

# *My thanks to Weimin He*



*Two generations — (left) the mother as a child in 1989, and (right) her daughter, aged eight, sketched by Weimin He in 2011*

I first met Weimin He, in 2007, when I reviewed the Chinese print exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum for *The Oxford Times*. Weimin jointly curated the superb display with Shelagh Vainker and the attractive book *Chinese Prints: 1950 – 2006*.

You will have noticed that most of the 50 castaways are people of many talents and Weimin is no exception. Weimin is as quiet and modest as his talent is prodigious.

To master English well enough to write, lecture and teach using it is no small achievement. When I asked him to be Castaway number 40 I discovered that his first experience living outside of China was in Belfast during the troubles — yet he adapted and was awarded a Ph.D. in Fine Arts at the University of Ulster, in 2005.

His depth of knowledge applies to both Western and Chinese art. The result of that insight, and his achievements as a practicing

artist, is the respect of his fellow Chinese artists around the world.

During 1989, he wandered like a travelling minstrel around Loess plateau — his music coming not from guitar or lyre but flowing from his brush and pen.

In 2011 Weimin returned to the same district in Shanbei, and once again was inspired by the people and sites. Recently I was privileged to see Weimin's latest sketches — and hear his stories — from this trip China.

While sketching an old man in the small town of Tongzhen in Jia County, Shannxi province, curiosity drew an eight-year-old girl to peer over Weimin's shoulder.

A few days later, in a village where the people live in rather elegant caves, he was surprised to see the child again and even more surprised to discover that he had sketched her mother at the same age on his 1989 trip.

Those sketches are reproduced here. You will notice the holes in the mother's shoes. Rural



*Self portrait, 1989*

China is still poor compared with the rapid development in the towns and cities, but even there people are better off than in 1989.

From this revelation an idea blossomed. Weimin is now planning a 'then and now' project, which I believe will be both moving and illuminating.

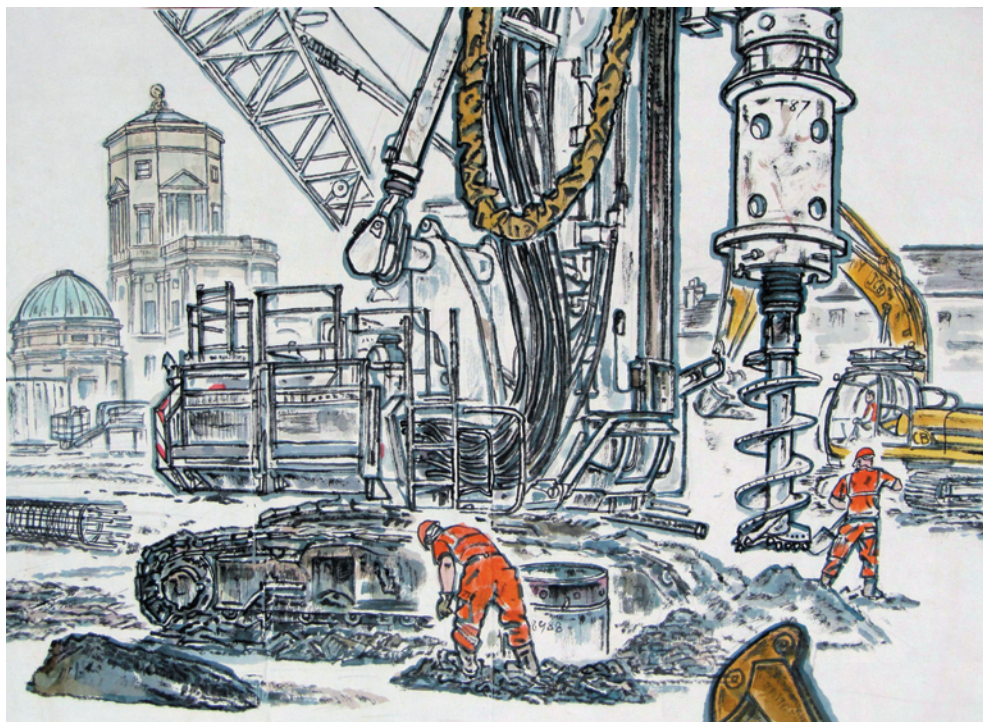
There is a warmth and empathy about his portrait sketches, but the profound changes occurring in China also come to light with

deserted villages where beauty was combined with sadness.

Visit Weimin's website ([www.heweimin.org](http://www.heweimin.org)) and you will be transported by the gallery of his work. As well as the portrait sketches you can see the impressive *Rhyme of Loess Plateau* and *Fantasy of Ancient Ruins*.

Indulge in a bit of the then and now by comparing his self portrait painted in 1989 with the photographs in his castaway feature.





In Oxford he has been prolific and is producing energetic and charismatic images of work on the site of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, where he works as artist in residence.

In the not too distant future, I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing an exhibition of all the work he has produced.

Weimin He is not the first Chinese artist to create his own particular impressions of our city.

In the 1940s, an artist called Chiang Yi used delightful pictures to illustrate his book called *A Silent Traveller in Oxford*.

*The sketches on this page are from the artist's current work on the Radcliffe Observatory site in Oxford. Weimin also designed the cover for this book and has also provided various illustrations. I have been privileged to see him at work over the past few years and feel honoured by his contribution to Oxford Castaways*

