

## ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО

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AND THE RUSSIAN-CHINESE UNIVERSITY HUMANITIES PROJECT  
IN ST. PETERSBURG (2016–2017)<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup> School of Arts, Peking University, Beijing, 100871, P. R. China<sup>2</sup> St. Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation<sup>3</sup> National Research University "Higher School of Economics",  
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In this article the issue of the creative activities of young artists from Russia and China representing the new generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is emphasized in historiography for the first time. The analysis is based on the material, produced during a collaborative project which began in 2015. The project in question features both cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural approaches, that are essential for liberal education.

For the first time in world culture, a history of one cultural space is being formed. In this space a new generation, which emphasizes its own identity, is acting, while challenging, feeling and recognizing its own 21<sup>st</sup> century. A renowned Professor of Peking University and art historian Peng Feng, contributes to a dialogue between Russian and Chinese artists regarding the nature of the modern Chinese art. Refs 19.

*Keywords:* Russia, China, contemporary art, liberation, generation, cultural space.

**СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ИСКУССТВО КИТАЯ И РОССИЙСКО-КИТАЙСКИЙ  
УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКИЙ ГУМАНИТАРНЫЙ ПРОЕКТ В САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГЕ (2016–2017)***Пен Фен<sup>1</sup>, Т. С. Юрьева<sup>2</sup>, Г. Л. Тульчинский<sup>2,3</sup>, Е. Ю. Станюкович-Денисова<sup>2</sup>*<sup>1</sup> Школа искусств Пекинского университета,  
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В статье на основе практического материала, полученного в ходе совместного проекта, запущенного в 2015 г., рассматривается творчество молодых художников России и Китая, представляющих новое поколение XXI в. В рассматриваемый проект изначально заложены междисциплинарный и кросскультурный подходы, принципиальные для либерального образования. Впервые формируется история одного культурного пространства, в котором,

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подчеркивая собственную разность, идентичность и то общее, что их объединяет, действует новое поколение, бросающее вызов, чувствующее и осознающее свой XXI век. В полемический диалог российских и китайских ученых включает свои размышления о том, что такое современное китайское искусство, известный искусствовед, профессор Пекинского университета Пен Фен. Библиогр. 19 назв.

*Ключевые слова:* Россия, Китай, современное искусство, освобождение, поколение, культурное пространство.

## **The artistic and educational Russian-Chinese project of Saint Petersburg University 2016–2018**

In Saint Petersburg State University the international project “China. Russia. USA. The Three Poles of a Multipolar World” (idea of T. S. Yurieva). In this article we analyze the results of the part of the project, which is dedicated to research of Russian and Chinese contemporary art.

Russia and China have very old traditions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century China appealed to the Soviet and Russian cultural experience for a long time. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Soviet education system made a significant impact upon the new post-war culture of China. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century China pursued the path of modernization of all fields of life and, moreover, managed to achieve one of the leading positions in the world of contemporary art. Cooperation of civilizations, not their clash — that is important for modern development of humankind. This very idea penetrates the system of modern humanitarian education.

Our project is essential in terms of comprehension of modern trends in culture, which is critically important for education in Russia and China. The project implementation is necessary within the frameworks of university training programs on the field of history, literature, painting, cinema and theatre. Nikolay Kropachev, the Rector of Saint Petersburg University, has emphasized in the introductory article, the “humanitarian field is the point, where the opportunities for inter-state cooperation are especially extensive” [1, p. 4].

The exhibition of the Chinese artists “Liberation of the Present from the Past” [1], held in Saint Petersburg in 2015 and the international conference “The West is the West? The East Is the East?” [2], preceded the project. At the 2015 Beijing Culture Forum T. Yurieva also reported on the upcoming project.

In 2016 the conference under the auspices of Saint Petersburg State University, dedicated to cultural cooperation took place [3]. In March 2017 it was followed by an exhibition of the young artists’ works at the Saint Petersburg New Museum. It attracted close attention of the Chinese cultural celebrities, who attended the event [4].

In 2018 a full-scale exhibition of artists “China. Russia. USA” is to be held in Saint Petersburg.

## **The history of formation of one cultural space**

The Chinese modern art makes a complex impression. Creating the appearance of a unified cultural space, penetrating in its history, answering questions related to the tradition and its refraction, discovers new correlations and objects for the researcher. Every curator understands, whether it is Chinese or Russian youth art, that artists have a

risk, having lived their youth, to stay unheeded, unheard, unnoticed, undiscussed. For the young generation there should be no such concept as «wasted time». Because of them, we ourselves explore the stream of thought of free-thinking young people.

This project is about young people and for young people.

The exhibition in 2017 showed that Russian and Chinese artists live through their own myth. Emotional currents of the last century ruin many of them. Both of them have passed Russian and Western avant-garde school. The extent of radicalism, toughness of Russian young masters, and the absolute enlightenment of young Chinese artists are amazing. Creative experimentation together with expression of intellectual strictness and clarity are redeeming. Our masters surprisingly boldly brought up the issue of what is allowed or not allowed in art, in historical and practical aspects. For the first time in the world culture, the history of unified cultural space is being formed, in which, emphasizing not only its own difference and identity, but something common that unites them as well, a new generation is acting, feeling and realizing its 21st century. This generation has tremendous energy, that is necessary to preserve independence. They will throw out a challenge, which will be partly accepted by the world community. To a full surprise of the intellectual elite, Chinese art has won a leading position in contemporary art [5].

There are values that are still preserved today and unable to be changed in Chinese art, such as hieroglyphic script, for example. The peculiarity of the cultural Chinese tradition lies in perception of Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist philosophical religious values as a whole synthesis [6]. No wonder, painting is considered to be a science in China. As the newest Russian encyclopedia “Spiritual Culture of China” rightly writes: “Understanding the artistic form not as a closed volume but as a channel, visualizes its through circulation of energy ... qi: the perception of form not as a mass, but as a dynamic configuration of a single space-time continuum in which the boundary between the background and the image is relative and variable: the harmonization of the form by balancing polar visual qualities and oppositely directed motion vectors: the concentration of energy in the composition of elements through the dominant of the center and the centripetal vectors; the unity of the plastic principles on the macro and micro levels of the artistic form”.

### **On the paths of comprehension of the integrity of diversity**

It has long been noted that artists “do not invent anything”. Neither in landscapes, nor in portraits and, especially, in everyday scenes. For this it is worth to visit their home countries. But the main adequacy is not in the objects of the image, but in the peculiarities of perception and expression. This is especially true for young artists whose creativity prism of culture and time affects itself, often in addition to their will, as a condition that is not present in the artifact, but without it its creation would be impossible. Comparing the creativity of young Chinese and Russian artists, this strikes the eye. And this is despite the fact that they have a lot in common — for example, high-quality Mannerism, fine culture, a kind of “picturesque erudition”, the desire to combine symbolization an image and discursivity.

And it would be strange if in our time of globalization and contacts intensity, the youth would not have anything in common. But nevertheless... Self-sufficiency of the immanence of the mass consumption society has long been noted. has Even higher values in it has the secular embodiment as the rubricators of the mass consumption market and

artifacts. In Mannerism and seriality reigns in the mass society culture. The expansion of knowledge is replaced by accumulation of diversity and the factorization of the present and the past. Even the place of science fiction has been firmly taken by fantasy with its medieval stylistics.

Modernity is a world fallen into particular pieces. Self-sufficient disparate ethnoses are being formed (with the help of social networks as well) [8]. Economic and political globalization generates the building of national boutiques, the building up of brands as a mechanism of difference. Even knowledge in various branches of science has disintegrated into self-sufficient concepts and theories. The worldview has lost its integrity. It appears as a systematic detailing and fractalization of the immanent.

Because of this self-sufficiency, such society does not need an image of the future. More important, it seems that this society is afraid of the future — primarily because it is afraid of losing the present. And this society and each of its members has something to lose. At the same time, the experience of recent decades shows that any achievement of modern civilization such as mail, medicine, computers, aviation, high-rise buildings, reservoirs, all means of transport and communication generate anxiety, because they can be used for its destruction. It is well-known from the history: the more developed a civilization is, the higher the quality of life; the more vulnerable society is, the more it accumulates fears and phobias that become not only the subject of psychiatry, but also aesthetic comprehension and sacred quests... This trend is clearly and vividly represented in contemporary art. There were certain genres and corresponding markets of horror, suspense and mysticism.

This situation is especially acute in modern Russia, where the expectations of collapse, deprivation and wars are probably natural for a society that in the previous century experienced two crashes of state system, mass repressions against its own citizens, two catastrophic wars and all monstrous trials related to it. In such society there must be formed an active request to create obstacles to the duplication of such misfortunes. However, the situation is reversed: feelings of insecurity and anxiety, enemy encirclement, general insecurity, which are already inherent in citizens, have been fueling by media practice for many years. At the end, a vicious circle was formed: the danger of collapse prevents us from establishing the very institutional foundations that would help to reduce the sense of anxiety.

The modern self-sufficient immanent society of mass consumption has reached the limits of semantic formation, inexplicability of the integrity of the world, which generates a request for integrity, creating a post-secularism [9; 10]. Symptoms of this request are the phenomenon of revival of interest in traditional religions, (including the “Islamic challenge”), the search for a new transcendental experience in the spirit of the New Age, fundamentalism, an increasingly right-wing vote in liberal democracies. It's not just about “archaization”, but about the situation in the spirit of late Rome. The high prosperity, the availability of free time, the recreation and entertainment industry create a search for a mental experience that transcends the immanent. In fact, humanity faces a powerful challenge to civilization.

All that is said, however, refers to the civilization generated by the “meeting of Jerusalem and Athens”. The synthesis of the Judeo-Christian ideas of monotheism, i.e. the unity of the world and its design and rationality, which means the accessibility of man's cognition of this idea. It is the civilization, that largely determines the face of the modern world

and the achievements of scientific and technological progress. In its formation, the key role was played by the cataphatic branch of Christianity like Catholicism and especially Protestantism. It was the reformation that opened the road to modernity and modernization of the Western world. The processes of “catch-up” modernization have been adjusted for a long time to this. And societies with a moral culture ascending to apophatic Eastern Christianity are still experiencing problems with the development of a market economy. No less acute problems are in even more apophatic Islam. However, there are world religions that do not know the ideas of the transcendental God.

So in Buddhism one can become enlightened like Buddha, repeating the path of Siddhartha Gautama to moral purification and spiritual perfection. Special attention should be paid to the experience of Chinese culture. Confucianism as distinct from the Abrahamic religions, also does not know the idea of the transcendental God. Its essence is the organization of immanent social and personal experience. No wonder that the Chinese empire in contrast to other empires, once having arisen, “measurably fading and measurably inflaming”, did not disappear from the history. In this regard, the success of modernization, realized in the countries with Confucian (Singapore and both Chinas) and Buddhist culture like India and Vietnam is not accidental. Although there are reverse examples of the success of Islamic Malaysia, and the problems of Buddhist Sri Lanka, which only stimulates deeper research into the role of culture in economic and political development.

What awaits us? A new synthesis based on transcendental experience? Or a complete triumph of self-sufficient immanence? Probably, experience is always open to new things. And the new one has an amazing feature — it comes. Perhaps the future has already come, but not each person is able to notice that fact.

And in this regard it is worth paying special attention to the work of young artists — not so much to what unites them, as to what distinguishes them.

In the works of Chinese authors, there is an attitude toward a holistic perception of the world, a path in harmony, a search and finding a place in it. Even if it is not just about nature (“Lingbao mountain in the open spaces of the Lesser Plateau” Feng Zhenguo, “Gray fog” by Lee Yong, “Summer trees-3” He Jia), but also about the urban environment (“Monk’s Residence” Cao Meng), Modern technological realities (“Indigo-2017 Number 14” Ma Shenzhen, “Neon time, number 1” Wang Changming), the person in them (portraits of Liu Laming, Zheng Wei, “Waiting” And Daer), or alone with nature (“Houses” Liu Yongkun). Even the incorporeal “Running figure” Wang Jie, “Lines” Liang Huiqing, “Vector 3” Yang Yang, or melted ice cream by Wang Weizze — are self-sufficient in this world. At first sight the surprising harmony in the non-objective “Silence” by Yang Le refers not so much to color and composition as to the transfer of mood of mind and soul. Paradoxically, the same mood is transmitted and horror fantasy in the video art of Geng Xue [4, p. 13–19].

The world of Russian artists is a world of exploded or disintegrated reality. The artifacts have recorded its fragments (“Dance of Matisse” by A. Tsikarishvili), hardly traced signs of ghosts (“Lake 1” by A. Marakulina, “Seredina” by A. Andrzejewska), unnamed and difficult to determine (“Bul-Bul” by S. Motolians, “Unnamed / Surnon” by I. Grishaeu), or — deformed perception, radical elimination (“Salmon” O. Mikhailov, “Field” A. Tereshko, “Androids also love milk” S. Kotin-Kazimova, “Psychedelic Forest” A. Gart), confusion — like a young man in a T-shirt with the inscription “No future” in the video “Russian unconscious” by V. Rudyeyev-Ryazantseva. If there is an image of a certain unity,

then it appears as a lump from the palms (“Lump” by P. Dyakov) — whether separated from the bodies, or state bodies inside this lump. It is no accident that the curators talk about the Russian part of the exhibition as a “Russian puzzle” [4, p.20–27] — the idea is literally embodied under this title in the video-photo collage by L. Lerner, the central place in which is the Orthodox grave cross [4, p.23]. It is especially indicative that the majority of authors in the selection are girls whose creativity is always characterized by a holistic worldview. This loss of integrity, the divergence of the worldview can hardly be explained by some rationalistic attitudes. Russian culture has always been characterized by an apophatic, the desire to look beyond the screen of this fragmented world, if not to see, then to feel its transcendental integrity. It seems that the new generation of artists catches serious progress in the Russian worldview.

Perhaps the Russian and Chinese cultures are moving in oncoming courses. The Russian one, entering the world economic, information, and, most importantly, cultural space, being traumatized by the loss of an appeal to transcendence (the otherworld or from the “bright future”), is looking for the foundations of a new synthesis. And the Chinese one, being initially immanent, develops this diverse integrity of the world. Will it come to the limits of understanding this integrity? Does it need this?

However, it seems that in this oncoming movement, for these cultures the experience of each of them is mutually interesting and useful.

## The trends of contemporary art development in China

### *Definition*

What is Chinese contemporary art? That is the theme of the First China Contemporary Art Forum co-organized by James Elkins and Peng Feng (an author of this article) in Beijing in 2009. Nothing came from the three days presentations and discussion, in addition to a 1000 pages Chinese English bi-lingual proceedings published two years later. Chinese contemporary art seems not easy to be defined. But it does not mean this phrase is useless or meaningless. We can differentiate Chinese contemporary art, theoretically and practically, not only from Chinese traditional and modern art, but also from the contemporary art in Northern America, Europe and so on. Historically, some art after later 1970s, can be named contemporary art. Theoretically, the art related to contemporary society, especially made dissent and criticism to the dominant ideology is usually called contemporary art. As Hal Foster observes, contemporary or postmodern art is “primarily about meaning and not about aesthetic value; it is political rather than aesthetic, literal and materialistic rather than transcendent. The artist is a rebel and social critic and art is primarily a form of political rhetoric” [11, p.16–17].

### *Post-modernist, post-socialist, and Chinese contemporary art*

Does contemporary art have stages or processes? Does contemporary art has history? According to Arthur Danto and Hans Belting, the answer should be no. “Contemporary art,” Hans Belting write, “manifests an awareness of a history of art but no longer carries it forward.” [12, p.3] For Arthur Danto, contemporary art reaches post-historical stage of art. He wrote, “Today there is no longer any pale of history. Everything is permitted.” [13] The word “post-historical” literally means after or without history. If Danto and Belt-

ing are right, it means that contemporary art in Northern America and Western Europe would not have history. Northern America and Western Europe represents the international and the post-modern, and so we can say that international contemporary art or post-modernist art is an art without history.

International contemporary art does not have history, not only due to its progress could not be found, but also because of its beginning is not clear. We cannot find a clear break between modern art and contemporary art. As Danto wrote, "It is characteristic of contemporaneity-but not of modernity-that it should have begun insidiously, without slogan or logo, without anyone being greatly aware that it had happened.... Contemporary art, by contrast, has no brief against the art of the past, no sense that the past is something from which liberation must be won, no sense even that it is at all different as art from modern art generally" [13, p.5].

But the situation in China and Eastern Europe, i.e. in the post-socialist country, is different. The beginning of contemporary art in post-socialist country is clear. There are lots of slogan, and almost everyone in art circle and even the whole society is aware of its beginning. Actually there are revolution or reformation. The enemy of contemporary art is obvious and indoubtable, socialist realism. In short, contemporary art in post-socialist country is different from contemporary art in postmodernist country, such as northern America and Western Europe.

However, history of contemporary art in Eastern European countries is also not clear, even we can find a rupture between contemporary art and socialist realism there. Contemporary art in Eastern Europe has its beginning but no progress or processes that is essential for history. The radical revolution in Eastern Europe changed the society immediately. Contemporary art won the fight with socialist realism and accomplished its mission in very short time and so there was not duration for its progress or processes. Contemporary art in Eastern Europe is absorbed into the international contemporary art soon and finally reaches its post-historical stage.

The situation in China is different not only from the post-modernist but also from the post-socialist. Instead of radical revolution, China takes reformation gradually. Contemporary art does not yet win the fight with socialist realism. It does not yet accomplish its mission, that is, to promote political reform and social change. Therefore, contemporary art in China is in the progress toward and not yet reach its end, the so-called post-historical stage.

For example, socialist realism totally disappeared in Eastern Europe, while it still lingers on and even revives in China. In 2006, the central government invested billions of RMB in Significant Historical Event Project. Most of the paintings and sculptures in this project remind of socialist realism.

### *Processes*

We can find processes of contemporary art in China and so we can say that we do not only have synchronic themes but also diachronic history of Chinese contemporary art.

#### *a. Modernism as the Contemporary*

Peng Feng takes the break with socialist realism as the start of Chinese contemporary art. Therefore Chinese contemporary art cannot be equal to post-89 art, which Richard Vine and others argued for. We can find its emergency in later 1970s. The painted naked

women in YUAN Yunsheng's mural Water-Sprinkling Festival in capital international airport and wide debate on it would be an appropriate moment for us to talk about Chinese contemporary art. The painting's style is not socialist realism but modernism. But the painter's intention is not only artistic but also political. YUAN did not want to defend modernism but to test the degree of the authorities' openness and the society's tolerance. Surprisingly, DENG Xiaoping praised this work, while the public could not accept it. The commissioner decided to build a wall before the naked women and so the public could not see this part. Finally the artist was forced into exile in the United States. YUAN Yunsheng's mural Water-Sprinkling Festival is contemporary since the political intention and implication, even if the style is modernism.

The exhibitions of the Stars can be treated in same way. The members of the Stars are painters and sculptors who were fascinated in modernism. However, they could not get any chances to show their works openly during the dominance of socialist realism. Finally, they decided to exhibit their works in the yard of China National Museum of Fine Art during the 5<sup>th</sup> National Fine Art Exhibition in September 1979. The illegal exhibition was canceled after its opening and the artists demonstrated for freedom. The unexpected exhibition became a serious social event. Finally the authorities made concessions. The exhibition was permitted to do in Shishahai Museum in later November and again in China national museum of fine art in August 1980.

Yuan's Water-Sprinkling Festival and most works of the Stars exhibitions are modernist painting. Fighting against socialist realism with modernism is a common strategy for Chinese contemporary artists in that time and so modernism became contemporary in the first stage of Chinese contemporary art.

According to Socialist Realism, art should come from and serve the people's life. The best way for art to achieve its aim is imitating and transfiguring people's life. In a word, art should be a tool to educate people and to strengthen socialist ideology, and so art cannot be independent, pure, or autonomic. In 1980s, the avant-garde artists launched a movement to purify art language. This purification movement aimed at saving art from utility and substituting heteronomous art for autonomous art. Even if autonomous art or "art for art's sake" is an outdated idea in that time in the West where postmodern art had surpassed modern art, it is still an avant-garde idea in 1980s in China where the art circle was still dominated by Socialist Realism.

During 1980s Purification Movement, most artists took abstract painting as example of pure art. The abstract paintings of the Boston Exhibition in Beijing and Shanghai 1981 fostered the Purification Movement.

However, the representative of Purification Movement is not any abstract paintings but an installation. Xu Bing's Book from the Sky, created from 1987 to 1991, could be the most important work of the purification movement. Book from the Sky is different from and goes beyond the abstract paintings which were practiced by many artists during the purification movement. Book from the Sky is totally meaningless. They are not paintings, even abstract painting. They are actually books, unreadable books which consist of thousands of fake Chinese characters forged by Xu Bing. Xu Bing spent four years to do one meaningless thing; he intended to defend the idea that art is meaningless and to fight with the art idea of Socialist Realism.

### *b. Realism as Contemporary*

According to Frederic Jameson's cultural periodization, realism, modernism, post-modernism are in sequence. He argues that this sequence parallels capitalism's successive development from market capitalism, through monopoly capitalism and imperialism, into multinational or consumer capitalism [14]<sup>2</sup>. Realism is seen by western critics as anachronism in contemporary art world. But a real realism can be seen as contemporary art in China, since it can exemplify the differences with socialist realism and touch the real society.

Actually, in early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernization realism was not an old style in China, since it was not developed or mature before. When Christian missionaries, such as Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), brought realist representational painting to China in early of 1700s, it was not widely accepted for a number of reasons. One was that the paintings created by Western missionaries were stored, and thus isolated, in the court, unavailable to the public. Their recognition, appreciation and influence were limited. The Chinese public was not yet sufficiently familiar with Western culture nor was it ready to accept realistic painting. The other reason was that European style of realist painting wasn't suitable for the Chinese literati's taste. Let us illustrate this position by a comment on Western painting by Zou Yigui (1686–1772):

“Westerners are skilled in geometry. They make precise measurements of light and shade, foreground and background ... The images in the pictures are measured with a set square so that they are reduced in size according to distance. People almost want to walk into the houses and walls they have painted. ... Though meticulously executed, their works are those of craftsmen and cannot be considered as paintings” [15, p. 340].

Prejudice against foreign culture, arrogance and the sense of superiority of domestic culture prevented the prevalence of realist painting in China. But after the Opium War in 1840, China suffered further aggression from colonial powers, and its cultural arrogance and sense of superiority quickly diminished. The country eventually opened its doors to accept foreign culture. When this happened, realist paintings caused excitement and amazement both among artists and public, as did the illusionary paintings in Renaissance Italy. For example, when Wu Fading showed his Heroes of Qinglongqiao, a large oil painting depicting an incident from revolutionary historical events in 1922, “its size and dramatic realism caused something of a stir” [16, p. 42].

But realism in China was not developed as real realism but pseudo realism aimed at political propaganda. When Luo Zhongli exhibited his painting Father in China National Museum of Fine Art in 1980, the real face of a farmer on the painting attracted a lot of attention. People realized the difference between reality and propaganda.

### *c. Political Pop*

Some of the Stars' works can be classified as political pop. For example, Wang Ke-ping's woodcut sculpture can be found out political implications. After Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg's visiting China in 1982, especially Robert Rauschenberg's exhibi-

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson admits, “At any rate, it will also have been clear that my own cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme” [14, p. 136].

tion in China National Museum of Fine Art in 1984, Chinese artists learned to use Pop language to express their critique of and ridicule on the political symbols. Political Pop emerged and soon became the main aspect of contemporary art in China.

Political pop in China is a part of international political pop, that is same as that communist movement in China is a part of international communist movement. We can find a lot of similarities between political pop in China and Eastern Europe. Political pop is a unique phenomenon in post-socialist country. In other post-socialist countries, contemporary art ends in political pop. But Chinese contemporary art finds other way to continue its processes.

#### *d. Cynical Realism*

After 1989, the political reform began by the end of 1970s was almost closed. China made its progress on the road to socialism with Chinese characteristics. The government became more pragmatic and mercenary. It is no longer the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but the disinterested government, according to a Peng Feng's colleague Yao Yang's interpretation. He writes:

By a disinterested government, we mean a government that is impartial towards different sections of the society. To be more precise, it is a government that does not form an alliance with, or provide favourable treatment to, any specific social section. It is not necessarily a neutral government lacking its own interests. It can, instead, have its own agenda and self interests. The key argument here is that a disinterested government is more likely than a partial government to adopt growth-enhancing economic policies even beyond its own strategic choices.

Political pop is no longer relevant and effective now, since its target is, not the disinterested government, but the government of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Chinese artists should and actually already found a new way to express their dissent and criticism, that is cynical realism. Political pop is an international phenomenon, while cynical realism is a typical Chinese domestic art. Chinese contemporary art does not stop at political pop. Cynical realism continues to write its history in China.

Most of cynical realistic works are artists' self-portraits. The authorities are more neutral, institutionalizing, and powerful. Individuals can do nothing directly against this powerful authorities. What they can do is self-mockery, self-abuse, and self-criticism. Through a mischievous distortion of self-portrait, artists express their noncooperation with the authorities.

#### *e. Chineseness*

With the continuous speed development of Chinese economy, especially after the international financial crisis in 2008, more and more Chinese artists began looking into their own tradition. A new tendency with the elusive "Chineseness" or, simply, New Chinese Style emerges.

More and more artists appropriate the symbols of traditional Chinese culture to create contemporary installations. For example, the China pavilion at Venice Biennale 2011 was based on Five Elements which is important ideas of traditional Chinese philosophy. Five artists focused on five fragrances, such as herb medicine, *baijiu* (a clear grain liquor with a long history of celebratory use in China), green tea, lotus flowers and incense, respectively. As Richard Vine pointed out, the China pavilion tries to "introduce international

visitors to the elusive notion of 'Chineseness' [17]. "Perhaps the most memorable work in this year's Chinese pavilion was the least material. Yuan Gong's dry-ice fog, periodically arising on the lawn and simultaneously filling the interior, recalls the misty space of traditional shan shui (mountain water) painting. But it also evokes the subtlety, pliability and, finally, enveloping pervasiveness with which Chinese culture has for millennia absorbed its would-be conquerors" [18].

After aping Western art in the 1980s and serving Western art markets in 1990s, Chinese contemporary art finally reached its self-consciousness of identity in the new millennium. The identity consists of its Chinese features, contemporaneity and artisticity. In the past decades Chinese contemporary art borrowed much from the rich tradition of Chinese culture. But since 2008, demand for art with Chinese characteristics started to become a prominent phenomenon in art circles. Numerous avant-garde artists, such as Feng Mengbo in Beijing and Qiu Zhijie in Hangzhou, abandoned new media experiments and turned back to traditional ink painting. This does not mean that they turned into old masters of ink painting. Instead, the pursuit of contemporaneity transformed old ink painting into new ink art. Akin to modernists in early twentieth century, such as T. S. Elliot, the newness of their art could be somehow traditional. Rather than challenging the boundary of art, Chinese contemporary artists are defending the status of art or artisticity. Most of contemporary artists in China had academic education. They do not believe slogans, such as "Everyone is an artist" declared by Joseph Beuys and "Everything in permitted [to be art]" announced by Arthur Danto.

Demanding Chinese characteristics, pursuing contemporaneity and defending artisticity results in yet another art movement in China, namely, the New Ink Art Movement. Their works were exhibited in dozens of exhibitions, such as Undoing Shuimo: Invitational Exhibition of International Contemporary Ink Art at Shanghai Duolun Modern Art Museum in October 2012 and Beijing MoCA in January 2013, Re-Ink: Invitational Exhibition of Contemporary Ink and Wash Painting 2000-2012 at Hubei Fine Art Museum in December 2012 and Today Art Museum in April 2014, Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in December 2013, and so on. Indubitably the wave of new ink art is becoming increasingly stronger.

This fresh movement of new ink art is different from the movement of experimental ink art which began in 1980s and ended in 1990s. Ironically, the latter is even newer than the former. Experimental ink art was so fascinated by the pursuit of novelty that it hardly maintained its Chinese character or its artisticity and reached its end quickly. The difference between new ink art in 2010s and experimental ink art in 1990s is somewhat similar to the difference between graffiti and street art.

Even if the two are in many ways the same, contemporary street art is clearly more subtle and aesthetic than graffiti. Street art aims at "aesthetic integration" instead of occupation. "Viewing street art is about more than the aesthetic appreciation a new art form" [19]. New ink art participates in this return of the aesthetic and can be regarded as a return from the contemporary or postmodern to the modern. Modernism seems to emerge in China for its third time after the end of contemporary art.

China is still on the way to a more open and democratic society. Contemporary Chinese art's processes match the social changes in China. It does not yet reach its end so long as the real is misted in the dream.

While working at this group project, we understood the necessity of combination of theoretical constructions and their creative assertion by the young artists. This paves the way for a really new research (probably, a fundamental one), in which curatorial ideas will gain a mature, modern and polemic form, that matches the new problems, put by new young art professionals... of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At present we need not only to find, but also to cultivate the seeds, which are scattered in the works of young artists. They can be reproached for various kinds of negligence or excessive generosity, but one cannot appreciate their sincere desire to act in the present time and promote its humanitarian concepts.

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