

LIFE



From left: Yan Dehui (1908-87) admired a lion sculpture during his visit to Beijing in 1977. The sculptor gave finishing touches to an artwork at his studio in Paris. Yan and modern artist Pan Yuliang at his studio in France. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Love for home shines through

Forty works of late sculptor Yan Dehui are on display at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, **Lin Qi** reports.

Wu Weishan, director of the National Art Museum of China, recalls a long car ride one winter morning in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comte region, eastern France in 2018.

Through the woods delivering “a poetic mood to remind one of the landscapes of Barbizon school”, Wu and his colleagues arrived at the end of a country road where stood the former studio of Yan Dehui (1908-87), the Chinese sculptor who lived and worked in France since the 1930s till death.

They were greeted by Yan’s daughter, Marianne Yen, who ushered the visiting group into the house, in which “sculptures filled almost every corner of the room, the desks and the top of packed book cabinets,” Wu recalls, “and there were unfinished works and chunks of *huangyangmu* (boxwood) left for carving”.

Wu says he had never met Yan, but “seeing his works, as if I had seen the man”. He adds: “The works, carrying the marks of his hands and fingers, whether been done or not, touched us deeply, all the while conveying his homesickness.”

The trip was arranged for a meeting with Yan’s daughter who wished to donate his works to his home country.

The fruits of this journey — 40 works from Yan’s oeuvre and a donation by his family — are on show at *Shaping Techniques From Within*, at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. Part of the works are on show until Sunday and the rest through to Aug 14.

The exhibition provides insights into those clues in his work: his deep love for family, the modern art movements he was exposed to while in France, and the Chinese cultural roots that kept him warm and nurtured him while living far away from home.

Yan left for France in 1938, making him a member of groups of Chinese youngsters studying in Europe,



a phenomenon of the first half of the 20th century.

Yan, however, did not find fame as much as his contemporaries in Europe — Xu Beihong, Liu Kaiqu and Wu Guanzhong — to name only a few who later became luminous figures and helped shape the Chinese art scene.

Before that, Yan had attended Shanghai Fine Art School, greatly inspired by the words of Liu Haisu, the school head and artist of repute, that “the mission of the school is to research on the latest developments of European art and meanwhile, to rediscover the treasures in the palace of our own culture, and blaze new trails for the revival of Chinese arts and culture”.

Finishing his initial art education at home and teaching at his alma mater for some years, Yan thus traveled to France to follow the tenets of Liu Haisu.



From top: *Fisherman*, a boxwood sculpture, on show at *Shaping Techniques From Within* at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing. Two statues of Yan’s daughter Marianne Yen on display. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

The exhibition shows a typed recommendation letter for Yan in French and signed by Liu Haisu in his own hand, in which the latter described Yan’s work as of “Eastern particularity” and “highly esteemed and appreciated”.

Liu Haisu wrote that, Yan, to further improve his skills, went to France to draw inspiration from European arts to meld them harmoniously with the Eastern forms, a skill “which he was certainly able to master”.

Yan’s studies in France were fruitful. He enrolled in the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, the time-honored school in Paris. His graduation thesis writing was halted during World War II, but he managed to finish his studies after the war ended.

“Yan’s work shows his solid disciplines in school and a figurative method to master,” says Wu Wei-

shan, a sculptor in his own right. “He treated his subjects as delicately as Auguste Rodin and as expressively as Antoine Bourdelle,” he adds.

Walking Alone, a work on display, sets a fine example. Shao Xiaofeng, a researcher at the National Art Museum of China, says the nude statue shows the results of the academic training Yan received in Paris.

“By giving a definition to her soft, well-fit silhouette, he hails the inner energy of life,” Shao says, adding the depiction of a figure walking alone also reveals the confusion and loneliness of Yan in a foreign land.

Yan never forgot his roots. Born in Zhejiang province, he began to learn boxwood carving — his home province produced skillful artisans of the kind — at the age of 13 from famed carvers.

Several boxwood sculptures he made in France are also on show at the current exhibition.

During the decades he lived in France, he continued with this craft, a way to retain an emotional link with his homeland and also to source from Chinese elements.

While his Western-style sculptures were on show at Parisian exhibitions and collected by museums, he also endeavored to make his home art better known to Europeans.

He exhibited a wood carving, *Hide and Seek*, at a show at the Grand Palais in 1938. He joined the Chinese Society of Art in France which promoted traditional Chinese art. And his graduation thesis was a study of the sculptures of the Jin (265-420) and Sui (581-618) dynasties.

Wu Weishan says the Chinese side of Yan’s art continued to influence his work, especially those in the later stage of his career.

“His works, enriched by spirituality and philosophy of his home art, allowed him to initiate a smooth dialogue between the East and the West,” he sums up.

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New finds indicate a legendary state in Shaoxing

By **WANG RU**
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The latest archaeological discoveries in Shaoxing in Zhejiang province appear to confirm records of the existence of a legendary state millennia ago.

Complex large-scale foundations from the Yue State, which existed during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), have been discovered for the first time in Shaoxing ancient city, which is known to have been the site of an important Yue capital, scholars explained at a recent news conference at the National Cultural Heritage Administration in Beijing.

The Jizhong Site in Shaoxing was discovered during a construction project at the Shaoxing Jishan High School last year. It has yielded results over the past five months since archaeological efforts started in February. The area under excavation covers nearly 3,000 square meters.

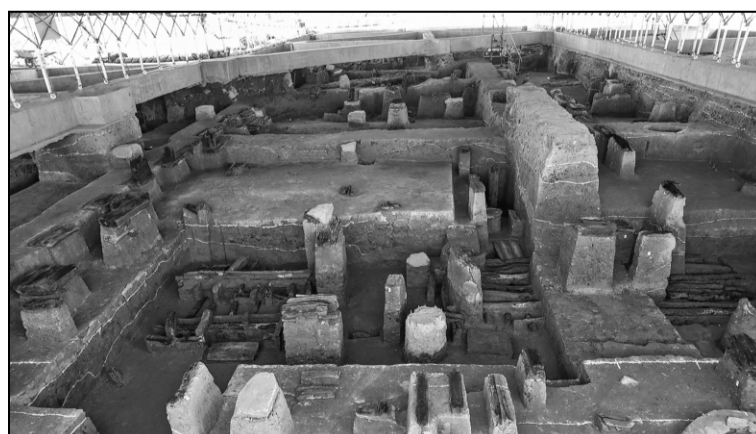
Li Longbin, director of the Shaoxing Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, says that the remains of wooden foundations from the Warring States Period and the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220)



are densely distributed across the site. The later Han complex was built on the site of an earlier structure covering an area of 2,385 square meters.

Based on records, archaeologists believe that the Warring States Period relics are from the Yue, a state that ruled part of today’s Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces and Shanghai.

A large number of tiles have been found from both periods, which imply the existence of important buildings. “From the Warring States Period to the Han Dynasty, only important buildings had tiles. The large number and types of tiles unearthed clearly indicate that the site was originally home to important buildings,” says Li.



Above: The Jizhong Site under excavation covers nearly 3,000 square meters in Zhejiang province’s Shaoxing ancient city, the site of high-level buildings of an important Yue state capital during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Above left: A brick well built in the Six Dynasties (222-589) at the site. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Moreover, archaeologists have found that the original complexes were built on high platforms, indicating they were government offices since at the time only government buildings were elevated.

The complexes from both periods show evidence of buried wooden foundations and buildings on platforms. “This shows an innovative way of building that probably com-

bines the use of traditional Yue state stilt houses and Central Plains-style buildings,” says Li.

“I believe this is a way of construction invented by the Yue prevented their buildings from settling. ... Then when the Han rulers built there, they inherited the Yue methods,” he adds.

Qin Dashu, an archaeology professor at Peking University, says that the

earliest foundations are well-preserved, and display characteristics very different to contemporaneous structures in northern China, and thus play an important role in the history of the country’s architecture.

According to Li, archaeologists have excavated a few Yue sites, particularly tombs, but all the earlier sites were located outside Shaoxing ancient city, which is part of the modern Shaoxing, and only the new site is located within the confines of the ancient city.

According to historical literature, King Goujian assumed the Yue throne in 496 BC, and three years later, the state was invaded and defeated by a neighboring power, the Wu, who took Goujian captive and held him until 490 BC.

Following his release, Goujian built a new capital in Shaoxing ancient city and is said to have lived a humble life. He slept on piles of firewood and hay, used his weapons as a pillow, and hung bitter gall in his home, licking it every day to remind himself of the bitterness and shame of being captured. Through much resolve and immense effort, he finally built up Yue strength and defeated Wu 17 years later.

“Carbon dating shows that the site

dates to 2,500 years ago, and stands as testimony to the recorded history of King Goujian establishing his capital in Shaoxing ancient city,” says Li.

“As a result, it’s a big discovery since it fills in a blank about why no Yue state relics had been found within Shaoxing ancient city, and offers clues to the study of the layout of the capital,” he adds.

Artifacts from later dynasties have also been found at the site, including from the Six Dynasties (222-589), and the Sui (581-618), Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties.

One standout find is of part of a tablet written by Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) historian and poet Lu You, which was unearthed at the site last year, alongside a large number of building units and ceramics found more recently, which together indicate that the site may have been Shaoxing’s *guanxue*, a type of government-sponsored educational institution for nurturing talent during the Song Dynasty.

“The Jizhong Site boasts a wealth of artifacts. The area is full of foundations of buildings that were in use for a long time,” says Li.

“These buildings, spanning different eras, exhibit the features of high-level architecture, providing evidence of ancient Shaoxing’s role as a political, economic and cultural hub in the southeastern region of China,” he adds.