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Hans Christian
Andersen Award
Nominee

The People's Republic of China

ILLUSTRATOR

CAI Gao



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1 Biographical Information

Born in 1946 in the city of Changsha, CAI Gao was the eldest of five sisters in an extended family consisting of three-generations. As a result she grew up in a very supportive and caring environment. CAI Gao's early experiences were steeped in the traditions of a pre-industrial China where traditional crafts prevailed. CAI Gao learned to respect the wisdom of everyday life from her grandmother Zuo Shurong. Phrases such as 'Do not lift the lid of the pot until the time is up' or 'One open stove costs three stoves of firewood' convey the importance of 'care'; of attending fully to the task at hand. This was a time when the oral tradition had not yet disappeared and CAI Gao lived that tradition.



Zuo Shurong would make cloth shoes for the whole family. CAI Gao would help her when grandma was busy. While engaged in making and sewing, Zuo Shurong would sing nursery rhymes and tell stories to amuse themselves. This was a period of great happiness and CAI Gao associated those days with her own enlightenment and love of storytelling. CAI Gao said that Zuo Shurong had endless needlework to do, so she had endless stories to tell. The family would often go to the theater. CAI Gao would memorize lines from the plays and draw the characters. Zuo Shurong often bought paints for her granddaughter as a reward for a job well done. This encouraged young CAI Gao to immerse herself in the world of pictorial storytelling.

Storytelling forms the bond between parents and child, and this relationship is how traditions were passed from one generation to the next. Later in life, CAI Gao would turn many of these stories into pictures. Many of these works have since been collected together and published.

Zuo Shurong also encouraged CAI Gao to help prepare the family prayer service. CAI would climb three steps, place incense sticks on the altar in the courtyard, ring the bell three times and clasp her hands together. Even though she did not understand the concept of "heaven", she understood that this was a sacred space. Through these ceremonies, CAI Gao experienced the sanctity of life.



Sketch of *Blazing City 1938* (picture book)

illustrated by CAI Gao and Aozi
Yilin Press



Sketch of *Blazing City 1938*
(picture book)

illustrated by CAI Gao and Aozi
Yilin Press

The period of Cultural Revolution brought hardship to the family, who was relatively prosperous, fell into “Black Five Categories”. Fortunately the family remained united in their love and support for each other and their values survived.

During these times, CAI Gao's family moved to Zhuzhou. At Liqun Middle School, one of the most dilapidated junior high schools in the region, CAI Gao met some outstanding teachers. Under the guidance of good teachers CAI Gao discovered a new love for learning and excelled in many subjects, including math; a subject she had previously hated. At the age of 16, CAI Gao was admitted to Hunan First Normal School. In this new community CAI Gao discovered both Chinese and Western literary classics such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Records of the Gran Historian*, *Les Miserables*, *Notre Dame de Paris*, and others. When there were no books, she would copy manuscripts by hand.

As a student, CAI often drew illustrations for the school magazine. After graduating

from high school, she had no chance to enter university, instead she worked for a year in Zhuzhou County Cultural Center, painting posters on walls. Later, she was assigned to work as a village primary school teacher for six years (1969-1975) in the most remote mountainous area of the county LuKou. It was in this time that the intellectual spirit we find in works such as *THE Land of the Peach blossom* was formed.

When she was a teacher, CAI Gao had endless students' homework to mark after-class, apart from doing cooking and farming, she also had her own children to take care of. Free time at weekends was limited, but CAI was very fond of fine art; she compiled a textbook for herself by pasting art pictures from the few newspapers and periodicals available. At a time of scarcity, her husband made mini oil painting boxes and sketchbooks which were never far from her side.

After six years of self-study, she contributed articles to magazines and was delighted to find that her drawings were quickly accepted and published. After being transferred to Lukou in 1975, CAI Gao began to draw covers and illustrations for children's magazines. In 1980, her first book *The Beautiful Garden* won an award. Her second book, *The Understudy*, published in 1982, commissioned by Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, was very popular.

In 1982, at the age of 36, CAI Gao was hired as an editor by Hunan Children's Publishing House. She worked hard to develop her expertise and continued to illustrate children's books in her spare time. By the end of the 80s, she became an outstanding editor and accomplished illustrator in her own right. In 1996, the founder of Fukuyinkan Shoten, the leading figure of Japanese picture books, Mr. Matsui Tadashi, was invited to visit Changsha to give a lecture which CAI Gao attended. She was confronted with some new ideas which had a direct impact on her own understanding of picture books and of the unity of image and text.

CAI Gao has always looked on the creation of picture books as something more than the joining of words with pictures. The picture books she created won many awards, and her colleagues called her an “award-winning professional”. CAI Gao regarded her work as a sacred undertaking. She remained devoted to children's book editing until her

retirement in 2000.

After retirement, CAI Gao continued to create. She observed children, drew many sketches, and recorded her dialogue with children in her sketch book. She incorporated her observations and experiences into her art.

With the boom in picture books in China, many of CAI's books have attracted attention, and become popular among young readers. Now, CAI Gao is a grandmother herself. In addition to her painting, she also tells her grandchildren folk stories in the Changsha dialect, just like her grandmother. At the same time, she also uses picture books to share her views on art as life. She gives public lectures explaining the value of Chinese cultural traditions, highlighting their power for modern times.

CAI Gao became one of the most beloved picture book artist of China, in 2022, she was selected for Special Contribution Award of the 34th Edition, Chen Bochui International Children's literature Award.



2 Contribution to Literature for Young People

Heart-Warming art knows no borders

CAI Gao's artistic achievement has been recognized by artist and critics beyond China:

Of the new wave of Chinese artists who work in the field of picture books, CAI Gao stands out for her mature fusion of rich Chinese folk art and elements of Western painting. As the picture book emerges in China as an art form, rather than a purely didactic medium, the magnificent work of CAI Gao will provide a solid foundation.

Martin Salisbury

Professor of Illustration Director, The Centre for Children's Book studies Cambridge School of Art, UK

CAI Gao's painting does not interpret the tradition in a superficial way. She inherited it and transformed it. This is more than a style; it is the expression of a living tradition. She is not bound by any received wisdom about how picture books should be.

Tsuda Roto

Japanese art critic

When one looks at CAI Gao's illustrations one would like to read the text aloud. Her images convey the narrative drive of the story.

Sugiura Kohei

one of the most influential Japanese Graphic Designer

CAI Gao's visual-poetical and authentically youthful universe go beyond all ideology other than a human belief in the child and innocence. For which the only truth is simply to console souls and complete spirits. To become children, to see anew, to look back at the past and into the future with consciousness and the self-sufficiency of a new born, ready to move forward, slowly, to explore a new world of vision.

Jonas Stampe

Contemporary art critic and senior curator ,Sweden & Switzerland.



1. Let children see light by drawing power from the classics

As a bridge connecting Chinese classical literature and contemporary children's literature, CAI Gao's picture books are unique. Many of her works are adapted from ancient Chinese classics, and those works have spanned thousands of years of Chinese history, from the Western Han Dynasty to the pre-Qin period, down to the Ming and Qing Dynasties; those original texts were all written in ancient Chinese. Thanks to CAI Gao's knowledge of classical literature, she makes these difficult works meet the needs of contemporary readers

CAI Gao's adaptations are not a simple retelling in the modern vernacular, nor simply a product of her imagination. She developed her own interpretation of these texts. and brings the essence of Chinese classics to modern children in a simple and vivid form.

CAI Gao believes that picture books are akin to a spring of fresh water that can help to cultivate a new humanistic spirit. Her innovation is rooted in Chinese classical civilization and traditional culture. In the classic picture books adapted by CAI Gao, two important elements that emerge repeatedly are "love" and "transcendence". For example, *Bao'er* tells the story of a child who, loves his mother and his family, acts beyond his age. *Hua Mulan* tells the story of a maid who, because she loves her father and her homeland, surpasses the limitations usual for a woman of her time and social class. *Meng Jiangnu* tells the story of transcending life and death for love; *The Dragon Robe Festival* is about the sacrificial love of a hero Qin Hou; *The Land of the Peach Blossom* tells the story of a fisherman who was drawn to act outside of the norm - drawn by a vision of beauty, he came to paradise, and finally returned to reality, because of his love for his family. However, he brought back the seed of ideals. This story highlights the spirit of seeking, which is actually the transcending spirit of life and encourages people to go beyond the limitations of everyday common sense.

CAI Gao never underestimates children's ability to understand complex and abstract concepts. She believes that children's feelings and perspectives are open. She relies on



picture books to create an entrance for children which allows them to experience deep thoughts through pictures.

CAI Gao said: “Creating picture books is a heart-warming experience. You can discuss issues through picture books; you can make it profound or light-hearted. It’s a big world and you can do whatever you want with it. But you have to give children something bright, which is a kind of expectation. Because children all have the need for a sense of belonging, a sense of security, a need for a home and a need for love -especially the need for love. Children come to this world just for love. Going back to our childhood, we also need to be cared for, recognized and respected. Without respect there is no love.”



2. Love, transcendence and beauty - the three primary colors of CAI Gao that she put in her works

CAI Gao’s life experience serves as her work’s background color. The love represented in her books is rooted in her happy childhood, and the transcendent spirit comes from her longing for light in troubled times. The beauty in her work is born with love and transcendence, and she always draws on her own life experiences.

The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden, which won the 14th BIB Golden Apple Award in 1993, was an example. The young protagonist Bao’er was suddenly under a strange and inexplicable pressure because his mother was threatened. CAI Gao had experienced a similar feeling when she was young. Her family, was was rich and had a scholarly background, so they became political outcasts. This put a lot of pressure on her as a child.

CAI Gao recalled: “At that time, I chose to walk on small paths to school, because I didn’t want to meet my acquaintances on the street, and I didn’t want to see the contempt in their eyes. But when I look back on those days, I still had a lovely family and great teachers. The friendship between my parents and their friends was really precious;

the simple understanding between people and not betraying others was precious.”

In *Bao’er*, CAI Gao used black extensively . She said that there were many colorful things in the darkness; black can become a noble color, it can be the color of beauty. The famous Japanese picture book artist Wakayama Shizuko read *The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden*(early version of *Bao’er*) and found that “the little boy’s eyes are mostly like the clear blue of a lake, but when he fixes his eyes, they turn black again.” That was CAI Gao’s design :“I paint so because children retain the awe and respect for the mysterious. Children’s eyes are very clear, and they can often see the essence of things.”

CAI Gao creates picture books with a critical perspective. She hopes that her works can convey information in a non-verbal way, which is not to tell children directly, but to make young readers discover new things by themselves.



3. A dedicated editor is the soul of children’s books and the one who cultivates the soil

When *The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden* won an international award, there was no real market for picture books in China. Many parents did not know or understand what a picture book was, so many published works were sold as scrap paper. Under those circumstances, CAI Gao upheld a belief in the medium as part of Chinese culture: “the picture books I draw are definitely not as simple as providing a one-off story; my creation of children’s books is not only a profession, but also an ideal.”

As early as 1989, when famous painter Huang Yongyu saw CAI Gao’s paintings of *The Dragon Robe Festival*, he appreciated what she was doing. Mr. Huang wanted to introduce CAI Gao to people overseas so they could experience for themselves.

He encouraged CAI Gao to paint large-scale traditional Chinese paintings, and volunteered to help her hold an exhibition in Hong Kong. When she heard about this,

CAI Gao was so excited that she couldn't sleep, but the next day CAI Gao decided to stay in this field. she hopes she could create some valuable books for the future, she was proud of working for new generations.

In the early 1990s, in order to promote the development of Chinese picture books, Mr. Matsui Tadashi established the first Chinese children's picture book award The Little Pine Award with his own money. In the first list of winners in 1995, Mr. Matsui found an unusual thing, five picture books were all edited by the same editor, CAI Gao, including *The Adventure of the Little Eggshell*, *The Wanderings of Beibei the Kitten*, *The Bunny and the Little Bunny became Great Detectives*, *The Bag-Cat Mother* and *Bega's Cherry Class*. Mr. Matsui Tadashi believes that behind every good picture book there is a good editor, so he asked to meet CAI Gao, and they have been friends ever since. CAI Gao gained a deeper understanding of modern children's picture books through communication with Mr. Matsui Tadashi. She invited him to give lectures to the editors in Changsha through Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House. She also began working with Mr. Matsui, which developed into a lifelong friendship, fueled by the spirit of international cooperation. CAI Gao invited her best friend, Ms. Ji Ying, to translate Matsui Tadashi's most important theoretical book: *My Picture Book Theory*. The simplified Chinese version of this book was published in 1997. It is the first book in China that put forward a theory of picture book creation, and played an important role in the development of contemporary picture book art in modern Chinese society. Later it was republished by many other publishing houses.

CAI Gao worked as an editor for 18 years until her retirement in 2000. The picture books she edited have stood the test of time, -not only the five works that won The Little Pine Award mentioned above, but also *The Little Caterpillar's Dream*, *Where is Dengdeng* and etc, are still being reprinted today.



4. Passing through hardship, inheriting the past and ushering in the future, she is a witness for our time

When CAI Gao was a child, old China had not yet disappeared. She witnessed the great changes have happened in Chinese social and cultural life in her youth and adulthood. In her 60s, she entered her golden age as an artist holding her first solo show in Beijing, In 2008. Two news outlets reported it. The Beijing News reported with the headline "CAI Gao Leads the Way for Original Chinese Picture Books" whereas the Beijing Youth Daily reported under the title "CAI Gao's World Blooms". These exhibitions and reports enhanced CAI Gao's popularity among the general public. The year of 2008 also became a very critical year for the development of children's picture books in China.

One of CAI Gao's lectures was held at the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. In the lecture hall, CAI Gao shared her artistic experience and beliefs in a very simple way. Young artists, editors, teachers, students, and scholars packed the hall, and they were deeply moved. CAI Gao's pictures and words inspired her young audience, who included a new generation of writers and artists of modern Chinese picture books including

Yang Zhong (associate professor, who established the picture book studio in Central Academy of Fine Art in 2011. Very active in the field, she was invited to be juries of various children's picture book illustration competition. Under her guidance many of her students became awards winning picture books artists)

A'Jia (one of China's foremost translators of Western children's books and an influential storyteller, author, and educator, founder of Red Clay Reading Club, who won the Bridge Award, The Carle Honors, The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in 2022,)

Aozi (picture book artist, associate professor ,Hunan University ,founder of Childhoodsky Picture Book Studio, winner of 2018 Chen Bochui International Children's Literature Award)

Tu Tu (independent publisher, senior book critic, founder and chief editor of Yuefu Culture Press, winner of annual publisher of the 23rd Shenzhen Reading Month)

Yan Xinyuan (picture book artist, professor of the Beihang University, won 2019 wordless picture book in Bologna Children's Bookfair)

Since then, many talented people who were interested in creating Chinese picture books have sprung up: writers, artists, editors, researchers, teachers, publishers, librarians, advocates, and bookstore owners have gradually united to help ordinary families learn more about picture books.



5. The “Borrower of Light” has become a “Giver of Light”

CAI Gao called herself a "borrower of light". When she was little, she “borrowed light” from nursery rhymes, and when she was young, she “borrowed light” from literature. Now the light she has borrowed all her life is illuminating others.

After retiring, CAI Gao continued to create picture books and she entered her golden age: *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, *The Folk Tales of China, Korea and Japan*, *Hua Mulan*, *Meng Jiangnu*, *Blazing City 1938*, *Three Monks*, *What Can You See in the Moon*, *Where the Moon Goes, I Go*, *How I Came to be Me* and many others works were produced after her retirement. Among them, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* was published by Fukuinkan Publishers in Japan, 2002, and it surprised everyone with its success.

After 2008, in addition to continuing to devote herself to her picture books, CAI Gao also served as a judge for many important picture book awards in China, such as Feng Zikai Award, Hsin Yi Picture Book Award, Chen Bochui Award, etc. Besides of that, CAI Gao has been active on the international stage, such as serving as a judge of the Bologna Illustration Exhibition in 2002; she participated the “Japan-China-Korea Fairy Tales

Exchange Project”in 2004, created the *Blazing City-1938* for the “Japan-China-Korea Peach Picture Book Project”in 2013, and held an art seminar in Bologna in 2018.

Also, she is a passionate, promoter of picture book reading. Since 2008, CAI Gao has given many speeches every year to promote children’s reading, both for parents and teachers, and for children. Wherever she went, she sowed the seeds of her ideas, and is widely admired. She is affectionately known as the “Changsha Grandma” and the “Picture Book Grandma” .

The significance of CAI Gao’s picture books is actually not limited to children. Ten years ago, Jiu Wowo a young woman left the big city to do organic farming in the countryside after reading *The Land of the Peach Blossom*; Entrepreneurs influenced by her have set up picture book libraries. A few years ago, a couple Liu Rei and Zhou Zhou took their autistic child back to the countryside to carry out organic farming, and helped many families like themselves to improve their educational environment. They received continuous support from CAI Gao, and established an ongoing relationship with her. CAI Gao’s deeds have received more and more attention. An increasing number of people from different backgrounds have discovered the appeal of her work.

CAI Gao has dedicated her life to children. Although she is over 70, she still insists on creating and is recognized as an innovator in the field of picture books. CAI Gao’s works provide a cultural mirror for Chinese children, to enrich their aesthetic and literary experience. Also, she provides a window for children around the world to understand China’s rich and cultural heritage. She is an important voice representing Chinese culture in the world of modern children’s literature.





3 Essays on CAI Gao's Work

Starting from Here, We Can See the Source

Tu Tu

independent publisher, senior book critic, founder and chief editor of Yuefu Culture Press

In 421, Tao Yuanming, one of the greatest poets in Chinese history, wrote a short essay of only 320 characters, *Tao Hua Yuan Ji*. This is probably the most famous and important essay in China (*it is now included in middle school textbooks*). Since then, 'The land of the peach blossom' has become the spiritual home of generations of Chinese people; similar in importance to Dante's exploration of the Hell in the *Divine Comedy*. *Tao Hua Yuan Ji* expresses a Chinese version of the ideal world of absolute beauty, Impossible to reach. The way there can only be dimly glimpsed, and most important of all, its reappearance is almost impossible. Where people once lived in harmony, today we can only look at an Image.

More than 1,500 years later, CAI Gao, a female artist in contemporary China, recreated Tao Yuanming's *Tao Hua Yuan Ji* in the form of a picture book. This was supposed to be an impossible task. Because in most cases, the limits of the human imagination can only glimpse an image of The Absolute. But just as Tao Yuanming's fisherman walked through the darkness 'as if there were light', CAI Gao also found her light. In the first sentence of her book "One Hundred Children, One Hundred Blessings" CAI said, "Children are my light." Because of this guidance, she found her own way to truth. She created a new form of picture book which is an art in it's own right In China, millions of children grew up reading CAI's picture books, receiving strength and beauty

from the artist, known as the Good Grandmother of Changsha, who draws inspiration from the soil of Chinese tradition . Many years ago, the same vitality and beauty nourished CAI Gao herself.

CAI Gao is a native of Changsha, the capital city of Hunan province. Fortunately, In her childhood, the Chinese cultural traditions were still very much alive. The experience of rural life in her youth may have been an even greater influence. For when CAI's was young -- her generation of were committed to building a new civilization, at the cost of breaking with tradition altogether. But what is rooted in the soil is impossible to destroy completely. CAI Gao immersed herself in that tradition during the period of Cultural Revolution. Many years later, in her picture books, she used vibrant red and green with a modern sensibility. Red and Green were once considered "not modern enough", but in her childhood, they constituted the essence of rural life. CAI Gao found that real beauty has nothing to do with current evaluation. Trends change over time. The only thing she needed to do is to stay true to beauty itself.

Of course, CAI Gao did much more than that. It was only a generation later that the Chinese began to rediscover the value of their own tradition. Some things that are destroyed can never come back, but some things that are broken can grow again. A large number of artists, poets and writers, including CAI Gao, set out from the Chinese tradition and returned to the city, replanting the lost civilization. CAI Gao may not have been the most obvious artist to lead this revolution in the beginning, but looking back after 40 years, we have to say she is the most important artist in the field of children's picture books that China has produced. She not only retained the idea of beauty but created it. She gave the traditional Chinese spirit a modern form. She understood this form could be understood by children.

CAI Gao created many picture books, of which the most important is undoubtedly *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, which is a reproduction of the *Táo Hua Yuan Ji*. For Tao Yuanming, The Land of the Peach Blossom was not only an ideal world, but also a lost world -- and CAI CAI Gao knew very well that childhood itself is an ideal world. It is bound to be lost, but we might not understand its importance. Because of this, in *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, the moment of sudden enlightenment is central to the story.

A world is seen behind the light, full of peach blossoms, a bright; a vision of absolute beauty. What CAI Gao is trying to express here is the power of beauty itself. In the everyday world, the seed represents the yearning to regenerate that which is lost. At the same time, the image of the 'road' throughout the book, with its twists and turns, dark and night, light and warmth, also suggest the difficulties and hope of the long journey. At the end of the book, on the lining paper, there is a man looking in the distance at the ideal land. It is not only about the yearning, but also a farewell before we set out again.

Seeds, and their ability to grow, are perhaps the most important spiritual metaphor in CAI Gao's work, though she doesn't always say it directly. A few years ago she held an exhibition entitled 'Season of Sowing', which said the same thing. In the picture book *How I Came to be Me* she eulogized life itself directly, and in the "One Hundred Children, One Hundred Blessings" series, she used the images of hundreds of different children's poses-- to convey the spirituality of life. Excuse the use of the word "spirituality," which does not mean any mysticism. Simply out of admiration for the vitality of life. In this series of CAI Gao's works, you will feel again and again, the love of life and trust.

This kind of love and trust is also the secret of CAI Gao's ability to activate the spirit of Chinese culture. We can say that tradition has always been there, it was never really lost, but if the new generation of artists do not draw inspiration from it, the tradition becomes more like a museum and cannot have a living relationship with modern China. CAI Gao, is the one who discovered the living tradition and it became the foundation of her work. She embodied that tradition and brought the timeless message to the modern world. She reactivated it, and in the process, she also added something new to the tradition, something that might be called CAI Gao. In this sense, CAI's work was exactly the same as that of Tao Yuanming who create it more than 1,500 years ago.

What are these new things? Part of it, at least, might be called a rediscovery of motherhood, or the roots, and the land. To get a sense of this, consider CAI's works about women: *Hua Mulan*, *Meng Jiangnu*, *The Weaver Maid* (as yet unpublished). These books feature some of the most famous female characters in Chinese folklore: Hua Mulan, who joins the army to take her father's place, Meng Jiangnu, who searches for her

husband and cries down the Great Wall, and the Weaver Maid, daughter of the Emperor of Heaven.

The main characters in these stories are all extraordinary women, but in these books CAI Gao first gives central place to their daily work and growth. These images are beautiful, of course, but more importantly, CAI Gao is emphasizing to children that they are ordinary women. The hero is not born to be a hero, beauty will not automatically appear, as the heroine Mulan, Meng Jiangnv, or the Weaver Maid discover. They must all walk a long road. To find their husbands, Meng Jiangnv was blocked by a great river, became fearful, but she stayed true to her ideals. We can imagine that CAI was probably crying when she painted Meng Jiangnu's journey, and at that moment she herself became part of a female tradition that stretches back thousands of years. But this time, CAI didn't want the emperor's offer of salvation in the traditional story. Under her brush, Meng Jiangnv just needed a glimpse of her husband's soul. This is the farewell and the beginning. The ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said: "The most supple in the world can go through the hardest in the world". CAI Gao uses her works to respond to Lao Tzu's(*CHAPTER 43, Tao Te Ching*). She uses ordinary images of female gentleness and arrives at great strength. Thanks to the Hollywood adaptation, Mulan's image became famous even in the West: she disguised herself as a man, took her father's place in the army and won battles. She finally, quietly returned home as an ordinary woman. In short, she is a true hero. In contrast, Meng Jiangnv looks as if she lacks strength. All she has are her tears, but she cries so much that the Great Wall, one of the symbols of Chinese civilization, collapses for her when her husband, collapses on the construction site. As for the Weaver Maid, just like her name, she was born for "weaving", the work of traditional Chinese women. She brought the colors of the clouds and the pattern of heaven to earth, and thus stole absolute beauty from heaven. Like Prometheus, The Weaver Maid was a thief of fire, and what she took was not the tinder of civilization, but absolute beauty. That extreme, never-ending pursuit is evident everywhere in CAI Gao's work.

It is difficult to fully explain CAI Gao, just as it is difficult to fully explain any real artist. She preserves tradition, she opens up the possibility of experimentation; She tells old stories, but renews them. Sometimes her pictures are warm and filled with passion,

sometimes they are simple, abstract, pointing to the origin. This origin, may be that she has an ideal China in her heart that she wants to express. There is not only China in her heart, but also the road from this Chinese spirit to absolute beauty, absolute good, and she wants to paint perfection itself. A few years ago, CAI Gao gave a speech at one of China's most influential lecture platforms, Yi Xi, about turning 'the chicken feathers on the ground 'into splendid brocade and creating beauty out of chaos. She certainly achieved this, and anyone who saw her rooftop garden would think she was the personification of beauty.

The story is important, but the way of telling a story is even more important. With her brush, CAI Gao retells the stories for children and the world. If she tells the stories differently, it's because the stories themselves hold endless possibilities. CAI Gao used her own road to reach her land of peach blossom. People have reason to believe that the children under the light of these stories will get their own little seeds and grow into other stories, other roads, that may lead to The Land of the Peach Blossom at some point in the future.



Nomination of CAI Gao for the Hans Christian Andersen Illustrator's Award

Martin Salisbury

Professor of Illustration and Director of the Children's Book Research Center at the Cambridge School of Art

The exquisite visual storytelling of CAI Gao, initially forged during the years of the Cultural Revolution, when she found herself exiled and working as a schoolteacher at a remote primary school deep in the Chinese countryside, transcends numerous boundaries and builds links between many cultures that so often seem mutually exclusive. It was against this backdrop of rural isolation from the late 1960s to the early 1980s that she immersed herself in her painting, inspired by a deep affection for the landscape and the natural world. After the Cultural Revolution she took a post as Chief Editor at Hunan Children's Publishing House, winning the award for the nation's most outstanding young editor in 1996 and, combining her editorial role with the ongoing creation of her own picture books, going on to be named as China's most outstanding illustrator for children in 2000.

The bridges that CAI Gao has somehow built through her art include those between traditionalism and modernism, Eastern and Western visual culture, and between the Fine and applied arts, the latter often regarded, especially in the West, as among the most difficult cultures to reconcile. In a country where the unique art form of the children's picture book has only recently fully emerged and begun to be recognised, CAI Gao has, over many decades, brought a rare combination of technical skill and aesthetic vision to her graphic storytelling, employing her exceptional draughtsmanship, painting skills and sumptuous use of colour in the service of the modern picture book idiom. Though she may rightly be seen in many respects as a pioneer, the key qualities that underpin all of her work are deeply personal, and yet universal - a love of nature and a very human, empathy and vision that perhaps explains the burgeoning cross-cultural reach of her output.

I first became aware of CAI Gao's work in the early years of the 21st Century, when Chinese students began to find their way the MA Children's Book Illustration course that I founded at Cambridge School of Art in 2000. I was moved to include examples and introduce them to an international audience in my books, Children's Picture books: *The Art of Visual Storytelling* (2012, with Morag Styles, Laurence King Publishing) and *100 Great Children's Picture books* (2015). In the latter book, I wrote the following short text to accompany the selection of *'Bao'er* (*'The boy who outfoxed the fox'- by Xin Yi*) as one of the chosen influential picture books:

*CAI Gao was born in 1946 in Changsha, in central southern China. In 1993, her **The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden** won the Golden Apple Award at the Biennial of Illustrations at Bratislava. Her books have been published in Japan and South Korea and in 2008 a major retrospective of her work was exhibited in Beihang University and Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, along with a published book of her collected works.*

In 2018, CAI Gao's body of work was especially celebrated at the Bologna Children's Book Fair, in the year that China was the official Guest Country. This body of work stretches back to the 1980s. On emerging from exile, she took on the role of Chief Children's Editor at Hunan Publishing House. After a few years, she began to combine this role with the creation of her own picture books.

*Of the new wave of Chinese artists who work in the field of picture books, CAI Gao stands out for her mature fusion of rich Chinese folk art and elements of Western painting. **Bao'er** tells the story of a boy who awakes one night to find his mother in a state of madness. He goes on a quest to root out the source of the evil fox spirits that have brought about her condition. This is explored through painterly artwork of rare depth. The artist combines pattern and space with unusual mastery and an exceptional, vibrant use of complementary colours - in particular, reds and greens - set against black.*

As the picture book emerges in China as an art form, rather than a purely didactic medium, the magnificent artwork of CAI Gao will provide a solid foundation.

Over the years, CAI Gao's contribution to the field of children's literature and the graphic arts has grown and widened. As well as her outstanding body of graphic work, she has contributed to the field through her work as a jury member at the Bologna Children's Book Fair as well as other panels in China and abroad. But it is perhaps *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, in collaboration with Japanese writer, Matsui Tadashi that

has done most, among so many important books, to cement her status as one of world's great masters of the picture book form, and communicating so much about Chinese aesthetics and rural life to the wider world. Although her stylistic approach is deeply sophisticated, the warmth and affection with which her observations of daily life are imbued make this and other picture books accessible to all ages. Over the years, this stylistic approach has evolved, embracing a more graphic, often schematic approach to the arrangement of pictorial elements, retaining a deep respect for Chinese graphic traditions whilst seeming to be simultaneously entirely modern and accessible.

The keen eye for visual anecdotal detail can be seen to be constantly nourished by CAI Gao's devotion to her daily sketchbook/ journal, which she uses religiously to record in words and pictures her everyday experiences and observations. A selection of pages from these will be published in the UK and USA (*as well as various other expected international co-editions*) in 2023 by the publishers, Thames & Hudson in my forthcoming book, *Illustrators' Sketchbooks*, along with some of her thoughts on what these journals mean to her. They reveal a passion for the everyday, a fear that the little details may escape if they are not observed and recorded, as this passage shows:

"Plants grow every day and so do children. It would be a shame if I didn't pay attention to them. I discover many interesting things that I can't afford to forget. So I draw them, quickly. I enjoy collecting interesting things and ideas in everyday life, but how can I preserve them? A camera can't do it well, nor a computer. Only sketchbooks, they are like storage bins, or cabinets for keeping things fresh, keeping my collection safe and alive."

The integrity and stature of CAI Gao's work over the last four decades and places her among the giants of the picture book world. These qualities justify the claim that she is truly the grandmother of the Chinese picture book.

CAI Gao: Discover the Hidden Gift of Childhood

Jonas Stampe

Contemporary art critic and senior curator, Sweden & Switzerland.

In an elegant and poetic challenge to a male dominated art world, the curator of the 59th Venice Biennial in 2022, Cecilia Alemani decided to select 192 female and only 21 male artists in a outspoken 9 to 1 ratio. A selection which, furthermore, included artists situated outside the international art market, that had never before had been showcased at the biennial.¹ CAI Gao could undoubtedly have been one of them, had Alemani's selective perspective been more inclusive. Yet, it was a refreshing and symbolic questioning of today's gender unequal art world and the tunnel vision of a ubiquitously dominating market aesthetics. Two issues and courageous acts which perhaps overshadowed one another : the iconoclastic decision to entitle the Venice Biennial after a children's picture book, *The Milk of Dreams*, by Surrealist Leonora Carrington. Alemani's choice had of course a tremendous meaning, a children's picture book as a title for the art world's most prestigious exhibition, considered the Olympics of contemporary art.

Alemani's subtle yet forceful curatorial act, empowers and highlights the signification of the children's picture book as a medium. Both as an educational tool for enlightenment, as a contemporary art form with meaning that problematizes pictorial and societal hierarchies. An act that expands a potential understanding of the function of art, of meaning and intention, in questioning how we see and appreciate. It elevated in one elegant stroke, its signification and function as a tool to educate with a social language of text and images, figures, colours and stories. Children picture books for the

1. Alex Greenberger. Venice Biennale Names 213 Artists for 'Transhistorical' 2022 Edition. Artnews. February 2 2022.

art world to learn from. It gave significance to the notion of the children's book as an artwork of image, text, intention and function, as an essential language to enlighten and develop the imagination and cognition of both children and adults. As an embodiment of a human bridge, the unique double reading-listening-seeing bond, it creates and sustains between adult and child - before being read by the child alone. It also raised questions about the complex relationship between text and image, as well as between the notion of art and illustration. How to read the text's organized hierarchic and linear discursive order with the pictures unhierarchic, simultaneous and spatial structure. With its dialectic narrative between text and image, the children's picture book stands out as a highly complex conceptual medium with an essential function and a powerful potential.

The history of children's picture books, in its turn, has an intricate connection to modern and contemporary art as it becomes manifest with Carrington's *The Milk of Dreams*. But also as a medium explored by other artistic giants like Oskar Kokoschka in *The Dreaming Boys* (1908)², Marc Chagall in *A Story about a Rooster* (1917)³, El Lissitzky in *About Two Squares* (1922)⁴, Andy Warhol with *The Little Red Hen* (1958)⁵, Salvador Dalí in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1969)⁶, David Hockney in *Six Fairy Tales from the Grimm Brothers* (1970)⁷ and Yayoi Kusama in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (2016)⁸. CAI Gao's paintings for children's picture books functions exactly in this spirit. Not only as images of graphic design to support a story visually, but also as artworks, paintings created by an artist to accompany a famous tale, a poem or a classic ancient text.

By tradition, Chinese painters has a preference to relate to ancient stories as to raise

2.Oskar Kokoschka. Die träumenden Knaben (*The Dreaming Boys*). Kurt Wolff Verlag. Leipzig. Published in 1917 with the prints executed in 1907-08.

3.Marc Chagall in A mayse mit a hon; dos tsigele (A Story about a Rooster; The Little Kid.) Vilner farlag fun B.A. Kletzin, Petrograd. 1917.

4.El Lissitzky. About two squares: in 6 constructions. Skythen Press. Berlin. 1922.

5. Andy Warhol. The Little Red Hen. The Best in Children Books. New York. 1958.

6.Lewis Carroll & Salvador Dali. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. New York. Maecenas Press and Random House, 1969.

7.Grimm Brothers. Six fairy tales. Illustrated by David Hockney, Petersburg Press. London, 1970.

8.Hans Christian Andersen & Yayoi Kusama. The Little Mermaid. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. 2016.

the significance of their work and sustain a dialogue with history. It elucidates the truth in CAI Gao's observation "how poetry, and traditional Chinese aesthetics, have developed through thousands of years of history, and permeated throughout people's ordinary lives".⁹ But also her admiration for "the accomplishment of intellectuals in the past. They treated life as art itself. With a spirit of self-consciousness, and an ability for introspection, they were able to elevate themselves and (their art) to a higher realm".¹⁰

It is true that the visual fusion and dialectic dialogue of text and image forms a cornerstone within Chinese aesthetics. Merging text and image in a unified composition constitutes two of three types of pictorial narrative. The most familiar of these is the long handscroll format used to illustrate a story in multiple scenes. As each of the handscrolls unrolls section by section from right to left, either in a continuous landscape setting or in scenes punctuated by corresponding texts, the viewer is transported through time and space. The second type of narrative relies on a single iconic scene - usually the climax - to evoke an entire story in the viewer's mind. The third type of storytelling is represented by landscapes, still lives, and flower-and-bird paintings that contain no narrative imagery, but tell stories in their appended calligraphic writings. This type of storytelling is an important and distinctively Chinese practice. All these three types of narratives forms a part of CAI Gao's aesthetics and visual articulation. The organic approach to text and



Long handscroll style: the girl grew up quickly, illustration of Meng Jiangnv.

9.CAI Gao, in Laurence McKnight, CAI Gao, Art and Life, unpublished document.

10.Ibid.



A single iconic scene: we share the same moon , illustration of *The Land of the Peach Blossom*

image makes them two halves of the same coin, as body and mind, in absence of any Cartesian separation. This organic non-dualist approach to image and text, and to the universe, gives CAI Gao's paintings a meaning that goes beyond the limited notion of a textual illustration. Instead they become integral parts of one poetic articulation.

CAI Gao grew up in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province, characterized by its grey granite-paved streets and facing houses¹¹ She was brought up by her grandmother who excelled in telling textured and fragrant stories while knitting. An aficionado of Chinese opera she always brought CAI Gao with her to see opera troupes, local and visiting, so that the young girl could draw its characters and create a memory of the performance. CAI Gao's love for opera and the atmosphere of the theatre is rooted in this childhood, and has certainly influenced her paintings and the composition of various scenes. A natural born artist, as a small child she used charcoal from the fireplace to make large drawings on the interior walls of her home, before being given paints by her parents. Later, at Hunan First Normal School educating future teachers, she studied poetry and literature and explored the venerable institution library's unique

11. Ibid.

holdings in-depth. After graduation, CAI Gao's artistic career began like so many other contemporary Chinese artists of her generation by poster painting. And like so many others of an educated urban youth during the Cultural Revolution, she was, as the saying goes, "sent to the countryside", to connect with the realities of the poor rural China. In fact, she was ordered to go to Taihu, a small village in the middle of nowhere, as a punishment for having been disobedient and not wanting to inform on a friend, unwilling to be used as a tool for uncovering so called "intellectual enemies". Situated in a valley in the Hunan mountains, Taihu appears like a blooming lotus, with a 1000-year old temple at its center, like pistils. This temple converted into a school became symbolically CAI Gao's work place and home in Taihu. A school-temple full of children who were called for class with a 1000-year old bronze bell sounding over the valley and the mountains in an infinite echoing, a touch of natural zen.

Although CAI Gao liked the village, she was an exile. The shock of being sent away under such brutal circumstances was healed, to some extent, by her closeness to nature and of course the children, her little teachers as she called them - in front of whom she maintained her dignity however difficult the situation. After the morning and afternoon classes she became, like the other villagers, a farmer, learning the routines of sowing in spring, reaping in autumn, gathering firewood and water. It was obviously not like an opera, but was nevertheless a life-changing experience which gave her a certain mindset, to appreciate the hidden joys of hard life. Learning to understand the real meaning of the saying that "All things lead to the great Tao/Enlightenment".



people seeking for their ideal land , title page illustration, *The Land of the Peach Blossom*

In this micro-society with its harsh conditions, and intimate surroundings, CAI Gao kept her integrity and courage for her mission. Teaching the village children of all ages different subjects, from reading and writing, to history and mathematics, poetry and of course classes in visual art. It would form her understanding of the value of education for children and adults. It was here that she learned, through practice, in a continuous dialogue with her pupils, about the relationship between reading and verbal articulation of meaning, in regard to drawing and painting. This rural temple-school at which she taught for six years, anchored CAI Gao's profound understanding of her children's aesthetics, of the young students own imagination and fantasies but also of their hopes and wishes, their doubts and fears. It was a rural school for life which formed the basics of her future passion and engagement with painting and children's picture books.¹² Moreover, it anchored and immersed her love for the act of painting, with a pluri-aesthetic approach to form as an artist, seeing with an innocent eye, with the freshness and vitality of a child.

"A child sees everything in a state of newness.... genius is nothing more nor less than childhood regained at will" wrote Charles Baudelaire in *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne (The Painter of Modern Life)* in 1863.¹³ It articulated a notion of the innocent aesthetic of the child as a source for creative inspiration, which ever since accompanies modern art in its development. The search for newness and originality, formulated a modern doctrine of a tradition of the new, which became the driving force behind modern and contemporary art's exploration of ever new aesthetic territories.¹⁴ From Claude Monet to Paul Cézanne, the child's eye was celebrated, with the latter even confessing his intimate wish; "I would like to be a child".¹⁵ Many of the greatest artists of modernism like Pablo Picasso, Henri

12. After her six years in Taihu, CAI Gao was transferred to teach at a middle school in the small, yet less remote, town of Lukou in Hunan province.

13. Charles Baudelaire. *Peintre de la vie Moderne*. 1863. Paris. p.8

14. The notion the tradition of the new was coined and explored by Harold Rosenberg in his collection of essays *Harold Rosenberg. The Tradition of the New*. Horizon Press Inc. New York 1959.

15. Emile Bernard. *Souvenirs sur Paul Cézanne, et lettres. A la rénovation esthétique*. Paris. 1921. Republished in *Conversation avec Cézanne*. Séguier. Paris. 1995.

Matisse, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, El Lissitzky, Joan Miró and Jean Dubuffet owned large collections of artworks by children by which they were inspired, and at times used as templates.

CAI Gao's own practical hands-on experience during six years at the temple-school, not only witnessing the pictorial universes of children, but their actual process of creation, or the poïesis to use the concept and notion developed by the French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, could only but influence her visual philosophy.¹⁶ That both the artworks poïesis, the act of creation, and the aesthesis, its reception, were essential, both the process and the result. Or as CAI Gao puts it, "In my view, an artwork is the expression of an artist's thoughts, what the artist has created, and how it is created are both very important".¹⁷

The originality of CAI Gao's pictorial universe expands in an almost tangible sense parallel to the creation of a child, in its identification with the undistorted process of seeing and doing in proximity to a child's viewpoint. CAI Gao's painting is authentically naïve, immediate, and colourful, like a child's vaccine against any adult habit or tradition. Yet conceptually conscious about tradition and a pictorial poetic legacy. Her perception corresponds perfectly with Henri Matisse's 1953 declaration in *Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child*, that the artist "has to look at everything as though he saw it for the first time: he has to look at life like he did when he was a child, and if he loses that faculty, he cannot express himself in an original, that is, a personal way".¹⁸ Yet, just like Matisse, CAI Gao's colour rich compositions shows a fragile and conscious universe, fresh and invigorating, denoting both to the modernist canon and the Chinese pictorial tradition. Appropriating folk art figures and colours as well as abstract flatness, two of her cherished influences. Or as she says, "Traditions are not just theory. They are necessary in our lives, things that we do daily, often unconsciously. You must rely on your soul, and

16. Paul Valéry. *Discours sur l'esthétique* (1937), in Paul Valéry, *Œuvres 1*, Paris, Gallimard, « La Pléiade ». 1957, p. 1331.

17. CAI Gao, in Laurence McKnight, *CAI Gao, Art and Life*, unpublished document.

18. Henri Matisse. *Looking at Life with the Eyes of a Child*. In *Matisse on Art*. E.P. Dutton. New York. 1978. p.148.

19. CAI Gao, in Laurence McKnight, *CAI Gao, Art and Life*, unpublished document.

not just your senses, to notice and appreciate this”.¹⁹

CAI Gao’s style is not one of repetition but changes with the subject of her work, or her own emotional experience. She prefers to use gouache or water colour on paper, but employs sometimes ink, charcoal, oil paints depending on her needs. While not being attached to a particular medium she feels how “different media evokes new feelings” and that each new project brings a new round of exploration. “Sometimes”, she says, “I discover a new technique as I am painting, and that is a delightful experience for an artist”.²⁰ At times her work features a dense form of painting expressing feelings of fullness and weight, and at times it articulates the visual philosophy of the intended blank.²¹ A white emptiness with a spiritual resonance, spatial hierarchy, conceptual



CAI Gao's Traditional style brush painting: *Flower Fairies*. ▲

CAI Gao's Oil painting: *Flower and kids*. (Part of painting) ►

20. Ibid.

21. Tianyi Zhang. Aesthetics and Philosophical Interpretation of the 'Intended Blank' in Chinese Paintings. In *International Journal of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences*. Volume 02; Issue no 10: October, 2021.



meaning of philosophy and aesthetic theories developed since millennia.

The Intended blank is a unique visual style in Chinese painting, where blank space directs the viewer's experience of contrast between emptiness and solid form. Used as a way to emphasize the value of silence, it follows Laozi's concept that "the great music is without sound, the great form is without shape".²² Intended blank, also simply called "blank" or more poetically "the remaining jade", is used as a tool to open up the beholder's unlimited imagination.²³ As an instrument of perception psychology functioning like a visual trigger and mind-opener, to stimulate optical participation. The diversity of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism permeates Chinese culture and values, and finds all a powerful articulation in the intended blank. Formulated in the *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya* or *Buddhist Heart* sutra as : "Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form".²⁴ Or as Laozi put it in his *Dao De Jing* : "everything on earth is born of Being, but Being is born of the nothingness of Dao".²⁵ The intended blank white empty space used by CAI Gao carries as such signification, relating to the depth of Chinese philosophy. While being a spiritual articulation meaningful as a compositional tool, inciting viewer participation, it connotes to a pictorial tradition of ages.

Besides the compositional use of a white wide open intended blank, CAI Gao employs an empowering colour palette. It is articulated in subtle monochrome tones as well as in the powerful colours of folklore she wore on her clothes as a child. Her use of colour and form all depends on how she understands the content, the story and its language, connecting subjective personal feeling to artistic expression and meaning. She prefers an "open feeling, unrestrained, all at one go" and likes to "work with a structure that leaves room for a sense of movement and freedom".²⁶ She prefers not to revise her work but to make it in one go, saying that she "would rather start over than make a correction".

22.Lao-zi, Dao De Jing, verse 41 (see Tim Chilcott's translation, Lao-zi. Dao De Jing. 2005. p.91)

23.Tianyi Zhang. Aesthetics and Philosophical Interpretation of the 'Intended Blank' in Chinese Paintings.

24.Jayarava Attwood. Form Is (Not) Emptiness : The Enigma at the Heart of the Heart Sutra, Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, 13, p. 53 (2017).

25.Chilcott, p. 89

26.CAI Gao, in Laurence McKnight, CAI Gao, Art and Life, unpublished document.

This work process, or, all-in-one-stroke poiesis is visible and tangible in her paintings, emotionally and conceptually. Yet, only made possible through a thoroughly elaborated main structure and detailed visual plan.

What gives CAI Gao's compositions an outstanding and at times sensational visuality is her conscious use of perspective. Employing both a flat abstract-like frontal view, and an aerial perspective of a bird's eye. It articulates an observation of the world from above, seeing its figures and landscapes like a child with a satellite zoom, at a distance or just up-close. It can be a central-perspective, at times distorted, or merging several viewpoints in one picture. In a sense this multi-vista on the world and its appearance, relates to Chinese landscape painting which employs a flattened perspective useful for the long handscrolls. As a result, there is no specific setpoint guiding our view, which at first can make a logic-minded adult feel confused. Yet the absence of a central perspective stimulates a wider space of thought and imagination, as a way to go beyond the self-imposed spatial restrictions proclaimed in the single viewpoint. It also functions as a rational solution to depict multi-perspectives.

Another perceptual tool employed by CAI Gao to raise the visual attention, is her use of stark contrast between foreground and background. It can be a flat covering mountain wall, parallel to the picture plane, with a hole opening at the center, through which one can distinguish, as a reversed background, flowers and figures at a distance. Or a foreground with dense flowering bushes and above it far away exceedingly small human figures. CAI Gao's conscious play and change of perspectives stimulates a perception and reading that incites the viewer-reader to be on constant alert, as an authentic visual intelligible opposite to any notion of monotonous industrial repetition.

This variation is also inherent in her figures and use of form, which can change following a new book or project. In some she uses a figurative and popular folk-form that accentuates profile and sharp contour against a white or black background, similar to the traditional Chinese paper cuttings that inspired both Henri Matisse and Hans Christian Andersen.²⁷ In others she employs an almost abstract informe, in which human figures

27. See for example Hans Christian Andersen's paper cuttings to Astrid Stampe's Picture Book from 1853.

and flowers of flora integrates as a flat all-over-pattern.²⁸ In front of which one, again, has to stay alert to visually distinguish hidden figures and forms, inciting seeing as a notion and practice of optical exploration.

Seeing CAI Gao's art works published in her many picture books with their different visual articulations stimulates certainly any child's potential to learn how to see. As it can incite any adult who has preserved the capacity to observe detail and analyze form, to appreciate the perception psychology inherent in its visual compositions. Openness, opacity, space, form, figure, ground, flatness, colour, achromes, the written text from selected stories and poems, form all parts of CAI Gao's visual-poetical and authentically youthful universe. They go beyond all ideology other than a human belief in the child and in innocence. As a visionary and intuitive being, accompanying the logic-blinded adult, in an imaginative journey of the senses. For which the only truth is simply to console souls and complete spirits. To become children, to see anew, to look back at the past and into the future with consciousness and the self-sufficiency of a new born, ready to move forward, slowly, to explore a new strange world of vision.

It is of course impossible to select any of CAI Gao's more than 20 published picture books over any other. Together, they all constitute a monument of a formidable and positive life achievement. Not in marble, bronze or stone, but in the souls and minds of her readers, in the memories of children and adults alike. It is an impressive accomplishment. Yet if we had to choose one picture book it would be *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, which tells a story with an open ending, posing more questions than giving answers, textually minimalist and visually expansive, beautiful, invigorating like the colours of spring. It is a story about all of us, children and adults, about the human

28. "Informe" meaning formless, was a term used by the French art critic Michel Tapié in regard to a certain painting in the late 1940s and 1950s comprising matter painters like Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet, alongside abstract painters like Jackson Pollock and Wols, giving the name to the categorie "l'art informel".

being's social exploration, curiosity, friendship and kindness but also betrayal and failure. CAI Gao gives here a rainbow of colours, forms and words, a visual waterfall of human warmth into which we can immerse with our own seeing and imagination. She articulates a monumental mind on a human scale, creating relationships of questions with perspectives and colours, the intended blank of course, and a bond of surprise and understanding between children and adults. Painting as a wide open spatial potential to empower an inherited intellectual human vision. This is what CAI Gao's artwork is all about, of course, with the humble and profound understanding that the act of doing is intimately linked to the way of seeing, in creating meaning.



Intended blank, illustration of *The Land of the Peach Blossom*

Warm Artwork, Amiable Artist: My Impression of CAI Gao

Yang Zhong

Associate Professor of Central Academy of Fine Art, co-founder of Children's Picture Book Studio in CAFA.

“Peaches and plums are silent, and a path is formed beneath them; In the fields flowers are blooming, March is already here.”

This is what CAI Gao said when she was invited to visit our University, Central Academy of Fine Arts, to hold her solo exhibition and lectures in 2008. Until now, I can still vividly remember she quoted this old Chinese saying, which I have regarded as an interpretation of education and practiced it day after day. Since then, I have had the honor of becoming friends with her, and our friendship also gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to be a professional picture books artist.

The two poetic quotes she cited were reflections of her own life. She likes Tao Yuanming, not only did she produced *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, but also lives in it's spirit. She has beautifully transformed the suffering, the tribulation of life and all the simplicity, trivial experiences of life into her art. Pictures books are a way of spreading her understanding of Chinese classics and her spiritual world, illuminating her readers' minds.

At that time, CAI Gao's exhibition had an impact on our faculties and students; everyone was impressed by her art works and picture books. CAI Gao's lecture even moved some listeners to tears, and everyone began to believe that art come from the artist's own experience. Literature and art are in CAI Gao's blood; The turbulence of the Cultural Revolution has not diminished her creativity. Reading and painting illuminated her spiritual world in the darkest of times.

Our hearts beat with CAI Gao when we were in front of her art work; Each stroke

is so vital, and beautiful. All the darkness that she experienced has been transformed into a colourful background in her work, as CAI Gao said: “Art allows me to transform ‘chicken-feathers-on-ground’ (a mess) into a piece of brocade.”

When CAI Gao was an art teacher, she devoted herself to education; When she was an editor, she devoted herself to cultivating creativity and editing many important publications. After she retired, she was able to devote herself to her true passion. Her talent and profound understanding of the human condition combine to make her the preeminent Chinese picture book artist.

In spring the frost is melting and the flowers are beginning to bloom. It is art that warms CAI Gao, while, CAI Gao's art brings warmth to the world.





4 Interview with CAI Gao

Our Peach Blossom Land-Childhood, Mother Tongue and Chinese Culture

Lamplighter Education

Be Close to Mother Tongue

XU Dongmei (*founder of “Be Close to Mother Tongue”*) and LIU Ying (*Educator and Senior Researcher*) had an in-depth interview with CAI Gao. They talked about CAI Gao’s picture books, especially *Bao’er*, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* and *Hua Mulan*.

LIU Ying:

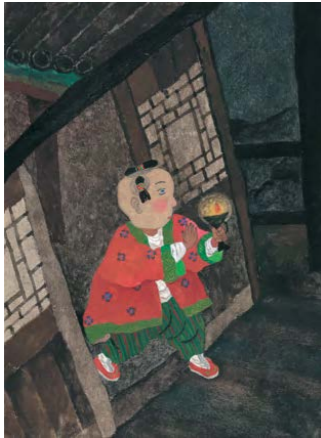
Your books (*Bao’er*, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* and *Hua Mulan*) have a distinct Chinese style, yet in the same time very modern, and they are beautiful. Children are very happy to read your books.

At first, I thought children would think the book *Bao’er* was a bit scary. However, our parents all said that their children might feel this way at the beginning, but after reading it, they especially liked this book. Some students even said it was their favorite.

The parent of Xu Peijun in our class would like to ask Ms. CAI: “Why did you choose the picture of Bao’er holding an oil lamp for the cover, instead of the one that has Bao’er brandishing a sword?”

CAI Gao:

I chose that picture as the cover because I want to highlight the important role of a



lamp, especially in darkness. A child has a lamp, which can illuminate himself and the road before him. Where there is light, the darkness recedes. In addition, the lamp itself has a good symbolic meaning in literature, so it is more representative.

LIU Ying:

Thank you! I researched children's responds to the pictures in *Hua Mulan* and I found boys like pictures depicting the following sentences:

*She gallops ten thousand miles,
For the war she has to honor.
She crosses lofty hills,
Like an eagle soaring over.*

*From northern gusts, through biting chills,
Echoes the watchman's clapper.
With wintry glow, of icy hue,
Light glimmers on her armor.*

*Generals die in a hundred battles,
Our warrior's back, how ten years fly.
Upon her return she is summoned to see the Emperor.
In the Hall of Light, she receives the highest honor.*

Boys can feel the bravery of Hua Mulan and the tragedy on the battlefield, while girls prefer the pictures of:

*Click click, and click click click,
By the doorway Mulan weaves.
When all at once the shuttles cease,
A sigh is heard with solemn grief.*

*Besides the window, I dress up my hair,
In front of a mirror, I rouge my face.*

from which they can feel the warmth of home. The picture that both boys and girls like is:

*And when I walk out to meet my compeers,
They are perplexed and amazed.
For twelve years, we fought as comrades-in-arms,
The Mulan we knew was not a lady of charm!*

When Hua Mulan put on women's clothes, her comrades were amazed. Everyone's expressions are different. The young readers felt as if they were on the scene. Ms. CAI really brought the children into the story.

FENG Yiqi, our student, after reading the book asked “ Why the feelings of Hua Mulan's father were not depicted in the book when Mulan said goodbye to him? ” She felt it was a very cruel for Mulan's father to see his daughter go to the battlefield instead of him. Why is there no such scene?

CAI Gao:

In fact, the father has been with his daughter all the time. When Mulan was buying a horse, her father was by her side; When Mulan led the horse on the street, her father walked in front of her. A father's love and a mother's love are different.

When people saw Mulan off, I let Mulan's father lead the horse, and Mulan's mother, sister and younger brother bid goodbye to her. If the whole family was drawn in a pile, the composition of the picture would not look good, so I drew a well next to them. It is the scene of the family saying goodbye.

Most of all, I want to use a more magnificent scene to express the "parents " in "she leaves her parents by the city wall", The 'parents' not only refers to Mulan's, but all of those who are going to participate in the war.

There is also an association between *Hua Mulan* the poem *Song of the Conscripts*:

"Chariots rumble and horses grumble.

The conscripts march with bow and arrows at the waist.

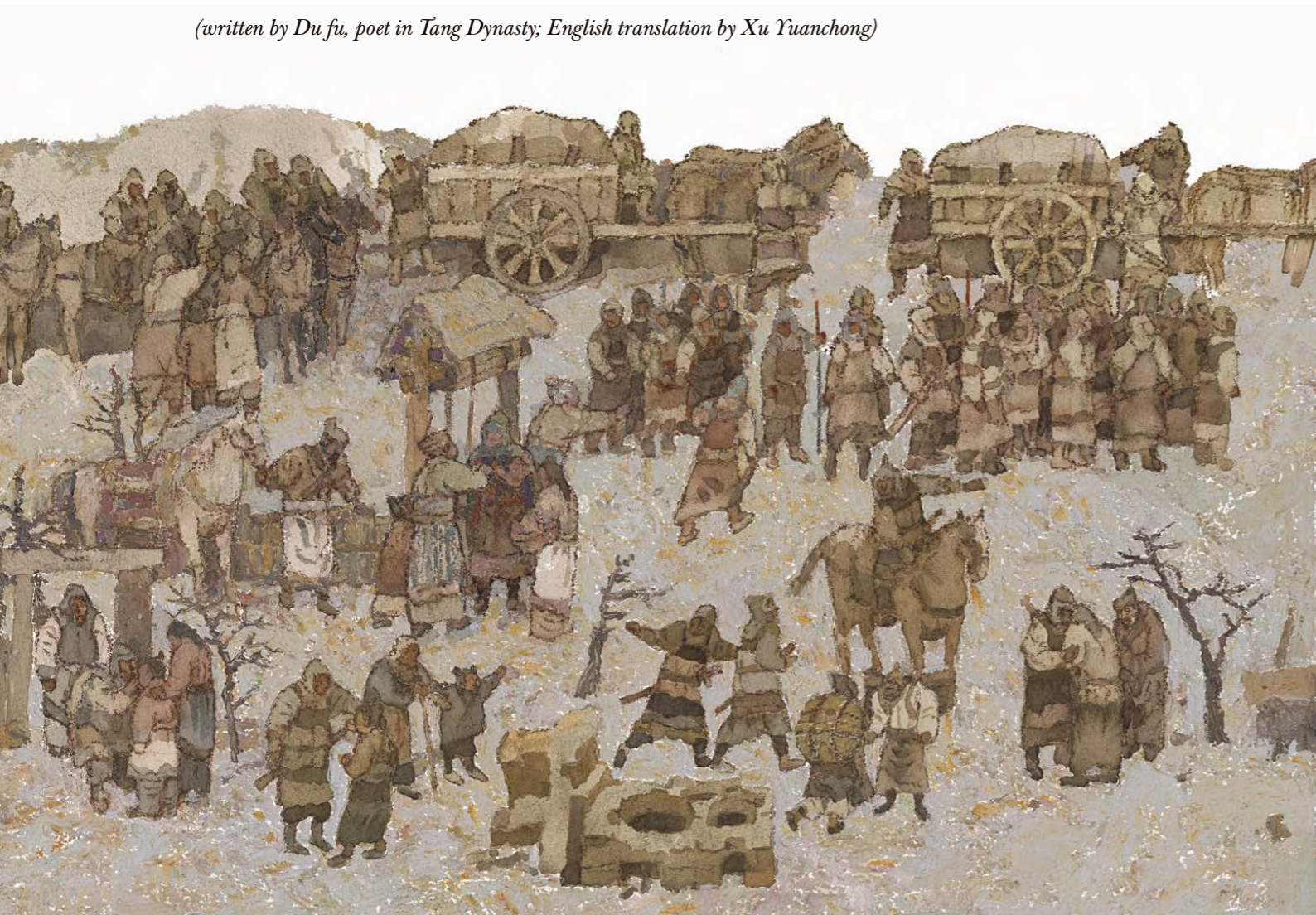
Their fathers, mothers, wives and children come in haste

To see them off, the bridge is shrouded in dust they've raised.

They clutch at their coats, stamp the feet and bar the way;

Their grief cries loud and strikes the cloud straight, straightaway."

(written by Du fu, poet in Tang Dynasty; English translation by Xu Yuanchong)



That's the farewell scene I wanted to portray.

LIU Ying:

I have one last question about the book *The Land of the Peach Blossom* asked by FENG Yiqi. As you mentioned in the postscript, "I put the unforgettable things in reality in the pictures", what is the most memorable thing for you? Where is the closest place to paradise in your mind?

CAI Gao:

What I can't forget the most is my childhood and my life teaching in the countryside. Unlike schools of today, in 1970s, during my years of teaching in the countryside, teachers did everything. We became peasants when we put down the chalk. During the busy farming seasons, the school teacher had days off for working in the fields. It was a period in which my life was closest to that of a peasant. Sometimes I would return to that place in my dreams, a simple but very beautiful place.

The place where I worked was an ancient temple surrounded by mountains. In that huge temple, some houses were converted into school buildings and many other places need to be rebuilt. We participated in building houses. The place where I lived was also converted from the temple. There was a pine tree in the middle of the temple, which was planted during the Six Dynasties, It was 1000 years old. When I left that place, the tree was still alive and very green. When I was teaching there, as long as the class bell rang, there would be echoes all around.

In *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, when the fisherman first entered the peach blossom land, he met an old man standing on the bridge. There was a small thatched pavilion beside the stream. When I was going to school for class, I would pass a place where there was a thatched pavilion with a wooden bucket filled with tea for passers-by to drink. It also served as a place for pedestrians to rest. Peasants are really good at taking care of passers-by, so I painted a thatched pavilion in the picture.

The orderly cultivated paddy fields are also something I am particularly familiar with in my life. Walking barefoot on the ridge was pleasant and it has deeply imprinted in my mind. In springtime, the soft mud under my feet, and the feeling of being close with seedlings in the fields, are still vivid memories.

When I created *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, I basically painted my experience



of rural life into it. Mills, bamboo forests...everything in *The Land of the Peach Blossom* has its prototype. The roads were crisscross, the small cottages lines on the foot of the hills, one after another, the dogs barked and chicken clucked...It was really an enjoyable experience.

I especially like to draw the brushwood gate. There are many sentences about the brushwood gates in Chinese poems, such as "I knocked at the brushwood gate, but none responded to my knocking at all" (*poem, by YE Shaoweng, Song dynasty*), "the birds twitter on the brushwood gate" (*poem, by DU Fu, Tang dynasty*) and so on. For a lifelong time these poems have deeply influenced me and I can't forget them. Sometimes, I can't even tell the difference between poetry or life itself.

Hardship sometime also could be a gift. With certain distance and perspective, it could also be a very unique experience, and sometimes even beautiful.

The pictures in *Hua Mulan* are all contrasting: war and peace, before and after the battle, life and death, desolation and tranquility, close-up and fading away.

Mulan joining the army and returning home are also contrasting scenes. This is a scene of going and returning. Some people can go out, but they can't come back. It was

not easy for Mulan to come back. If she didn't have the love for her homeland, the kind of love that deep in her soul, she would never be able to come back. Not to mention fame, if she had other ambitions, such as politics, or a desire for a superior life, she would never come back.

However, Mulan was eager to return to her homeland. If there was no previous description of the peaceful life there, how do we explain Mulan's decision to return without hesitation?

There is no explanation in the poem, but I should give an explanation to our children. Otherwise, it would be pointless for me to illustrate this poem. I want to tell our children: never forget your homeland. Childhood is our homeland, poetry is our homeland, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* is our homeland and Chinese culture is our homeland. Isn't the power strong enough as such a united hometown? Such a power is strong enough to call a wanderer from afar to return to his hometown.

I don't like the way people look at the country with pity, not at all. I don't quite agree with the opinion that children in the country live a very rustic life. I think the countryside is very good and beautiful, even if it is difficult.

Let's go back to the picture book. There is a picture which shows before Mulan leaves, holding a heavy armor, she keeps looking at the spinning wheel next to her. Her expression is complex. What is in her mind? Maybe she is saying goodbye to it. "I may not be able to come back" or "I will come back and hear you sing again"?

After Mulan returns home, with her sister she goes to her room to take off the armor and dress as a woman again. Her steps are slow when she passes her spinning wheel. The joy of "seeing an old friend again" is obvious on her face.

The creaking sound of the spinning wheel is very pleasant, and there is a sense of tranquility and eternity. Therefore, I also pour out my feelings for the spinning wheel here. Mulan grew up listening to such voices, could she not have feelings for the spinning wheel? Men farming and women weaving are the main characteristics of Chinese civilization for thousands of years. Can a hard-working girl not miss the spinning wheel?

When she goes to the battlefield, she takes the responsibility of a citizen. She serves in the army in place of her father. "My father is old, so I have to take his place and fight for our homeland". Her motivation is simple, it is not for glory.

I like Mulan very much, and I drew her beautifully. Her battle robe was carefully designed. I dressed her in a green cape with red decorations, The color of her armor is



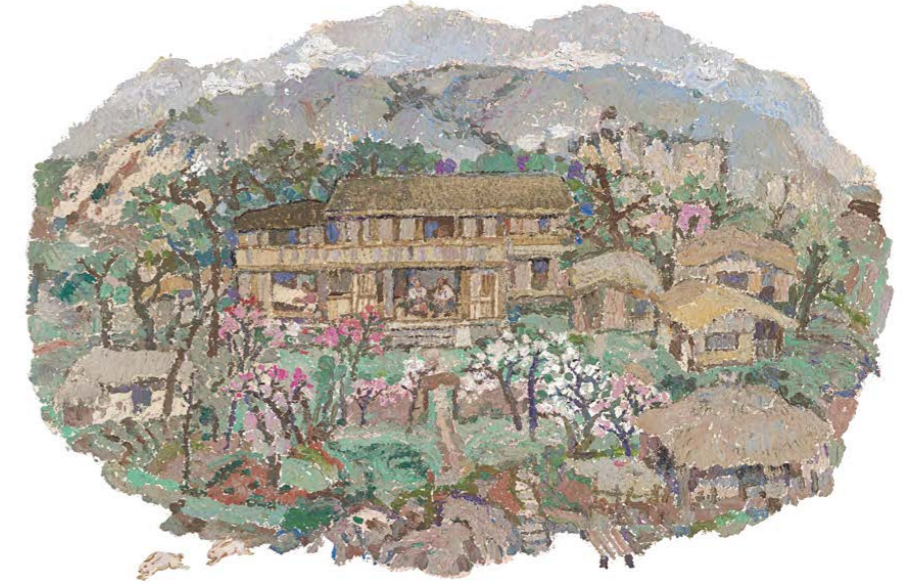
the color of the black earth; Her battle robe is woven with gold and silver threads. I dress her carefully to show her liveliness and her love for life.

Look at the two pages one is of her home before she left and the other is after she came back. One can see the exterior of Mulan's house has not changed. Why? More than ten years had passed, the house is still the same, and so is her room. Mulan takes off her battle robe and puts on a girl's dress. She looks beautiful. This is an expression of being in the same space at different times.

The peach blossom is still the same, but people and things have changed. Some people can't come back, but Mulan is lucky. Her house and her room (*the little attic*) is well. We can see the inside of the attic through the window, which is very neat and beautiful. Mulan loves beauty, and this kind of beauty is like nature, neat and delicate.

For the colors of the quilt and clothes, I deliberately used red and green, which have a symbolic meaning, not the actual colors used by Mulan in life. Mulan in real life may not be dressed in red and green, but she may be dressed more plainly in blue calico or grayish purple. However, I want to detach myself a bit. I use colors to symbolize the beauty of a girl's life before going to war. Even most ordinary days, she is very beautiful.

In addition, some children asked about the last picture The picture is quiet and peaceful and there are two little rabbits at the bottom. They want to ask why I didn't draw the rabbits bigger ?



I just can't draw them too big. The size or gender of the rabbits is not important. The important thing is time. As time goes by, the era of Hua Mulan is very far from us, so far that we cannot really imagine it. I want to paint the feeling of fleeting time in the book. The scenery is also like this. It is clear and complete at the beginning, but at the end, it is farther away from us. We can no longer see it as it was, we only know that it was beautiful. At the end of the book, I used a place similar to *The Land of the Peach Blossom* to express the tranquility after the war. That place should be fading and faraway; it should be hazy rather than clear. And the rabbits have to be as small as they are.

A painter must have their own thinking. All big things have a rhythm, when we give it to children, we also present it in a rhythm. It is the rhythm of the picture book, the rhythm in our heart and of time. When I want to reflect the rhythm of time, ten years is just an instant, and a dynasty is also an instant.

Today, when we think about the meaning of *Hua Mulan*, we'd better start from this point: we want our children to obtain a kind of solid affection and love similar to that of Mulan for her homeland and her family. In general, I drew the book Hua Mulan according to the rhythm of a front-to-back comparison. If children cannot comprehend it fully, it doesn't matter, just let them get as much as they can at the moment.

LIU Ying:

If one has a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, one will understand CAI Gao's books more. If one understand the details of CAI Gao's pictures, one will understand of the stories better.

XU Dongmei:

I personally not only like CAI's picture books, but also especially like your language and your attitude towards life. I recommend everyone to read Ms. Cai's collection of essays *Each Seedling has Its Own Rainfall*. The language of this book is beautiful and it records a full life. Can you talk about your creation, your language and your attitude towards life? What factors have influenced you?

CAI Gao:

I have already mentioned some before, and I will tell you more. How I came to be me? Why do I make picture books and enjoy planting green things? Those things all rooted in my early life.

I am able to become what I am today, especially thanks to my childhood. This is exactly what I want to talk about: free to be oneself. It is not easy for a person to be free and live a calm life. Many problems need to be solved.

All my picture books and words are to find my childhood. If a person has obtained good things in childhood, he can gain a kind of power all his life. Though, of course, other stages cannot be ignored too, as each stage has its benefits.

Another thing is the country life. Children must be close to nature. They should often go to fields and the riverside. We can do that easily.

How do we understand our cultural tradition. Chinese culture has great potential, yet there is a lot of dross, which hinders a person's longing for freedom and beauty. However, there are also strengths in it to help us resist these things. Our poetry and literary works can help us distinguish the dross from the essence.

I embrace a few things, one of them is childhood the other is self-reflection.

If a family creates a good environment, children will definite benefit. For example, the strength, the courage, the ability to perceive things from different perspective, which is sufficient to support one for a lifetime.

When we read picture books, we must use our eyes, voice , emotions and heart. We



Each Seedling Has Its Own Rainfall (graphic book)

CITIC Press, 2018



Each Seedling Has Its Own Rainfall (graphic book)

can also treat life in this way, because life is a larger picture book. We should learn how to use various senses in our early days, which requires help from adults. Parents need to have the ability to help their children.

Let us provide children the best environment: more beauty, less vanity. Beauty and vanity are two different things. The elements of life should be simple, but not rough. Simplicity comes from our heart, it is we do things sincerely, with full attention, to make them good. That will make one feel happy.

When I was young, whenever my grandmother peeled broad beans, she would sing nursery rhymes to me. She was not trying to educate us, she did it just because she enjoyed it. She had nursery rhymes and many stories from her own childhood.

She had received no schooling in her early days, could read or write until in her late 40s. However, she memorized a lot of things from the passed, including nursery rhymes and folktales. I got these by word-of-mouth gems, which are authentic and precious. At first, I just listened to it and later I could recite it.

Your attitude towards life affects your children the most. Even in the most ordinary house, you can create a good environment.

Creating good things for children is wonderful. I know it, so I make children's books. It would be a shame not to give good things to children. Beauty is everywhere, we just need an eye to discover it.



The traditional three-generation family has changed, but the way of word of mouth has not. For example, my mother asked me to wash my face and told me to wipe my ears at the same time. People want to be clean, it brings a very comfortable feeling, and produces a kind of awareness: my duty is to maintain hygiene, to maintain a clean environment for children, so I need to find the source of clean water and provide it to my children.

We need to protect our children and our heart from being polluted. There are too many things that pollute us. We have to clean up instinctively to refresh ourselves. If we can reflect on our behavior and keep clean, our children will love to be clean, naturally.

We have *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, the *Book of Songs* and a rich cultural tradition. These are beautiful things, and we need to bring them alive for our children.

Educators are like miners who dig to find good things. They have the habit of searching for seeking the source; They keep thinking. Everything has an origin, the ability to find it is something educators and picture book promoters must have.

XU Dongmei:

Thank you, your answer is from your heart. In fact, your knowledge of classical literature is particularly good. I think the knowledge is not from your grandmother; What she gave you were nursery rhymes, stories and attitudes towards life. So how to



Each Seedling Has Its Own Rainfall (graphic book)

enrich our literary literacy?

CAI Gao:

My literacy is attributed to my teacher. I really thank those teachers who have taught me. During 1950s, because of the political movement, I was not accepted by any public middle schools. What could I do? I could only go to schools that require no political background. The school I attended was Weiwun Secondary School, which was later renamed as Qunli Secondary School. In this middle school, there were many excellent teachers.

Qunli Secondary School was converted from a old shabby house in an old street. There was no auditorium, no lawn, but a few bare classrooms.

The classrooms were very dark, but the teachers were really good. My Chinese teacher was like an artist. He was very young, but as soon as he entered the classroom, he sparkled. He was passionate about literature. Often, he finished the text very quickly, then talked about Shakespeare, Leo Tolstoy, LU Xun, LI Bai and DU Fu.

I had no chance to read foreign literature at that time, and felt that the teacher's words were thrilling. I was able to memorize many articles by Mr. LU Xun because of this teacher who led the way. He made me feel the charm of poetry and classical literature.

Later, I was completely immersed in independent reading. I went to read the source of Chinese literature, for example Records of the Grand Historian and more classical

works. The beauty of literature and poetry is in my bones.

I liked my teachers; My math, physics, chemistry and English teachers were very good. I was very fortunate to have them leading my way.

A capable child will take the initiative to find the source, and he will block some things he does not like. What if a child does not have this awareness and ability? There needs to be teachers who will lead him to literature. If the teacher loves literature, it will be easier for his students to enter that world. As long as the door is open, many good works will flow in. When we see blossom buds, the spring has come.

Up to here I provide my answers. Thank you, your questions triggered a lot of memories.

Thank you all.

XU Dongmei:

Thanks to all who participated in interview, the children, the teachers and parents, and specially thank you Ms CAI Gao for sharing your stories with us.

Ms. CAI Gao's work will bring the mother tongue and our cultural tradition to our children. Let's open our senses to experience its warmth and strength.

Thank you all.

5 Bibliography

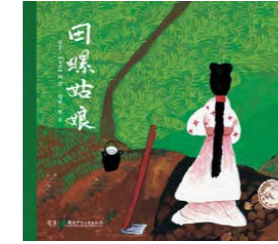
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written by Gan Bao (Eastern Jin Dynasty)
adapted by Yu Li

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Qingfeng (*comic-strip*)

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Hunan People's Publishing House, 1979



The Understudy (*comic-strip*)

written by Unkown
adapted by Chun Fu

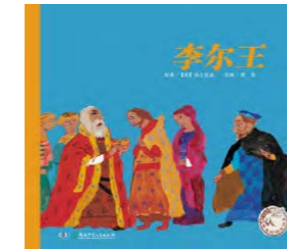
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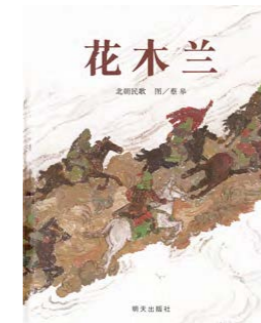
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Beijing United Publishers, 2020



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Beijing United Publishers, 2020

6 Representative Books

The Land of the Peach Blossom

written by Tao Yuanming (Eastern Jin Dynasty)
adapted by Matsui Tadashi



Introduction to *The Land of the Peach Blossom*

Since the 1990s, CAI Gao began to cooperate with the Fukuyinkan Shoten of Japan and published *Violet Nursery School* (1992), *The Flower Fairy* (2001), etc. In 2002, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* was published.

Looking into The Land of the Peach Blossom

Written by CAI Gao

The Land of the Peach Blossom depicts the beauty of seeking. I naturally draw my feelings about rural life into the painting, and put my ideal relationship between man and nature into the painting. It depicts all what I know about nature and country life.

My "peach blossom land" is a very ordinary village in southern China, a place where people can live in peace. When I was settled in the village in 1969, after school, I learned to press oil, to do menial work, to plant rice... to read under the oil lamp midnight, to rise with morning bell and to rest at evening drum, these life experience are all pictures and poems. I might not have been able to paint *The Land of the Peach Blossom* without the real experience of country life.

I don't want to paint *The Land of the Peach Blossom* as an illusory place. I hope it reflects real

lives. I illustrate how people work, eat and drink, all are included in my book. I like to describe the warm relationship, the smell of rice soup, the aroma of burning wood, and fragrance of trees ... I painted how people in the countryside live their lives. Don't look at it from the historical perspective. It's not history. I made it up.

The fisherman, I designed him as an ordinary man but probably a descended of poor intellectual family, his different. Because the fisherman initially went out for fishing, to make a living. When he saw the peach blossom, the fisherman was surprised and abandoned his boat for curiosity. That is a bit different: he interested in beauty more than fishing.

I draw the beauty of the peach blossom, the misty waterway, let the fisherman in *The Land of the Peach Blossom* walk all the way with curiosity. He was lost. Being lost itself is interesting, because it is the best way to arouse people's emotions. I care a lot about personal experience. I don't think it's interesting to explain everything bluntly, the process of seeking itself is fun, to experience the unknown is particularly fascinating.

The moon shines upon our ancestors as well as on us. I must bring out the good things out of tradition, but also invoke the feelings of modern people. We live in a global village, my painting language absorbed impressionism, expressionism, the influence is in my blood. But my heart, the Chinese aesthetic concept, aesthetic taste, aesthetic expression, aesthetic spirit, are equally important. What I want to pursue is to make all these in a whole. I prefer weightiness, texture, elegance, simplicity and gorgeous.

The Land of the Peach Blossom can be understood as the story of the seeking the truth, the process is very beautiful, so is the result. When we go to pursue our ideal, it is better to bring curiosity and passion and with us. To find the beauty is good, even without any company, even unknown, it is still good. Because your heart changed in the process, when your heart is beautiful, everything will be beautiful accordingly.

Life is a series of pursuits, it will shining when you add some ideal and beauty in.

Inherit the Peach Blossom Land in the best way

Written by A'Jia (Writer, translator, picture book reviewer, educator)

When I first read *The Land of the Peach Blossom* in 2009, I was shocked by its beauty at first glance. Although the text I read was the modern version, restated by Mr. Matsui Tadashi, when I saw the painting by Ms. CAI Gao, I was reminded of the ancient style prose of Tao Yuanming. "In the year of Taiyuan, Jin Dynasty, there lived a man in Wuling Prefecture, who earned his living by fishing." (*The first folio in the text*) -- Turn to the next page, "one day, he rowed his boat alone a stream, unaware of how far he has gone"-- turn the page again, "when all of the sudden he found

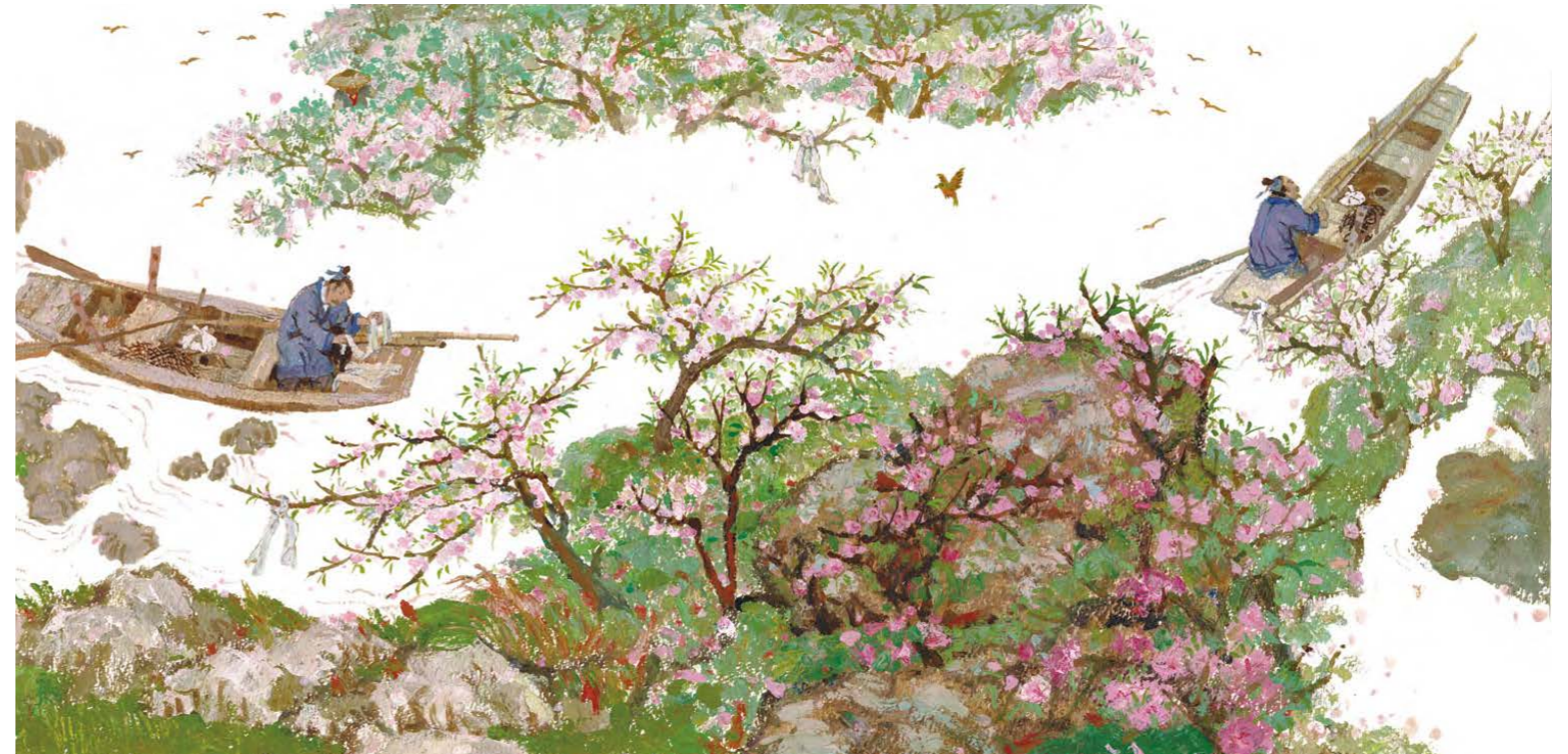
himself in the midst of a wood full of peach blossoms. There were no trees of other kinds, the fragrant grass was fresh and beautiful and peach petals fell in riotous profusion....." when I read "fell in riotous profusion", my eyes hardly can move away from the brilliant illustration, and my hand reluctant to turn the page.

I have been able to recite this ancient prose since I was a child. I know it is actually the prelude to *the Peach Blossom Land Poem*, although I can't recite the five-character poem, but this preface is deeply imprinted in my mind. I seriously thought, why is "Peach Blossom Land" so popular with children? First of all, it is a beautiful and mysterious story, with a sense of wonderland that can grip a child's curiosity. The second is the sense of sound and rhythm. Although the 321 characters are written in prose style, the sentences are basically three, four and five characters in units, which makes the reading very rhythmic, like a free verse without the constraint of the phonetic style. If you read the story and repeat it to a certain rhythm, you may be tempted to dance, and enjoy it.

As a picture book aimed at contemporary children, it is necessary for Japanese publisher Matsui Tadashi to adapt the prose into modern text. Because of his child-friendly retelling, accompanied with beautiful illustrations by CAI Gao, the story was included in Japanese elementary school textbooks. Thus fulfilled Mr. Matsui Tadashi's dream. Because he was influenced by his father since childhood, deeply love the story of the *Tao Hua Yuan Ji*, through a long life effort, finally have the opportunity to let the peach blossom Land into the picture book for Japanese children through cross-border cooperation. I believe that asking an adult to read the text of a book to a child, while letting the child look at the picture in the book, must be the best way to enjoy *The Land of the Peach Blossom*.

But I expect more from young Chinese readers. I think it would be much more enjoyable to read the original prose directly with the picture after being fully familiar with the story. Looking at the story told by the picture alone, it completely matches the meaning and rhythm of the original text, which also shows the artist's profound literary skills. In the original story, after the fisherman went back to the county, "he report the story to the local official," the original text refers that the fisherman took the initiative to inform. The adapted story is more tolerant of human nature and becomes a official who asks the fisherman after hearing the hearsay. Details of communication are added in the picture to make the process more natural. Adapted text story, removed "Liu Zijie of Nanyang Prefecture, a learned scholar of high repute, was excited when hearing the fisherman's story. He devised a plan to find the village, but failed ." The latter tidbits, however, can also be interpreted as such information in the last folios drawn by the painter. The one on the boat writing with great vigor could be either Tao Yuanming or Liu Zijie. Therefore, when I turn to the lonely boat on the last page, I feel that the mood of "no one after that" is exactly with the rhythmic pace of the ancient style prose.

II have read this picture book in Tao Yuanming's original ancient style prose in many reading activities with children. The most impressive one was in the Beijing Concert Hall. With the improvisation accompaniment of a performer, we were immersed in the beautiful imaginary world created by the joint efforts of ancient style prose and modern illustration, a beautiful world created



by joined effort of Chinese and Japanese people. It's a story, we know, but it's not just a story, it's more like a good wish that deserves to be passed on from generation to generation in the best possible way.

CAI Gao's experience of having to teach in a remote village for many years in a special era has enriched her painting with a strong rural atmosphere. The folk customs in the book are authentic and vivid. "the villagers treated the fisherman with all kinds of food and wine" are details written in the ancient prose, the artist illustrated it with the fragrant rural foods of the Wuling Prefecture. Young and old all like this images, and because of reading this story, they will more appreciate the beauties of ordinary lives.

There is water almost everywhere in the story, but the painter rarely paints water directly. The white space in the traditional painting often happens to represent the water in the imagination of the reader, and sometimes it also happens to be used as the space to print the text. There is also some interesting details: the fisherman enters the peach blossom land from left to right, leaving the peach blossom Land becomes right to left.

Here's an interesting detail. I have been wondering since childhood, when the fisherman left, in order to have the opportunity to return to the peach land, "he made marks everywhere ", how he marked it? And why he lost the way even though he made with all this marks? What happened to the marks ? This book actually provides the answer! Of course, this is a game designed by the painter in the picture. I'm sure young readers would love to find out for themselves.

Meng Jiangnv

Folkstory
adapted by TANG Yaming



About “Meng Jiangnv”

written by CAI Gao

“Meng Jiangnv Crying at the Great Wall” is one of the four folk love legends in China. The prototype of the story can be traced back to the Warring States Period (476 BC -221 BC). It has been passed down from generation to generation and changed continuously. It was not until the Tang Dynasty that the story became what it is today.

A few hundred years is enough for folk tales to be formed, but the story of “Meng Jiangnv” took a very long time to develop. It is a story that had been written for more than 2,400 years, what is written transcends any period of history. People had been reinterpreting this story, and collectively recreating it for millennia, reflecting the core values of a nation. In CAI Gao's view, there is a life affirming spirit in the story.

Meng Jiangnv is a representative of Chinese rural women. We had “Meng Jiangnv” in every dynasty. In China, the Great Wall was begun in ancient times. It was not until the Emperor Qin unified China that the Great Wall was united the country. The Great Wall is majestic and solemn; built on the blood of countless ordinary people.

It could be said that every section of the Great Wall, or every brick and stone, has a soul. When the Great Wall sensed the grief of Meng Jiangnv, it empathized with her. When the Heaven and the Earth cried with her. Then, the Great Wall collapsed. The Heavens fell apart and the Earth quaked.

The story embodies the deepest respect for individual life. The sanctity of life lies in the the existence and dignity of individuals, even the humblest and weakest; the purest love cannot be desecrated.



Meng Jiangnv: The solemn and Stirring Love

Dictated by CAI Gao

Meng Jiangnv, a woman who face great challenges as she sought her husband for the sake of love.

Meng Jiangnv had to take care of her elders. This was resolved because of her parents' love and understanding. They understood their daughter's love for her husband, so they supported her to go and look for Xiliang. Meng Jiangnv herself symbolizes the completeness of love.

But taking the first step requires more than sympathy and understanding, it requires courage, determination and willpower. Before taking the first step, Meng Jiangnv knew clearly that the road ahead would be full of difficulties, she knew she might never return.

I didn't give Meng Jiangnv super powers. She is just industrious, simple, beautiful and full of primitive vitality. If there is anything extraordinary about her, it is her willpower.

When Meng Jiangnv encountered difficulties, miracles always occurred. The mountain god came to give her instruction, and the river had to make way for her. What I wanted to express is that the difficulties had been overcome - Meng Jiangnv crossed the river, no matter how; the mountains bowed down to her. These miracles represented the physical world being subdued to her spirit. It is the great love and tenacity, the power of a life that made it possible for her to overcome these challenges.

Meng Jiangnv had overcome the forces of nature, but she still had to face political and imperial forces. Moreover, she had to face death. After much hardship, she found that her husband had died building the Great Wall like countless others. Meng Jiangnv's way of overcoming death was to unify with nature. Death brought her transcendence. She became part of nature.

The Dragon Robe Festival

Folkstory
adapted by Wu Chaozhu



About *The Dragon Robe Festival*

The Dragon Robe Festival was the first book where CAI Gao demonstrated her own direction as an artist and author. It is a folk tale from the Tujia people which deals with themes of good and evil and the conflict that arises between the ruler and the people. The story centers on the hero Qin Hou and his struggle against tyranny.

In the legend Qin Hou attempts to assassinate a cruel emperor to avenge his parents but is ultimately killed himself. The villagers treasure his bloody clothes and the blood-stained dragon robe. In order to commemorate the hero, they take out the clothes to wash and dry on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month every year. Since then, that day has become the Dragon Robe Festival of the Tujia people.

The story also questions the relationship between failure and success because although he is ultimately killed by the emperor, he becomes the hero of the people immortalized and celebrated down the ages.

The story uses mythic symbolism. Qin Hou is born with a tattoo of three dragons, an imperial symbol, which indicates that he is the equal of the emperor despite his ordinary birth. The emperor attempts to have the baby killed. His parents are killed because they refuse to hand him over. So when he grows up he vows to avenge them. Qin Hou becomes a master archer by training for three years but ultimately fails to take revenge at the right time because of his sister's impatience.

The story raises questions about the nature of heroism. Qin Hou's commitment to the people is the very thing that leads to his death. Heroism is more than the power to defeat evil. There is a deeper heroism at work in the story. When the general threatens to kill the villagers, Qin Hou is prepared to hand himself over in order to prevent the slaughter of innocent people. To express the heroism in the story CAI Gao uses a very stylized way of drawing the characters combined with





bold colors to match the themes of the story. The use of size is one example. When Qin Hou uses his supernatural strength, he towers over the other characters, almost filling the page. When he faces a daunting task, such as pulling some magic bamboo out of the ground, the bamboo towers over him, indicating the herculean nature of the task.

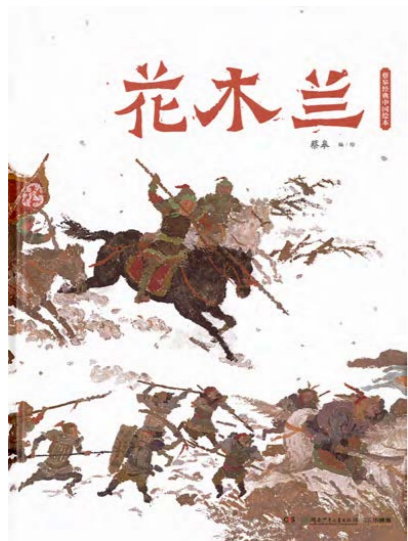
In the battle scene CAI Gao uses composition from a birds eye perspective to show the chaos and violence of war without any bloodshed. CAI Gao's technique allows the reader to interpret the image themselves, indicating horror without actually showing it. We bring our own understanding to the image, which is CAI Gao's intention. When Qin Hou is killed, we see him stretched out on the ground, with the dragons on his body ascending to heaven. It is clear what has happened, the surrounding figures recoil in terror. The use of black as a background makes the figures stand out and indicates the death of the hero. This contrasts with the white background indicating peace and tranquility on the following page.

Thus CAI Gao succeeds in using the folk tradition of painting with a modern perspective in order to suggest the themes of the tale.



Hua Mulan

Folk Songs of the Northern Dynasty



Mulan, the Maiden Chief

Written by A'Jia (Writer, translator, picture book reviewer, educator)

As early as 2012, two years before the original version of *Hua Mulan* was published, I had the opportunity to visit Ms. CAI Gao, she introduced the main contents and creative ideas of the book in detail. Her version uses the original poem as the text. I was so excited that I sung it for her because "The Ballad of Mulan" of the Northern Dynasty is really a song.

There have been many contemporary adaptations of Mulan's story, and Disney alone has an animated film and a live-action ones, not to mention several films made by the Chinese themselves. Several versions of the picture book story have been published in recent years, most notably "I Am Mulan", co-written by Qin Wenjun and Yu Rong, and "Mulan", a French version co-written by Ye Junliang and Clemans Bolet. Whether it's a film or a picture book, the editors have focused on adding modern elements to the ancient heroine, seeking to explore a more contemporary sense of femininity. In contrast, CAI's version of Mulan is the more authentic, trying to return to a more rural and folk context, to experience the lasting impact of the heroine's song.

However, CAI Gao does not simply preserve the sense of historical realism. She chose some objects to elucidate a symbolic significance. For example, in the page "Go and sleep by the Yellow River", there is a door in the lower left corner of the picture, an earthen stove in the middle of the picture, and a well on the left. Scattered in the picture are many bare trees -- doors, Wells, stoves and family trees, which are all symbols of home, corresponding to the assembled crowd here, forming a picture of sad scene. It echoes the picture of Mulan returning home. At this time, we see the well again. The peach trees beside the well are blooming, with petals falling on the crowd. It



may seem like a sign of recovery and hope, but most of the people you see in the village are either old or children, and you can see how much peace has cost.

In CAI's version of Mulan, she does not deliberately explore a modern sense of female subjectivity, but is trying to restore some of the palpable sense of the female model of self-respect and self-empowerment inherent in the narrative. In this sense an ancient narrative it is also current.

At the end of the heroine's song, "Two rabbits walk beside the ground, Ann can tell I am male and female," the land where the two rabbits play looks familiar, from the corner of Mulan's village to the peach blossom. On the small bridge in the middle of the picture, is a reproduction of the scene of "seeing a fisherman is a big surprise"? In fact, the shadow of Peach Blossom Land appears in many of CAI's traditional picture books. Such a peaceful and beautiful life, should also be Mulan's ideal.

Read CAI Gao: *Imagine a Happy HUA Mulan*

Excerpted from the WeChat public account "Bread and Wine", written by WANG Yingrong

I recited *The Mulan Poem* when I was still a little girl.

I can still recite more than half of the *The Mulan Poem*, thanks to my cousin. This boy, who was joking, told me the *The Mulan Poem* was a tribute to his hometown (*his family lived in a town also called "Mulan"*). I admired him so much that I memorized the whole ballad for many years, I distorted a bit though.

Mulan, a girl acting on her own will went to war. She not only returned safely but also met the emperor. Facing the highest, she was neither humble nor overbearing. She refused money and official status. She just wanted to return home. I knew nothing about war as a child, but I became fascinated with the story. Later, as an adult, I saw different versions of Mulan, westernized versions like Disney's Mulan who looks nothing like a woman born in the ancient China. Some say she looks more like an American Soldier.

Zhao Wei, a famous actor, also filmed HUA Mulan told the story. When Mulan was young, she would fight to protect her friends. Her father demanded that she apologize. He was a traditional father who told Mulan: "The HUA family only fight on the battlefield. If you have to fight, be a man in the next life."

As war approached, her father was eager to go to war even though he was seriously ill. Mulan, decided to sneak off to join the army in her father's place and without his approval. Without considering the reality of war, she threw herself into frontline for years. Fortunately, she survived and returned to the capital city to meet the Emperor. Finally, for the sake of hard-won peace, she abandoned her lover and return home alone.

From Patriarchy to imperial power to war... Mulan never saw a moment's peace. We think of Mulan as a tragic story.

Isn't there another possibility? Even the Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a boulder up a hill for all eternity Camus advised us to "imagine Sisyphus in happiness".

The answer lies in CAI Gao's Mulan, let's imagine a happy Mulan, heavy story be conveyed to children in the form of a picture book? This was a particularly difficult challenge.

CAI Gao did not avoid the "painful heaviness" in the story. By using a large portion of black in some of the illustrations, she expressed it prominently and strongly. The black colour was so skillfully used, that the atmosphere of the story was exaggerated and palpable, also, it implies the character's fate and gives a hint of mystery.

At the same time, CAI Gao creatively integrated the "lively and playful lightness" in the illustrations. She depicted many daily-life things as well as animals and plants common to Tujia people. Those colourful and joyful elements can naturally arouse the intimacy of readers. Seeing them, the tension of the story can be softened and the readers can get some comfort.

The interaction between the "heaviness" and "lightness" makes this ancient story radiate a new artistic appeal, allowing it to release more beauty and fun. In the reading process, although readers may feel oppressed by the plot, they may also gain a strong longing for the beauty of life, humanity and nature.

Imagine a happy Mulan

"What comes out of the brush is only a result. Without understanding Mulan, without original aspiration, why I paint?" -CAI Gao

One thousand readers, one thousand HUA Mulan. **Why do Chinese people need to read CAI Gao's Mulan?**

"There have been many contemporary adaptations of Hua Mulan's story," Mr. AJia said. "CAI Gao doesn't deliberately tap into the female consciousness, but tries to recreate a faithful version that brings meanings and responds to real life. "Not to cater to the current trends, but to return to the original text, and restore Chinese tradition, a Mulan who appreciates the happiness of simple life.

Unlike *The Land of the Peach Blossom*, which has a fresh and bright color scheme, The picture book HUA Mulan is full of the gray hues of the North. The story begins at the lining page, an anxious general riding on a horse, on the copyright page is a young girl weaving. On the title page, an old couple are reading a message, all are part of the prologue of Mulan.


The text is directly taken from the original poem of Mulan because there is no better way to tell this "dense and legendary story". Even without knowing its meaning, if one reads it aloud, one can feel the beauty of ancient poetry.

"Click, Click, and Click Click Click, by the doorway Mulan weaves."

CAI Gao said, the poem has kind of beauty that "people cannot bear to disturb", "very poetic, very calm", "CAI Gao read the ballad many times, a sensitive heart capable of appreciating the beauty of everyday life. It is from this perspective CAI Gao began painting a picture of Mulan's home.

In CAI's opinion, the detailed depiction of Hua's house and daily life was necessary to explain why Hua Mulan chose to join the army in her father's place.

"If Mulan's family life was not so good, so warm or so beautiful, she would not have done such a brave thing, she would not have fought for her homeland, for her parents, for her people." In order to protect the family and the life which she loves so deeply, Mulan had to step out. She fought out parental affection rather than filial piety, out of love and not to prove herself, she took her destiny.



Oddly, while the original text clearly says "leaving my parents in the morning", many versions of Mulan focus on portraying Milan as a rebellious girl who leaves without saying goodbye. Fortunately, in CAI Gao's version, Mulan doesn't have to get her father drunk and doesn't sneak away at night. When her mother heard Mulan was joining the army, she cried. Fortunately, she still had Mulan's sister at her side. The father and younger brother watch Mulan's practice with her sword. The boy is still young and curious.

In the end, Mulan wears a military uniform, says goodbye to her parents, and was accompanied by her family to the gate of village. I always think that the Mulan who said goodbye is much happier than that silent girl at home.

'Mulan is a story of transcendence,' CAI Gao said. From the time when Mulan joined the army in place of her father to the final victory in battle, it was the first time she surpassed her limits. And "I can serve in the army for my father, I can also walk away easily from fame and wealth", This is the second point where she transcends her limits.

CAI Gao asked her audience a question I had never thought about: "Why did Mulan choose to go home?" Is she tired of war, of being discovered? Or does she miss her parents? Mulan makes her decision to "return home". CAI Gao believes that at that point Mulan had 'broken the yoke', she surpassed material well-being, surpassed life-and-death", she has grown up, but deep inside she was still the same girl sitting in front of her door.

"The roots of childhood are deep enough for Mulan to come back," she said. Memories of family life, of the country, neighborhood, always called her back. Even after victory in war, Mulan turned down an official position and returned home. It is a memory as captivating as The Land of the Peach Blossom. To love one's homeland, is a very deep-rooted thing. With urban life we no longer have this connection to the land. We are homeless, A house is just a place to live. We have lived with each other for a lifetime, but we do not know our neighbors next door. The Land of the Peach Blossom and Hua Mulan can help us fight the apathy and anonymity of modern life and remind us to care about ourselves and others. I want to convey these messages in my work."

Before saying that, CAI talked about her grandmother and her parents. What could be more beautiful than being old enough yet still able to recall the trivialities of childhood? Who knows better than she what it feels like to have enough childhood roots?

So we see the last page, the world in gray and white, vast, broad, only the figure of Mulan riding a horse a riding, in gray red and gray green, Mulan riding a horse. It is not a feeling of having nowhere to go , or having to return, but a feeling of 'longing and longing'.



I talked with my friends about returning home for holidays.

Those who go home happy are probably those whose "roots are deep enough in childhood", those whose roots are still able to draw nutritional support into adulthood; Those who have to go back or not go back at all are mostly reluctant to return to their childhood, let alone face the "poverty" in self-esteem or happiness after returning home. In the middle of the two, there are people who want to be close to their hometown, but want to withdraw as well. Kobayashi Ichicha's haiku "Hometown, touching, are all prickly flowers" describes this complicated feeling of home.

Thus, we know more about what CAI Gao said: "The roots of childhood are deep enough."

Bao'er

Adapted from The Collection of Strange Stories, By PU Songling



Talk on the Creation of Bao'er

Written by CAI Gao

I like Pu Songling and many other Chinese folk tales, they are very joyful, very and full of vitality. There are so many valuable things hidden in Chinese traditional culture that we need to dig for them and look at them with modern eyes.

My *The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden* was drawn in 1992 and adapted from the story *Gu'er* by Pu Songling. The story tells of a little boy named *Bao'er*, who alone tries to deal with a haunted fox ghost. His father, who is a businessman, was not at home; his mother became entangled with the spirit of a fox, so the child had to deal with these problems on his own. How brave Bao'er was! That was the story I wanted to draw.

Red and green are very positive colors, and I think they are suitable for Pu Songling's stories; I also used black, which can represent a strange inexplicable pressure surrounding the characters. There is a picture, -the fox is looking for a drink, followed by Bao'er, I drew it as a straight composition, with large blocks of black color on both sides, to make it in a bird's-eye view and flatten it, so it has a sense of oppression. The fox was a little scared as it was a different kind in the human world; Bao'er's eyes were fixed on the fox, and he was painted in red. Bao'er is on top of that picture, and his red color can overwhelm the black color.

And I have a few more words about the cover. For the cover of the latest edition, I replaced the above mentioned picture with one of Bao'er holding an oil lamp, because I wanted to highlight the importance of this lamp. If a child has a lamp, he can use it to illuminate himself and the road in front of him, especially when facing some obscure things. Where there are lights, all darkness will



recede, so this lamp is very important. Holding the lamp higher, people can see farther.

When I created this book, I finished it in 20 days. I drew it very quickly because I held it in for too long. When I finished drawing the last picture, I fell down and lay on the table, because I was too tired and my heart couldn't bear it. I really put my life experience into this book.

Bao'er- A Special Witness to the Development of Chinese Original Picture Books

Written by A' Jia (Writer, translator, picture book reviewer, educator)

In 1993, when *The Fox Ghost in the Abandoned Garden* (the predecessor of *Bao'er*) became the first Chinese picture book to win the Golden Apple Award at BIB in Bratislava, many Chinese people could not believe it, and some even doubted: Are such high-level children's book illustrations created by the Japanese?

Indeed, our domestic original picture books were still in their infancy at that time. Even such an excellent work could only be printed in a thousand copies and most of them were used as gift books. The picture book market and readers were not ready yet. I was fortunate enough to read one of the thousand copies published in 1991 at a collector. I was quite impressed by the splendor and delicacy of the book that did not match that era, and I also noticed the influence of traditional comic strips on graphic narratives.

We know that a comic-strip is consisted of serial pictures with a part of text attached to each, the picture is usually taken in the middle ground, the size of the picture frame is fixed, and usually the picture frame is on top and the text is on the bottom. The original version of *The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden* broke the boundary of the aforesaid picture frame. The left page of the folio is a frameless full-scale painting, and the right page is a close-up with blank surroundings. The relevant text was placed on the top of the right page and was divided into two parts, respectively with arrows to indicate that the text belongs to the left page or the lower picture on the same page. This can be seen as a transitional form of graphic narrative between Chinese Traditional comic-strips and modern picture books. However, CAI Gao adapted to this narrative style very well that she made the rhythm of the narrative just fit the needs of story development.

But I have to admit that it is not easy to adapt *The Collection of Strange Stories* into children's stories. Even a story like *Gu'er*, which tells witty elimination of demons, -punishing evil and promoting good, still has some dark and gloomy colors. The painter boldly used black as the main

color of the background, and at the same time she used red and green that can produce strong contrasts to highlight the characters, -especially that wise and courageous child. In this way, the color of the pictures shows a feeling of first suppressing and then rising, gradually guide readers entering the scene. When the fairy tale ending of “they live together happily ever after” appears, if readers look back at the previous pictures with dark tones, they will feel the powerful strength from the pure black.

This picture book may not be a pleasing style for children, but the deep-down simplicity and honesty will definitely make thinking children feel understood and respected.

The 2008 reprint of *Bao'er* was a fairly successful adaptation. The title of the book was changed from *The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden* to *Bao'er*, which is further closer to children's stories. For the first time, the little hero had his name “Bao'er” instead of “son of the merchant”, and the focus of the story has shifted from the fox ghost causing trouble to the little hero eliminating demons.

Careful readers will find that the updated story text weakened the details of the fox ghost's entanglement. Also, in the process of exorcising the demon, the narrator added some necessary explanations in the plot where Bao'er begged for poison, poisoned the wine, and stored the wine in the wine shop to prevent accidental injury to others. It reflects Bao'er's carefulness and sense of responsibility, providing a good example for potential children readers and prevents them from imitating to do wrong things.

However, for some reason, the 2008 version ended with “Bao'er's family has returned to peace, and the family lives happily and harmoniously”, which probably fits the ending of the usual fairy tales. But since this is a story about a little hero, I think all readers, adults and kids, will really want to know “what happened later” and “what happened to Bao'er when he grew up...”. In fact, this was explained in Pu Songling's original story, and only in that way can the story be complete.

I am glad the ending design is back in the latest version of *Bao'er*. I really like the finale image drawn by CAI Gao, which looks like a painting of a door god. It adds a bit of festive color to the story, which can make readers completely escape from the atmosphere of demon. I believe that children will stay for a while in front of this picture; it will completely relax their little nervous mood and the promising future of the little hero will inspire them.

For adults who care about children's education, the story of *Bao'er* is actually quite inspiring. For example, it reminds us that we must not underestimate children but should give them more trust and opportunities to exercise. Moreover, in terms of education, we might as well learn from Bao'er's father, to respect children's preferences and strengths, and to teach them in accordance with their aptitude.

I think, if Pu Songling was alive, he would be happy to see his story adapted into such a childlike and inspiring picture book. At the same time, CAI Gao creatively integrated the “lively and playful lightness” in the illustrations. She depicted many daily-life things as well as animals and plants common to Tujia people. Those colourful and joyful elements can naturally arouse the intimacy of readers. Seeing them, the tension of the story can be softened and the readers can get some comfort.

The interaction between the “heaviness” and “lightness” makes this ancient story radiate a new artistic appeal, allowing it to release more beauty and fun. In the reading process, although readers may feel oppressed by the plot, they may also gain a strong longing for the beauty of life, humanity and nature.



7 other works



How I Came to be Me

Written by CAI Gao

Each new life is a kind of miracle. Some people think that life is nothing more than a series of accidents and that we are born to suffer. Maybe there is some truth to this, but I prefer to view it from a positive perspective, especially for children. I prefer to tell them “you are the fruit of your parent’s love”

This is one of my favorite books. The process of drawing is like being reborn. I think of my mother and the past returns to me in all its beauty. You don’t realize how precious those moments are until your loved ones are gone. I try to draw the connections between lives in my work. With love and hope in our hearts, we can see the wonder of the world like a new born baby.



Once When I was Little

Written by TuTu (independent publisher, senior book critic, founder and chief editor of Yuefu Culture Press)

These series are the new publications from CAI Gao, yet in certain sense, they are not completely new, because they have slept for more than a decade on her book shelves. Maybe it is meaningless to talk about new or an old. The point is they are a set of books contemplating time, awakening common memories and anticipating the future. The inter-weaving of new and old, traditions and avant-garde, are the most interesting characteristics of this series. So let us forget about the passing of time and enjoy the timeless beauty of existence, just like Yuan Ji’s poem that CAI Gao quoted: “As time passes, only the moments of flowers blooming can I remember.”

CAI Gao is an artist, and an expert on writing. Most of the time, we only know her as a picture book artist, a pioneer and master of Chinese children’s picture books. In this series, we find her at her most experimental. In these books, she uses fewer brushstrokes to depict the meaning of those stories that are treasured by the Chinese people. She talks not only to children, but also to those who are young at heart.

So, the series starts with *Colors in My Life*, and ends with *Still, I Remember*. As long as we still remember our true colors, we won’t get lost, no matter how far we roam.

CAI Gao said, “I am looking for my childhood.” We are all looking for our childhood, the innocence we have actually is so precious to us that we cannot afford to forget.”

Childhood is a collection of songs, so, in that series, there is “Where the moon goes, I go,” One might not have heard this children’s rhyme, but everyone understands the joy when a child sees the moon and follows it. A child will grow up, but the moon always remains the same. CAI Gao drew *Where the Moon Goes, I Go*, and *What Can You See in the Moon* in a way that is fun and light hearted. The rhyme contains a whole world rooted in folk culture, unsophisticated, yet powerful. We look for childhood, and find it in a folksong.

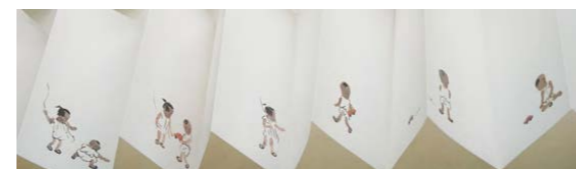
Childhood is a collection of stories, so Our Story must be included in this series. What does it tell you? Just like the poem of LU Qian, “I remember we were young, I talked while you always smile. One day, we sat under a peach tree, the wind was blowing gently and the birds were singing, we fell asleep without knowing how many flowers fell...” CAI Gao sewed these fragments into stories, when we see a little ant searching for a new home of its own, perhaps, we might remember the days we spent all afternoon watching ants moving home... We look for childhood, and find childhood itself is a story.

This is a series that tries to preserve childhood, yet never stops there. CAI Gao looks for strength that is rooted deep in the very beginning of life, bringing comfort to her readers. With ancient binding, she makes modern picture books. Illustration and design combine seamlessly with dialogue so that her readers can enter the world of childhood. Those books are gift for all who are seeking light. When CAI Gao draws, she draws for all, children, grown-ups, and for the sake of art itself. She draws with freedom, and arrives at freedom.

Freedom, is beautiful.

Childhood is beautiful, but it disappears in a flash. Nowadays high skyscrapers and neon lights hide the moonlight. In fact, it is not the moon they cover, but our eyes.

Now, through the eyes of CAI Gao, let us see the moon and the true colors of life again.





Where the moon goes, I go

Wandering with the Moon (An excerpt of the book review)

Written by Laurence Mcknight & Aozi

It is common to illustrate children's rhymes in picture books, but how can artists free themselves from nostalgia and depict the world from the point of view of children? How does CAI Gao transform a nursery rhyme that cannot be altered to create an interesting story?

A sense of humor is the key to decoding the story. Unlike *What Can you See in the Moon* which is an imaginative game, this one deals with our ordinary lives. But if you only read or sing the rhyme, its meaning is obscure: "Where the moon goes, I go. I help the moon carry its basket of flowers. The moon and I stop at the front door, where three sisters are picking pomegranates, pomegranates round, pomegranates sleek, three sisters now are combing their hair. The eldest combs her hair, round and sleek; The younger arranges flowers on her head. The youngest knows nothing about combing her hair, so she combs a lion's hair instead;" How can that be? Does she actually comb a lion's hair? Or is she simply combing her hair like a lion? An ordinary reader might be confused, "The lion is playing with a hydrangea ball, which rolls to the front door! There is no ball now, but only the lion"...Again, what does this mean?

CAI Gao use her sense of humor to interpret it: "the lion" is the pug (dog) of course, to comb it would be fun! Of

course the pug is very likely to play with a ball of thread, if it gets the chance. Of course it would like to chase the ball to the front door, where, as we turn the page, we discover the answer with almost spontaneous laughter: instead of "the lion", there is an angry old lady, who is obviously the owner of the thread ball, releasing her "Lioness's Roar".

If the artist just follows the text and paints a real stone lion at the front door, as in the original scene, the result will be too literal. Thanks to CAI Gao's witty interaction between the words and text, the little girls unique point of view, is full of vitality and fun.

And the shape of the moon is everywhere in the book, mirror, pomegranates, hair style, thread ball, provide a rhythmical visual narrative.

CAI used to describe her painting style as rich, natural, weighty and simple. However, in *Where the Moon Goes, I Go* She also adds lightness to the book, echoing the spirit of Chinese literati painting.



What Can You See in the Moon

A Game of Imagination

Written by XIAO Aozi

(artist, associate professor at the School of Design, Hunan University)



Why we turn nursery rhymes into picture books? Aren't nursery rhymes good enough to be sing alone? Aren't it independent enough with its playful nature? As a language game, to be sung alone?

There are many different types of nursery rhymes, most of which are complete in language alone. Some tell simple stories while some have no stories at all. Some nursery rhymes seem simple and meaningless, just for fun, but they have a secret -- and if you don't pay attention to them, you may never understand them even if you sing them a hundred times. Moon Ba Ba is a typical nursery rhyme with a "secret" in it.

"Moon bright, Moon white, I see a grandpa inside, he went out to buy vegetables, now, I see a grandma inside..." *Moon Ba Ba* is a famous Changsha nursery rhyme. When a bright moon rises in the sky at night, the children in the streets would sing it for fun. Most children would enjoy its playful rhythmic nature: the sounds join together, making the end of the previous sentence the beginning of the next. It is good even without understand its meaning.

But that is only half of the value, if one explore deeper, combined with images, will find a more splendid world. Actually, *Moon Ba Ba* is a game of imagination as well. And that is why CAI Gao interpret it into a visual adventure in the form of picture book and name the book *What Can You See in the Moon*.

From the very beginning of the book, CAI Gao invite children to imagine: what can you see in the moon It demands a bit of imagination, for thousands of years, human had gazed upon the moon and pondering what is on it. We could see vague shadows and patterns on its surface with naked eyes. If there are some clouds, it will add brought more mysterious for the moon. In old days, Chinese created lots of stories about the moon, there is goddess Chang'e with her Jade Hair and the Moon Palace, there is Wu Gang cutting the tree, there is the Goden Toad, to name only a few. The modern have to be disappointed a bit for their technology dismissed all the romantic stories about the moon.

But, in picture books, technology is not a must, it despoil the fun. In *What Can You See in the Moon*, imagination soars, followed each turn of page, is a brand new discovery: there is a grandpa sit inside the moon...Alas! a cloud covered the moon a bit, the grandpa seems left! perhaps he left for buying vegetables. Now, a grandma shows up, when a cloud come, she disappeared, perhaps she left for packing her suitcase! Luckily, the game continues: a girl appears, she starts making embroidery, and she embroiders a rice cake! Alas! The rice cake falls into the well how could this be possible that the rice cake turns into a toad? The toad jumps onto a tree, and it turns into a turtledove? The turtledove cooing, a monk is eating Bean curd under the tree... so, from the moon the the Earth, form a grandpa to a toad, a turtledove, a monk, the moon's image constantly shifting, our imagination juggles with the rhyme. The moon, either in the sky, in the well (its reflection), or on the ground (rice cake), its white, round shape is the key to link everything: the rice cake, the monk's head (shaved, round, exactly like a moon).

If CAI Gao illustrate the monk as a real monk according the text, the story will lost its flavor in its later part. As an outstanding storyteller, she changed the meaning of the text a bit: she illustrated the monk as a little naughty boy, a boy with shaved head. It is very common in old days and people call them 'little monk'. And followed this, the rest of the nursery rhyme become reasonable: a daily drama of a little boy, who eat the Bean curd, the rice cake, not satisfied enough, he 'steals' water chestnuts on the table, thus entails his 'crime and punishment' -- 'knock the head' which she illustrated actually in an very amiable, funny way. (In original text, the punishment was "off his head", children enjoy it, for when they sing this, usually without warning their will using a palm knock the neck of their friend pretending 'off his head'! It is bit scary according today's education standard.)

CAI Gao shed the lights on the other side of Moon Ba Ba, reinterprets this old nursery rhyme with adventure of imagination and intimate daily life experience, like a double sided embroidery.



Blazing City 1938

A Pray for Peace

In 2006, four famous Japanese picture book artists proposed to create picture books for a peace project together with Chinese and Korean illustrators. This was how the *Japan-China-Korea Peace Picture Book Project* began. CAI Gao's thoughts on peace and war were deep, and she had touched on this theme in works such as *Meng Jiangnu*, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* and *Hua Mulan*. CAI Gao's parents experienced the Wenxi Fire in Changsha 1938, 90% of the city was burned to the ground during the war. So she chose this subject in memory of this tragic event.

The story as designed by CAI Gao looks back at old Changsha to experience the *Wenxi Fire* from the perspective of a child. CAI Gao chose pencil and charcoal for drawing. To highlight the theme, she chose black and white to make her drawings more like old photographs.

CAI Gao said: "The cruelty of the war back then is unimaginable to today's children. Seeing many children happily playing virtual war games on the computer, older people can't help but feel concerned. How can we tell the children, War is never a game?" CAI Gao specially invited her daughter Aozi to participate on the book. Two generations joined forces to participate in the project, which also added to the meaning of "knowing the past and looking forward to the future".

What is peace? What is war? How precious is peace? She hopes that every reader can be inspired by this book and look for an answer.



The Hundred-Bird's Feather Robe

A Gift for All Girls

Written by CAI Gao



The Hundred-Birds' Feather Robe is a simple folk story of the Miao People. "Once upon a time," The story began like this "There was a young man named A'Zhuang who live in a mountain village. His parents died and he was very poor, so no one would marry him. It is true that A'Zhuang is poor, but he is kind, strong, up right, honest, and hard working. By no means it is poor. Unfortunately, the secular world turned a blind eye on this.

One day, a man wearing shoes and holding a piece of meat, taunted A'Zhuang, who was barefoot and carrying wood "Why don't you invite an artist to draw you a girl to keep you company?" It was a joke, but A'Zhuang treated it seriously. So he sold the wood for money, and asked an artist to draw him a beautiful girl. The artist also joke: "This is my daughter A'CAI, treat she kindly, please." Now A'Zhuang was no longer lonely. The next pages show something wonderful happened: his cottage became clean and tidy, the stove is warm, the food is steaming hot, but who made it? A'Zhuang notices that the girl in the painting seems to be smiling.

It is the girl in the painting did this for him. Once found it, A'zhuang said to her, "A'Cai, I have called your name a thousand times. Will you marry me?" When he said this, A'Zhuang hid the painting behind his back, and it is easy for the young reader to see. A'Cai is shy, but happy. So, they married.

Don't misunderstand the message of the story, doing house work, since ancient time, is an important ability in China, regardless gender. There is an old saying "Cultivate individual's ability makes one capable of run the family and manage a nation in order". Instead treat house work a burden, a wise person treat it a everyday practice of various

kind of ability.

The later part of the story tells the conflicts between the couple and a evil Emperor. The Emperor want to take A'cai as his wife. So he throw a lots of trouble to this young couple. He demands various of impossible tasks, if they can not deal it, he will take A'Cai away or off their heads.

The man didn't know how to deal with conflicts. But the woman are much smart. A'Cai, who represents the ingenuity of the Miao artist, has the magic power that could turn everything she created to life. She cuts a paper flower, it becomes real. She cuts a paper bird, it flies away. She also creates a living horse from bamboo. That is to say that the hands of creator bestow a liveliness' on their art work which gives them life.

The story follows from these miracles. The bamboo horse beats the Emperor's horses in race, the couple's small boat beats the Emperor's big ship, and the weak prevail over the strong. The righteousness are rewarded, and the wicked are punished. The story has a funny ending in which the evil emperor the symbol of power, is turned into a bird and flies away.

The folk's affirmation and praise of women, their attitude towards love, and their anger and mockery of the power are vividly expressed in the story. When I was young, I heard my grandmother tell me the stories of "silly husband and clever wife" and loved the respect and praise for women in folk stories. I think this kind of story is alive. Even today, it has a strong social significance to the gender inequality that still exists.

It is a gift to all girls.



The Flower Fairy

Human, Universe and the Spirit of Nature

CAI Gao created *The Flower Fairy* in 1998 at the invitation of the Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers of Japan. Adapted by Matsuoka Kyoko, from Chinese writer Feng Menglong's *The Old Man Who Met the Fairies* written during the Ming Dynasty. A good old Man whose name is Qiu loves flowers, he spent many hours collecting flower seeds and growing them in his garden. His garden bloomed. Unfortunately, one day a rogue came across the garden and wanted it for himself. He demanded that Qiu sell his garden. Qiu refused, so in his anger, the rogue destroyed many of the flowers. A flower fairy who witnessed the devastation helped Qiu restore the garden. Next day when the rogue returned, the garden looked exactly as it had done before. The rogue wanted Qiu dead so he could have the garden for himself. So he accused Qiu of using sorcery to heal the garden and went to the governor with his false accusation. Qiu was sentenced to death for using magic. The fairies freed the old man from prison and threw the rogue into a pond. In the book, the flowers, characters and the scenery are vividly realized. The imagery draws inspiration from traditional Chinese landscape painting, which gives the reader a sense of the scenery southern China. The reader can understand CAI Gao's connection between art and life. Qiu represent CAI Gao's values and her commitment to nature.



The Magic Leaf

The Way of Learning

Written by CAI Gao

The Magic Leaf is a picture book adapted from an ancient Chinese joke about *A Man who Wants to be Invisible* from a *Collection of Jokes*, by Handan Chun (220-265 AC).

In the original text, the main character is an older man. In this picture book, CAI turn him into a teenager, Dong, a book worm. Dong hides in books all day long. His mother worries about how he can make a living in the real world. One day, Dong reads a story about "a mantis hiding itself behind leaf when hunting other insects. The leaf has the power to make the insect invisible." Dong was excited. He wanted to prove himself to his mother. He found a leaf, holding it in front of his face, tried to steal some oranges from a vendor in the market. Of course the vendor could see him plainly. Dong tried to explain himself, but people who heard his explanation could only laugh at the foolish bookworm.

What make us interested in the story is, like Dong, nowadays many children have less chance learn from life, and comprehend knowledge with depth and experience. Reading, first of all, should be motivated by the desire for truth, with the right motives and methods. Reading should not be motivated by mere trickery or a desire to appear clever. *The Magic Leaf* is a good book for readers who want to contrast different ways of arriving at knowledge.



8

List of Awards and Other Distinctions

1) as an author / illustrator / designer

1980 **The Beautiful Garden** (*picture book*)
won the first prize for the “1976-1980 Hunan Children’s Book Art” Award, 1980

1980 **The Story of Helong** (*comic-strip*)
won the second prize for “excellent work” in the Red Scarf journal, 1980

1981 **The Three-Color Ballpoint Pen** (*comic-strip*)
won the second prize for “excellent work” in the Red Scarf journal, 1981

1983 **Meimei** (*illustrations*)
won the third prize of “1982 Annual Illustration Award” of the periodical Little Bee by Hunan Juvenile & Children’s Publishing House.

1984 **The Angry Balloon** (*picture book*)
won the third prize of Hunan Art Exhibition for Celebrating the 35th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China

1987 **Seven Sisters** (*illustration*)
Chinese Children’s Book Illustration Competition.
won the Excellent Work Award in the Chinese Children’s Book Illustration Invitational Competition

1988 **The White Lotus Petals** (*Illustrated Book*)
won the first prize of “The Cover Design Award of the five central and southern provinces (regions)”

1989 **The Dragon Robe Festival** (*picture book*)
awarded the “Excellence Award for the 40th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” by the Hunan Department of Culture and the Hunan Branch of the Chinese Artists Association

1998 **The Mermaid Princess** (*illustrations*)
awarded the second prize in the “The Contest of Art, Calligraphy and Photography Works for Bureau System Staff” by Hunan Press and Publication Bureau

1990 **The Little Rooster Wants to Borrow Ears** (*Illustrated Book*)
the cover design was awarded the “Excellent Work” by the Sixth Annual Conference of Book Design in the Six Central and South Provinces & Districts

1990 **The Rabbit King Sells Its Ears** (*illustrated book*)
the illustrations was awarded the third prize of Book Design in Six Provinces (Districts) in Central and South China

1992 **Li Xiaogui’s Ears** (*Illustrated Book*)
the cover design was awarded the third prize of the Book Design in Hunan Province.

1993 **The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden** (*picture book*)
won the BIB Golden Apple Award at the 14th Bratislava International Children’s Book Fair

2003 **Nianlou: Short Poetic Essays** (*Illustrated Book*)
the overall design won the first prize of the Hunan Book Design Award

2010 **Butterfly and the Pea Flower: Classic Chinese Children’s Poem** (*Illustrated Book*)
won the Bing Xin Children’s Book Award
won the Children’s Poetry and Painting Award – Children’s Book TOP 10

2013 **Hua Mulan** (*picture book*)
won the gold medal in the picture book category of the first Chen Bochui International Children’s Literature Award

2016 **What Can You See in the Moon** (*picture book*)
The First ZHANG Leping Picture Book Award Honorary Art Creation Award
Listed in “The Beijing News Annual Children’s books”

2016 **Where the Moon Goes, I Go** (*picture book*)
nominated for the “Book Times Award”
shortlisted for the Feng Zikai Picture Book Award

2021 **Once When I was Little** (*picture book*)
The Beauty of Books in China , 2021

2022 **Special Contribution Award, 34th Chen Bochui International Children’s Literature Award**

2) as a children's book editor (awarded to books)

The Adventure of the Little Eggshell

1987 won the "National Children's Book Awards -Excellent Book Award"

1995 won the "National Children's Picture Book -Little Pine Award" by CBBY Children's Book Working Committee

The Black Eyes Series

1996 awarded the "National Excellent Children's Book Editor Award" by the Eight ministries and commissions

around 1996 won the "Special Award of Hunan Books"

1996 won "The Best Works Award" by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee

1996 won the "Annual China's Picture Book Award" by the General Administration of Press and Publication Chinese Publishers Association

The Hyacinths Series

1994 won the second Prize of the "National Excellent Children's Books"

1994 awarded the "National Excellent Children's Books Award" by the Ministry of Education

The Wanderings of Beibei the Kitten

1995 awarded the "National Excellent Children's Book Editor Award" by the Eight ministries and commissions

1994 won the second prize of "Excellent Picture Book Editor" issued by Hunan Press and Publication Bureau

1993 won the second Prize of the "National Excellent Children's Books"

1995 won the "National Children's Picture Book -Little Pine Award" by CBBY Children's Book Working Committee

The Happy Clumsy Bear

1993 won the second Prize of the "National Excellent Children's Books"

1994 won the third prize of "The Excellent Picture Book Editor Award of Hunan Province"

The Peter Rabbit Series

1996 won the second Prize of the "National Excellent Children's Books"

The Bag-Cat Mother

around 1995 won "The Color Ring Award of Central and Southern Six Provinces"

1995 won the "National Children's Picture Book -Little Pine Award" by CBBY Children's Book Working Committee

The Bunny and the Little Bunny became Great Detectives

1995 won the "National Children's Picture Book -Little Pine Award" by CBBY Children's Book Working Committee

Bega's Cherry-Class

1995 won the "National Children's Picture Book -Little Pine Award" by CBBY Children's Book Working Committee

The Adventure of Qiqi

1995 won the "Award of Book Design & Illustration" at the National Book Design Art Exhibition held by China Publishers Association and China Artists Association

Where is Dengdeng

Between 1997-1999 won "The Color Ring Award of Central and Southern Six Provinces"

A Green Dream: A Tree

around 1999 awarded "The Best Book Award" by China Book Business Report

The Ox King Festival

1989 won the third prize of Noma International Children's Book Illustration Competition in Japan.

1992 won the second prize of "1988-1990 Excellent Picture Book Editor" by Hunan Press and Publication Bureau

The World Witty Story Series

The World Strange Stories Series

1990 winner of the 4th "National Golden Key Award" issued by the National Book Golden Key Award Working Committee and the Publishing Research Editorial Department

The Painting library of Chinese National Festival Custom Stories

1991 won the Bronze Award of the "Chinese Arts Book Award" by the General Administration of Press and Publication

The World Witty Story Series

The World Strange Stories Series

The World Funny Stories Series

1992 won the third prize of "1988-1990 Excellent Picture Book Editor" by Hunan Press and Publication Bureau

3) as a children's book editor (awarded to individual)

- 1990 “1989 Annual Award” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1992 “1991 Annual Excellent Editor Award” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House Annual
- 1994 “1993 Annual Spiritual Civilization Award” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1995 “1994 Annual Advanced Worker” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1996 “1995 Annual Outstanding Worker” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1996 “Top 10 Young Picture Book Editors in Hunan Province” awarded by the Administration of Press and Publication of Hunan Province and Hunan Publishers Association
- 1996 “National Outstanding Young Editors Award” by China Publishing Association and China Editors Society
- 1998 “1997 Annual Advanced Individual” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1999 “1998 Annual Advanced Individual” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 1999 “1998 Annual Award” by the Administration of Press and Publication of Hunan Province
- 2000 “1999 Annual Advanced Individual” of Hunan Juvenile & Children's Publishing House
- 2000 “National Excellent Children's Worker” awarded by the Women and Children Working Committee of the State Council

4) Social position

- 1998 elected as council members of Hunan Artists Association, director of Children's Art Committee of Hunan Artists Association
- appointed as a council members of the CBBY

5) Social activities

- 1996 served as a special jury for the first *China Children's Picture Book Award - The Little Pine Award of CBBY*
- 2000 served as one of the five juries of the 34th *Bologna International Children's Picture Book Illustration Exhibition*



- 2010 served as a jury of the first *Hsin Yi Picture Book Award*
- 2013 served as a jury of the third *Feng Zikai Chinese Children's Picture Book Award*
- 2018 served as one of the five juries of *The Golden Pinwheel Young Illustrators Competition*

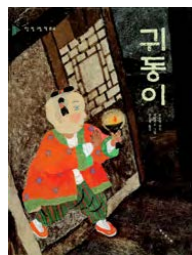
9 Foreign Language Editions



picture book

The Fox Spirit in the Abandoned Garden

1995 (Japanese)
Kazi Publications Inc, Japan



Bao'er

(former name: *The Fox Ghost in the Abandoned Garden*)

2008 (Traditional Chinese version)
Hsin Yi Foundation Hsin Yi Publications Co., Taiwan

2014 (Japanese version)
Kazi Publications Inc, Japan

2014 (Korean version)
Borim Press, South Korea



picture book

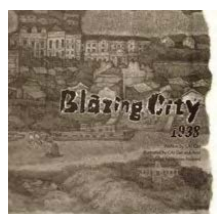
Blazing City 1938

2014 (Korean version) 불타는 옛 성 -1938
Sakyejul Publishing, South Korea



2014 (Japanese version)
Doshinsha Publishing Co., Ltd., Japan.

2014 (English Version)
Shenandoah Publications, Inc., United Kingdom



illustrated Book

Violet Nursery School

1992 (Japanese)
Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers, Inc



illustrated Book

Chinese Legends

1995 (Japanese)
Cox Publishing Japan



illustrated Book

The Collection of Strange Tales

1997 (Japanese)
Wanami Shoten Publishers, Inc., Japan



picture book

The Flower Fairy

1998 (Japanese)
Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers, Inc., Japan



Picture book

The Land of the Peach Blossom

2002 (Japanese version)
Fukuinkan Publishers, Inc., Japan

2006 (Korean version)
Montessori Korea Co., Ltd., South Korea

2009 (simplified Chinese version)
adapted by Tang Yaming
Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House



illustrated Book

The Folk Tales of China, Korea and Japan

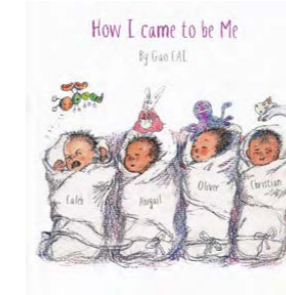
2004 (Chinese, Japanese & Korean)
The Committee of Children's Fairy Tales Exchange Project.,
Published in China, Korea and Japan



picture book

Meng Jiangnv

2012 (Japanese)
Ivanami Shoten Publishers, Japan



picture book

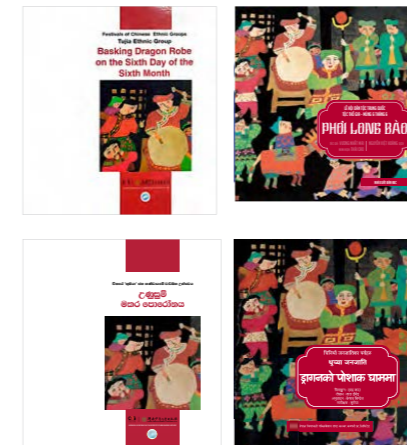
How I Come to be Me

2017 (English Version)
Starfish Bay Publishing, Australia



Beautiful Chinese Folk Tales

2018 (Nepali & English version)
Nepal Tianli Publication & Culture Company Pvt. Ltd.



picture book

Chinese National Festival Customs and Stories Gallery-The Tujia nationality: The Dragon Robe and the 6th of June Festival

2017 (Sinhalese version & English version)
Neptune Publications, Sri Lanka

2017 (Korean version)
National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage, South Korea

2018 & 2021 (Sinhalese version & English version)
Neptune Publications, Sri Lanka

2019 (Vietnamese version)
Chi Culture Joint Stock Company (Chibooks), Vietnam

10 Exhibitions, Lectures, Fairs, etc.

1984 *The Angry Balloon* was selected for the Sixth National Art Exhibition, 1984

1986 The illustrations for “*The Spear*”, “*The Carpenter's Son*” and “*The Fisherman's Daughter*” in “Asian Folk Tales” were selected for the 1986 National Literary Illustration Exhibition

1989 *Dragon Robe Festival* was selected for the seventh National Fine Arts Exhibition

1998.10 invited by *JBBY* and the *Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association* to participate in the exhibition “Chinese Picture Books” held by *Chihiro Art Museum Tokyo & Azumino* in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the normalization of China-Japan diplomatic relations



at the same time, gave a Gallery Talk as a representative of Chinese picture book artist

2001 *The Land of the Peach Blossom* was first published in the 50th anniversary issue of *Kodomo no Tomo*(Children's Friends) series by Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers, in Japan

2002 *The Land of the Peach Blossom*-the original artworks are collected by the Kijo Picture Book Village in Tokyo

the original art works of "The Land of the Peach Blossom " tour exhibition in Japan

2003 *The Land of the Peach Blossom*-Some of the illustrations have been used in the Japanese elementary school textbook (grade 6) since 2003

1998.10 *The Fox Spirit in Abandoned Garden*, *The Land of the Peach Blossom* and *The Story of A'Hei* were selected in “Original Paintings of World Picture Books” exhibition hosted by BIB and JBBY; it toured in Urawa Art Museum, Nara Prefectural Art Museum, Akita Museum of Modern Art, and Chiba City Museum of Art.

2007 the illustrations in “The Folk Tales of China, Korea and Japan” were exhibited at the Elizabeth Stone Gallery in Alexandria, USA.

2008 held solo-exhibitions at Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing and gave a speech at the university lecture hall

held solo-exhibition at held solo-exhibition at Beihang Art Gallery in Beijing

Held in Shanghai Normal University of China Cross-Straits Picture Book Seminar in October, the theme of the forum was "Big Education in Picture Books" as a speaker (40mins to share creation)

2012 Invited by Japan JBBY and Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association, she participated in the exhibition of Original Chinese Picture Book Painters in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations between China and Japan held in Tomihiro Art Museum and Amtano Art Museum.

2014 *Blazing City 1938* The only picture book representing China in the “China-Japan-Korea Picture Books for Peace” publishing project



2015 *The Land of the Peach Blossom* was selected to exhibit in Asian Festival of Children's Content, Singapore

Stories behind The Peach Blossom Land, Cai Gao, shared about the classical Chinese inspirations behind The Land of Peach Blossom

2016.5 held Solo exhibition *Ah! The Season of Sowing* at Moon Center for Contemporary Art, Changsha

2016.8 held solo-exhibition *What Can You See in the Moon* at Changsha Museum, and had more than 200,000 visitors

2017 *Hua Mulan*- Selected for the "Picture Book Go Global" fundamental bibliographic library constructed by the Import Management Department of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television.



Solo exhibition *Ah! The Season of Sowing* at Moon Lake Contemporary Art Gallery, 2016, Changsha

What can You See in the Moon, solo illustration show of CAI Gao, 2016, Changsha Museum

2017 *Blazing City 1938* was selected as a representative in China's Original Illustration Exhibition, in the Bologna Children's Book Fair

2018 “*Crossing National Boundaries : China's Picture Books in relation to World Culture--An International Symposium on Cai Gao's Picture Books*” On Bologna Children's Book Fair



2019 *Hua Mulan* was Selected as one of the 100 original Chinese picture books recommended by the National Library of the Children's Museum



invited by Yixi.TV to give the talk *CAI Gao: Life is Worth Ten Thousand* in Shanghai



https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1s4411j7gZ/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click



Still, We have Books, documentary film in Bilibili.com

https://www.bilibili.com/bangumi/media/md28220315/?spm_id_from=666.25.b_6d656469615f6d6f64756c65.2

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