary development of the animation art form."



Dartmouth College

Department of Film and Media Studies

Rm 202 Black Family Visual Arts Center, 22 Lebanon Street

Hanover, New Hampshire • 03755

June 25, 2015

Dear Mr. Jack Ma,

I am an American independent animator and professor of animation who has taught for over 20 years at Dartmouth College and for the last 7 years, at Beijing Film Academy, Communications University of China, Qingdao University of Science and Technology, and at your alma mater, Hangzhou Normal University.

This past year, ANIMATOR, an animation festival in Poznan, Poland, asked me to curate several programs of recent animation from Chinese graduating students and independents. It was a source of great honor and satisfaction for me, in selecting work from all the many animation programs in Chinese schools, to see the hundreds of fine animated shorts that are the equal of anything done in the best schools around the world. It was also a source of disappointment for me to see the scarcity of work produced by Chinese independents. These were young Chinese artists who had done fine work in school, but who could not find the financial resources after graduation with which to continue their personal work, resigning themselves to commercial work at China's studios and game companies. This is surely a cultural waste of creative talent that had been so carefully nourished in the many animation programs of China's universities. Moreover, it's historically been the independent animation in other countries that has moved the art of animation forward and has subsequently served to raise the quality of the commercial work done in the studios.

In Canada, the National Film Board and the provincial cultural offices have for many years awarded grants to young filmmakers out of school to complete their independent work. In the U.S., the National Endowment of the Arts as well as the State Arts Councils all award similar grants to filmmakers. In Europe, all the nations contribute funds to an organization called, CARTOON, which awards grants to independents throughout Europe. Similar opportunities, however, are slim for China's independents. I propose that China's business leaders come together to sponsor a kind of Animation Commission that would review proposals for independent animation work and grant support to those with the greatest potential. And so I come to you, as someone whose creative imagination has been so successful in business, to begin such a Commission. I am ready to help in any way that I can.

Yours sincerely,

David Ehrlich

MORE ON THE JACK MA LETTER

I appreciate the feedback I've received from all of you and of course, all the retweeting. I can sense that, despite your support, some of you think I am being unrealistic or naive in hoping that successful businessmen would fund ANY independent animation, not only because in "market terms" the investment would have such a high risk but because even if the investment were to bring a return, that return would be much too slow in coming. I will try to answer to these points, but in so doing, I must take my own risk in writing about political processes.

In my opinion, the greatest animation in the world, done in the 40 years between 1950 and 1990, was done, not at Disney, but in the studios of the Socialist countries with centralized economies. This was not because those governments cared about the art of animation. In fact, the mandate given those state studios by their governments was primarily to make animation for children that educated those children about socialist values. Those governments soon learned, however, that there was tremendous propaganda value in having some of their studio's animation win awards at animation festivals in the western, capitalist countries. And so, a small part of the studio's budget and time was devoted to "art animation". Many of these great works were not ever shown to audiences within that nation, but were sent directly out to foreign festivals in the hopes of persuading international viewers of the positive benefits of living and working under socialism.

It's strange to think that market-driven businessmen might think of the 'propaganda value' of funding animation that would have little chance of a profitable return. But when we change the words from "propaganda value" to "public relations", we may then understand why a businessman who has reached a high level of success in his business might want to show the public that he is as interested in the public's good as much as he is in his profits. In turn, the improved image (face) of his company would tend gradually to generate more business. It's not necessary to look at the obvious examples of Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, because here in China we have Wahaha (wahaha.com.cn), the largest beverage company in China, producing healthy drinks for children. "Since it began in 1987, Wahaha built its name as a company that cares about China's children. And to support that image, it offers art workshops for small children that bring in absolutely no profit for the company. This is excellent public relations! Why might Jack Ma choose independent animation to build his image? Because in the past year he has already developed strong business connections with the major American studios and exhibitors. He may now want to add to that section of his business empire, the image that he cares about the future of animation in China. And a convincing argument can be made that only independent work, with no profit in mind, can take the risks of new and untried techniques, concepts and modes of expression, all of which might well lead to that bright future. That's why I wrote that letter.

EVEN MORE ON MY LETTER TO JACK MA

I want to address the opinion, voiced by a few of you, that Chinese artists do not need money to continue as an independent animator. They have the surviving Independent Film and Video Festivals in China, animetaste.com, the internet and each other. That's all true, and it's great, and it's better for them than it was even 5-10 years ago. With courage, dedication and hard work, many of these artists can go forward a few years, at least, until they get married and have a child. Moreover, American independents of my generation, coming up in the 1970s were often overwhelmed by the high costs of film lab work and of sending heavy film prints to foreign festivals. Now, you can do your whole film at your computer and send it to festivals over the internet at no cost. Still...even before marriage and that child, why do so many young independents stop their personal work? Here's what I wrote in the program notes for that Polish animation festival. I was addressing the question as to why Europeans do not see much of the great work being done in China.

"Entry level studio jobs in China average 4000RMB and require the young animator to continue commercial work in the studio well into the evening hours. However, assuming that the animator is determined enough to complete a short animation while holding down a survival job, many festivals still refuse to accept online entries. For a Chinese animator to mail a simple DVD abroad, one must sometimes have to fill out a special form at the post office and have it signed by an official. Sending it via FEDEX or DHL can cost 300RMB. If the work is then selected, the Annecy Animation festival in France, for example, will accept only a DCP for screening, and the cost in Beijing for that conversion is 4000RMB, a month's salary. Additionally, to actually go to one of these foreign festivals, to be there at the screening of your film and to meet all the folks who may inspire and help your career, the cost of a round-trip from Beijing to a European and North American festival will be 7000-10,000RMB."

I think that even a modest funding from the Commission I am asking Jack Ma to organize, would encourage Chinese independents to go forward with their courageous work."

Ali Baba Film finally contacted me and invited me to visit their Beijing office to discuss my proposal. I went, accompanied by Shuliang, one of my CUC graduate students. We drank tea together and discussed the limits of what could be done, and when we left, unfortunately, nothing more ever came of it.

Appendix articles:

Paths to Success in Animation in China

The Frames Generation in the U.S.

On This National Day

When I Was 40 Years Old

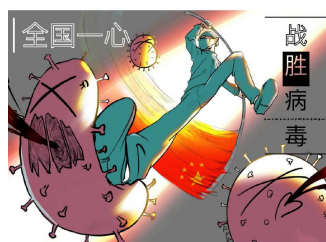
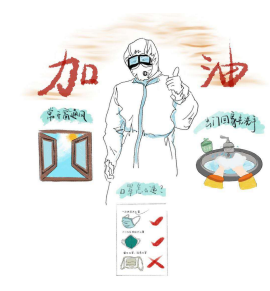
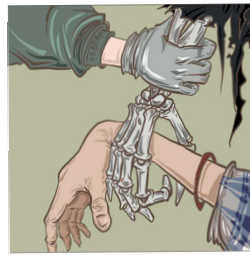
Goodbye, China

PART 7

Covid-19, Lockdowns and Animation

In 2019, after teaching classes each year at SWUN in the fall and CUC ANIMA in the spring, I returned to Vermont and changed over to online courses for my students in China. Then early in 2020, COVID-19 exploded in China, and entire cities went into full lockdown. Animation studios struggled to keep going, sometimes going under. And animation departments in China's universities began switching over to online courses, with their students locked down in apartments with their families. Because I had begun teaching online in 2019, it was quite natural for me soon to do so for reasons now related to the lockdown in China's schools. When I began to see how my students were feeling depressed and somewhat lost in the midst of this chaotic situation, I transformed my online courses into vehicles for the students to express in their artwork, their feelings about what was going on. I wanted to share them with my readers here.

Click any image to view it full screen. Click a full screen image to return to this page.



In the summer of 2020, under the leadership of my CUC students, and in collaboration with locked down animation students from six other schools throughout China, a musical tribute was created for the medical workers in Wuhan who had so courageously been working to fight the pandemic there.



As of this writing, Beijing has begun to open up and hopefully, schools throughout China will soon return to normal in-person classes. What these passionate animation students have created in the midst of this crisis will not be forgotten. They, and the generation they represent, are the future of China.

APPENDIX

Through the years, I've written a number of articles about Chinese animation and education that were presented at international festivals, forums and on my Chinese blog. Some of them are included below.

Animation Festivals: Part One

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On a purely personal level, animation festivals have been tremendously important to my growth as an animator and as a human being, and prizes and honors have had nothing to do with this. Many of the best, artist-centric festivals showed all the 100+ selected films in large cinemas and invited each director to attend, with hotel and full hospitality. The director of each film had the chance to view the film on a large screen, with full sound, and with a large audience. Other directors and animators in the audience could see the film and after the screening, all could go to a bar or festival cafe to discuss the work into the long hours of the night. Friendships across national lines were begun, nurtured, and then reborn at the next festival, and all of us began to feel part of a family that was marvelously supportive. Prizes given at the closing ceremony seemed unimportant compared to this experience.

China's first animation festival, the Shanghai International Animated Film Festival held in 1988, was organized by the Shanghai Animation Studio under the patronage and support of the Ministry of Film. I served on the Selection Committee after which I stayed at the studio for the three months until the festival, helping where I could with preparations. YanDingxian was director of both the Studio and that first festival, and Yan with his colleagues worked tirelessly to organize an event that paid great honor to each individual animator and his/her work, and that encouraged the camaraderie among all the artists from 20 different nations. The festival turned out to be one of the finest in the world to have been held that year. A second successful Shanghai Animation Festival was held in 1992.

In 2008, Duan Jia, then professor of animation at BFA, organized a wonderful Animation "Salon" at Wuhan whose sole purpose was to celebrate the "ART" of animation as opposed to the business of animation. It brought together the greatest Chinese directors, many of them retired from the Shanghai Studio, with some of the masters from the west like Caroline Leaf, Georges Schwizgebel and Noori Zarrinkelk. The aim was to encourage cross-fertilization and to open this experience publicly to the thousands of young people in Wuhan. Duan Jia is now the leader of a new animation college in Qingdao and she is working to organize another such event there.

The world is changing rapidly, and China with it, but the artists from China and around the world can stand proudly, not for the transitory honor of a prize but for the growth of their art and of their friendships with one another. In further postings, I'll explore some of the ways this is being done.

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Animation Festivals: Part Two

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Last week, I asked my students to create 4 public service announcements for an imaginary animation festival named, “ANIFUN”. I think they’re damn good. And posting them now, with their permission, gives me the opportunity of continuing a discussion on animation festivals I began two weeks ago.

In my previous festival postings, I wrote nothing negative about contemporary Chinese animation festivals. Not only would it not be right for a foreigner to do so, but there are more than enough problems with the excess commerciality of western festivals. The crux of the problem is that unless there is government funding of a festival, as there was in Shanghai in '88 and '92, or the former festivals in Zagreb, Yugoslavia and Varna, Bulgaria, a festival must seek support from businesses. Businesses are not apt to spend money on culture unless there is some kind of return on their investment such as greater publicity or the creation of a venue in which to do more business. That tends to change the nature of the festival as it clearly has with the original and most prestigious festival in Annecy, France. Another basic problem with all these festivals seems to be the competition between them and the notion that bigger is better. Artists know that this is obviously not to be the case with art. However, “Bigger” does certainly cost more, necessitating compromises with local government, business, or even with a school’s leaders, if it is the site. In the end, the initial motivation to begin a festival, to celebrate the art form and to encourage the young artists and bring them together, must fall by the wayside.

I now propose a radical alternative. I leave it to you as to whether this is naïve fantasy or a possible reality. It’s certainly clear to me that the greatest, most creative, most heartfelt animation being produced in China is not being done in the studios but by your students in all the schools. Let’s create an annual three-day animation festival for them and by them that will need only a minimum of funding and therefore a minimum of compromise. There will be no boring speeches, no cosplays, no one walking around in animal costumes, no dances, no concerts. There will only be student animation from China, and ALL works selected will be screened in a hall. There will be no admission charged and there will be NO prizes awarded. The true prize will be a student’s seeing his/her film on a big screen with a large audience of other students, teachers and animation lovers from throughout China. They then would go to a café and discuss work with their colleagues until late in the evening. There will be no hotel rooms offered, and no international travel paid. All students coming from outside Beijing with proper ID and school recommendations will stay with Beijinger students and young graduates in their apartments, on couches, on floor mattresses, whatever is offered by one young animator to another. All organizing and planning for the festival and all administrative and screening work will be done by volunteers who wish only to create an event that is meaningful artistically. All publicity will be done at no cost because Chinese bloggers are a thousand times more effective than any posters or TV spots. Each festival will feature a day with a true Master of Animation, not someone you are told by the

festival is a Master, but one recognized internationally in every animation history book published. That will be my contribution. I will pay his/her travel and offer hospitality in my apartment. The Master will first give a three hour presentation publicly and then spend the rest of the day and evening talking informally with groups of students. S/he will not spend a single minute in banquets or meetings with business leaders but will be happily dedicated to meeting students who will carry the future of Chinese Animation.

How about it? Who else wants to get involved. This will be a volunteer Cooperative Festival with absolutely no one being paid, no school or business pushing to increase its self-importance. **I'll start this, then let all of you organize everything. I'll bring in a Master, and then will be excited to go to every screening and watch every single student film.** We need teachers in all the schools to pitch in, and young people to volunteer throughout the year. At first I thought of Beijing, but this could be done in Shanghai, Wuhan or even in a tiny town in the mountains. No matter where we begin, if all works out the first year, there's no reason that the reels of videos cannot go from town to town so that young people throughout China can share this work. And there's also the web. **So for the first event, sometime in 2013-2014, we need a large screening hall with good video screening equipment and a café and a lot of young people offering their couches and mattresses. Let all the other festivals in China do what they do, and let's do what we can do--together!**

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In the last 35 years, I've served on Selection Committees and Juries of Animation Festivals throughout the world. My experience with Chinese festivals began in 1988 with the Selection Committee of the First Shanghai International Animation Festival and has continued on juries of the festivals in Jilin, Hangzhou and yesterday, for the second year, on the ANIWOW Jury. I've noted that although there may of course be vast cultural differences from country to country, artistic differences from one jury member to the next, and finally the changes of taste through the years from one technique to the next, there are a number of aspects of these juries that remain constant. I thought I'd lay out some of them.

Selection Committees must screen between 1000 and 2000 shorts, while Juries must screen over 100. Watching so many films is exhausting, causing several things to happen. Often films longer than 5 minutes tend to be stopped or fast-forwarded, and especially towards the end of a day of screening, juries may grow relatively more impatient even with shorter works. Some festivals program the films for these juries in the sequence with which they have arrived. So it improves your chances of a good viewing if you send your work as early as possible. If your film is over 5 minutes, you should make certain that there is enough interest in the graphics, animation and story to discourage the jury from stopping your film.

Although Art Direction is but one aspect of a film, it is always the very first thing that captures the viewer's attention. If you are not Japanese, for example, imitating the big eyes and V-shaped chin of anime is an immediate "turn-off". Characters and backgrounds that are creatively designed to look fresh while supporting the thrust of the story and atmosphere will draw in the viewer immediately. For the first 15 seconds, animation that emerges from the various art colleges around the world has usually had the edge on the work that comes from film and media colleges. After 15 seconds of these "establishing shots", the story or the idea takes over, and art students need to work much harder at developing this aspect along with the actual animation.

Finally, as both a frequent Jury member and also as an instructor, I want to say a few things about animation music. It's still all too common for a student to spend up to a year working hard on the animation only to spend a week or two at most pulling some music and sound effects off the web. The right music can add immensely to a film's comprehensibility and atmosphere while an unthinking use of music can deaden all the effects you tried so hard to achieve for all those months of work. I can't say this strongly enough: use original music! And as far as festivals go, most give awards for music, but only if the music is original. When you've taken my humble advice and found a buddy to create your music or have done it yourself on your computer, be sure to mention the music is original on the festival entry form, even if the form does not ask you. So few student films use original music, you'll be in a much more competitive position with the jury. And finally, if your film is selected for a festival showing, there may be TV programmers in the audience who like your film and may wish to acquire it. Not a single TV station in the west will take any animation that does not have original music or copyrighted music that has not been legally released to you. I'll write more about festivals and animation music in a later posting.

Finally, bear in mind that I would never encourage an artist specifically to target the creation of one's film at a festival jury in hopes of winning an award. Make your film as honestly as you can, from the core of your heart and mind. Festivals come and go. Your film will have a life of its own that goes beyond any festival.

Paths to Success in Animation in China

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In my presentations these past few weeks at both Qingdao and Chengdu, students stood up to ask me very provocative personal questions that made me pause and think hard before answering. Now that I've thought more about the issues involved, I wanted to open a dialogue with my readers so that I can learn more. Here goes.

It's clear that to succeed (economically in animation in China there are several paths that studios can and must take, and even then it is risky:

- 1) As CCTV still holds to the original mandate to show entertaining educational animation FOR CHILDREN, animation can be commissioned that reinforces family-oriented moral principles or that teaches numbers or other subject matter of grammar school.
- 2) CCTV is also open to animation, based on the Japanese anime model, that is aimed at young people, aged 10-17.
- 3) Feature animation imitating anime, Disney/PIXAR or Dreamworks can have limited theatrical runs in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.
- 4) Animated commercials based upon accepted styles can bring in much-needed income as well.
- 5) Games based upon the Japanese and Taiwanese models

The conclusion: experimental or even simply original material will have difficulty in China. As one student asked me, "What's the use of making experimental or just new, original work if noone will understand or appreciate it?!" I will extend the question to China's schools of animation: "Why encourage 4th year students to make creatively original graduation films when they will probably not have a chance to make such work again after graduation?"

Well, every school prides itself on the number of its graduation films accepted by international animation festivals, and copies of Miyazaki and PIXAR will not make it into selection, no matter how technically perfect they may be. So it's certainly in every school's interest to encourage original graduation films, and the more experimental they are, the better the chance of selection and even prizes by prestigious festivals in France, Germany and Canada. All seems fine. The school promotes these festivals on its websites, and the student's family is proud. Then the graduating student must find a job in one of the studios following the paths I outlined above. Some students truly love anime or PIXAR and are happy to play even a small part in such a derivative production. They may even be fortunate enough to get a job in the Dreamworks or Disney studios popping up in Shanghai and Beijing. But what about those students who take very seriously a school's encouragement to do something original or even "Chinese" rather than American or Japanese. After the successful festival run, what can this student do to earn money? It's unrealistic to think that after working all day in a studio doing commercial work, one can always come home to a small apartment and have the stamina and dedication with which alone to make a personal original work. What solution is there?

ANIMATOR, a relatively new animation festival in Poznan, Poland, asked me to put together two 90-minute programs of new Chinese work for their next July festival—one composed of original student works and one of original “independent” works. It’s been no problem for me to put together a program of really interesting student work. In fact the only “problem” has been that I have to cut out some of the best student work I’ve seen to keep to the 90-minute limit. Now I must program the independent work. What does “independent” mean in China? Suppose a studio has completed production of a commercial project, and the studio director has his workers spend a month to make a 3-minute short appropriate for festivals. The work is certainly “independent” of outside funding, but strictly speaking, I do not consider this work as “independent”. At the other extreme is the graduate working alone at night or on weekends for almost a year on a personal work, asking former classmates to help perhaps with sound. This gets my vote for “independence”. So what are the criteria? I suppose that I consider individual courage and sacrifice here, and I think that juries and audiences at western festivals would as well.

And this returns to my original point. It takes more courage and sacrifice to pursue one’s personal creative vision despite the risks than it does to follow along with what others have done previously. Moreover it’s my view that, although imitation may prove successful in the short run, it may well prove self-defeating in the long run. Styles change, audience tastes change. PIXAR has kept its popularity high for over 15 years by constantly transforming itself. Imitating what they did a few years ago will be boring to audiences when production is completed, and in any event, will never play beyond the Chinese mainland. It’s time for the Chinese animation industry to make a capital investment in its future, to support original creative work AFTER graduation with the hope that some, just some of this work will prove prophetic of the best Chinese animation to come, work that will make the West sit up and take notice as it did before in the 60s and again in the 80s with the Shanghai Animation Studio’s fine films. I call out to successful Chinese studios and business executives to form a committee to award competitive funding to the most dedicated young graduates for these artists to have the support and independence with which to pursue their dreams. Wherever I teach, wherever I go in China, I will repeat this call. In the meantime, I offer independents the chance to have their work shown in Poland, and possibly in other festivals after that. Send me work created within the last year and a half via email or server. I will respond quickly to everything sent to me. In the meantime, I want to hear from all of you about the issues I’ve brought up here. The 3-day festivals in CUC this fall and last week in Chengdu give me hope for Chinese animation. Let’s take the next step.

Since Yuan Zheng mentioned the Frames Generation in his article on AnimeTaste, I wanted to re-post what I wrote a few months ago.

THE ***FRAMES GENERATION*** IN THE U.S.

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In 1974, at the age of 33, I began experimenting with animated drawings as a way to enhance my multi-media performances. Within a year, these animations took over my life. However the animation I saw on TV in the 70s was absolutely terrible, and I had no idea that anyone in the U.S. was doing animation that really was art. I finally took my little films and an 8mm film projector to an animation teacher at the School of Visual Arts in New York. He said there was a group of young animators that met monthly in the apartment of George Griffin, so I called George and went to the first meeting. As I opened the door, there were about 35 young men and women all seated on the floor before a little screen on the wall, and George was introducing each person's animation being shown. I sat down in the back and began excitedly to watch. So many different styles and ideas, nothing like the commercial stuff on TV, and it was as if a new world had opened up to me. Towards the end of the evening, I shyly offered my work to be seen, saying I was really just beginning to explore the art form. After my work was shown, a few of those around me smiled, touched me on the shoulder and told me they were looking forward to seeing more of my work. I know my eyes watered, and I felt I had become part of a family.

That began my association with the group in New York soon called, "the Frames Generation" because of a book published in 1978 containing one page of graphics and words by each of about 80 young independent animators. I use the term, "independent" because only one or two worked in commercial studios. Most of these folks, to support themselves in New York, worked at other jobs, like teaching, door-to-door salesmen, waiters, and construction workers. At that time I, myself, worked as a telephone salesman and teacher of children's workshops. In our spare time, we would work alone on little 2 or 3 minute drawing animations, screening them to each other at these meetings where we would gain not only support but also, more importantly, constructive criticism. Sometimes one of us would hear of an opportunity to show our work beyond these monthly meetings, and we'd collect a group of our films and send them on. In the 70s there were only a few animation festivals in the world: Ottawa, Canada; Annecy, France; Zagreb, Yugoslavia; Varna, Bulgaria. Mailing a 16mm film back and forth to Europe was expensive, and there was no guarantee the festival would even select the film for competition screening. Even if we could spend the money on the extra film print and the postage, and even were the film selected for competition, most of us could not afford the plane trip to get to the festival. But when we did finally manage to get there, we could feel part of a much larger family of animators throughout the world who were doing personal, not commercial work.

That was all more than 30 years ago, and it's history. Many of my generation became pioneers of the animation that made MTV and Cartoon Channel so popular. Others eventually married, and to support new families, formed new studios that changed animated commercials forever. Still others, like myself, eventually found secure teaching positions that enabled us to continue making personal, creative animation that would appear at film festivals, sometimes on TV stations and that would inspire ever newer generations of young animators to become independent.

Things are different now, 30 years later. We do not need to buy film stock, pay fees at film labs, or even pay the expensive postage to send our films to a festival abroad. We can make a whole animation on our laptop and ship a simple DVD or even email a digital copy to a festival. And festivals there are-...hundreds of them throughout the world, all hungry for new animation. And there's the web, with Youtube, Vimeo, Youku, Tudou, all hit daily by hundreds of thousands of viewers. My good friend, Vincent, has nearly half a million hits on his "Gongfutu" blog! It was never easy in any country to stay independent and true to one's personal vision, but there are openings, opportunities that didn't exist 30 years ago. All that's needed in China is for young animators to come together to support each other as my generation did in the 70s. When you have each other, as we once did, nothing is impossible. Who will begin it?

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On This National Day

On this National Day, I celebrate as an American by thinking about Mao's words at Yenan in his speech "On Art and Literature".

"A person with truly good intentions must criticize the shortcomings and mistakes in his own work with the utmost candour and resolve to correct them."

Throughout history this has been the guiding principle of our greatest artists and writers like Michelangelo, Van Gogh, Tolstoy, Dickens and Flaubert. It has been no less true for my good friends in animation. Raoul Servais, Piotr Dumala, Caroline Leaf, Frederic Back, Te Wei and A Da all were the first to admit openly those elements in their works that fell short of their original intentions. This honesty and humility was why there was so much growth in their work from film to film. And so on this day I want to criticize the decreasing output of my own animation, my growing tendency to use color to cover unresolved structural issues, and my laziness in learning Chinese. I want to do the best I can to correct these weaknesses.

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When I was 40 Years Old

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When I was 40 years old, I began writing a book on the Creative Process. The final chapter was about creativity for the senior artist. Reading it over now, 30 years later, I am surprised at how relevant it feels to my own ageing process as an artist. Whereas at 40 years old, I may have been perceptive enough to describe the process of ageing that others were going through, at the age of 70 I am now acutely aware of every issue that I, myself have fought through. When at 35, I moved to Vermont from New York City for a simpler pastoral life, I placed myself away from the center of professional activities. I tried to replace my connection with New York by periodically going to film festivals around the world and developing new friendships. As time went on, however, those festivals seemed to become less relevant to whom I was becoming, and I gradually lost contact with the friends and colleagues in my field. Although my work was initially included in a number of books and articles on animation history, as time went on, such mentions inevitably seemed to grow somewhat less. Younger animators took advantage of all the developments of the digital age while I continued doggedly to draw directly on paper.

On the other hand, witnessing this ageing process in other artists 30 years ago, and in writing about it, I managed to prepare myself to some extent for the changes to come. Recognizing the inevitability of the decreasing income that comes with retirement, I did begin at 50 to place half of my monthly income into retirement funds and to make certain that I would also have access to a supplementary medical insurance at 65. As I neared retirement age, understanding and acknowledging my deep love of teaching, I made a step-by-step transition from teaching animation at Dartmouth College in the U.S. to teaching at universities in China. The Chinese people have always had great respect for the experience and wisdom of their senior citizens. This appreciation has been a source of support for me, and I have been able to gain fulfillment and inspiration from working with my Chinese students the past few years. My youthful intensity is all but gone, but in its place I do have a greater feeling of calm as well as a sense of history and continuity that I didn't quite have before. The process continues, of course, and all that goes on contributes to growth. Ageing for me has brought with it a welcome acceptance of myself and all that occurs.

Finally, I would like to turn my attention to those colleagues in China who have so inspired my own creative work and life. As an American artist, I've had advantages that artists from other lands have not often had. I could always find some job to support me while I did my creative work. There were state artist grants, not very large, but always helpful. And I had the freedom with which to approach galleries to show my work, to send my films to festivals, and to manage my own creative life as an "independent artist". I have found good friends in China of my own age, and many have maintained strong, creative lives. But so many creative lives were hindered by the changes in China. In thinking about all these good people, I have become increasingly aware that my life as an American artist had been untested,

soft, and perhaps a bit fragile. Whenever as a rather spoiled American, I would begin to complain to myself that I had not enough time away from my job to create or when I felt I could not continue my animation one morning because I was short a particular color pencil, I would think of the Chinese men and women who doggedly found ways to pursue their art in the midst of hardship. These people became my heroes, my models of who I wanted and needed to become.

In my own ageing process, I have strengthened through the years, but not so much from any hardships through which I, myself, have passed as much as from those whose bitter lives have inspired me. Many people have asked me why I left America to come to China to teach. It is the inspiration I gain from the strength and perseverance of the Chinese people.

David

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Individual vs Group Creation

In 1974, at the age of 33, I began experimenting with animated drawings as a way to enhance my multi-media performances. Within a year, these animations took over my life. However the animation I saw on TV in the 70s was absolutely terrible, and I had no idea that anyone in the U.S. was doing animation that really was art. I finally took my little films and an 8mm film projector to an animation teacher at the School of Visual Arts in New York. He said there was a group of young animators that met monthly in the apartment of George Griffin, so I called George and went to the first meeting. As I opened the door, there were about 35 young men and women all seated on the floor before a little screen on the wall, and George was introducing each person's animation being shown. I sat down in the back and began excitedly to watch. So many different styles and ideas, nothing like the commercial stuff on TV, and it was as if a new world had opened up to me. Towards the end of the evening, I shyly offered my work to be seen, saying I was really just beginning to explore the art form. After my work was shown, a few of those around me smiled, touched me on the shoulder and told me they were looking forward to seeing more of my work. I know my eyes watered, and I felt I had become part of a family.

That began my association with the group in New York soon called, "the Frames Generation" because of a book published in 1978 containing one page of graphics and words by each of about 80 young independent animators. I use the term, "independent" because only one or two worked in commercial studios. Most of these folks, to support themselves in New York, worked at other jobs, like teaching, door-to-door salesmen, waiters, and construction workers. At that time I, myself, worked as a telephone salesman and teacher of children's workshops. In our spare time, we would work alone on little 2 or 3 minute drawing animations, screening them to each other at these meetings where we would gain not only support but also, more importantly, constructive criticism. Sometimes one of us would hear of an opportunity to show our work beyond these monthly meetings, and we'd collect a group of our films and send them on. In the 70's there were only a few animation festivals in the world: Ottawa, Canada; Annecy, France; Zagreb, Yugoslavia; Varna, Bulgaria. Mailing a 16mm film back and forth to Europe was expensive, and there was no guarantee the festival would even select the film for competition screening. Even if we could spend the money on the extra film print and the postage, and even were the film selected for competition, most of us could not afford the plane trip to get to the festival. But when we did finally manage to get there, we could feel part of a much larger family of animators throughout the world who were doing personal, not commercial work.

That was all more than 30 years ago, and it's history. Many of my generation became pioneers of the animation that made MTV and Cartoon Channel so popular. Others eventually married, and to support new families, formed new studios that changed animated commercials forever. Still others, like myself, eventually found secure teaching positions that enabled us to continue making personal, creative animation that would

appear at film festivals, sometimes on TV stations and that would inspire ever newer generations of young animators to become independent.

Things are different now, 30 years later. We do not need to buy film stock, pay fees at film labs, or even pay the expensive postage to send our films to a festival abroad. We can make a whole animation on our laptop and ship a simple DVD or even email a digital copy to a festival. And festivals there are-...hundreds of them throughout the world, all hungry for new animation. And there's the web, with Youtube, Vimeo, Youku, Tudou, all hit daily by hundreds of thousands of viewers. My good friend, Vincent, has nearly half a million hits on his "Gongfutu" blog! It was never easy in any country to stay independent and true to one's personal vision, but there are openings, opportunities that didn't exist 30 years ago. All that's needed in China is for young animators to come together to support each other as my generation did in the 70s.

When you have each other, as we once did, nothing is impossible. Who will begin it?

One of my colleagues who reads my blog sent me this personal response:

I have doubts about "groups". Competition exists everywhere. It's harder than in those old days to "support each other" even for Chinese people.

As you said in the article, it's different after 30 years in many ways through the world. Then "groups" might be not as strongly helpful as they were. We have a whole new world today. Simply if we "We do not need to buy film stock, pay fees at film labs, or even pay the expensive postage to send our films to a festival abroad. ", why would we still need the same way to work like 30 years ago?

Art is personal. People interacting is something complex and tiring. That's how a virtual social- world, Facebook, has grown vastly. Interactions diffuse an "art-centre" inside an artist and weaken intensity. Numbers of great artists through history work solo. They sometimes even had mental disturbance.

This is my answer:

It is true that some of the most intense creative thinking involves the kind of concentration that usually requires a sustained period of solitude and an absence of interruptions. Psychologists have often pointed to the experiences of great visual artists, poets and novelists as examples of such "loners". On the other hand, creative people who work in the performing arts such as theater, film, dance and music seem to thrive on creative social interaction. Animation is a hybrid form of art, integrating visual art, theater, story and music, so it should naturally draw creators with different psychological characteristics and needs. The old Disney and Warner Brothers animation studios, as well as the Shanghai Animation Studio were creative centers of great social cohesion. Artists would work together sharing meals, parties, ideas and work. The

growth of “independent animators” in Germany in the 1920s, and then again in the U.S. and Europe in the 1970s, led to the entrance into the art form of painters, graphic artists and sculptors who brought with them more solitary creative processes. There are artists throughout the world who clearly have preferred to work alone and, moreover, to stay clear of anything that seemed group-oriented. These artists have my great respect. However, “independent” does not necessarily mean solitary. Very few animators could compose their own music, for example, so collaboration with composers was necessary. There have also been famous husband-and-wife animation teams (John and Faith Hubley, Jan and Eva Svankmajer, Paul and Sandra Fierlinger, Phil Mulloy & Vera Neubauer), and teams of brothers (Quay Brothers, Wan Brothers).

Because I came from a more solitary background as a painter and sculptor, even my theatrical performance pieces in the early 70s were created solely by myself and performed in art galleries. So when I came to animation by 1974, I saw it as a continuation of the solitary creative processes I had developed as a visual artist. I would not have felt at all comfortable creating my animation as part of a group. But those monthly meetings of the animators in New York were so supportive because they occurred as quite separate from the time I was working alone, and they were a means of reestablishing a periodic connection of warmth and fellowship with those who had been working as I had.

I actually gained a small taste of group creative work in 1988 when I spent a few months at the Shanghai Animation Studio and worked side-by-side in a small room with WangShuchen and QianYunda. I suppose my limited command of Chinese kept those two artists from interrupting me with much conversation, but it was a new and inspiring experience for me to be working with others. It was almost as if the consciousness of art existed in the air of that little studio and that it lifted me above trivial daily concerns. The demise of that great studio remains to this day for me one of the saddest issues in the history of world animation.

My last posting about the “Frames Generation” has brought forth responses quite different from the one above. Several of my CUC students reminded me of the great work that the website, animetaste.com.cn, has been doing in the last few years with bringing together young animators here in Beijing through meetings and modest collaboration animation. There has even been some talk of their collecting new animation and sending it together to festivals abroad. I met with one of the group’s leaders two years ago and was impressed by his dedication to new Chinese animation and his integrity in working for the website at no pay, after a hard day’s work at his other jobs. I keep meaning to go to one of their Beijing meetings, and I am hopeful of the potential they have for bringing together and supporting young animators in Beijing and soon, throughout China. This to me is the best sign of a parallel to my Frames Generation of 40 years ago.

As an animator, I work completely alone, doing the producing, directing, concept, design, animation, editing, distribution and sometimes even the music. But for a few years, I

chose to collaborate with my colleagues around the world, and it was an exciting experience for me. Here's the story.

In 1983 I invited my Romanian friend, Adrian Petringenaru, to Vermont to collaborate with me on a series of children's animation workshops. While there, Adrian became interested in a film I had left uncompleted from the late 70s, a series of transformations between drawings by the Masters. By the time Adrian was to return to Bucurest, we had designed an international co-production around these drawings, with the Bucurest Animafilm Studio extending them, coloring them and adding music. The resulting film, called Perpetual Revival, was completed in 1985 and premiered at the Varna Animation Festival in Bulgaria. Adrian and I were pleased with the artistic result, but because of administrative problems with the Animafilm Studio, though I was listed as animator, designer and co-director of the film, I was unable to gain a single print of the film. I then decided that if I were to enter into another international collaboration, I would do it also as the Executive Producer. What follows is the story of the films that are the result of that decision.

Academy Leader Variations (1987:6 minutes) Co- directed by Jane Aaron, Skip Battaglia, David Ehrlich, Paul Glabicki, George Griffin, Al Jarnow (USA); Claude Luyet, Georges Schwizgebel, Daniel Suter, Martial Wannaz (Switzerland); Piotr Dumala, Krzysztof Kiwerski, Jerzy Kucia, Stanislaw Lenartowicz (Poland); A Da, Chang Guangxi, He Yumen, Hu Jinqing, Lin Wenxiao, Yan Dingxian(P.R. China). Produced by David Ehrlich (USA).

Since 1978, each of my personal films had begun with a personal variation on the academy leader, and in 1985, I had begun doing a number of variations to place into a single film compilation. However, I was increasingly conscious that all my variations were a bit too similar. At the Zagreb Animation festival in 1986, I was discussing this problem with my young Polish friend, Piotr Dumala. Piotr thought for a moment, then within a few seconds sketched out his own variations. After a moment of depression that this young genius could come up with such great variations so quickly, it occurred to me that I could ask other friends to do the same thing and put the segments all together for an international compilation film. The unifying element of the film could be the structural theme of the academy leader. Piotr liked the idea and we immediately went to speak with Jerzy Kucia, another mutual Polish friend, who was excited about the project, and we agreed to invite two of his other Polish colleagues to participate. Then I went to Georges Schwizgebel who agreed to bring in his colleagues from the GDS Studio in Geneva, Switzerland. Raoul Servais and Nicole Salomon, President and Secretary-General of ASIFA, the International Animators Association, happened to be at Zagreb, and I asked them if the project could come somehow under the official umbrella of ASIFA to facilitate the participation of my friends from Poland, and, I hoped, from China. I thought that these two socialist nations might need the UNESCO affiliation of ASIFA as a kind of guarantor with which to collaborate with the West. Raoul and Nicole both readily agreed, and the French title, "ASIFA-Presente" was placed at the head of the film. With ASIFA (and therefore UNESCO) behind us, I then persuaded my Chinese friends, A Da and Lin WenXiao, also at Zagreb that

year, to return to Shanghai and try to bring others in the studio into the project. I was fortunate that Lin was in fact the wife of Yan Dingxian, Studio Chief at the time, and I imagined that after one of Lin's beautifully cooked dinners, Yan would be softened up enough to agree. When I returned home, I immediately called five of my American friends, all of whom were fascinated by the project and happy to participate. We were now on our way!

As Executive Producer and co-director, I agreed to advance the funding of the final printing and distribution of the film. This was to be a cooperative venture, however, with all net profits (after the return of my advance) divided equally by fourths to each of the national group leaders who would then sub-divide the funds to the individual animators. This was a simple matter with the American, Swiss and Polish animators, but the good people from China, in 1987, required something different. We agreed that the Chinese portion would be used to pay the annual ASIFA dues of the Chinese animators.

The structural theme of the academy leaders, was quite experimental and was somewhat problematic for Shanghai animators used to beautiful but fairly straightforward animation for children. The animators had to analyze and deconstruct the academy leader, abstracting the most significant and dynamic elements, and reconstructing them in their own personal ways. And although the Chinese variations were less experimental than those of the other three nations, they were certainly much more experimental than the work they had been doing, and the opening this provided to the greater exploration of material and concept prepared them for more extensive co-productions with the West. In fact, the most successful of all the variations in the entire film and the one that generated the greatest applause and laughter was the revolution of the stamping pig, created by Chang Guangxi, who later went on to become the Director of the Shanghai Animation Studio.

The film had a wonderful lifespan, at festivals like Cannes, where it won the Jury Prize for Shorts, on TV, and in the popular International Tournee of Animation. Invitations to festivals and subsequent trophies were distributed to those groups who lived nearest the event, and two of the participating animators, Paul Glabicki from the U.S. and Stanislaw Lenartowicz from Poland, were given commissions to create MTV logos solely on the basis of their work on this film.

Soon after the completion of *Academy Leader Variations*, my dear friend, A Da, passed away, and at the film's screening at Annecy in June of '87, we dedicated the work to him with these words: "It was A Da's dream that one day all peoples could be as one and smile at one another."

Animated Self Portraits (1989: 8 minutes). Co-directed by Sally Cruikshank, David Ehrlich, Candy Kugel, Bill Plympton, Maureen Selwood (USA); Mati Kutt, Priit Parn, Riho Unt, Hardi Volmer (Estonia, USSR); Borivoj Dovnikovic, Nikola Maydak, Josko Marusic, Dusan Vukotic (Yugoslavia); Jiri Barta, Pavel Koutsky, Jan Svankmajer (Czechoslovakia); Renzo Kinoshita, Kihachiro Kawamoto, Osamu Tezuka (Japan). Produced by David Ehrlich (USA).

The next ASIFA Presente project began in 1987. My initial idea was a series of variations on the ASIFA logo. This time I thought the segments could be less experimental and a bit more entertaining. The Americans I chose were all experienced in narrative animation. When we got together in New York to discuss the project, there was some resistance to doing all that work for what seemed to be just a promotional vehicle for ASIFA, and when Candy Kugel suggested self-portraits as the theme, we all liked the idea. It may not have been as conceptually interesting as a deconstruction of a logo, but the idea of an expression of self proved more exciting to artists who must spend long hours in solitary confinement over a drawing board. I presented the proposal to the ASIFA Board at the Varna Animation Festival in Bulgaria in the fall of 1987, as an aesthetic expression of identity, and gained approval for it as the next ASIFA-Presente project. Then, while at Varna, I immediately got the cooperation of the Japanese, the Estonians, the Czechs and the Yugoslavs. It was agreed that my friends would lead their respective groups: Renzo Kinoshita (Japan), Priit Parn (Estonia), Pavel Koutsky (Czechoslovakia) and Nikola Maydak (Yugoslavia).

The following year witnessed great socio-political turmoil in Central and East Europe and it was reflected in the process of our collaboration which became a clarification not only of personal identity but also of national identity. In beginning this film, and choosing the countries whose animators I wanted to participate, I had been thinking only of the artists whose work I respected. In 1987, I never believed that the world could change so much in 2-3 years. In Academy Leader Variations, I had transformed the title into each of the four national languages and had intended to do this for Animated Self-Portraits. And in the final credits, I had similarly planned to list the authors under the names of their countries. The first problem I had was with Yugoslavia, a country that was already coming apart psychologically if not yet geographically in civil war. The leader of the group and ASIFA Executive Board member, Nikola Maydak, was living and working in Beograd, and we naturally expected that the film's title be in the Cyrillic script, the national writing of Yugoslavia. Josko Marusic, a Dalmatian working in Zagreb felt the Cyrillic too esoteric and insisted the Serbo-Croatian title should be in Romanic script. My ultimate compromise was to place the Serbo-Croatian title in BOTH Cyrillic and Romanic script, a sad prediction of the violent geographical/ political split that was to occur a few years later.

The Czechs had no such problem with the language of the title, but Pavel Koutsky, a firm nationalist, told me in 1987 that very soon the country would dispense with the suffix, CSSR, and that in no case should I place that suffix in the credits. My Czech wife, Marcela, who had left Prague in '68 with the Soviet invasion, would not believe that things would ever change there, telling me that Koutsky had his head in the clouds, and that I shouldn't listen to him. But then, as I was completing the film in the early spring of '89, things looked so different over there that I decided to dispense with CSSR. If the film had in fact been delayed just another couple of years, I would have had to change the name of the country completely.

In 1987, Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union. The Russian on the ASIFA Board said that Estonia was part of the Soviet Union or USSR and should be listed as such and that the language of the title should be in Cyrillic. Priit Parn, a fierce nationalist like Koutsky, told me that within two years Estonia would be an independent nation, that the title should be in Romanic Estonian, and that he and his colleagues should be listed under the designation, Estonia. There was a lot of heat around this discussion, and the final compromise as we came into the early Spring of '89 was to have the title in Romanic Estonian and the credits listed under "Estonia, USSR".

Artistically, the Czech and Japanese animators, whose international reputations were already secure, simply confirmed their greatness in these short segments. The real surprise was the Estonian section, for few had heard of the work being done in Tallinn. The segment of the entire film that received the greatest applause was created by young Mati Kutt, indeed a complete unknown. The Tallinn Studio has since become as well known as Moscow's Soyuzmultfilm Studio and the '98 Ottawa Animation Festival presented four retrospective programs of the Estonian work that toured through North America afterwards. Animated Self-Portraits went on to win many awards at festivals, including the short list for the Oscars that year. The award for which we were most proud, however, was the Prize for Efficiency of International Cooperation presented at the Krakow Short Film Festival in Poland.

Both collaboration films gave animators from different parts of the world a way to get to know each other better, as they could now meet at festivals and have an easy rapport. It gave 40 animators from eight countries a vehicle with which to experiment with new techniques and ideas, something with decreased risk as the segments were but a few seconds in length. It gave animators like Chang Guangxi and Mati Kutt a chance to show the world (and themselves) what they could do, and it made some much needed hard currency for our colleagues in the former Socialist countries. I also hope that it gave a world in the late 80s, beset by racial, ethnic, cultural and national divisions, a positive image of artists coming together across these divisions to create something of beauty.

Dance of Nature (1991: 4 minutes) Co-directed by David Ehrlich (USA) and Karin Sletten (Norway). Produced by David Ehrlich (USA).

In the Spring of 1991, I was invited to MRDH College in Norway to teach a two month course in animation. I had a class of some of the most beautiful young women I've ever taught, which made teaching them both difficult and easy. While I was there, I would spend the evenings working on the designs for Dance of Nature, which was to be the animated imagery of Vermont mountain landscapes for a choreographed dance piece I was to perform in Vermont later that spring. One of my students, Karin Sletten, saw what I was working on and was inspired to do a few designs herself, abstractions of the Norwegian landscape close to her home in the north. After completing the two

international collaborations, I was open to any opportunities for further collaboration, and I liked Karin's designs so much that I asked her if she'd like to collaborate with me on this film, synthesizing her Norwegian landscapes with my Vermont mountains. She was enthusiastic, and we finished the film quickly. It provided an excellent background for my dance piece, and I still like some of her designs more than mine.

Genghis Khan (1993: 8 minutes) Directed by Miagmar Sodnompilin (Mongolia).
Produced by David Ehrlich (USA).

In May 1993, *Genghis Khan*, an animated short depicting the young Temujin, premiered at the Annecy Animation Festival in France, went on to film festivals in eight countries, and soon appeared on TV stations in the United States and throughout Europe and Asia. The film was a collaboration between a young Mongolian animation director, Miagmar Sodnompilin, trained in Moscow, and myself, and was the first known U.S.- Mongolian co-production.

I first met Miagmar in the Fall of 1987 at the Varna Animation Festival on the Black Sea in Bulgaria. At the time, I was premiering *Academy Leader Variations*. When Miagmar expressed his excitement about the film, I asked if he'd like to work with me on a co-production about Temujin sometime. He explained sadly that because of the Soviet influence, any encouragement of Mongolian nationalism in dealing with Temujin, especially in co-production with the U.S., would have been impossible until liberalization.

During the next three years, Miagmar and I continued to correspond and to meet at East European film festivals, all the while planning the film we would make when Mongolia's political situation had changed. We were in fact quietly encouraged by mutual friends at the Soyuzmultfilm Studio in Moscow who helped us work out an economic and administrative structure for collaboration. Finally, in 1991, when the political situation had radically changed, Miagmar said he was set to go. I found funding in New York through Italtoons, a film distribution company, and my brother, Jeff, and I set about working on the script about young Temujin. The script completed, Miagmar and I met at the Stuttgart Animation Festival in 1992 where he spent one very long evening creating the storyboard from the script.

Production began in August when I flew to Ulaanbaatar with boxes of colored pencils and equipment. But after all the wading through the political obstacles, our first week of production in Ulaanbaatar presented us with greater difficulties. Our film had become a cause celebre among Ulaanbaatar intellectuals, and Miagmar insisted we meet with them to have the storyboard approved. They tore into the storyboard, saying that the texts from which we had drawn the details of our story were by Russian historians. Only *The Secret History of the Mongols* would be an acceptable basis for reality.

The next two weeks were filled with phone calls back and forth to New York, negotiating compromises between the reality desired by the Ulaanbaatar intellectuals and the children's legend desired by a sponsor who hoped at least to break even by selling to TV. In Ulaanbaatar, they said that young Temujin would never have ridden with a little girl,

but from New York we were told that cutting the girl would cut the viewing audience in half. The compromise? We had Temujin, several boys and one girl riding together at the beginning, while Temujin is proudly alone most of the later film. From New York we were instructed that if Temujin must hunt an animal to bring back to the ger (the tent like structure in which Mongols still live), it could not be an animal adored by American children. In Ulaanbaatar, we were admonished that the animals left in Mongolia after excluding Bugs Bunny, Bambi, and Porky Pig were not considered edible by Mongols. After long discussions we settled on a wild boar.

Studying the art from the historical period at the museum in Ulaanbaatar, Miagmar and I decided that normal cel animation, expected by our sponsor, with neat outlines and bright colors, would not fit. It was too smooth, too slick for the rough feel of the life the Mongols faced, especially during the winter months, when our story takes place. We wanted harsh black brush lines on a light brown rice paper with no color. When told of our move away from cel paint, our sponsor reminded us that kids around the world were used to a certain image and would not accept our solution. The compromise? Rough slashes of black and brown slightly softened by intermittent pastel surfaces, all drawings done on paper textured a bit like rice paper.

As horses would play a major role in the film, I had brought with me a portfolio of sketches of horses, done by Leonardo for his 'Battle of Anghiari'. When I first showed them to Miagmar and his artist, Tegsuren, they seemed confused. Then they realized that the musculature, the way these horses would run and jump, was entirely different from that of the Mongolian horses of the steppes. And they set about designing a new, more Mongolian vocabulary of musculature, bone structure and movement that resulted in the elevating of Temujin's magnificent horse to a stature equal to Temujin himself. Half the film takes place during a freezing wintry night on the steppes, with the wind blowing fiercely over the snow. The rough strokes that had earlier served to define the leathery faces of the Mongols now came alive as torrents of wind and sleet, and in fact, no cel animation could have yielded the tremendous power of nature that is felt in this film.

We used authentic period music for all but the introductory title sequence, for which we used more westernized music first created for a Mongolian live-action feature. All sound effects were created by Darmasuren, a brilliant foley artist in the Ulaanbaatar film studio, with none of the technical computer equipment of the modern studio, but with only his voice, his body, and a few rough instruments.

After two months of drawing from morning to late evening in a living room 8'x9', Miagmar, his two talented assistant animators and I had completed most of the artwork. Because the cameras in Ulaanbaatar were not at that time sufficient for our needs, our colleague at the Shanghai Animation Studio came to the rescue in November, filming the entire production late in the evenings. I edited the footage in New York, and the film was ready for its premiere at the Annecy Animation Festival. After the presentation, Miagmar and I broke open a bottle of Genghis Khan vodka and feted our colleagues from Moscow and Shanghai.

The eight year period from 1985 to 1993 during which I explored these collaborations proved tremendously exciting both for me and for my collaborators. I learned a great deal about what artists in other countries must go through to make a film, a great deal more about their cultures, and even more about myself and my own culture, as seen through their eyes. These projects were done at a time in which animation was not yet commercially big business, a time at which we created for the sake of our art. Times have changed, of course, and the fact the animated films are now so popular throughout the world and bring in such large profits from such large outlays of funding makes it ever more problematic to “explore” such experiments in our art form. But it is my hope that others may be inspired to think about what can be done and just maybe, to try it out.

Humanistic Animation Education in the Digital Age

FIRST CHINA INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION SUMMIT FORUM

(Hangzhou, China), June 2005

David Ehrlich, Professor of Film Studies, Dartmouth College

My own experience is with teaching animation at Dartmouth College, a liberal arts college in New Hampshire. I'll come right to the point of my presentation: my opinion is that a *moderate* use of digital technology, always in combination with the teaching of basic drawing and animation skills, would be best in the education of our young animators.

Throughout the early 90s, my students worked in traditional film animation, doing countless drawings and tiny moves of puppets or clay. In the beginning, there was no animation stand, only a CanonScoop camera on a tripod. If a student wished to pan across a flat scene, it was preferable to create the pan within the drawings themselves. To make matters even more difficult, the zoom lens of the camera was not sufficiently calibrated, so that a zoom would also have to be drawn into the artwork itself. Such things sound absolutely ridiculous at the present stage of animation education, with computerized camera stands and, finally, digital imaging. What parents would send their child to a school without the most modern, state-of-the-art technological equipment? Similarly, what animation studio could hope to compete in the market without it?

I'd like to discuss what is gained and what is lost in the rush to ever newer state-of-the-art devices. Two of my students in the early 90s, Phil Lord and Chris Miller, seemed at first to be severely limited by the camera on a tripod. As their talent developed, their ambitions increased: they wanted to pan, move backgrounds, zoom, and even introduce atmospheric effects into their animation. Their frustration at their inability to achieve these effects with the equipment that we had at that time, got them experimenting with whatever they could do with various manipulations of the art materials themselves. The concrete results were very unique animations that won a number of prizes. A less obvious result, and one that I will come back to again, was that they strengthened their creative problem-solving abilities and the confidence with which they could approach *any* situation that seemed new and initially unworkable. In fact, when they went on to jobs at Disney after graduation, it was precisely this ability that served them so well in coming up with very unusual solutions to conceptual, artistic and technical issues. They ended up producing and directing their original series, "Clone High, USA" for MTV.

(And last year the highly original feature animation that they wrote and directed for SONY, "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," was number one at the box office for three weeks in a row, earning over 150 million dollars.) RECENTLY ADDED.

I should be clear here. I am not arguing that we educators should purposely force our students into the most primitive technology. I am arguing, however, that there are valuable lessons that were previously learned in the absence of the newest state of the art equipment, lessons that now need to be reinforced in other ways when we present this shiny new equipment to our students.

Five years ago, we outfitted our lab with Mac computers and loaded them with a 3D software. This program was meant to supplement and perhaps eventually replace the former study of puppet and clay animation. My students love anything that PIXAR creates so they were quite excited about the opportunity to use roughly the same software that the PIXAR animators were using. It has a very steep learning curve, but within a few months, most of the students were able to come up with basic animations of fairly simple characters. And because of the capability of the software to render designs in bright, beautiful, shiny colors with a variety of textures, the students and their friends were quite happy with the resulting projects. It then became time for the students to plan out relatively short stories with believable characters and to animate them in a fluid, believable manner. This is where problems ensued for some of the students, students who had jumped directly into digital animation without first learning the basics of character design and movement that, in my opinion, can best be learned through the study of drawing. These students were trying to use the software to compensate for deficiencies in their own background. One of these students actually managed to come up with an intriguing abstract animation, as he used for his "characters," the primitive shapes of the palette (spheres, cubes and cylinders). But the only students who were able successfully to create believable and interesting character animations, were those few who had first gone through the process of developing and completing a drawing animation. All the others, who had jumped over that stage of development, directly to the software, were limited to simple, rather stiff virtual puppets which moved more like machine parts than live, malleable, organic beings.

The problem became compounded as expensive upgrades were introduced each year by the company with announcements of particular improvements which would make animation more lifelike and believable in various ways, such as, for example, the rendering of special hair and fur or the more advanced particle generation of fire, smoke and mist. In effect, the software's ever enhanced performance seemed to create the false sense that it might lessen the subsequent need of students to master the basics of drawing animation. I then came to the question, what is the educational value of a tool that increasingly pushes to the sidelines those skills that I consider basic to both the understanding and the creation of fluid movement and character. Now certainly, the steep learning curve that accompanies any digital methodology yields a number of opportunities for growth. And confronting a new logical system can give its own sense of excitement to the inquiring mind. I am a firm believer in the value of placing before our students in all fields, as many methods of arriving at "answers" as is possible. And because the digital realm has become so significant, so pervasive to our era, any educator in any field who takes a romantic, traditionalist stand against it, would be depriving students of a significant element of their future lives and work. But I am also a firm believer in the value of learning to come up with unique alternative solutions to problems, solutions that may sometimes be much more interesting than those so facily obtained with digital tools.

Let's take as an example, John Lasseter, PIXAR's star director of "Toy Story" and other fine films. Lasseter first studied classical animation at the California Institute of Art. His student film, "Lady and the Lamp" was a wonderful drawing animation that went on to win the Student Oscar that year. When he then began to work with computer technicians at PIXAR and came up with "Luxo, Jr.", the first great 3D computer animation to be nominated for an Oscar, he could bring to that work *about lamps* all of the fine sense of character and movement previously learned as a classical drawing animator. In fact, that film is

phenomenal in its depiction of character simply by use of simple, pure, movement, with no supporting facial features, no moving limbs, and all from the same basic frontal shot. His timing and choice of movements within those severe limitations were quite brilliant, effective, and to tell the truth, "Luxo, Jr" has remained for many years my favorite 3D animation, that is until Brad Bird's "The Incredibles" knocked my socks off. What was so fascinating about a couple of lamps bending up and down? This artist managed, with the simplest of movements developed initially as a classical animator, to instill into normally inanimate objects the kind of emotions and thoughts which we, the audience found completely believable.

As another example, I'll take my Czech friend, Paul Fierlinger, who spent over 40 years making beautiful drawing animations, one of which was nominated for an Oscar. Several years ago, he turned to 2D digital animation, but he continued to draw, no longer with a pencil but with a stylus on a digital tablet. His digital-based films are just as compelling as his previous animation had been, but as Paul is quick to point out, his success in this new medium is clearly due to his prior experience in classical drawing animation.

Moving over to my favorite Chinese animations, I'd like to give you some of the animated moments that are most dear to me as moments that were created from keen observation of life, from creative problem- solving, and from love of the medium itself. First on my list are "Where's Mama", "Buffalo Boy" and "Feeling from Mountain and Water" by Te Wei and his colleagues. As if it were not sufficient to have come up with a wonderful and entirely original graphic technique that placed in the forefront traditional ink and wash, in "Where's Mama", Te Wei was able to give a lovely sense of freedom and exhilaration as those little tadpoles swam about, with no cute little faces, but solely through the swirling of their tails and their choreography through the water. And my favorite moment in "Buffalo Boy" occurs when the buffalo moves through the water with a thin wash beneath him, with absolutely no wave lines in the space surrounding. The purity and grace of this heavy buffalo through the calm water always moves me very deeply.

Hu Jinqing's inventive cut-paper animations, derived from his observations of nature, always seem to intrigue me in similar ways. How many times, in the Vermont countryside where I live, have I watched a bird who is carefully waiting to grab his live prey, stop, cleverly turn around and peck at his feathers as if he couldn't really care, just as Hu's creatures are apt to do? Hu's work comes from intense observation of nature and the ability to recreate that sense of life in simple, perfectly executed movement.

Finally, there is my favorite film, "Three Monks" by my old friend A Da. Who can forget the moment when the third monk entering the water daintily picks up the bottom of his cloth, or when the three monks begin hiccupping in perfect rhythm, when they freeze diagonally in the midst of the fire, and when they all scare the mouse to death. The loving care with which A Da created the personalities of each monk and then worked his way through how each would react to the constantly changing situations, brings me back again and again to these monks, because A Da has made me love them as much as he did. That is the most perfect example of the humanism that I value so highly.

Now let's get to "The Incredibles" which so justly won this year's Oscar for animated feature. Yes, the writing, the story, the creation of the cast of characters were all absolutely brilliant.

Each moment of this feature was cleverly constructed in terms of situation and character. But none of this could have worked had not these characters been created, each with an infinite flexibility of musculature and movement, so close to the remarkable work that Art Babbitt had done with Goofy or that Chuck Jones had done with Wile Coyote and Pepe LePew! Classical elements of anticipation, of squash and stretch were finally integrated into the digital realm of stiffly jointed bones. It was this reemergence of classical drawing animation technique, originally developed from the artist's imagination, that gave the Incredibles the sense of vitality and excitement, that made us believe in them and even care about their very unusual lives.

Bringing this rather wide-ranging discussion back to animation education, how can we best prepare our students for their future career in animation? Well, yes, they'd better become familiar with a mouse other than Mickey, and explore various digital techniques. But I would also, and I believe *first*, show them Goofy and Wile Coyote and the Three Monks, and Where's Mama and Clam-Snipe Grapple, and all the wonderful animation that each of us has come to love. I would have all the students take clay modeling and life drawing classes, of the human figure, of animals in nature, and studies from their own imagination. Then they would begin to animate those beings with pencil, crayon, ink, clay, bamboo, anything with which they felt inspired. When they had completed their first animated short, one of which they were proud, then they could move to a 2D or 3D digital realm. And by the way, any student who chooses to move into this realm, and of course all will be captivated by it, should also simultaneously gain some theoretical understanding of the digital processes. This is because any future career will necessarily embrace a multitude of new developments that would not yet have existed during the student's education. And the best preparation would prepare the animator to move conceptually from one to the next. Being a mere technician, skilled in one technique, is not a good prognosis for survival. It should be the goal of animation education to develop creative people who are both artistically imaginative and creative at technical problem-solving. The confidence to confront new creative issues and ever new technologies should be instilled in students at the institutional level, and in my experience, the best means of doing this is to give them the opportunity and encouragement to explore their full potential, to take as many risks as possible in an educational environment in which economic and career failure are not as much a danger as they will be later on.

The curriculum I just set forth is my ideal, of course. In this age of instant weight loss pills and quick educational results, a curriculum that delays practise in digital technique may well be rejected by most students and their parents. So compromise is often necessary for a fine educational program to survive and grow. Screenings of "hand-made" animation can be held simultaneously with digital classes. And a strong first year's curriculum should include classes in drawing and modelling along with beginning digital technique. Each institution and each instructor will have to work out an integrated structure that best fits the needs of both the students and the market they will enter upon graduation.

Now that I have laid out some of the limitations of an exclusively digital education and have emphasized the need of the student animator to develop basic drawing and problem-solving skills, I wanted to backtrack and to say a few things about the recent public dissemination of Flash animation in China. I find this a most exciting development for a number of reasons. Without the necessity of state support or complex studio equipment, *individual Shanke* animators at all skill levels are beginning to explore self-expression and artistic

experimentation, and they are finding and building their audience through the web. This obviously has far-reaching socio-political implications for China, for this has all been taking place within the arena of contemporary popular culture. This phenomenon is just five years old, so it is too early to judge whether the self-taught or university-educated artists of this new medium will be able to reach the heights that artists of traditional animation like Te Wei, A Da, or Hu Jinqing were able to scale. But what is most important is that an individual artist, working alone on his computer, can create from his own imagination and have an available venue to communicate his work. Insofar as Flash can be included in conjunction with basic drawing courses, within the curriculum of an animation department, it seems a most valuable tool for the future animator. It is inexpensive, it can be learned very quickly, it has practical applications for web design and commercial shorts, and it is a wonderful vehicle for personal expression for it can be done simply, by the individual artist *who has developed drawing skills*, and immediately placed on the web.

Although there are obviously serious socio-political differences between our two cultures, I'm struck by the similarities between the Chinese Flash phenomenon and the "Frames Generation" on the American East Coast during the 70's. Until the Second World War, almost all animation in the U.S. had been done in the major studios like Disney, MGM, Warner Bros. and Fleischers. It was assumed that only the complex industrial model with hundreds of employees, each doing a small part of the entire job, would be appropriate for following through on all the stages of cel animation. And of course, just as in China, animation was directed towards an audience of children. Then beginning in the 50's, with the proliferation of TV commercials and Saturday morning children's shows, the various stages of production were streamlined and compressed to "limited animation" that could be completed within a week's time by a much smaller studio. Artistically, of course, quality dropped to make way for quantity.

This provides the context in which collections of fine European animation, collected at international animation festivals by ASIFA members, began to be shown throughout American universities and museums as part of what was called the "Tournees of International Animation". These films, made by international artists of the medium, were intelligent, highly original, and made not for children but for educated adults. By the early 70's, young American artists, inspired by this work, began to make very personal animated shorts on a very small budget, with simple means. Pencil and crayon could substitute for cel paint, and typewriter paper for cels, and a single individual could do all the artwork from beginning to end, in the evenings after a day job, then shooting the artwork in a single day at a studio or university stand, edit and sometimes even do the music and sound effects himself. These efforts, in the beginning, had obvious technical limitations, but they were refreshing, original expressions of a single creative mind. Distribution channels were still limited to works from the large studios, but these "independent animators" would meet every month in someone's loft in New York, and show and critique their work. With constructive criticism and collegial support, everyone's work improved, and gradually they began to organize shows and even a book of their collective work called "Frames", under the leadership of George Griffin. By the late 70s and early 80s, a number of works by these animators were winning awards at international festivals, and this first independent generation entered the mainstream, with many of them finding jobs at New York and West Coast studios, adapting the personal styles they had developed as an independent animator, to commercial venues. Others, like myself, continued to produce only personal expressions,

supported by positions as professors at universities. Eventually, the spirit of all of this independent work came to influence much of the animation shown on TV, in effect, transforming it.

When I first came to China in 1988, I spoke with the young animators at the Shanghai Studio, trying to encourage them to create personal work with the same simple means. But as the state controlled all the means of studio production, the equipment, labs, even film stock, such opportunities that we had in New York in the 70s, seemed all but a dream to these young Shanghai artists. Now with the proliferation of relatively inexpensive computers and with the entry into China of Flash and other inexpensive animation programs, what was once but a dream has become very real indeed. According to research provided by Wu Weihua, from the City University of Hong Kong, FlashEmpire.com, the first website devoted to Chinese Flash animation, links to over 10,000 Chinese Flash animations! The most influential works, the 1999 "Rock 'n' Roll on the New Long March" and the 2001 animated music video, "People from the Northeast are All Living Lei Fengs" are but two of the most interesting examples of this new work. This is very exciting to me, and I am hopeful that this is, like the "Frames generation" in America, the beginning of a most important artistic movement in China, one that may well influence and transform Chinese animation.

Animation Music

In a post last week, I emphasized the need for original music tracks for your animation. Only a few animators are skilled enough as musicians and composers to feel confident enough to create their own music tracks. The solution then is to approach someone with sufficient musical background to do the job for you. There are many composers with experience in film/video music, but much fewer with experience in animation music. Animation is a very concentrated form, created a fraction of a second at a time, and there is often a corresponding need for musical changes that occur much more frequently, especially within the normal 3-5 minute duration of an animation. In a post on AnimeTaste a few days ago, Yuan Zheng indicated that the website offered a list of composers who have worked with animators. You may also know someone who can handle the job. The issue now is to work out the way in which you will communicate your needs to a composer. What follows are suggestions. Some of them may seem very obvious, but I am trying to be thorough.

- 1) Study your animation so that you will be able to verbalize what is going on in it step-by-step.
- 2) Try to think of the kind of background music that might fit the mood you are after. Experiment placing different pieces of music from the web against your animation until you find a few that feel right to you.
- 3) Write down all the various sound effects you may need and their precise position in the work.
- 4) After you have done all the preparation, contact one or more composers and ask to hear some of their compositions, especially if they have composed for other animations. Sometimes a composer has their work on the web.

- 5) When you have selected one or more composers, work out a short meeting time of 30-40 minutes.
- 6) Come to the meeting fully prepared with your laptop loaded with your animation, the samples of music you like, your notes on the sound effects, and your mind practiced in explaining the animation step-by-step.
- 7) At the meeting, chat briefly, then get to the animation. Lay out everything as clearly and thoroughly as you can. The composer will ask a number of questions. Answer what you can, and when you can't, clearly say you have not thought about that aspect.
- 8) Through this discussion you and the composer will each make an internal decision, usually based on intuition as much as on concrete detail, as to whether a collaboration will work out. At this stage, if not earlier, you should ask the composer's fee for doing the sound track. Usually the work will include both music and effects. If you are both students, the fee will probably be about 500rmb. If one or both of you are already professionals, the fee will be higher. The length of the work as well as the complexity of what is required will also play into the fee.
- 9) Once you decide upon the fee, you are set to begin. Some composers can begin work even before you have your animation completed with its precise timing. They can explore various musical tests based upon the clips you have played for them and what you've said about the atmosphere you wish. Other composers prefer to begin work only after your precise timing is completed. In this case, make sure you have included all final credits, including one for music, because you may well wish to have the music continue under them.

- 10) At this point, though you may like a break from the process, it is not a good plan for you to leave the rest to your composer and wait for the finished track. It's best for you to hear your composer's tests of the music and collaborate with your composer at least insofar as you express your preferences. If you can actually communicate clearly about harmony, melody, dynamics, rhythm, so much the better. If not, try to speak in general impressionistic terms about the atmosphere you wish and the nature of the effects you hear.

The collaboration may last for a week to a month, depending upon the length of the animation and the composer's schedule. When it is finished, make certain you really feel it is finished and not just "ok." You will live with your work and its music for the rest of your life! Finally then, pay your composer's fee, and you are ready for post-production. Ideally, the process you have gone through together has been inspiring for both of you, and you've developed a meaningful connection.

CHINA DAILY USA Reporter: I'm a reporter with the China Daily and I'm writing a piece next week on the growing Chinese investment in animated films and animation in general -- we're seeing a lot of success with Chinese and US animated films at the Chinese box office, Shanghai's Disney World just opened up, and there are a number of studios that are focused on animation in China, including one out in Culver City devoted to Chinese animation.

David Ehrlich: The Chinese government's support of animation departments for the last 10 years, in so many colleges and universities across China, has been generous, well-placed and well-used. In my opinion, the result, that so many schools and studios are now at a technical level equal and often surpassing that of the other Asian and European industries, is well-earned. The technical lessons learned from Disney and Dreamworks have also been tremendously beneficial. The problem is that technical proficiency is virtually useless in the absence of originality and compelling stories and characters. This is where pre-production comes in. In the west, studios spend one or two years developing such aspects before beginning animation. Chinese studios spend much, much less time because budgets are so much smaller, AND because there is not enough training or encouragement in these aspects.

Chinese studios can go to the Monkey King well a few more times until it's exhausted. and perhaps they can do one or two more Pleasant Goat features which capitalize on the TV series, but beyond that, I tend to think they will try to copy Disney or Dreamworks franchises which will take them nowhere. How many Kungfu Pandas, Rabbits, and Dogs will saturate the market? In any event, whether or not they can break even in the domestic market, a lot more originality and pre-production will be needed before any of them can reach an international market. I call to mind, in my fondest hopes, the story and characters developed by Wang Lei in Beijing for a feature animation on true Chinese history, about the early Mohists. This could be of real interest to Chinese children AND young people, and also, if permitted to run its course of production without being compromised by silly gags and unmotivated action, could have a chance internationally, especially because the Mohist era, so important to Chinese history, is unknown in the west and could provide that audience with a more enlightened view of Chinese culture. I suggest you connect with Wang Lei: <wangleianim@163.com>

I'm all in favor of a new "Back to the Roots" movement similar to the one 60 years ago. I wish there were now a leader of the stature of Vice-President Chen Yi , 60 years ago, who had enough cultural savvy to push the Shanghai Animation Studio towards an integration of ink-brush painting and animation. That first result, "Where's Mama" by Te Wei, won prizes at festival throughout the world and made the west stand up and take notice of what was being done in China. That was not just technical skill. That was originality, passion, beauty and heart. Chinese animators need not go back now to old formal roots of cut-paper, ink & brush, and folded paper. They should and, hopefully will, like Wang Lei, go back to the roots of

Chinese thinking and feeling. The world needs to see and feel it as much as China needs to present it.

Reporter: One quick question -- do you think the success of animated films at the Chinese box office in the last nine months or so is a bit of an anomaly? Monkey King, Zootopia, Kung Fu Panda -- were these instances of right place/right time? Or has China's consumption of animation been building up slowly and we're now seeing how potent a force animation could be?

David Ehrlich: Zootopia and Kungfu Panda were hits all over the world. They had beautifully worked out stories with strongly developed characters. Monkey King was an example of superior technical skill applied to a traditional Chinese legend, making it a hit at the Chinese box office, but not throughout the world. The formula applied there for success in China has less implication for international box office and, in my opinion will not be duplicated even at the Chinese box office without the development of original story and characters at the level of Zootopia.

Interview Questions for David By Liu Shuliang

Q1: Among your multiple social identities, you are most well-known to our Chinese people as the animation teacher. How many years have you been living in China? And during all these years, which Chinese universities have you been teaching at?

A: SHORT ANSWER: 10 years living in China from 2007, off and on. BFA, Fuzhou U Art College on Gulangyu Island, CUC, BIFT, Hangzhou Normal U, Qingdao U of Science and Technology, SWUN, Chengdu U. Single lectures at 10 additional Chinese universities.

I first came to China for four months in 1988 to help with the first Shanghai International Animation Festival. I found time to begin a few animation workshops for Shanghai children with Xu Chang, A Da's son. Through the 90s, I would return to Shanghai every year or so to see my friends at the studio and to collaborate with Xu Chang on further children's workshops. Beginning around 2004, animation festivals began to pop up in China, and I would come as a Jury member or presenter. I happened to meet Duan Jia, BFA professor and independent animator, and in 2007, on leave from my position at Dartmouth College, I joined Duan Jia at BFA as Guest Professor for a term. While there, I had the chance to lecture at other universities, and when I "semi-retired" from Dartmouth in 2009, I took a position as Guest Professor at Fuzhou University's Art College on Gulangyu Island. I stayed long enough to find out that the college was to move off the island to a dusty area of Xiamen, so I phoned my old friend, Lu Shengyang at CUC to ask if I might take a position there, and soon I was teaching at CUC with a separate class at BIFT. In 2011, an old friend from the Shanghai Animation Studio, Wang Gang, was just beginning an animation program at Hangzhou Normal University and wanted help, so I arranged to fly back and forth each week for the next year between Beijing and Hangzhou, spending a few days each week teaching at each school. In 2013, another old friend, WangShuiBo, introduced me to the incoming Dean of Animation at Qingdao University of Science and Technology (QUST). As the program was just starting up, they wanted me to create a new studio for drawing animation. So I finished my work in Hangzhou and, while still continuing to teach a course or two at CUC, took a full-time position at Qingdao for a year. In 2015, a colleague at SWUN (Southwest University of the Nationalities) invited me to teach a class there in the fall for two months, and I continued each fall until this year, when I would split each week between classes at SWUN and at Chengdu University, where my former CUC student, Luo Shiyu, is teaching. While moving from school to school, my heart was always at CUC, and I found time each year to teach a post-grad course there in the spring.

Q2: You've been teaching at Dartmouth College for more two decades now. In terms of skills and capabilities, what do you think of the differences between your American and Chinese students? And what about the differences between students from each Chinese university? For each and individual school, will you adjust your teaching syllabus and methods accordingly?

A2: Dartmouth is a "liberal arts" college, so my classes there, whether in creating animation or in researching animation and socio-political history, are full of discussion and argument back and forth, between teacher and students, and students with students. So originality in speaking up in class and in writing papers, is most important. Arguing with the teacher is clearly not acceptable in China, despite my wishes, and paper-writing in China is more an exercise in paraphrasing other writers than in original thinking. On the other hand, because so much time in American colleges is spent on sports and beer parties, it is very difficult to get American students to work continuously on their animation throughout the week. Animation students in ALL Chinese schools where I've taught have the capacity to work intensely and continuously, foregoing many youthful pleasures. So, when I've returned to teach a Dartmouth course each year, I now teach not animation production but Asian Animation History, with a lot of paper-writing and class participation (argumentation) which they do well. When I teach in China, I take the welcome opportunity to teach animation, which Chinese students do exceptionally well.

Q3: People in Chinese animation industry respectfully address you as the "Bethune in Animation". What do you think of this title?

A3: I am aware of what Bethune meant to the Chinese people, because of Chairman Mao's speech upon Bethune's death, about Bethune's selfless care for the Chinese soldiers. So I am of course moved by this title. But I love working with Chinese students and feel that I gain more from them than they might ever gain from me.

*Q4: You've been devoted most of your career into abstract animation and on some level we can say that your work could represent the style and features of the **abstract animation** in your time. How do you think and what you can say about **abstract animation**?*

A4: Because I came to animation as a painter/sculptor, my artistic concerns had to do not with stories but with the movement and transformation of line, shape, and color. My work is not always abstract, however. Because I've lived for 40 years in the Vermont mountains, nature has always played an important part of my films, so I've tried to express not only the dynamics of nature such as growth and transformation, but also the colors and shapes of mountains, trees, flowers, and the female form. Here is my recent film, SHAN, a meditation, in the blue-green mountains, on age and timelessness.

Q5: In 2011, when I was a first-year post-graduate, I was lucky enough to be at your animation class. What you've taught us about the abstract animation deeply impressed and influenced me on my own animation creation during my post-graduate years. Non-narrative animation is normally considered to be marginalized and non-mainstream. But based on my observation, at least in your post-graduate classes, you've focused most of your teaching on training students how to tell a good story, especially the stories that have the potential to be commercially successful. Why would you do that?

A5: As a teacher, I feel it my responsibility to prepare students for society after graduation. My own life as an artist has been a hard struggle in many ways, but I'm grateful to have found friends and colleagues throughout the world. And to support my art financially I have enjoyed teaching at Dartmouth and throughout the world. Non-narrative animation has found a modest place for itself in the west, but I don't see this as likely to occur in China for a long time, if at all. So although I don't discourage Chinese students from such work, I also don't encourage it. I feel it much more of value for me to encourage creativity and originality in the narrative genre of animation that is, in fact, the reality in China today. Even when I taught animation at Dartmouth, I never encouraged abstract, experimental or non-narrative work, but prepared my students to bring their original, well-structured stories and characters to their animation and to society. And the result there has been positive. No abstract animators came out of my classes, but some very creative narrative directors did, such as Phil Lord and Chris Miller, who wrote and directed "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs", "21 Jump Street" and "The Lego Film". I am going even further now, teaching my Chinese students how to think creatively in making animated advertisements.

Q6: I've heard that you financially supported some Chinese animation students to help them release the daily-life pressure and better concentrate on their work. Is that true? But some of your friends didn't quite understand why you did this. They thought it's those students' job and professional responsibility to get their work done. So what are the reasons that you wanted to do that?

A6: I fully agree that it is the students' professional responsibility to get their work done, and in my classes, when the students have enough command of English, I give special workshops in salesmanship—how they should prepare and give arguments for why a studio, an art gallery or an acquisitions chief of a TV station should take and/or support their work. The few times I have, myself, supported a student's work were when: 1) I felt that the previous work created was excellent and more appropriate for animation festivals and audiences in the west, than in China. 2) When the proposed project was highly ambitious and time-consuming 3) When I felt that even the best salesmanship would be ineffective in the student's gaining support in China. 4) When the student's school actually paid me a salary that I could use as a production grant.

Graduating students have just spent their 4th year at school creating their graduation film, usually a labor of love, and this has often filled their minds with even better work they might next pursue. I also know that the year after graduation is difficult for animators at their first studio jobs, that they usually get back to their apartments late in the evening, exhausted, with no energy or passion to work on their personal animation. It would be great if schools or the Ministry or successful business leaders could offer grants for the most serious of these students to work on a film the year after graduation. Until this occurs, however, I do the best I can to workshop salesmanship, teach creative advertisements, and whenever I can afford it, give a promising graduate a small grant.

Q7: In 2015, you posted a letter in public for Ma Yun on WeiBo. In that letter, you expressed your hope and expectation that as the leader and pioneer of Chinese business industry, Mr. Ma should support and invest in Chinese independent animators. That letter can be said to have raised a lot of heated discussion among animation industry and academia. Shortly after the letter was posted, A Li Baba contacted you and invited you for further discussion, and I came along. But, to be honest, it turns out that A Li Baba didn't push and promote this project as we expected. What do you want to say about this?

A7: It was my duty to try to persuade Alibaba-Film to support independent animation. We didn't have the chance to meet Mr. Ma directly, but I did feel that the young woman you and I met there, who was in fact a CUC graduate, was supportive initially. Shuliang, I brought you along because I was about to return to the U.S. the next week, and I had hoped that you would provide the continuity with the company. So I think that you would be the best one to answer what in fact had happened with the follow-up. I still have hope for business leaders like Mr. Ma.

Q8: Recently (November, 2017), you've posted several first-year students' work from Southwest Minzu University and praised their superior creativity. I know you saw my post on Anim-babblers (不知道这是不是动画学术趴的英文...) of several first-year students' class assignments from Da Yong's class. May I dare to say that your post can be considered as the feedback and is supplementary to my earlier post? As a teacher how should we teach and encourage our students to keep their creativity while learning all the techniques? (Is it possible that you could authorize me to post all those students' works on WeChat, preferably the video file?)

A9: Yes, Shuliang, I thought that you provided an important service in posting the work from Dayong's FLASH class and that this could and should begin posts from

schools throughout China, especially the work of first-year students of animation. Although the work of my first-year students in Chengdu was of course not yet technically proficient, I felt that ALL the 21 students had created highly original committed work, both the animation and the sound tracks. I thought that it should be seen and encouraged, especially as it came from a small animation department far from Beijing and its prestigious schools. After I posted the work on my weibo, Dayong and I talked about how we could somehow find ways to maintain the students' creativity through the four years of technical education. I think this should be an entirely separate and most important discussion, open to input from teachers and students throughout China.

Q8: How do you think of the past and present of Chinese animation? What are your hopes and expectations for its future?

A8: I've written and lectured widely on the work done at the Shanghai Animation Studio and my great love and respect for it and for the artists who worked there. As to the present, I am amazed at the effects and great beauty of the backgrounds in recent Chinese animated features. In just a few short years, Chinese studios have brought up the level of their 3D work to that of the major American and French studios, and they should be congratulated. The next aspects to conquer must be the further development of ORIGINAL story and characters. Only then, can Chinese animation successfully break into the world market.

President Xi

President Xi has courageously and wisely taken action against the kind of wasteful *guangxi* with which political and business leaders buy each other expensive gifts as a substitute for hard cash given under the table. Americans are not immune to this as is seen by the U.S. government's criticism of leaders of both Disney and Dreamworks for distributing bribes to further their business interests. As a vegan for over 40 years, I've never been a fan of the large 15-course banquets, and I'm perfectly happy with the cheap white wine sold in bottles with red labels and have no need for high-grade *MouTai*. So President, Xi, Right On! I hope that the leaders of other nations can be inspired by your example.

Aside from the waste connected with these bribes is the oligarchical abuse of wealth used for the acceptance of inferior products and work. Suppose, for example, a hefty bribe given to a government food inspector to look the other way results in the poisoning of a multitude of people. Or a bribe given to officials in the railway administration results in a serious train accident. On a more pedestrian level, poor exam scores may always be supplemented with well-paced "donations" to academic leaders to cause the admission of students who would otherwise be inappropriate for that institution. Having taught at one of America's "Ivy League" colleges for the last 20 years, I am quite experienced with the admission of "legacies" (children of those who have previously graduated from the college who often do nothing more than to take up the space that might have gone to a much more deserving student. This is not to mention all the football and basketball players admitted for their athletic skills more than for their academic achievements. Then, if all else fails, the donation of part of a university library is always considered equivalent in the U.S. to those giant banquets with shark fin soup in China.

From time to time in my blog, I will take the liberty of pointing out some of the more subtle abuses of wealth. This week, I'll point the finger at the famous art museum at CAFA. Two weeks before the opening of the final graduation exhibition of the post-graduate Design students, those who are to screen their final animations have been told that the students, themselves, must absorb the costs of 20 days rental of large rear-screen monitors. Obviously these costs are prohibitive for many students and their families, and with only two weeks to go, the chances of their raising these funds while simultaneously completing their final graduation projects means that only those students coming from wealthy families will be able to install an exhibition appropriate to the great amount of creative work they have done. Such a consequence of the late notice might never have occurred to the leaders of the Museum. And isn't that the real issue, namely that China's cultural leaders have become so singularly concerned with the prestige and growth of their institutions that they no longer are sensitive to the needs of those with future artistic value who may not yet possess the financial strength with which fully to enter the exhibition arena? Well folks, when I attend this exhibition, I may turn away from the large expensive high-lumen screens in favor of the small VCRs and monitors. I suspect that that's where I'll find the greatest results of committed creative work.

In Memory of Vice-Premier Chen Yi

In 1960, Vice-Premier Chen Yi, visiting an exhibition dedicated to film animation, indicated his desire that the work of the well-known contemporary painter Qi Baishi could one day be animated. It has always been impressive to me that such a high-level political figure and former army general would have had the highly original idea of animating delicate brush strokes. Inspired by Chen Yi's idea, the Shanghai Studio chief, Te Wei, then told his animators to begin experimenting with animating Qi's work. It had to be done in such a way as to avoid the vibration caused by the frame-by-frame movement of the brush strokes with their varying ink densities and widths. It took a number of months before only A Da and his photographer came up with a potential solution. This solution remained a guarded studio secret for nearly 50 years and resulted in three of the studio's most internationally respected works for which Te Wei has been given most credit: "Where's Mama" (1960), "Buffalo Boy and the Flute" (1963), and "Feeling from Mountain and Water" (1988). At this point in time, long after Te Wei and his colleagues have been deservedly praised for this great work, I wanted to show my gratitude and admiration for Chen Yi and hope that he may be remembered as much for his service to Chinese animation as for his dedicated work leading the Foreign Ministry. In this week of the American elections and the Chinese Party Congress, now that animation has become such a great commercial success, wouldn't it be wonderful if more political leaders like Chen Yi around the world were to take such a similar supportive interest in the ART of animation ?

te Wei

Te wei fut en 1957 un des deux fondateurs du Studio d'Animation de Shanghai qu'il dirigea jusqu'en 1985. Après des études de peinture classique occidentale et chinoise, il est devenu un des plus grands réalisateurs de Chine. C'est à lui que l'on doit l'utilisation de cellulose avec les motifs et les histoires traditionnelles chinoises comme dans *Le Général Vaniteux*, ainsi que l'application à l'animation de la technique rigoureuse du lavis. C'est cette dernière technique que nous mettons à l'honneur dans cette rétrospective.

La peinture au pinceau traditionnelle a pour but de retranscrire l'esprit et de l'artiste et de ce qui est peint grâce à une modulation de la vitesse et de la pression avec laquelle les doigts manipulent le pinceau. Bien que le spectateur de l'œuvre terminée ne puisse attester du mouvement de la main qui a réalisé la peinture, il est possible d'expérimenter ce mouvement de manière cinématique en regardant attentivement la trace laissée par l'encre. Pour Te Wei l'animation représentait une fabuleuse occasion de ne pas seulement montrer ces touches achevées, mais aussi une petite partie du geste même qui les a engendrées. Utiliser ces images que l'on retrouve abondamment dans les peintures de paysages traditionnels et centrer ses récits sur les relations délicates entre l'homme et la nature.

Te Wei a élaboré un genre merveilleux de peinture progressiste à laquelle il a intégré ses histoires. Ses films se déroulent au rythme d'un paysage spirale que l'on déviderait lentement. Avec de la patience, on peut être transporté en d'autres lieux et d'autres temps, et on peut ressentir la Nature et l'Homme au travers du regard d'un humain doté d'une perception intense des choses.

Achévé en 1960 le premier film réalisé à l'aide de peinture au pinceau, *Où est Maman* est un fidèle hommage à l'œuvre du maître de la peinture, Qi Baishi. Il raconte la vie dans une mare où des perles noires reluisantes se transforment en têtards et s'éloignent gracieusement à la recherche de leur "mama", qu'ils ne reconnaissent pas tout de suite. La peinture au pinceau capture tout de suite alors l'expression de la joie pure du mouvement et a encouragé Te Wei et son collaborateur, Quan Jiajun, à produire leur second film d'animation en 1963, *Le Gardien de buffle et la Flûte*. Ce film était cette fois un hommage à Li Keran, ce peintre contemporain connu pour ces tableaux représentant la campagne au sud de la rivière Yangzi. La relation sensible entre le buffle d'eau et le garçon a

Te wei was one of the two founders of the Shanghai Animation Studio in 1957 and remained the Director of the studio until 1995. He was trained in both Western and Chinese classical painting techniques and became one of the greatest animation directors in China, responsible not only for the use of cel animation with traditional Chinese stories and motifs, as in *The Conceited General*, but also for the unique adaptation of the very rigorous discipline of brush-painting (ink and wash) to animation. It is the latter technique that we honor in this retrospective.

Traditional brush-painting aims to express the spirit of both the artist and what is being depicted, by the modulation of speed and pressure with which the fingers move the brush. Although the viewer of the finished painting is not witness to the movement kinesthetically

by looking carefully at the strokes of ink that it has left. Animation presented Te Wei with an exciting opportunity to show not just the completed strokes, but also a bit of the actual movement that produced those strokes. Using the images that abound in traditional landscape painting and focusing his narratives upon the delicate relationship between man and nature, Te Wei has created a wonderful genre of landscape painting-in-process within which he has integrated his stories. The pacing of these films is similar to that of the movement of a landscape scroll that one slowly

unravels. With patience, we can be transported to a different land at another time, and we can feel Nature and man through the eyes of an acutely perceptive human being.

The first brush-painting film, *Where is Mama*, was completed in 1960 and was a faithful homage to the work of the old painting master, Qi Baishi. It told the story of life in a pond where shiny black pearls transform into tadpoles that move gracefully off in search of their "mama", encountering a series of mistaken identities. The paint brush captured perfectly the sense of the pure joy of movement and encouraged Te Wei and his collaborator, Qian Jiajun to produce their second brush-painting animation in 1963, *Buffalo boy and the flute*. The film was this time an homage to Li Keran, the contemporary painter famous for his paintings of the countryside south of the Yangzi River. The sensitive relationship of a water buffalo with the boy permitted the artists an opportunity of exploring fully the potential of the brush to express Nature in wonderful new ways. As the massive



permis aux artistes une totale exploration de la technique du pinceau afin d'exprimer la Nature de diverses manières fabuleuses. Alors que le corps encre, massif, du buffle d'eau qui se dissout dans le vide, on perçoit tout à coup le blanc devenant rivière, et nos yeux commencent à s'ouvrir à une nouvelle étendue de perceptions spatiales et de qualités tactiles et subtiles des coups de pinceau monochromatiques.

La Révolution Culturelle a stoppé l'activité de l'Animation Studio de Shanghai en 1965, et Te Wei fut envoyé dans un camp de travail à la campagne. Au début des années 70 il revint pour reprendre sa place de directeur du studio et n'eut pas l'occasion de réaliser de nouveau film de peinture au pinceau avant 1983, quand -avec l'aide de Yan Sanchun et MaKeKuan- il entreprit de travailler minutieusement sur *Sentiment de la Montagne et de l'Eau*. Ce film se compose de peintures représentant des paysages de la période de Ching.

La tendre histoire de la relation entre un maître et son élève était parfaitement intégrée à l'harmonie et à la majesté de la Nature qui les entouraient, a servi de métaphore à Te Wei pour passer les rênes du studio à Dingxian, son successeur.

avec la collaboration de l'ASIFA

inked body of the water buffalo dissolves into emptiness, we suddenly perceive that white expanse as the river, and our eyes begin to open to an entirely new range of spatial perception and the subtle tactile qualities of monochromatic brush strokes.

The Cultural Revolution stopped work in the Shanghai Animation Studio in 1965, and Te Wei was sent to labor in the countryside. He was brought back in the early seventies to resume his work as Director of the Studio and did not have a chance to direct another brush-painting films until 1983, when with the help of Yan Sanchun and MaKeXuan, he began five years of painstaking work on *Feeling from mountain and water*, based upon the landscape paintings of the Ching period. The tender story of the bond between a master and his protege was perfectly integrated with the majesty and harmony of the Nature surrounding them and served as a metaphor for Te Wei's own passing of the reins of the studio to his successor, Yan Dingxian.

David Ehrlich 1995
in collaboration with ASIFA

johan h^hagelbäck

Le Festival d'Annecy a la réputation de présenter des films d'auteurs qui ont choisi l'animation comme forme personnelle d'expression.

Johan Hagelbäck en est un excellent exemple. Il est très connu dans le milieu cinématographique scandinave pour son humour, unique et bizarre.

Ses idées, son style de dessin, d'animation, et ses bandes sonores rendent ses films surprenants ! toujours surprenants !

Avec la collaboration de l'Institut du Film Suédois et de Inni Karine Melbye (ASIFA Nordique).

The Annecy Festival has the reputation of presenting filmmakers using animation as a personal form of expression.

Johan Hägelback's work is an excellent example of this.

He is well known in the nordic (scandinavian) film-milieu for his unique and bizarre humour. His ideas, his style of drawing, animation and sound - make his films surprising! - always surprising!

In collaboration with the Swedish Film Institute and Inni Karine Melbye (Nordic ASIFA).

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Good-bye, My Beloved China

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It's been over a year since I last posted something on my blog. Why now? Because after six years in China, teaching in Gulangyu, Beijing, Hangzhou, and Qingdao, I am at last heading back to Vermont in September. I just bought a little house in the woods and will live there, continue to make my animations and sometimes drive to Dartmouth College, where I taught for 20 years, and teach a class again. I will miss China and am sad to leave the friends I've made here, but I know that we will always keep in contact through the web, and I am so much richer a person for this experience. As I think through everything I've seen, heard, and lived through in China, many things come to mind, and I wanted to share them with my readers for a few postings as I leave.

I first came to China in 1988, for the Selection Committee of the first Shanghai Animation Festival. The festival was run by the Shanghai Animation Studio, and the leaders were generous enough to permit me to live and work in the studio for the three months between the Selection and the festival itself. This gave me the opportunity to ride all over Shanghai on an old bike, meet Chinese people in a multitude of settings, and begin to write about my observations in articles for the Shinmin News. Because I really was quite enamored with the Chinese people, and expressed this admiration openly in my writings, I was rarely at risk of being edited. There was one exception which I will mention here. Buses 27 years ago in Shanghai were sometimes a bit unreliable, and once a bus I was in broke down. We all filed out of the bus and then, to my absolute amazement, a large group of the riders began to push the bus to the side of the road where it would not be in the way of traffic. I joined in too, which made the people laugh. Then I stopped to take a photo of the event. As soon as I got back to the Studio, I quickly typed up my next news article to accompany the photo. My point was the good humor and great sense of solidarity and mutual sense of responsibility of the Chinese people, all of which was a great source of inspiration to me.

As I always did, I gave my article to the Studio translator for the Chinese version. I remember she looked at me in a strange way as she read my English, then went in to the leader to tell him what I had written. She came back after a few minutes to say that probably the paper would not use my piece because it made the public transportation system look bad. Of course I protested that I had a completely different point- about the goodness of the Chinese people and a Chinese society that would encourage such nobility, but I was "overruled" and the article was never published. Now, looking back those 27 years, I am nostalgic that although today's buses in China, like its subways and cars, are now technically equal or even superior to those made in the west, I could never imagine Chinese people again taking the time to file out of a broken down bus to work together in pushing it out of the way of traffic. Probably, like New Yorkers, they would express their irritation and push each other out of the way as they hurried to work.

And this is the change I have seen in China since I first came in '88. The animation done at the Shanghai Animation Studio was not technically impressive, but for me, it was artistically and humanly superior to what was being done in the west. Now, like China's buses and subways, China's animation is technically near perfect, but lacks that initial creativity and deep human impulse. China's bicycles and motorbikes are second to none in the world, but it is ridiculous to me that so many riders, to go faster and avoid street traffic, think nothing of riding on sidewalks, making those who are walking have to step quickly out of the way. Beijing's subway system is the envy of much of the world, but of what use are the arrows positioned for people to form queues, when aggressive folks who don't feel like queuing just push themselves ahead of the lines. What I am getting at is that in the rush to modernize, there is something deeply human that has sometimes fallen away, and I am nostalgic, rightly or wrongly, for what moved me so deeply 27 years ago.

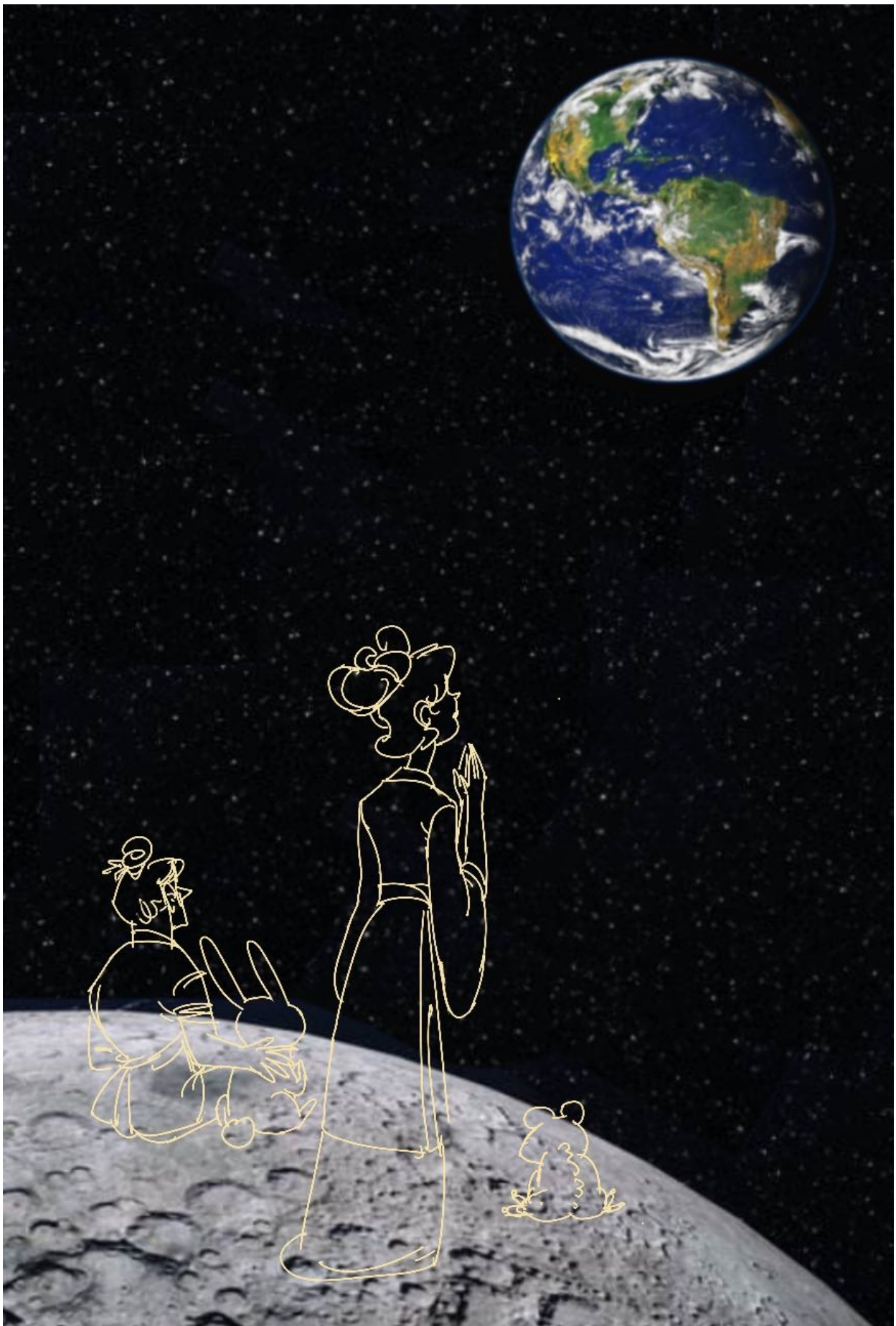
But then I see it again, in watching seniors, those older men and women (actually my age now who wake early to dance together, kick a featherball around, and exercise to music in the parks. In this sense, China has always been way ahead of the west, where seniors sit around a TV most of the day, staring at it but not watching it, lonely and alone even with others sitting next to them, in apartments and nursing homes. Yes, I know that treating China's senior citizens with kindness and understanding is one of President Xi's key points in his Chinese Dream, but I also know that this is part of China's cultural traditions transcending politics. And I never cease to be moved by this.

(Note: I just couldn't stay away for long. I returned to China again in the fall to teach in Chengdu and Beijing.)

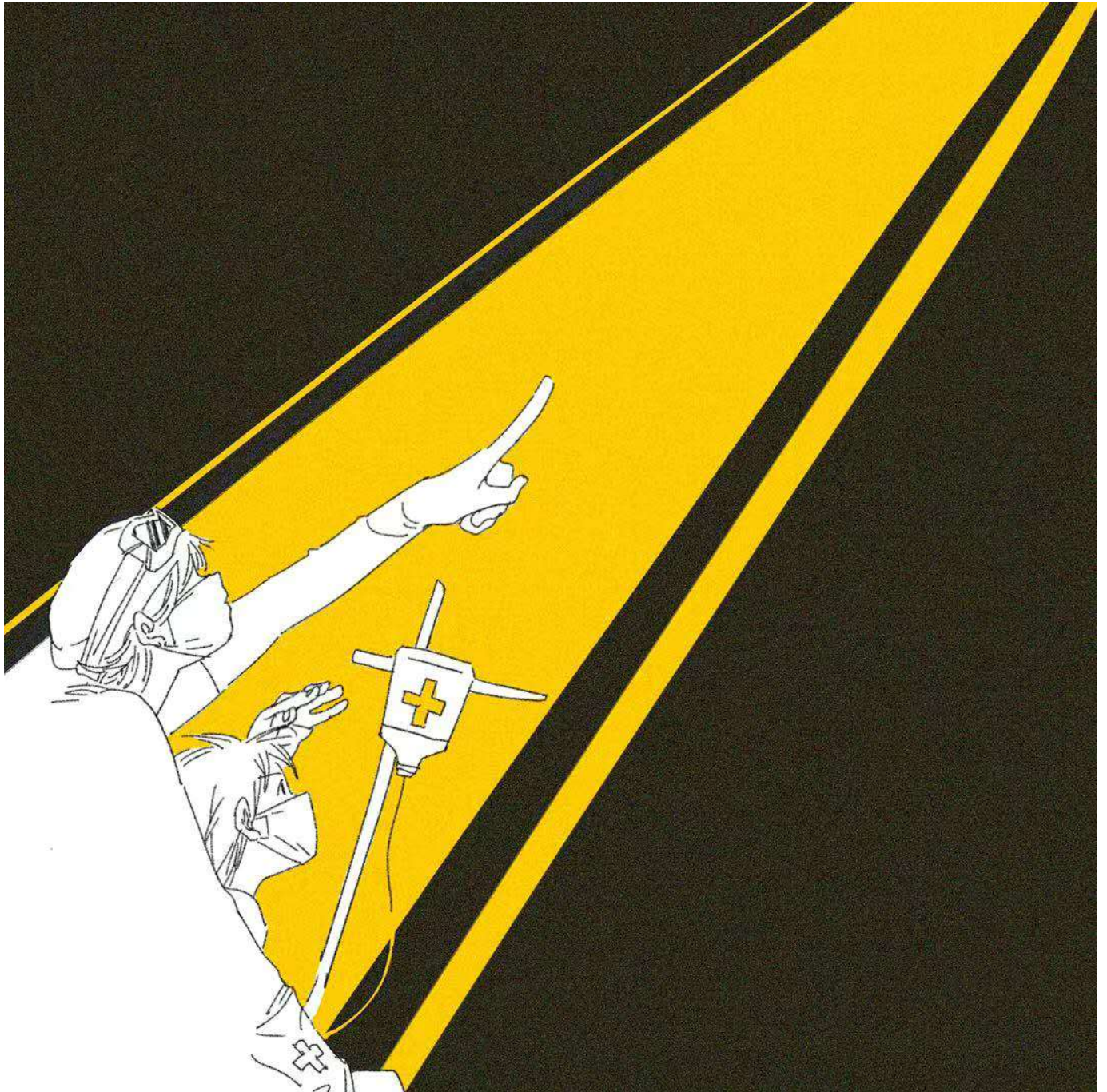
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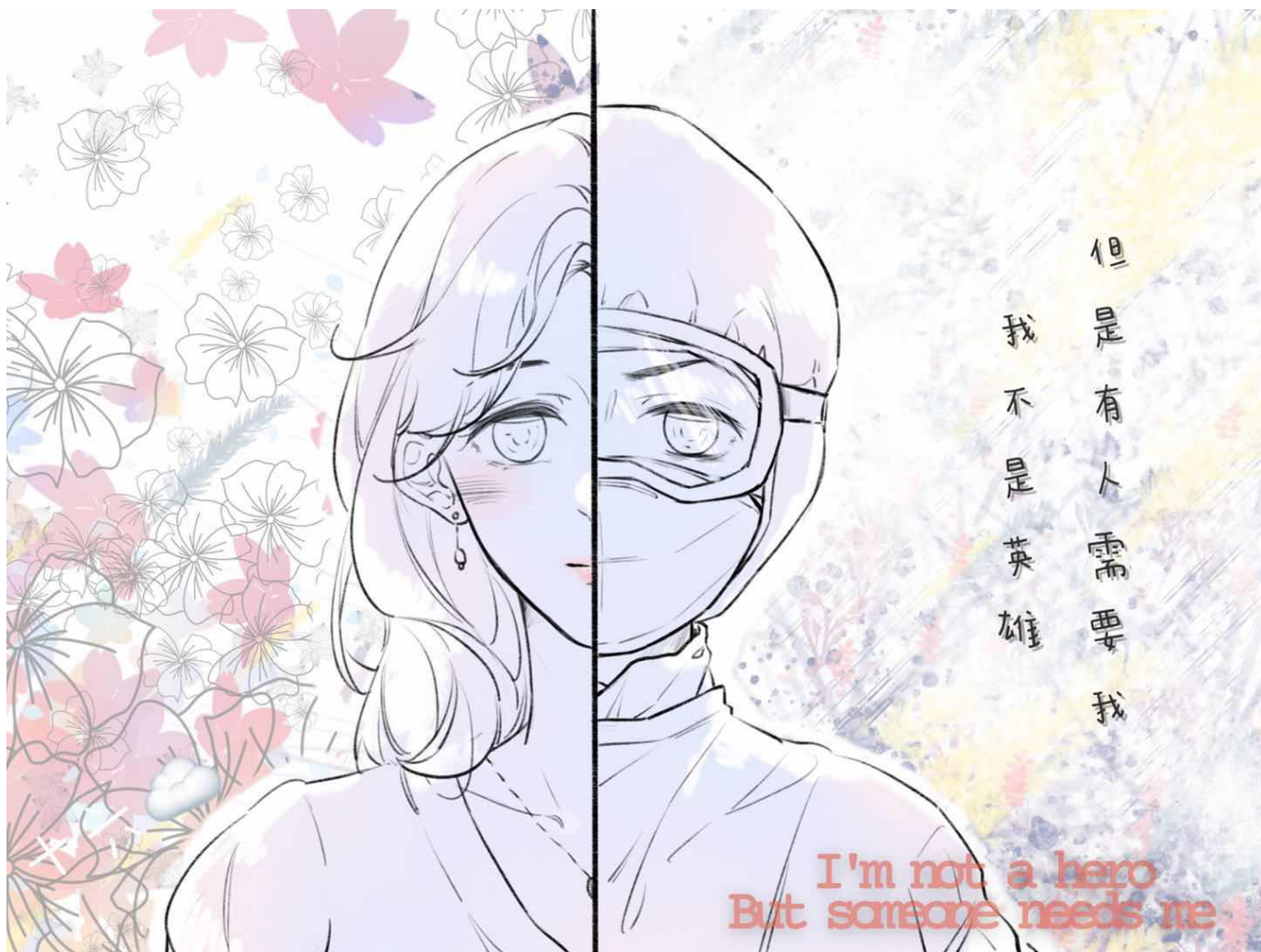


出门回家先洗手



口罩怎么选?





但是有人需要我
我不是英雄

I'm not a hero
But someone needs me

保护“我们”

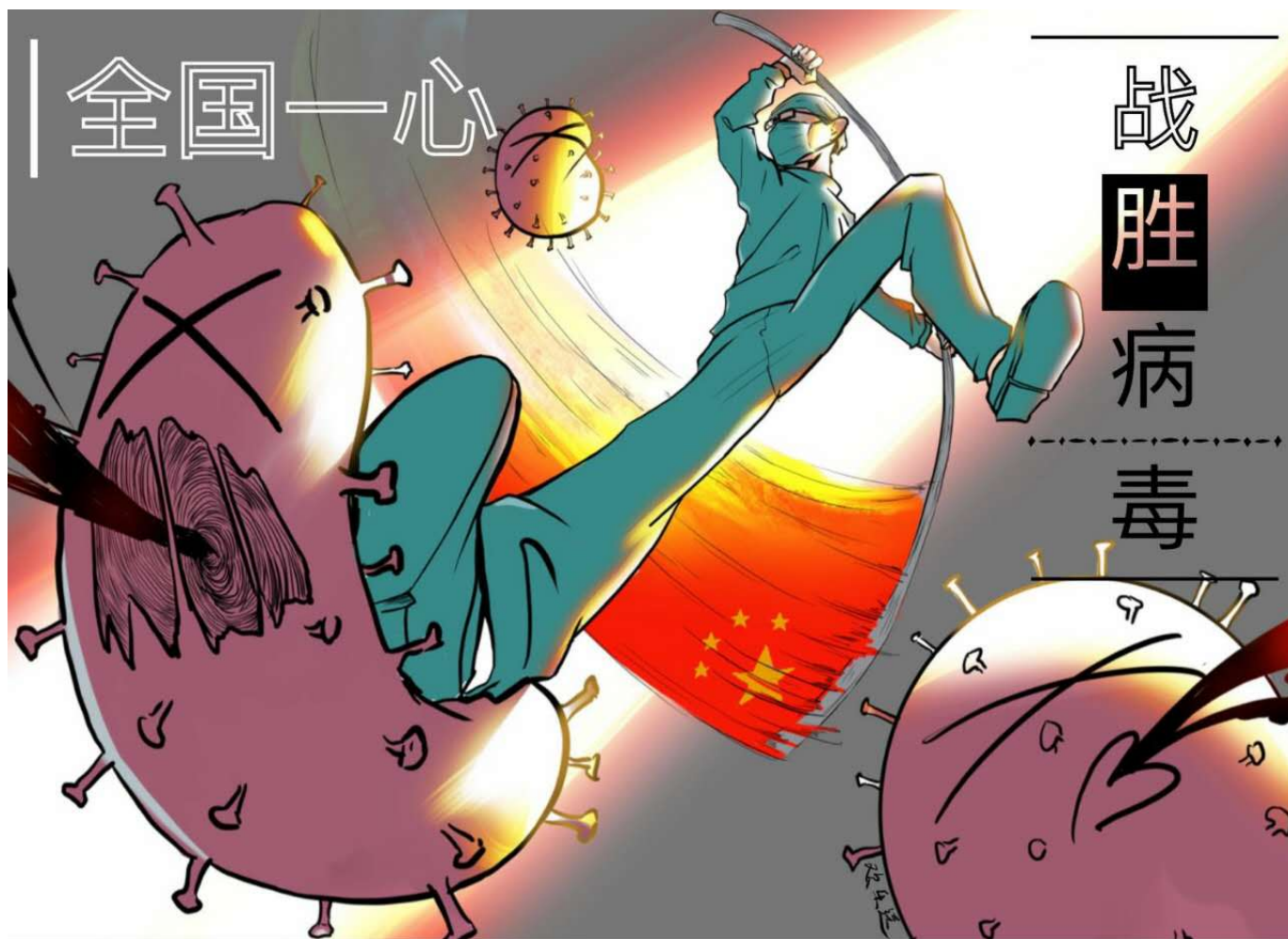
我叫蝙蝠，我不叫病毒

请
保护
好
自
己



全国一心

战胜病毒







没想到有一天
在家躺着睡觉
也是为国家做贡献

上海发现45起聚集性疫情
黑龙江聚集性疫情共48起
发病一起
北京发现41起聚集性病例
山东发现聚集性案例50起
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关于新冠肺炎的30个真相
一张图看懂新冠肺炎
钟医生称疫情拐点还要几天
保护野生动物...
疫情结束后你最想见的人
是谁

少出门 少聚会

今天的不聚 
是为了他日更好的相聚