



## STRUGGLING ARTIST

Ai Jing's book tells a singer's switch to painting

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# APEC agrees to work on FTAAP

Experts say different trade pacts in region are not mutually exclusive

By [Name] in [Location]

As the APEC leaders' meeting wraps up in Beijing, experts say the agreement to work on a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) is a significant step forward. They note that while different trade pacts exist in the region, they are not mutually exclusive and can coexist.

The APEC leaders' meeting in Beijing has concluded with a commitment to advance the FTAAP. Experts believe this will help reduce trade barriers and promote economic growth across the Asia-Pacific region.

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# Autobiography paints portrait of singer's switch to art

By CHEN NAN

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Ai Jing's book *Struggle*, which hit bookshelves in Beijing on Nov 2, gives voice to her transformation from a pop singer-songwriter to a contemporary artist in 1998 after the release of her album, *Made In China*.

"I was devastated at the time because my album couldn't be shared with listeners," the 45-year-old recalls.

Authorities objected to the content.

"I didn't want to repeat my past as a songwriter. So I moved on with my new identity, which gave me a new life."

Ai started studying under acclaimed artist Zhang Xiaogang in 1999.

"I didn't write songs for a while. When I wrote the book, I realized music has been an indispensable part in my life and enabled me to become who I am today."

She invited two good friends and celebrated music critics, Jin Zhaojun and Zhang Youdai, as book launch guests.

The talk started with Ai's first song, *My 1997*. The semi-autobiographical ballad tells the coming-of-age story of Ai and her love for a Hong Kong man. She looks forward

to Britain's 1997 handover to China so she can visit him.

The song made Ai, then 24 years old, a household name in China in 1992 and launched her career across Asia.

"It was a year when the song was played everywhere. Her fresh style contrasted with the heavy rock and love ballads in the market then," says Zhang Youdai, who's also a veteran DJ.

Zhang went to see her at an album signing held at Beijing's Xi'dan area in 1992.

"After talking with her, I found that we shared some mutual favorites among singer-songwriters," he recalls.

One of Ai's favorites is American songwriter and singer Suzanne Vega, who was listed in her new book among the 10 singer-songwriters who inspired her.

"One of her songs, *Luka*, overwhelmed me. For the first time, I realized singing could be as simple as telling stories. So I decided to write my own story," Ai recalls, referring to the creation of *My 1997*.

The native of Liaoning province's capital Shenyang was born into a musical family. Ai's father played several traditional Chinese instruments, and her mother was a Pingju Opera singer.



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**Ai Jing, best known as a pop singer-songwriter who transformed herself into a painter, says moving on with a new identity gives her a new life.**

She received vocal training at age 9 and was expected to become a soprano. She became a pop singer against her parents' wishes.

Ai left home at 17 and joined the Oriental Song and Dance Troupe in Beijing, where she developed a passion for Western pop and rock.

Her second album, *Story of Yanfen Street*, and third album, *Chasing the Moon*, were released by Sony Music Entertainment Japan, which brought the singer-songwriter onto the international stage.

She worked with China-born Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa in

Japan in 1995. They became friends during the collaboration and, following Ozawa's suggestion, Ai moved to New York City in 1997.

She met Zhang Xiaogang in 1998 and started studying under him a year later.

His first lesson was to paint whatever she wanted, be it a coffee cup or a skull. Then Zhang Xiaogang told her to tell stories with her paintings. This suited Ai, since she'd been telling stories with her music.

Ai released her last album *Dream Or Not*, while practicing as an artist in 2003.

When she returned to China from New York to promote the album, she realized that the music scene had totally changed.

"Lip-synching, boring interviews and entertainment shows were very disappointing," Ai says.

She then decided to stop being a singer-songwriter.

Her biggest break as a contemporary artist came in November 2012, when she held an exhibition titled *I Love Ai Jing* at the National Museum of China, bringing such artworks as *My Mom* and *My Hometown*, a tapestry of woolen patches knit by Ai's mother and decorated with the English word "love".

"I was first impressed by Ai's lyrics, especially the song *Wandering Swallow*. Such poetic lyrics are rarely seen today, which is a pity," says Jin, who's also the Chinese Musicians Association's deputy secretary-general.

"We miss the music scene of the early 1990s because the songs were artworks. Today, most songs are just commercial products."

Jin says he and Ai have continued to occasionally meet since she became a full time artist.

"Good for her," Jin says.

"She has found a new outlet to express herself."