

# WANG YAO

On 19th, February, 1969, Wang Yao, together with two other overseas Chinese artists, held a joint exhibition in a state Muzium in Taiwan. Although I was very busy at that time (festive season), somehow I managed to attend the exhibition. Ironically, I was the first to arrive at the exhibition too.

The three artists of this exhibition were Wang Yao, Wang Shi Zhao and Cheng Nai Chao. I was excited and very much looking forward to meet Wang Yao again, after a long silence of almost forty years! Though Wang Yao only exhibited fourteen of his paintings, I personally feel that, every work of his, is a master piece. His style of painting is very unique. This proved that, inspite of his absence all these years, his mastery of the skill of painting has not declined, but in actual fact, has achieved an even higher standard. One can safely say, among the contemporary artists, he stands up as a prominent and individual figure.

According to Wang Yao, his ancestors are decedents of Wang Xiang, the famous filial of the Eastern Han Dynasty. His ancestors migrated from Jiang Xia to Zhe Jiang Province during the Ching Dynasty. One of his ancestors, Wang An Tao, once held a very high and important official post in the province of Teocheow. His family once had a wide and priceless collection of paintings and calligraphy from various dynasties. His father, Wang Han Chong was also a famous connoisseur of traditional paintings as well as Chinese calligraphy.

When Wang Yao was very young, he studied classical Chinese under his grandfather. He is interested in the calligraphical style of the Tomb Stone of Han Dynasty. He also made an extensive study in the Oracle bone style of writing and constantly making research in the pictorial formation of Chinese characters.

When the Japanese occupied China, Wang Yao followed his father to Jia Shan district in the province of Zhe Jiang. From there, he learned calligraphy and painting from his father. When later while he stayed in Shanghai, and only at the age of 18 years, he became the editor of 'Shanghai Post', he was commissioned by the 'Shanghai Post' to draw cartoons whereby erasing off the popular image then of the Chinese people as 'The Sick Man' of Asia. Within a very short period, his cartoons became very popular with the people in China and abroad. 'Niu Bi Zi' was the pseudonym he used for his cartoons. Everyone was talking about him and his cartoons then. Through his creations, he satirised the Chinese society, but on the other hand, he would never failed to praise those who were good-hearted. Thus, he exposed the corrupted society and also at the same time trying to blend the world events then together with the day to day living of the ordinary Chinese people. His animated cartoons of the bull was highly successful. The different moods and expressions of the people were artistically drawn in his cartoons. No doubt many people since then have tried to

imitate his style of cartooning, nevertheless, they all failed.

Wang Yao is a frank, humble, sincere and helpful person, and also has a high sense of humour too. We lost in touch with each other since the Japanese occupation. From what I gathered from him later on, he once intended to fly from Szechuan to Shanghai immediately after the defeat of the Japanese in China. But instead, he joined a group of his good friends to start a banking business in Hanoi, Vietnam. But with outbreak of the French Vietnamese War, they were forced to close down and he left Hanoi for Kunming practically penniless. He stayed for about a year in Kunming and lived on his cartoons which fetched a very high price of 3 tails of gold for every square foot of his cartoons. In 1949, he was interested in movie making but unfortunately, this dream of his was abandoned again due to the Korean War. And when China was under the rule of the Communist, he fled first to Hong Kong, then to Thailand to Singapore and finally settled down in Malaysia.

When in Malaysia, he travelled extensively to various towns and capitals giving lectures and demonstration in painting to the primary and secondary schools. He was very well received by the students and local people. When Malaya became independent in 1957, he was invited by the Hang Jiang Secondary School in Penang to be their Master of the Board of discipline for 3 years. Later on, he became Headmaster of the Sing Ming Independent Secondary School in Alor Star, Kedah. He held that post for another 12 years. Due to illness of his and his spouse, he retired in Penang whereby he started his painting activities again.

The gallery owner of Art House in Kuala Lumpur was very impressed with his paintings and subsequently became his sole agent. His paintings can be classified into the following categories:

1. Landscape
2. Local scene paintings
3. Painting derived from Chinese Characters
4. Chinese Mythological painting
5. Painting of children playing games

Besides busy himself with his paintings, he spent ten years travelling the whole of Malaysia collecting information of the origin of the Chinese and their contribution towards Malaysia and Singapore. Finally he wrote a book about them under the title of 'The History of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia'. This was very well received.

Towards the twilight of his years, he absorbed deeply in Eastern Philosophical studies like Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. These studies influenced most of his later painting.

*26th June 1969 By Cheng Jiyong of Taiwan*