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## The Storm Society and the Chinese Western-Style Painting Movement

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# The Storm Society and the Chinese Western-Style Painting Movement

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## Abstract

The western-style oil painting movement is one of the most distinctive painting movements in early twentieth-century Chinese art history. This paper focuses on the Storm Society, a short-lived artists collective based in 1930s Shanghai who manifested to change the dying Chinese painting scene. The paper traced the less obvious history of Storm Society focusing attention as much on historical circumstances, as on primary writings including the Storm Society Manifesto, founder Pang Xunqing, and Ni Yide's memoir. Supported by the primary text this paper explores the limits of painting produced by the Storm Society. The research poses why art historian scholarships had overlooked the Storm Society because it is bearing the "Western" label and failed the interest of Western audiences and scholarships. By analyzing The Storm Society as a phenomenon of its time, the paper includes a wide range of issues such as Shanghai's semi-colonialism influences on its collective national identity and the controversy of the "Western-style" oil painting movement in modern Chinese art history. By way of conclusion, the paper offer observation the influence and issues of the Storm Society reflected the nationalistic sentiment in china The Storm Society challenges existing (especially Western) scholarship's ideology on what constitutes "Western" and "Nationalistic sentiment" in Chinese art, this will change the current art historical discourse of the Western-Style painting movement in twentieth-century China.

## INTRODUCTION

In the midst of 1932, a group of artists founded 决澜社 (The Storm Society) with loud and ambitious aims of starting a storm that would forever change the Chinese art scene. The Storm Society had been a hidden landmark in the development of Chinese painting in the 20th century and the modern Chinese history of art.<sup>1</sup> They became the first structured artist and painter's collective to boast a manifesto. Today, the Storm Society has become one of the topical subjects with which modern art historical discourse cannot dispense.

The painter's collective was founded in Shanghai, the center of modernization and westernization in China during the early 20th Century. Shanghai had a social and cultural environment that differed from the rest of China during the period. The social climate and cultural environment directly influenced The Storm Society from its formation to its doom. As overwhelming changes were more drastic in Shanghai than anywhere else in China, the city had collectively experienced a certain identity crisis that determined the city's cultural landscape. The artists and intellectuals in Shanghai were actively engaged in cultural and political movements. Much like the city itself, the artists gathered in Shanghai thrived in modernization and drove the revolutions aiming to reform the Chinese culture. This, however, also results in the artists and the city struggling to connect to a particular national identity that they were seeking. The narrative of the Storm Society in art historical discourses is often mentioned and

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<sup>1</sup> Here I loosely indicate Modern China from the Siege of the International Legations in 1900 to the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

revolves around the life of founder Pang Xunqin (庞薰琹,1905-1986), or at times, founder Ni Yide (倪貽德 1901-1970). At the beginning of 1930, Pang Xunqin returned from Paris and arrived in Shanghai with the hope of developing “national characteristic” (minzuxing 民族性) and “decorative characteristic”(zhuangshixing 装饰性) in his works.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 1932, Pang and fellow artist Ni Yide had founded the Storm Society at the same location and hosted its first exhibition with numbers of equally passionate and ambitious artists (figure 1). The artist and painter’s collective would later be seen as the one that broke the dead air of the Chinese painting scene.<sup>3</sup>

However, the Storm Society was not remembered for its glory; the painter’s collective was rather taken as a prime example of Western influences on Chinese modernity and painting history. In fact, there is perhaps little-to-no glory about the society in the eyes of its founder, Pang Xunqin. After merely four years, the Storm Society had dismantled, and Pang wrote poetically,

- *It (the Storm Society) was like throwing one piece of stone after another into the pond. Although a slight falling sound and some small splashes on the water surface could be heard at that time, the stone quickly sank into the pond’s mud. The water has returned to its original state. What more could have I done?*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Xunqin Pang, *This Is How It Happened (Jishi zheyang zouhuo laide)* (Beijing: Life, Reading and New Knowledge Sanlian Bookstore, 2005), 118.

<sup>3</sup>Chao Li 超李, *Kuang Biao Ji Qin: JueLanShe Ji Xiandai Zhuyi Yishu Xianshen 狂飙激情: 决澜社及现代主义艺术先声*, (China: Shanghai Jingxiu wenzhang chubanshe 上海锦绣文章出版社), 2008, 3.

<sup>4</sup> All translations from the Chinese sources are the author’s translation unless otherwise noticed. The original text of the sources is provided in parts where readers are encouraged to develop their interpretation of the text.

<sup>5</sup> Pang, *This Is How It happened*, 140

Current scholarly discourse on The Storm Society has been focused on a one-dimensional and exhausted approach that emphasizes its Western influences. This persistent focus neglects the potential to convey a more in-depth understanding of both the Storm Society and the entirety of the Chinese Western-style painting movement.

This paper will approach the Storm Society in search of what I would call nationalistic sentiment that is geographically specific to its founding city of Shanghai. Shanghai nationalistic sentiment which differs from an expected Chinese national identity is the embodiment of one's urge to seek national characteristics and reclaim the sense of national. Nationalistic Sentiment puts national interest as a priority and less in consideration for the state and political parties, driven by a heroic need to save the nation (Jiu Guo). Especially for the intellectuals and artists, they felt an urgency to reclaim and strengthen national culture in order to recover from the humiliation. It is geographically specific to Modern Shanghai where semi colonialism became part of the city's culture and the city had been showing a strong sentiment to reconnect with its Chinese nationality. The term 民族 (MinZu) was the most popular translation for nation from late imperial China to the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> The concept of nationalistic sentiment, is an ideology that extracted from Chinese Nationalism. This concept focuses on the need to regain the nation's power from shame and humiliation. Nationalistic sentiment emphasizes in search of nationalistic characters (MinZu Xing, 民族性) which was the main focus of founder Pang Xunqin. In this paper, I will be placing emphasis on Pang Xunqin's (

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<sup>6</sup> Marc A. Matten, ""CHINA IS THE CHINA OF THE CHINESE": THE CONCEPT OF NATION AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL THINKING IN MODERN CHINA." ( *Oriens Extremus* 51 (2012): 63-106.) Accessed May 2, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24047787>, 74.

《就是这样走过来的》 [This Is How It Happened ], 2005) and Ni Yide's ( 《艺苑交游记》 [YiYuan Travel Tales], 2012) memoirs and more broadly their biographical experiences as central to the narrative of the Storm Society, itself. I argue that, through examining the primary sources by Pang and Ni, the Storm Society is more than the “representative painting collective influenced by the West.”<sup>7</sup> Pang and Ni were the two most studied and powerful members, resulting in the two controlling the historical narrative.<sup>8</sup> Reading and laying emphasis on their primary sources is not to construct a narrative solely based on their perspective of the story of the Storm Society, but rather to study and analyze the *way* they are narrating the story. Through linking sources that have not been discussed or translated by current scholarship, and constructing narratives based on the primary sources through the lens of *nationalistic sentiment*, I wish to guide the reader to see the undiscovered potential of researching the Storm Society.

## CHAPTER I. National essence in Western style Painting movement

During 1900-30s, the artists of The Storm Society witnessed a promising future for China regaining its power burst into bubbles at its beginning. Shanghai went from a glamorous modern city to the battleground of domestic political conflicts and foreign intrusion. This traumatic period reflected through the art scene as well. The painting scene of China was conflicted and divided between traditional painting(Guohua, ink paintings) and Western

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<sup>7</sup> Chao, Li. "A Study of “the Storm Society”: Chinese Modernism as a Resource of International Modern Art." In *Complementary Modernisms in China and the United States: Art as Life/Art as Idea*, edited by 张謇, 布鲁斯·罗伯逊, Jian Zhang, and Bruce Robertson, 259-82, 259.

<sup>8</sup> I acknowledge the other members and their contributions as well; however, my interest is in changing the perception of the Storm Society through placing emphasis on its *nationalistic sentiment*.

painting (Xiyanghua, Oil paintings). Both movements were desperate to locate a national identity through different mediums, and different beliefs in what the Chinese national identity should be. The painting scene of China during this time perfectly reflected the dilemma of the nation itself as China adopts foreign influences and drives to modernization from Qing's culturalism. The conflict between modernity and tradition causes confusion and crisis for China collectively.

In the case of The Storm Society, oil paint was the main material and interest for the artists. Therefore, it was considered as part of the Western-Style painting movement in China. As Historian Cary Y. Liu points out, the introduction of Western oil painting during the early twentieth century led to artists calling for "modernization and reform to relegate traditional Chinese ink painting to a legacy of the classical or dynastic past."<sup>9</sup> As Liu indicated this result for the art world is divided between two distinctive schools: one calling for "integration with Western techniques that would alter the style of Chinese painting into a Western style (xi yang hua, Western oil paintings); Others sought separation, drawing on China's past to refine a new modern national style (guo hua)."<sup>10</sup> Pang classified Guo hua and Xi yang hua as he described that within China tend to call ink painting as Guo Hua (Modern national painting), and calling oil painting as Xiyang hua (Western-style painting)."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, oil paintings during the time were inherently associated with "Western." Under such divided circumstances, the reformed and elevated status of the traditional ink painting amongst Chinese painting scene and the

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<sup>9</sup> Cary Y. Liu. "Encountering the Dilemma of Change in the Architectural and Urban History of Shanghai." (*Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 1 (2014)),132.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Pang, *This Is How It Happened*, 119.

promotion of nationalistic sentiment in Shanghai further reinforced the Anti-Western Sentiment. As art historian Jane Zheng indicated, the tension between East and West, national and foreign, led to a “modern response of a group of stylistically conservative guohua painters to a national crisis fermented by Western imperialism.”<sup>12</sup> This Anti-Western sentiment trend which divides between the two painting movements, creates an imbalance amongst the general public's interest and ultimately limits the way to obtain financial support for oil painters. Pang wrote that, “No one wants to buy the Western style oil painting...for people who studied oil painting during that time, other than going to school to teach painting, there was no other way to support living.”<sup>13</sup> This shows the condition of the oil painting scene. Considering Pang's comment, oil painting did not spark interest in the general public and the market, oil painters struggled to make their remark and claim their statues in the art scene.

With distastification of their current environment, The Storm Society urged to create a world with colors, lines and forms with stormy passion and with steely reason.<sup>14</sup> Upon the formation of the artists collective, Ni Yide drafted the Storm Society Manifesto on behalf of the collective. The manifesto, Sullivan described that it was a “cry of despair about the present state of art and hope for the future.”<sup>15</sup> The Storm Society failed to achieve their goal, they struggled to gain recognition from the public and the paintings were considered plain and

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<sup>12</sup>Jane Zheng, . "The Shanghai Fine Arts College: Art Education and Modern Women Artists in the 1920s and 1930s." (Modern Chinese Literature and Culture 19, no. 1 (2007): 192-235), 192.

<sup>13</sup> Pang, 119

<sup>14</sup> Translation from Chao, Li. "A Study of “the Storm Society”: Chinese Modernism as a Resource of International Modern Art." In *Complementary Modernisms in China and the United States: Art as Life/Art as Idea*, edited by 张馨, 布鲁斯·罗伯逊, Jian Zhang, and Bruce Robertson, 265.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 63.

disappointing by art historians such as Michale Sullivan.<sup>16</sup> They were not Chinese enough to interest Western audiences,<sup>17</sup> nor was it Western and revolutionary enough to interest Chinese audiences. While The Storm Society had-been mentioned in art historical discourse about Modern Chinese Art, the artistic collective was never elaborated further than “Western-style paintings.” This applies to majority of the Western Scholarship that had included The Storm Society such as *A Century in Crisis : Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China; Above Sea; Shanghai Morden; Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China...etc.* It appears that the collective had never shown enough historical significance to be elaborated on. Pang classified Guo hua and Xi yang hua as he described that within China tend to call ink painting as Guo Hua(Modern national painting), and calling Oil painting as Xiyang hua(Western Oil painting).<sup>18</sup> As the painting collective which mainly produced oil painting. As a result, The Storm Society had always been categorized as the Western-style Oil Painting artist collective ( 西洋画会, XiYangHuaHui). The Storm Society is an example of a common issue in Western painting styles in China.Many of the paintings and artists from this movement were only seen in their Westernness, the national features in the works or artist’s pursuit are often undermined. However, The Storm Society’s conceptual essence resonate more to nationalistic sentiment than Western influences.

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<sup>16</sup> Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 63.

<sup>17</sup> In a sense that the Storm Society paintings lack Chinese and national characteristics. This is also shown through how the later works by Pang had been received. Pang’s later paintings were much focusing on national identity and rural representation of China, which are more recognized from art history discipline, art market and the general public.

<sup>18</sup> Pang, *This Is How It Happened*, 119.

The Storm Society as a collective had manifested their intention through the writings of the founders. Drafted by Ni Yide, "The Storm Society Manifesto" was published in October of 1932, in *L'Art* 1, no. 5.<sup>19</sup> The manifesto defined the tone of the artist collectives, it reflected on the idealistic passionate intention of The Storm Society. Li Chao, Shanghai based art historian indicated in the article *A Study of "the Storm Society": Chinese Modernism as a Resource of International Modern Art*, that "The "Storm Manifesto became one of the most eye-catching contents at its opening ceremony of The Storm Society's first exhibition."<sup>20</sup> The text has been used as a primary reference for art historical scholarships on The Storm Society.

环绕我们的空气太沉寂了·平凡与庸俗包围了我们的四周·无数低能者的蠢动·无数浅薄者的叫嚣。

The air surrounding us are so deadly and dull, ordinary and vulgarity surround us, the incompetencies are wiggling, *countless shallow ones are clamoring*

我们往古创造的天才到哪里去了？我们往古光荣的历史到哪里去了！我们现在整个的艺术界只是衰颓和病弱。

Where have the geniuses we have created since the ancient past gone? Where has our honorary history from our ancient past gone! Our entire art scene currently is just a weakness and declines.

我们承认绘画决不是自然的模仿·也不是死板形骸的反复·我们要用生命来赤裸裸的表现我们泼辣的精神

We admit that painting and drawing are not natural imitations, nor is it a repetitive ridge body, we are using life to express our spicy raw spirit.

我们再不能安于这样妥协的环境中。

We can no longer comfortably settle in a compromised environment.

我们再也不能任其奄奄一息以待毙。

We can no longer wait for it to die.

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<sup>19</sup>The Storm Society Manifesto included in Ni Yide's memoir *Yide Ni, Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], (China: Hai Tun Chu Ban She 海豚出版社, 2012), 109-110.

<sup>20</sup>Chao, Li. "A Study of "the Storm Society": Chinese Modernism as a Resource of International Modern Art", 264.

我们以为艺术决不是宗教的奴隶，也不是文学的说明，我们要自由地、综合地构成纯造型和色彩的世界。

We thought that art is not the slave of religion, nor explanation for literature, we want to freely, comprehensively structure a world of pure color shapes and color.

我们厌恶一切旧的形势，旧的色彩，厌恶一切平凡低级的技巧，我们要用新的技法来表现新时代的精神。

We resent any form of oldness, old colors, resent any ordinary low class techniques. We are going to use new techniques to express the spirit of a new era.

二十世纪以来，欧洲的艺坛实现新兴的气象：野兽群的叫喊，立体派的变形，Dadaism的猛烈，超现实主义的憧憬.....

Since the twentieth-century, european art scene has achieved a rising new climate: the howling of Les Fauves, the transformation of Cubism, Dadaism's fierceness, the longing of surrealism....

二十世纪的中国艺坛，也应当现出一种新兴的气象了。

The Chinese art scene of the twentieth century should appear with a new atmosphere as well.

让我们起来吧！用狂飙一般的激情，铁一般的理智来创造我们色、线、形交错的世界吧！

Let us rise up! With passion like a hurricane, reason like iron, let us create our world made out of color, line and shape!<sup>21</sup>

Despite the flattering influences, different approaches to the manifesto can drastically change the narrative and dialogue of The Storm Society. As Li commented the manifesto shows “imprint of radicalism and one-sided ness in their (The Storm Society) heroic rhetoric”, nonetheless Li considered the manifesto was “in truth a first attempt at creating an ontology of art in modern Chinese art world and an effort to expand the culture of Western art movement in China.”<sup>22</sup> The manifesto's messages seem contradicting and shows unclear intentions. In this

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<sup>21</sup> Author's translation, The Storm Society Manifesto included in Ni Yide's memoir *Yide Ni, Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], (China: Hai Tun Chu Ban She 海豚出版社, 2012), 109-110.

<sup>22</sup> Li, "A Study of *the Storm Society*", 265

section I will be presenting a close reading of The Storm Society Manifesto, to provide the context for the argument that The Storm Society embodies the *nationalistic sentiment*. Additionally, I will also be pointing out critical conditions and issues of the manifesto. To do so is not to diminish any historical value of these primary sources, but is to better understand the context and flaws so we can better catalog The Storm Society.

The Manifesto began with mapping the landscape for the Chinese painting scene at the time, as the artists considered themselves surrounded by the ordinary and incompetents. Then it questions the trace of the ancient glory, “Where have the geniuses we have been created since the ancient past gone? Where has our honorary history from our ancient past has gone! (我们往古创造的天才到哪里去了？我们往古光荣的历史到哪里去了) Contradictory, the manifesto declares a rejection to “oldness” as they indicated that “我们厌恶一切旧的形式·旧的色彩·厌恶一切平凡低级的技巧·我们要用新的技法来表现新时代的精神 (we resent any form of oldness, old colors, resent any ordinary low-class technics.)”. Here, the Manifesto begins to blur the message through generalization by rejecting “any forms of oldness” while showing a longing for the glory of history.

The paradoxical presentation shows the lack of discretion and communication in the process of writing the manifesto. Li’s article revealed Pang Xunqin’s doubt on the Manifesto written in his memoir:

*“We only had a quick look at the manifesto written by Ni Yide, which was only passed around among the Society members. There wasn’t any discussion about it. I basically agreed to its content back then and agreed to publish it. But I somehow felt something was left unsaid. What was*

*unsaid wasn't clear to myself at that time. The development of Chinese painting was to the me a rather vague concept"*<sup>23</sup>

Additionally to the lack of organization The Storm Society has shown struggle on refining its clear intention and purpose, Pang once wrote that, "So now we have held the first Storm Society exhibition and published our "Manifesto", but the exact reasons for forming the Storm Society remains unclear to me."<sup>24</sup> This struggle of clarity was reflected through the manifesto. Moreover, Pang's text shows the liability for the manifesto to represent the entity of the Storm Society because of the lack of communication in refining the content.

The Manifesto favors the "a new atmosphere that the European art scene achieved(欧洲的艺坛实现新兴的气象)." It referred to movements including Les Fauves, Cubism, and Surrealism and Dadaism as examples to show urgency for Chinese art scene to acquire a new atmosphere as well. Nonetheless, the manifesto emphasizes on originality and attempted to separate The Storm Society from the European movements. The manifesto indicated that, "We admit that painting and drawing are not natural imitations, nor is it a repetitive ridge body, we are using life to express our spicy raw spirit(我们承认绘画决不是自然的模仿，也不是死板形骸的反复，我们要用生命来赤裸裸的表现我们泼辣的精神)." The Manifesto continuously shows a need to isolate painting as a tool to create a new world, it indicates that, "We thought that art is not the slave of religion, nor explanation for literature.(我们以为艺术决不是宗教的

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<sup>23</sup> Pang Xunqin, Translated by Li., "A Study of "the Storm Society", 65

<sup>24</sup> Pang, *This Is How It Happened*, 266

奴隶·也不是文学的说明·我们要自由地、综合地构成纯造型和色彩的世界)。” This shows the Storm Society’s focus on painting.

Through the manifesto, the Storm Society ambiguously stated the urgency to create a new world through having its own stylistic paintings, however the paintings themselves failed to deliver what the manifesto declared for. Nonetheless this writing had shown the nationalistic sentiment the collective holds through the manifestation of their needs to achieve salvation for the Chinese painting scene through a revolutionary changes.

## **CHAPTER II. Chinese Nationalistic Sentiment in The Storm Society**

The Storm Society was a byproduct of its time. It is difficult to separate the collective from its social environment. Because of the work by the collective failing to achieve the revolution to change the Chinese painting scene as they set out to do, the works do not stand on their own. In an art historical context the work heavily relies on the discourse about Western Style painting. Furthermore, discourses of The Storm Society almost exclusively focus on Pang and Ni. This is because of how much literal documentation the two had remained about The Storm Society and the rest left blank in the history. I argue that the art historical discourse surrounding The Storm Society is exhausted and repetitive because its discourses are only surrounding the collective’s Westernness. This paper calls for a revisit of The Storm Society through the lens emphasising on the nationalistic sentiment. This will allow The Storm Society to be from a different perspective rather than the pre-existing idea of a failed collective of Western painting imitators.

This misconnection between The Storm Society and nationalistic sentiment both in Chinese and Western Scholarships resulted in a heavy emphasis of The Storm Society’s

“Westernness” as part of the Chinese Western-style painting movement. Historian Kao indicated that the movement was pushed by a generation of artists who studied abroad in the West (mainly western Europe), as well as Japan.<sup>25</sup> Kao elaborated that as an art movement, which came to be called *xiyanghua*, *xihua*, or *yanghua* (“Western-style painting”), in order to differentiate it from a painting of the traditional schools, which was designated, by contrast, *guocuihua* (“national painting”).<sup>26</sup>

During this period, the Western-style painting movement which was still under development, was overshadowed by a rising favor in the traditional painting scene in China as more and more are eager to hold on to a sense of Chinese identity. Kao considered that *Yanghua* and *guohua* coexist in Modern China and though their materials and techniques remain distinct, the two borrow from each other so that their styles intermingle and at times become indistinguishable.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the Western-style oil painting in China, despite its name, was more appropriate to consider a movement driven by nationalistic sentiment. Following this change of essence of the painting movement I argue will allow more room of conversation to discuss The Storm Society in its social context.

Michael Sullivan included his writing about The Storm Society in his book *Art and Artist of 20th Century China* under the section The Call of The West. In which chapter, Sullivan who shares a personal relationship with both Ni and Pang stressed the relationship between the germination of artists and the Western influences. Sullivan wrote that “After reading these

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<sup>25</sup> Matching Kao, *A Century in Crisis : Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998) 146-161, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Kao, *A Century in Crisis*, 146

stirring words, it is a little disappointing to find that the work of The Storm Society painters is quite restrained and conservative, at least in style.<sup>28</sup> In another word, the paintings produced by The Storm Society were too predictable and failed to meet the expectation, for the painters themselves who had been exposed to the oil painting movements in Europe or Japan, upon return began to promote this style of painting to China where there was relatively less open communication with other countries. In the eyes of Western audiences, it was already overdone. The style which The Storm Society's painters were practicing was already well distinguished in Europe or Japan. The artists were greatly inspired by Henri Matisse(1869-1954) and his Fauvism style or Ni had exemplified André Derain(1880-1954) to illustrate his idea of art;<sup>29</sup> Pang had addressed his admiration to Pablo Picasso(1881-1973) for his spirit and willingness to change style dynamically.<sup>30</sup> Thus, because of the lack of understanding of the social and historical context of the painting scene in China, the paintings are considered overdone. It is not a new statement that from "Western" receptions needing the works to be different and even in some cases exotic in a sense that shows the national characteristic(or the Chinese characteristics). However this expected national characteristic in association with Chinese identity was often utterly traditional or more of a representation of rural reflection. In the eyes of Western audiences, cities like Shanghai or paintings like The Storm Society hold a sense of familiarity that makes its culture not exciting enough. This is because of its development from the modernization that is promoted by Western semi-colonialism. The styles particularly adopted by The Storm Society were decades behind the western movements.

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<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Ni, *Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], 7.

<sup>30</sup> Pang, *This Is How It Happened*, 86

To better showcase the national and Western characteristics in The Storm Society, I will be presenting a visual analysis on Ni Yide's *Summer* (figure 3), the work had literal documentation by the artist himself. Ni Yide was not only the founder but also the sole writer of the manifesto that defines The Storm Society in scholarly discourses. Ni's painting *Summer* from 1932 was one work that had featured on the first Storm Society exhibition, and had been cited ever since. The Oil on canvas has unknown sizes, the work depicts a female figure in the modern clothing commonly seen in Shanghainese Fashion, holding a black fan, sitting on a squared wooden stool. The painting has a red pallet, from the cool pink QiPao(旗袍, traditional clothing fashioned in Shanghai) and the pink tone eyeshadow to the stool and background applied in oxide red with a brown undertone. The purple curtain contours the shape of the figure to reinforce the composition, the pink highlight shines through the purple curtain. Following the light source, the figure seemed to be sitting near a window. The composition and style of the face shows resemblance in Picasso *Nude with a Pitcher 1903*, in both paintings the figures were being cropped in an awkward part. The figure occupies the composition in a diagonal fashion, leaving rather awkward edges filled in black. From a technical aspect Ni's work is restrained(Jujing), It looks carefully calculated and in a box. This would be an example reflecting on some art historical critiques on The Storm Society's work as art historian Ken Lum mentioned in *Shanghai Modern 1919-1945*, the works "mimicking Western models of art without challenging or, at least, refashioning the models in a critical manner..."<sup>31</sup> However, examining the content of the work in fact includes many modernist and avant garde thoughts in the painting seemly predictable and if anything the shadow of cubist influence. Comparing The

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<sup>31</sup> Ken Lum, *Shanghai Modern, 1919-1945* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 228.

feet and the paler face of discoloration, while one can argue that Ni's poor skills, it is also likely that Ni is dictating modern Shanghainese female who (likely to be Bo which according to Ni was gaining interest in make-ups) had applied makeups on her face. Additionally, the size of the feet also indicates liberation and modernity as the women begin to abandon the foot binding culture as a form of rejecting the traditional system.

From Ni's memoir, he had expressed his view on capturing the essence instead of representation when painting figures. Ni had wrote that,

“We should not be satisfied by the ordinary technique that imitates the subject true to life, we have to think about a deeper method, one that's more direct and amazing to express the painting just right...Contemporary painting is not about what to depict, but it is how to express...”<sup>32</sup>

Looking back to the painting *Summer*, Ni was not considering a hyper representation of the female figure, but rather using technique to capture the essence of the subject. Ni refers to cubist and fauvism in his painting ideology, which can be traced looking at the painting *Summer*. However, the application of the painting itself seemed only to be more imitation than adaptation. The revolutionary socio-historical content was nonetheless buried behind the disappointment of reproducing the pre-existing european painting movements. Here I question why the existing visual analysis failed to reach the span of the work that The Storm Society produced, and why the cultural subjects had gone unnoticed in the analysis. I argue that this is a result of the overpowering literal presences written by The Storm Society as a collective or its members had created an assumption of what one should be expecting from the collective. For both Ni Yide and The Storm Society, the large amount of writing had set a specific expectation

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<sup>32</sup> Ni, *Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], 103.

and imagery for the viewers even before looking at the painting. This had resulted in the current resources incompatible in appreciating the works as paintings themselves that are not attached to the literal sources. Because of the lack in expressing a “traditional” or more evident national identity, as well as societal reason, the works are being buried and overlooked when conducting research about The Storm Society. It was mentioned as a supplemental context when focusing on the few representative figures in their historical content. There is an imbalance in looking at The Storm Society beyond its preexisting labels. much like Shanghai itself, The Storm Society bears the name of western influence and became a barrier for looking the other way of the subject.

The Storm Society was considered as the pioneer of the Chinese modern avant-garde movement by the domestic movement while western scholarships and Pang himself seemed to be more pessimistic about the turns out of The Storm Society. Both are accurate descriptions about the collective. The Storm Society itself as a collective failed to make a remark at the time, however the members who took part in the collective had been on the right path leading to a revolution. Many so they ended up making on their own, maybe even learning from the mistake of The Storm Society. For the collective what conveys potential for further art historical conversation about modern Chinese paintings, is not the works themselves, but how The Storm Society itself as a subject of research and how it is being documented. In other words, to look at The Storm Society as an example of how the discourse of Shanghainese oil painting collectives was being treated in an art historical setting. They also mirror a particular *nationalistic sentiment* which was geographic specific. It was a consistent description of the Western-style painting in Shanghai during the early twentieth century. The use of language to describe The

Storm Society is misleading for readers to understand the movement as “Western” or “Western-influenced and overlook the national feature in the essence of the storm society, in their influences and cultural significance. Moreover, they fail to receive recognition in western art historical studies, because they merely appeared to be over-ambitious artists who failed at achieving the impossible.

Emphasizing the “Western-Style” on the works of The Storm Society and focusing on the mediums of the paintings over its conceptual drive is misleading in this case of understanding the historical value of The Storm Society. While the “Western-Style” painting failed to obtain historical significance than the statements of the collective, I argue that the art historical essence of The Storm Society is represented in the primary texts that spark nationalism sentiment. To consider The Storm Society as a nationalism movement will allow the audiences to expand the perspective on the painting movement more than those who try to stir up a storm and end up failing.

As Pang indicates that the members of The Storm Society had all expressed some sort of dissatisfaction with the current statues(namely, the painting scene).<sup>33</sup> In the Manifesto, Ni emphasizes the weakness and incompetence of the current Chinese painting scene. Much like many other intellectuals who were advocating for the nation itself. To The Storm Society, their purpose is to restore the national power through developing its artistic culture.

Historian GuoGuang Wu distinguished two waves of nationalism during the 20th century of China in his article *From Post-imperial to Late Communist Nationalism: historical change in Chinese nationalism from May Fourth to the 1990s*. In the article Wu concluded that the first

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<sup>33</sup> Pang, *This is How it Happened*, 134

wave of nationalism occurred during the late 1920s was a result of a series of revolutionary events showing the rebellion and dissatisfaction towards the current government. According to Wu, Not only were they critical about the state's policies, the nationalism is themed with the urge to "Save the Nation".<sup>34</sup> The 20th century is what Chinese considered as the century of humiliation, as William A. Callahan elaborated that, "Chinese nationalism is not just about celebrating the glories of Chinese civilization; it also commemorates China's weakness".<sup>35</sup> Therefore, *nationalistic sentiment*, as a divergence of nationastim, is a way for the Chinese intellectuals located in Shanghai to manifest distification and change the current states of China. The political leanings of the nationalistic sentiment in early 20th Century Shanghai are linked and reflected through the manifestation of The Storm Society as well as the claims made by the founders including Ni Yide and Pang Xunqin. For The Storm Society, they urge to change and save the nation's oil painting scene, claiming the Chinese painting scene as weak and decadent(衰頹和病弱)<sup>36</sup> However, the connection to nationalistic sentiment is not evident as Oil painting and The Storm Society are considered as the Western influenced movements.

As Wu focussed Nationalists engaged and believed that they had the power to save the nation and achieve the dream of regaining China's political and economical power. This Patriotism was the key factor that influenced The Storm Society. The Storm Society was founded by artists returning from studying abroad in Europe or Japan. For Ni and Pang,

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<sup>34</sup>Guoguang Wu "From Post-Imperial to Late Communist Nationalism: Historical Change in Chinese Nationalism from May Fourth to the 1990s." (Third World Quarterly 29, no. 3 (2008): 467-82), 470.

<sup>35</sup>William A. Callahan. "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism." Alternatives: global, local, political 29, no. 2 (2004): 199–218., 200

<sup>36</sup>The Storm Society Manifesto included in Ni Yide's memoir Yide Ni, *Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], (China: Hai Tun Chu Ban She 海豚出版社, 2012), 109-110.

patriotism was the main force that caused the artists to return to their home country.<sup>37</sup> The Storm Society drives to change the current painting scene of Chinese Oil painting while showing a great deal of frustration and anti-tradition sentiments. As Historian Cary Y. Liu points out, the introduction of Western oil painting during the early twentieth century led to artists calling for “modernization and reform to relegate traditional Chinese ink painting to a legacy of the classical or dynastic past.”<sup>38</sup> The strong sense of nationalistic sentiment and patriotism of founder Ni yide and Pang xunqin drives the formation of The Storm Society founders had reflected its connection with the same sentiment g in Shanghai. Espically for Pang, nationalistic sentiment was a a imfatful influences on his artistic career. The reason for Pang to return to China, and specifically Shanghai was therefore a representation of adopting Western modernism as a means to restore the country’s culture power through developing its artistic scene.

I argue that Chinese national identity, especially to the city of Shanghai, is not fixed to Western concept of what constitutes Chinese, and the city’s identity was bound to a sense of Westernness Art historian Kuiyi Shen described in his text in *A Century in Crisis* about how Chinese students embraced the West as China’s identity.<sup>39</sup> This generation was born into the post imperial state of China where the West symbolized imperialist power. As a result, the generation of China is also associated with natiaonsltic sentiment in the early 20th century who

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<sup>37</sup> Pang returned to the country in the late 1920s wanting to study more about his nation and develop national features in his work. For Ni, he returned to China a few years earlier from Japan, prompted by Japanese’s invasion in northern China.

<sup>38</sup> Cary Y. Liu. “*Encountering the Dilemma of Change in the Architectural and Urban History of Shanghai.*” ( *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 1 (2014): 118-36),118.

<sup>39</sup> Kuiyi Shen, *A Century in Crisis*, 172.

seek power for the nation. Just as The Storm Society, while they were emphasized as the “Western” influenced group, they also represented the demographics that defined the early twentieth century nationalistic sentiment.

Founder Pang is an example of an artist who presented the ideology of those who studied Oil painting. Even though Pang experimented with the traditional method, he mainly focused on oil paintings, continuing to explore how to express the matter of “national characteristic”(民族性) and “decorative characteristic”(装饰性).<sup>40</sup> As someone who was dedicated to oil painting, such tension created a barrier for Pang, who had recently returned to the nation with little knowledge about the social state at the time. As Pang recollected, the members of The Storm Society had a collective dissatisfaction against the world at the time.<sup>41</sup> Although Pang did not specify what dissatisfaction against the world is, through examining both Ni and Pang’s experiences shows two main disagreements towards the current state of their environment. Pang had expressed his rejection of the state of Chinese art scene and domestic art education institutions. In contrast, Ni shows a passionate rejection towards the academic movement and the students who return from studying in the Western region. Yeh indicates that, at the conclusion of the First World War(1914-1918), a growing number of Chinese students and workers went to Europe and America, they returned China to function as “conduits for the dissemination of what they learned abroad, teaching at fine arts institutions and publishing...catalogues... or collections with hefty inclusion of translated articles.”<sup>42</sup> Ni had

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<sup>40</sup> Pang, Xunqin, *This Is How It Happened*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid,134.

<sup>42</sup> Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor*,62.

a strong opinion against the students who return from studying abroad in Europe, the artist expressed his loathing to the Chinese oil painting scene while showing strong patriotism. He accused that most of the artists who return from study abroad in Europe lack basic courtesy and technicality. Additionally, they had no comparative concept about the change of the trend of artistic thinking. Calling these groups of art students lacking individuality, Ni labeled them as “self-righteous, ordinary, naive, vulgar, superficial.”<sup>43</sup> Ni describes the Chinese Society as a general society that considers art as “a means of explaining something”, to him, it is only natural for The Storm Society – which is dedicated to pursuing new techniques—not able to gain attention and even being mocked.<sup>44</sup>

The rise of nationistic sentiment in the 1930s created a conflict with Chinese western painting, resulting in what Ni referred to as a “dying world of Chinese Western paintings.” “National” was not a common label used for The Storm Society because of the nature of the painting itself appearing Western influences, because of the overwhelming yet superficial “Western” influences. The rise of *nationalistic sentiment* was promoted by many students and intellectual’s dissatisfaction towards the state and their failure to maintain the power status of the nation. The continuous distification mirrors the anxiety reflected through Pang and Ni’s memoir.

During this time, Modern symbolizes transformation of collective culture and politics. This emphasis heavily influenced the decision of the founders and members of The Storm Society. This collective transformation was “traumatic,” and was very much reflected through

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<sup>43</sup> Ni, *Yi Yuan Jiao You Ji* [艺苑交游记], 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Pang and Ni's writing bleeding anxiety and existentialism. In this section I shinelight on the *nationalistic sentiment* which was overshadowed by the "Western" label when mentioning The Storm Society To clarify this underlined influences by nationalistic sentiment will change how The Storm Society is discussed and perceived. As a result changing the discourse of the entire western oil painting movement. Therefore, it is needed to conduct a revision of the "Westernness" in The Storm Society.

The paper argues for the importance of realizing nationalistic sentiment in The Storm Society because it can change the entire view and format of the movement. Through examining The Storm Society and challenging its existing label allows us to look at the Chinese western style painting differently, just as Pang Xunqing himself wrote in the memnior, that he could never consider his work western.<sup>45</sup> The nationalistic essence of The Storm Society as well as the artists are clouded by the label of xiyanghua. Ni Yide had long maintained the terms as problematic, so called Western painting is no longer found only in the West. It has become a painting medium used by artists internationally. Paintings produced by Chinese artists, whether they are of the old or new style, can all be regarded as Chinese painting. In classifying types of painting, the only criterion we can probably use is the material employed, for example, oil, water colour, ink and so on.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Pang had struggled later in his life to break from the perception as a Western painting artist as his work had more keens towards traditional south west Chinese tradition dispute. He had written that "the paintings I made, to the end I wouldn't

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<sup>45</sup> Pang, *This is How It Happened*, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Ni Yide, translated by editor. Danker, Jo-Anne Birnie, Ken Lum, and Sheng Tian Zheng. *Shanghai Modern, 1919-1945* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 191.

consider it as “Western Painting”.<sup>47</sup> The two key figure’s opinions had led the thesis to its concluding argument. In conclusion I will turn my focus on Wu Dan and Li Chao’s comment on The Storm Society as both articles had largely reflected the perception and changing status of The Storm Society in Chinese Scholarship.

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<sup>47</sup> Pang, *This is How It happened*, 202.

## EPILOGUE

Wu Dan had written that The entirety of Modern Chinese art history development is not just the issue of fine arts, it is always closely related to “Salvation” and “Enlightenment”, “Improvement” and “revolution”....<sup>48</sup> The essence drive of The Storm Society overlaps with this ideology of “Salvation” and “Enlightenment” as well as “Improvement” and “revolution.” Looking at the historical impact of The Storm Society, they have achieved their goals in an unexpected way. At his time Pang had considered The Storm Society making temporary remarks, and soon sinking to the bottom of the ocean of history. What Pang did not anticipate, however, is the re-surface of The Storm Society entering the twenty-first century. However, The Storm Society as a historical landmark had achieved beyond what any of the members had witnessed during their time. In October 2018 Li Chao curated an exhibition Painting and Documentation of The Storm Society at Liu HaiSu Art Museum in Shanghai. The exhibition brings more publicity to not only The Storm Society but also its founder Pang Xunqin and Ni Yide.

In recent studies, The Storm Society had begun to be linked to patriotism and *nationalistic sentiments* by domestic scholars. Wu had called the founders “patriotic youth” who built The Storm Society.<sup>49</sup> Looking at how art historian Li Chao presents The Storm Society through the press of Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism, shows how Chinese scholarships shape the narrative of The Storm Society differently. Li Chao as the leading scholar on this subject. From curating the exhibition to academic research, he had been

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<sup>48</sup> Wu, *Pang Xunqin de Jiuguo Jiliang* 庞薰琹的救国脊梁, 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 12

responsible for forging the recent spotlight on The Storm Society. Li had claimed The Storm Society as “Chinese story that contains many international resources and essence,” he considered The Storm Society as “the representative of the peak period of Chinese modern new school painting.”<sup>50</sup> Li believed that The Storm Society studied various styles, refined the essence of famous artists from all over the world, and gave them their local characteristics with their respective talents.” This comment, however, is in contrast to what Lum had mentioned in Modern Shanghai: “Mimicking Western models of art without challenging or, at least, refashioning the models in a critical manner...”<sup>51</sup> This exhibition was argued for a lense for viewers to better understand the national sentiments in the works by The Storm Society through looking at its documentations, therefore to better conduct international resources between chinese art and global art. This also has the issue of Li become the predominant secondary source in the eyes of the public. The way The Storm society is labeled as Western I argue, is one dimensional and repetitive.

Pang was considered as the spine of national salvation, and his later work with more visual national characteristics had received more attention from the general public. After moving away from Shanghai and settling in the southwest part of China, Pang's work had witnessed significant stylistic changes as well. Compared to Pang's early work, his later work had incorporated more evident national features as he had based more on southwest China. The Pang's stylistic change had resulted in rastical popularity as he had incorporated more

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<sup>50</sup> Li Chao “*Je Lan She Wen Xian Zhan Liang Xiang Liu Hai Sui Mei Shu Guan ‘决澜社文献展’ 亮相刘海粟美术馆*.” Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism, October 22, 2018. <http://wgj.sh.gov.cn/node2/n2029/n2030/n2040/u1ai156792.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Lum, *Shanghai Modern 1919-1945*, 228

evident Chinese characteristics in his works. On the other hand, Ni was celebrated for his devotion to the education of art in China, and later founding purpose to create art for the people in the second half of 1940s.<sup>52</sup> The founders' contribution in later of their career did achieve national salvation and change of arts climate in China. The figures who were partaking in The Storm Society included Pang Xunqin, Ni Yide, Wang Jiyuan, Liu Haisu....<sup>53</sup> had become the ones who shaped the twentieth-century Chinese art historical discourse.

Perhaps The Storm Society was a failed attempt at starting a revolution during its time, however when measuring the art historical value of The Storm Society. The collective should be considered beyond their achievement in making remarkable works. I shall conclude the thesis by making a paradoxical statement that The Storm Society is not about individuality, as Pang had indicated why the members had joined the collective is because it seemed easier to storm up the art scene.<sup>54</sup> The collective was deeply engaged with the narrative of modern Chinese art history, it mirrors how a larger national narrative was being constructed by scholarships after its time. For this reason The Storm Society was more national than Western. This applies the same to the Chinese Western-style painting movement. The Storm Society is one critical evidence to differ the one dimensional narrative of pre-existing scholarship of Chinese Western-style painting and diverted its narrative in modern Chinese art history. The Storm Society had an urge to change the Chinese art scene, ultimately to achieve the goal of national salvation through cultural development. To view The Storm Society as national is to

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<sup>52</sup> Jiang Xiaode [姜孝德]. *Jue Lan She Qi Shou Ni Yide "决澜旗手倪貽德"* (China: Hong Yan Chun Qiu 红岩春秋) 205.01(2019):76-79.77.

<sup>53</sup> Li, Kuang Biao Ji Qin: *Jue Lan She Ji Xiandai Zhuyi Yishu Xianshen 狂飙激情: 决澜社及现代主义艺术先声*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Pang, *This is How It Happened*, 134.

continuously accomplish its mission. By doing both research on The Storm Society and the Western-style painting movement it represents will develop beyond their “western” perceptions, and thus reclaim the subject’s national status.

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## FIGURES



1932年“决澜社”在中华学艺社举行第一次展览时画家合影  
(前排左起：梁锡鸿、张弦、段平佑；  
后排左起：庞薰琹、杨秋人、阳太阳、倪貽德、王济远、周多、李仲生)，  
图片由倪貽德家属提供。

Figure 1. Photos of the members taken during the first exhibition in 1932, provided by a family member of Ni Yide, published in *Kuang Biao Ji Qin: JueLanShe Ji Xiandai Zhuyi Yishu Xianshen* 狂飙激情：决澜社及现代主义艺术先声, 2008.

## 決瀾社第一次展覽會特載

- 一 決瀾社宣言.....決瀾社同人
- 二 洪水泛了.....李寶泉
- 三 決瀾社小史.....龐薰琴(社員)
- 四 決瀾短喝.....王濟遠(社員)
- 五 自祝決瀾畫展.....段平右(社員)
- 六 決瀾社社員之橫切面.....周 多(社員)

### 決瀾社宣言

環繞我們的空氣太沈寂了，平凡與庸俗包圍了我們的四周。無數低  
的轟動，無數淺薄者的叫囂。

我們往古創造的天才到那裏去了？我們往古光榮的歷史到那裏去了？  
我們現代藝術的藝術界只是衰弱和病弱。

我們再不能安於這樣妥協的環境中。

我們再不能任其奄奄一息以待斃。

讓我們起來吧！用了狂瀾一般的激情，鐵一般的理智，來創造我們  
絢·形交錯的世界吧！

我們承認繪畫決不是自然的模倣，也不是死板的形骸的反覆，我們  
全生命來赤裸裸地表現我們激烈的精神。

我們以為繪畫決不是宗教的奴隸，也不是文學的說明，我們要自由  
綜合地構成純造型的世界。

我們厭惡一切舊的形式，舊的色彩，厭惡一切平凡的低級的技巧。  
要用新的技法來表現新時代的精神。

二十世紀以來，歐洲的藝術突現新興的氣象，野獸派的叫喊，立體  
變形，*Dadaism* 的猛烈，超現實主義的憧憬……。

二十世紀的中國藝壇，也應當現出一種新興的氣象了。

讓我們起來吧！用了狂瀾一般的激情，鐵一般的理智，來創造我們  
絢·形交錯的世界吧！

Figure 2. The Storm Society Manifesto published in October of 1932, in L'Art 1, no. 5, complementary to the first exhibition, included in Li Chao's article The Storm Society Research 決瀾社研究(2008).



Figure 3. Ni Yide, *Summer*, 1932, measurement unknown, Lost. Image published in *The Art of Modern China*. (United Kingdom: University of California Press, 2012).