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The Political Body in Chinese Art

Curtis L. Carter

The uses of visual images based on calligraphy and the depiction of the human body in Chinese art have served an important role in the exercise of political power by leaders in Chinese culture. The two media that are most closely linked to the exercise of political power in Chinese culture are written or performed calligraphy and representational art featuring the human figure. The latter is more familiar in western nations where one often finds sculptures of political figures displayed in prominent public spaces. However, in China calligraphy as a form of written art serves as a principal symbolic expression of political power. This is true in both traditional Chinese culture and also the Twentieth Century revolutionary period and beyond. The connection between figurative political images and political power needs little explanation for a western audience. But how is calligraphy connected to the theme of the political body in Chinese art and culture? One answer is offered in Mao Zedong's early writings, where he linked the practice of calligraphy to physical training of the body. Calligraphy as he understood it, "used the entire body to express the writer's spirit."[1]

After a brief introduction to a Chinese understanding of the body in traditional Chinese culture, I will examine the political uses first, of calligraphy, and then of figurative representation. Figurative representation had a limited role in Chinese traditional cultures, apart from rituals and in portraiture. Nevertheless, figurative representation assumed a prominent role in the art of Twentieth Century China. Perhaps this shift was in part, a consequence of the influence of western cultures where figuration has an important role, both in popular culture and fine arts. The adoption of Socialist Realism, a popular style of art in Communist Russia no doubt was one of the contributing factors. Our discussion of the political body in Chinese art will conclude with a look at the works of two contemporary Chinese artists, Xu Bing and Ma Bao Zhong, whose contemporary art offers a different understanding of the roles of calligraphy and visual representation with respect to political power

I.

[1]Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991), *59.*

In traditional Chinese culture, the body is seen primarily in the context of filial relations to family, and by extension, loyalty to the sovereign. The body is transmitted thru the parents and enters into a set of relationships and obligations, first with family members. However, filial duties in Chinese culture extend beyond the immediate family in significant ways. This notion is expressed succinctly in the words of Li Chi, a Third Century B.C. disciple of Confucius: "If in serving the sovereign, he be not loyal, he is not filial. If in discharging the duties of office, he be not serious, he is not filial…. If on the field of battle he be not brave he is not filial."[2] The concept of hsiao (filial piety) thus constitutes the foundations of the traditional social and political systems in China. This concept of hsiao first developed when the Chinese were predominantly an agrarian society dependent on, and revering of nature; it continues to influence the thinking and actions of Chinese people even today. Filial piety calls for a hierarchy of relationships with respect to family members, and with respect to the sovereign. These relationships were built in part on the five virtues of Confucianism: jen (human heartedness), yi (righteousness), li (propriety, rituals, rules of proper conduct), chih (wisdom), and hsin (good faith).

II.

To begin our consideration of the political role of calligraphy in politics, let us consider the actions of the Chinese statesman-poet Qu Yuan (??-278 B. C.). Qu Yuan attempted to institute reforms against corruption in the administration of the Chinese state of Chu by satirizing in his poems the "corruption, selfishness, and disregard for the people on the part of dubious characters who achieved trusted positions in the Imperial Court."[3] His actions resulted in banishment from the kingdom. When he felt unable to do anything to save his state, he ended his life by clasping a big stone and leaping into the Milo River in northeast Hunan province. However, his efforts were not lost on his countrymen who continue to honor him each year on the day on the lunar calendar marking his drowning. The celebration includes drag boat races in symbolic search of his body, and throwing into the water bundles of zongzi (glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo) to divert the fish from eating his body. Perhaps this celebration itself carries forth the artist's intent to institute social change by calling attention to the vices of those

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[2]Fung Yu-Lan, *Selected Philosophical Writings of Fung Yu- Lan* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991), 636-648.

2Han Lin Scholar," State of Chu, Warring States Period," Internet Post 7, 251, August 17, 2007.

entrusted with power and the attending responsibilities for leadership. Qu Yuan's experience represents the ultimate fulfilment of one's filial obligations to self, family and state including the sacrifice of his own body. In this instance, the artist literally appropriates his actual physical body in the effort to influence political corruption. Thus Qu Yuan's effort to bring about reform, first as a poet writing calligraphy, and then through the symbolic use of his body to make a political statement represents the two modes of expressing political power under consideration here. Normally, except for actual military combat or situations involving bodily torture, the political use of the body involves figurative representation as in sculptures or pictures.

Prior to the Twentieth century, the main form of images used for political purposes in China was calligraphic writing.[4] Elegant calligraphic inscriptions typically serve this purpose in traditional Chinese culture. Calligraphy is based on characters consisting of marks that function as symbols in a language system. This practice was inn contrast to the practice in the West, where representations of the human figure hold a predominant role in public representations of political power in the form of pictures and in monuments. Here, the figure in art is "cloaked in its own authority, and is inclined to be totalitarian; it does not have to reveal its intent or temperament."[5] In China, calligraphy was regarded as superior to figurative art because of its ability to reveal the intent and character of the person.

Thus, one of the reasons for the relative absence of figurative representations of the human body is the esteemed place calligraphy holds in Chinese culture and history as a symbol of political power. In his book, Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy, Richard Kraus argues that calligraphy has served as a metaphor "for the elite culture of imperial China."[6] Within this tradition, public monuments typically feature calligraphy in the form of Chinese characters, instead of a figurative sculpture of a prominent political personage, as would normally be the case in the West. Mao himself rejected the notion of art for art's sake arguing that all literature and art must serve both artistic standards and political ends: "There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake or art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics."[7]

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[4]Chang Tsong-Zung, "The Character of the Figure," in *Word and Meaning: Six Contemporary Chinese Artists*, Exhibition Catalogue, University of Buffalo Art Gallery, March 31-June 30, 2000: 14, 15.

[6]Kraus, *Brushes with Power*, x.

[7] Mao Zedong, *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*, III, May, 1942.

Because of its identification with imperial China, calligraphy's place as an art form, as well as a symbol of political power, was perhaps viewed with ambivalence by some leaders in revolutionary Twentieth century China. Nevertheless, contrary to the view that the Communist revolution had obliterated Chinese traditional culture where calligraphy held a place of honor and of practical usefulness in enforcing the political power of the leadership, Kraus holds that Communist revolutionaries regularly adapted calligraphy as a means of reinforcing their own political power.

To offset any concerns over the elitist history of calligraphy, Mao proposed to treat calligraphy as a means of propaganda. This did not mean that aesthetics was to be neglected, only that the characters should be visually attractive ("clear, well shaped, and pleasing to read") and able to present a clear political message to its audience. In this case the audience would include workers and others comprising the mass population, instead of an elite literati. Fancy decorative characters intended mainly to exhibit the learning of the writer were deemed unsuitable for communicating to the masses a clear political message.

If Kraus's thesis is correct, it means that the education, public prestige, and power of an individual political leader was judged in part by his or her talent in producing calligraphic poems, moralistic inscriptions, and political slogans. This practice represents a cultural connection between the arts and politics in China that differs substantially from the relation of the arts and politics in the United States, where aesthetics rarely enters into the practical political domain.

The power of the written characters underlying their usefulness derives in part from an almost magical reverence for the written Chinese characters used in calligraphy, which extended even to the use of ink as a remedy for physical and psychological ills, or to ward off evils.[8] In the political sphere, public figures (emperors of the past and modern party leaders such as Mao) were expected to demonstrate mastery with ink and brush. Indeed, Mao and other leaders are said to have used effectiveness in writing calligraphy as a measure of education. Mao himself frequently wrote inscriptions in characters aimed to encourage his followers to improve or to carry out the aims of the revolution.[9] Accordingly, a leader's ability to exercise political power depends on the ability to demonstrate excellence in calligraphy. The calligraphy of political power is thus not only aesthetic, but is a code to authority. Calligraphic inscriptions of powerful leaders were sought to add prestige and credibility to public spaces,

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[8]Kraus, *Brushes with Power*, 5.

[9]Dong Zhiying, ed., *Mao Zedong Yishi (*Tales of Mao Zedong*)(*Beijing: Kunlun Chubanshe, 1989), 76, 209-11.

events, and even books. For example, in 1986, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping wrote an inscription for display at the Baldaling entrance of the Great Wall of China, commemorating restoration of the Great Wall.[10]

On the other hand, poorly executed calligraphy might also contribute to the demise of a political leader. For example it appears that his calligraphy may have contributed to the political demise of, Hua Guofeng, one of the interim Party leaders after the deaths of Mao and Zhou Enlai, following the suppression of Tiannamen demonstrations of 1976. Reportedly, Hua's enemies, in the ensuing struggle for power, used complaints about his calligraphy to diminish his reputation, eventually resulting in his resignation and the forced removal of his calligraphy from public display.[11]

III.

Thus far, the emphasis here has been on the political role of calligraphy in Chinese culture. This is not to say that human figuration had no important role in traditional Chinese culture, as it is featured in ritual objects and decorative arts, as well as in ancestral and commemorative portraiture.[12] The Terracotta Army discovered near Xien would suggest more than ritual function of the human figure as they embody the political power of Qin Shi Huang first Emperor of China (259-210 BCE), who was the first emperor to unify China. His achievements include initiating the first Great Wall of China and other numerous projects of a grand scale. Perhaps the most relevant for our purposes is the 8,000 member Terra Cotta Army discovered in 1974, buried near Qin's tomb, and known as "Qin's Armies." These free standing life-size full bodied figures of varying heights, uniform and hairstyle in accordance with their rank and equipped with weapons, were evidently intended to serve the Emperor in his afterlife. They were part of a grand scheme with horses, chariots, and material goods sufficient to support a life

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[10]In1472, a Ming scholar and calligrapher called Xiao Xian蕭顯 wrote the famous five characters in Chinese天下第一城meaning First Fortress under Heaven at the entrance to the Shanhaiguan pass. His calligraphy is on a placard hanging on the
top of the eastern gate.

[11]Kraus, *Brushes with Power*, 130-137. See Notes chapter 12, nos. 26-30.

[12]See Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reacktion Books Ltd., 1997), ch. 3. Clunas explores the role of figuration in Chinese ancestral portraiture as ritual and commemorative works during the Ming period. Clunas understands the Chinese *xiang* as figure and links it particularly in to representation of the human figure. See 103, 104.

of wealth. More interesting for our purposes is what the Warriors have to say as a symbol of the Emperor's power during his own earthly lifetime. To command the manpower—some 700,000 persons and the material resources to build the army of terra cotta soldiers and the underground environment in which they were places speaks volumes about the Emperor's political power. I propose that these figures employing realist figures of the human body are an important instance of the role of the human body as a symbol of political power in Chinese history. The Qi'an warriors are not the first free standing figures in history—the carved marble Kouroi/Kourai of the late Archaic Period in Greece (535 BCE-480 BCE) were earlier. But the mass production system using terracotta employed in their production is remarkable.

While there are examples of the uses of figurative, bodily images which appear to have had a role as symbols of political power in earlier Chinese culture, as in the case of the Qi'an warriors, it is not until the Twentieth Century that the human body holds a prominent place as a symbol of political power. As the imperial system of governance ended and a new republic was established in 1911 by Sun Yat-Sen, the call for reform in the social and political system was accompanied by a demand for a new art of the people. Influence from the west led artists and educators such as Gao Jianfu and others to adopt Western figurative art to the development of new art in China based on a synthesis of Chinese and Western art. Along with the new art came a desire to use this art as a means of influencing the thought patterns of the Chinese people.

With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Socialist Realism as adapted from the Soviet Union became the official art of the People's Republic. Art was altered to fit the political and educational needs of the new regime. The aims of carefully planned and implemented policies essentially organized artists for national reconstruction based on principles laid down in Mao's Yan' Talks on Art and Literature". A generation later, as the art favored distinctively Chinese themes, the focus shifted away from Soviet Realism to art that represented a 'fusion of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism." In both of these developments, the role of the figure based on the human body takes on a new significance as paintings and posters are used to implement ideological strategies aimed to exercise power and influence over the minds and bodies of workers in all fields from the literati group of intellectuals to the peasants living in villages throughout the nation.

The paintings and posters were intended to provide models of ideal behavior. They represented an idealized view of political leaders and the life of the people. Party leaders, especially Mao, were shown as loyal, sacrificing, and devoted to the well being of the people. Artist Li Chunhua's famous portrait of Mao, "Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan," represents the revolutionary leader, dressed in a long tunic carrying an oiled paper umbrella, and shown

against a background of hills, sky, and trees. “Mao was simply everywhere; his official portrait even hung in every home, often occupying the central place on the family altar....”[13] Mao and other Party leaders were often depicted alongside the people in the communes. (See for example, Li Mubai’s “Chairman Mao the Great Leader of the Chinese People,” 1950 where Mao, dressed in a military uniform is surrounded by four young children dressed in brightly colored blues and yellows, and bearing bouquets of pink and yellow flowers.[14]

The use of propaganda posters intensified during the Cultural Revolution period from 1966 to 1976, as “the hyperrealist representations of ageless, larger-than life peasants, soldiers and workers and educated youth in dynamic poses,” males and females alike, were offered as ideal types.[15] Women thus gained some social advancement when portrayed as carrying out equal roles with men. Images of soldiers, factory workers in steel mills and shipyards, and rural villagers engaged in agriculture were portrayed as optimistic, resourceful people dedicated to contribute to the transformation of China. In some instances, the posters were devoted to concrete issues such as encouraging increased production of the factories and in ouput from the agricultural communes.

Colors of the posters and paintings were carefully orchestrated in bright, shiny red; mainly absent in the posters were blacks and grays. The posters were mass-produced and widely distributed in order to provide the right models of thought and behaviour, and to influence as many people as possible.

The paths of calligraphy and figurative art in the context of political power did not have entirely separate lives since figurative images in the poster art, were normally accompanied by inscriptions written in calligraphy.

During the eighties, the political and economic culture of China changed significantly as the Party ceased to rely on propaganda posters to enforce political aims, relying instead on a new sense of openness to the West and receptiveness to a broader approach to art and less need to monitor daily life. At this point, both calligraphy and figurative art ceased to have the role that they had previously enjoyed. Figurative poster art thus lost its appeal and credibility and was no longer an effective symbol of political power. Symbols of power became more abstract as in the national flag consisting of five yellow stars on a red background, with

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[13]Stefan R. Lansberger, *Paint it Red: Fifty Years of Chinese Propaganda Posters*, Groninger Museum, December 5, 1998-February1999, 30.

[14]*Landsberger, Paint it Red,* 40.

[15]*Landsberger, Paint it Red* , 30.

considerably less attention to the portraits of the leaders.

IV.

Although both calligraphy and figurative representations of the body may at the present time have lost some their ability to function as symbols of power, they nevertheless remain of considerable interest to contemporary artists. I would like to end with a brief look at two contemporary Chinese artists, Xu Bing (1955-) and Ma Bao Zhong (1965-), who, respectively, examine in their art aspects of the roles of political power in reference to calligraphy and figurative representations. Xu Bing is one of he most famous among contemporary Chinese artists both in the international art world and in China.[16] For Xu Bing, "language...is the key to being human, and it lies at the crux of human culture."[17] Xu Bing's conceptual art piece, "The Book From the Sky" (1987), will serve to show the relevance of his work to our topic. "The Book From the Sky" consists of four books printed using more than four thousand characters, all of them invented by the artist and unreadable, but nevertheless familiar in their likeness to actual traditional Chinese calligraphy. According to a Smithsonian exhibition catalogue featuring Xu Bing's works, "the open books were displayed on low platforms with panels of text mounted on pillars and walls, and three long scrolls that ran up the wall and then draped in swooping arcs down from the ceiling."[18] Xu Bing's "impossible texts" forced viewers to disengage from their usual relationship with calligraphy. Literate Chinese viewers responded with incredulity and confusion. They were unwilling to believe that the texts could not be read, or that someone would invest so much effort to create the unreadable. For some viewers the experience is

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[16]Xu Bing moved to the United States in 1990 and returned to China as Vice President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in 2008.

[17]Britta Erickson, *Words Without Meaning, Meaning without Words: The Art of Xu Bing* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institute and University of Washington Press, 2001), 59. This theme appears in a number of Xu Bing's installation art work, "A Case of Transference" (1994) featured a pair of pigs placed in a cage to mate. The pigs were printed with an unintelligible text in calligraphy surrounded by books. Neither of these cultural inventions drew their attention away from nature's call to mating. "Net and Leash" (1998) addressed the role of language as a means of control available solely to human beings. For this work, Xu Bing commissioned a leash of words and a cage with mesh sides made of words. Viewers' gazes were returned by the gazes of placid sheep chained in the confines of the leash and wire fence of words.

[18] Erickson, Words Without Meaning, Meaning without Words: The Art of Xu Bing, 38.

reported to have triggered deep emotional reactions.

The social outcome of Xu Bing's art and language experiments was to empower viewers to reflect on, and perhaps to question the role of calligraphy in social and political life. His art is intended to be socially purposeful. In effect, the deployment of Xu Bing's invented calligraphy in "The Book from the Sky" questions the credibility of calligraphy and language in general. It thus challenges one of the chief vehicles for exercising political power, by inviting the people to engage in critical reflection on language and its role in political and societal life.[19] In short, Xu Bing's art diminishes the effectiveness of calligraphy's usefulness for propaganda.

Ma Baozhong, born in 1965, Heilongjiang Province, is a Chinese artist working in the post-socialist environment of Beijing.[20] Educated at the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, he chose to learn his craft as a realist painter by examining the practices of western master painters from Michelangelo to Warhol. In his paintings, one finds traces of these artists as well as German artists Albrecht Durer, Caspar David Friedrich, Otto Dix, the Austrian Egon Schiele and the English artist Lucian Freud. His decision to paint in a western based style instead of following in the tradition of Chinese brush painting sets him apart from fellow artists who first grounded their work in Chinese art before experimenting with western pop art or abstract expressionist art styles. According to the artist, his decision to follow western art means was influenced by globalization of the art market and a perception that the future would favor art based on the art practices of a dominant western culture. This decision allowed him to set aside grappling with the question that many Chinese contemporary artists struggle with: how to connect traditional Chinese art with contemporary practices art practices influenced by western culture.

Despite his doubts about the value of traditional Chinese art for his work as a twenty-first century artist, Ma Baozhang is decidedly Chinese in his worldview and his outlook on the social and political issues facing persons living in the contemporary world. He proudly identifies with the values and aims of his national culture. This characteristic is reflected in his subjects, which include Chinese military personnel and political leaders, as well as ordinary citizens. At the same time, his interests extend to world-wide geo-political concerns.

18See also Curtis L. Carter, "Conceptual Art: A Base for Global Art or the End of Art?" *Aesthetics and/as Globalization*, International Yearbook of Aesthetics, editor, Aleš Erjavec,Volume 8, 2004, 15-29.

[20]An earlier version of this discussion of Mao Baozhong Appeared in Curtis L. Carter, "Ma Baozhong: Creating a Visual Theater of Power," *Touch: Ma Baozhong's New* Works," Beijing: Beijing Art Gallery, 2008, 17-19.

Among the major narrative themes present in these paintings is power. What does this mean? Power refers to the ability of individual leaders and institutions to shape the lives of a people and steer the course of major developments economic, political, and cultural within national boundaries and across the global world. Political and military power are the obvious targets in Ma Baozhong's works. Featured in his paintings are many larger than life portraits of contemporary Chinese leaders and a few other world political figures. Chairman Mao, Premier Cho En Lai, Peng-Zhen, mayor of Beijing, army General Helong and other prominent party officials appear his latest works. There are also images of Western leaders including Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

The sources for these images are themselves historical documents including official publications and newspaper accounts of important gatherings. If there are already images documenting the events, why is it necessary to reconstruct the images? The artist's answer would be that he transforms images from newspapers and historical documentaries into paintings to express his own ideas. The paintings are intended to offer a fresh point of view on the persons and events through their construction using complex forms and colors applied in the manner of Chinese folk painters. They offer a visual narrative that is neither ideological nor cynical. The national leaders are portrayed in a manner that implicitly acknowledges their role as executors of power. There is no explicit effort on the part of the artist to pass judgment on their successes or failures. Rather, the paintings ostensibly at least show the figures as human beings dutifully acting out their designated roles in public ceremonies. Nevertheless, their decisions will shape the course of history in their time.

Among the notable paintings in this mode is the painting "19 December, 1984," done in 1997. The painting depicts the signing of Sino-British joint declaration handing Hong Kong over to China on December 19, 1984 at the West Hall of the Great Hall in Beijing. (This painting was auctioned at Sothebys in Hong Kong in a collection of unification art to celebrate the tenth anniversary, 1997 to 2007, of the transfer of Hong Kong from Britain to China.)[i]

Notwithstanding their roles in exercising power in the real world, in Ma Baozhong's paintings, these powerful political leaders, become characters as in a theatrical drama. The paintings fictionalize their roles as political leaders, and in doing so diffuse their power. Ma Bao's paintings are thus fictionalized theatrical narratives, as noted by the philosopher-critic Peng Feng. Their aim is to tell the stories of the leaders of China in a form that humanizes the brutality that can result when the exercise of power is not in harmony with the greater good of the people. Instead of making figurative paintings that serve as instruments of power for the political leaders, Ma Bao Zhong's paintings interpret and invite the viewers to reflect on the

meaning of the political dramas being depicted and perhaps on the impact that the powerful actions of political leaders have on the lives of the people.

Especially interesting in this respect are four “headshots” of Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, Bin Laden, and Che Guevara created in 2002. These portraits, executed in oil on canvas, show their subjects as super star cultural heroes. With a debt to Warhol’s portraits of western entertainment figures, the portraits of Mao and Lin especially are like theatrical masks. Yet they are not without interest for their psychological profiling of their respective subjects as symbols of political power.

There is in Ma Bao’s personal life a curious fascination for the military, and for the instruments of war including weapons and military aircraft. It is not surprising thus to find that military power also has a strong presence in his paintings. In some of his works, an entire painting is devoted to a display of soldiers as in “Volunteer Army Headquarters,” 1991. In other paintings, a military presence fills the background behind a gathering of ordinary people. For example, “An Event,” 1995, depicts armed soldiers with tanks placed toward the back of the crowd featured in the foreground of the scene. Another approach to the subject, shows fighter jets filling the skies above the portraits of female and male figures in “Stroke Series,” 2000 and also in “Gorazade,” 1995.

In his works portraying the military, Ma Bao revisits the theme of earlier western artists’ responses to war. His works on this theme evoke remembrances of Goya’s “Disasters of War,” Picasso’s “Guernica,” and the battle scenes of Otto Dix responding to the war-torn social climate in Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. Like the contemporary American artist Jane Hammond’s “Fallen,” a memorial installation composed of leaves fallen from trees, begun in 2004 and dedicated to young lives lost in Iraq, Ma Bao Zhong’s paintings show the military presence in contemporary society. These works cannot help but remind us of the unsettling effects on the human condition of war and violence resulting from abuses of power.

Weapons play an important part in the imagery of Ma Bao’s paintings. There are logical and practical connections between the artist’s representations of power and weapons. When the military is not directly present in the pictures, weaponry may still function as a symbol of power. Weapons are one of the means of exercising military power.

Ma Bao Zhong’s paintings remind us that power as manifest in political and military scenes also engages people on a personal level. On a personal level, the artist is fascinated by the material properties of weapons as objects with beautiful shapes and forms. Yet he seems mainly concerned with their societal purposes. Through his focus on weapons, he aims to disclose their meaning and role in the context of society. “My interest in weapons may come

from the interest in [the] human itself. The weapons in my paintings…are supposed to serve the purpose of representing the humans."[ii] Weapons accompanying figurative images assume this function in the series of portraits called "Series AK47," 1998. In these works, the weapons become a part of the identity of the subjects. Perhaps weapons bring comfort to human beings caught in a world of change and uncertainties full of circumstances over which they have no control. In any event they are an integral part of the portraits in this series relating to the theme of political power.

As an artist concerned about the future of civilization and the human condition, Ma Bao Zhong is aware that there are other forces that shape the meaning of human life, apart from political and military power. For the most part, the people portrayed in his paintings show signs of tension and uneasiness. They are not happy, even those who have the power; the artist is not happy. Throughout, there is a sense of an insecure world where so many things are changing. Their destinies are in the hands of others.

Culture, which includes manifestations of human creativity as expressed through the fine and popular arts, diversity in ideas and life styles, fashion, even manifestations of sexuality, constitutes an important component of happiness and fulfillment for human beings. Despite the dominant theme of people under duress in these paintings, there are moments when these other cultural forces surface. If only at the most basic human level, there are in the paintings overt and covert manifestations of sexuality in the portrayal of male and female representations of the human body, as in such works as "Target in Hawail," 1999; "Backstage," 2006 and the sketches referred to as "rough."[iii] Depictions of women eying a man and men eying each other with sensuous intentions, as well as bare breasted and scantily clothed female figures, signal these basic human interests. It may be that such cultural and social diversions are the necessary antidotes to the abuses of political and military power.

In his decision to become an artist instead of a soldier, Ma Baozhong affirms that art itself is a form of cultural power. The power of art may serve primarily market interest of the economy, or, more importantly, it can function in other ways to beneficial to the human spirit. The artist's power can be used to affirm, or to question when necessary, the directions taken in the exercise of other forms of power. When aimed at the search for knowledge and understanding benefitting the good of the people, the artist's voice is an essential part of a well-formed society. At times, Ma Bao Zhong may express doubts about his decision to become an artist as when he says, "If I were to choose once again, I would probably choose to be a soldier." [iv] But not really.

Conclusion

Both the developments concerning the uses of calligraphy and figurative art to reinforce political power exemplify a long standing practice in Chinese culture to make use of the arts including music, poetry, theatre, and paintings to communicate with the people the desired "politically correct" policies and behaviours of the time. The use of calligraphy and figurative art in the propaganda posters of the recent Chinese history resulted in the mobilization of these arts as a primary means of exercising political power. Because of their role as a means of communication between the leaders and the people, an examination of the role of these two manifestations of the political body in Chinese culture provide an important source for understanding the development of modern China. In addition, they offer an important case for the study of art's relation to political power. As contemporary artists resume their task as interpreters and critics post-revolutionary China, the uses of language and figurative representations of the body in the exercise of power again fall under the watchful eye of the artists who understands that they may participate in the brokering of power as well as in providing the tools for aiding in the use and abuse of power by others.

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[i] Los Angeles Times, photo and caption, June, 2007. Only in a Los Angeles Times photograph previewing the Hong Kong auction, the tranquility of the painting is interrupted by the presence of two female Sothebys employees in the foreground. The two figures posture in a confrontational mode intended to symbolize the underlying international ensions accompanying this historic event. Their energized bodily stances contrast dramatically with the solemn faces of the executors of power in Ma Baozhang's painting. Perhaps this Los Angeles Times newspaper photograph offers another opportunity for a painting by the artist. The auction took place June 26, 2007 in Hong Kong.

[ii] Some People are in no Position to Choose," Ma Baozhong, interview with critic Pi Li, Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing, in *Ma Baozhong (*Beijing: Arts Press, 2006), p. 142.

[iii] *Ma Baozhong*, 127, 134, 135, 143, 171,

[iv]"A Some People are in no Positi0n to Choose," Ma Baozhonh Interview with critic Pi Li, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, in *Ma Baozhong* (Beijing: Arts Press, 2006), p. 142.