

**CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ART AND THE WEST: DIALOGUES IN THE
ART OF CAI GUO-QIANG, XU BING, AI WEIWEI AND ZHANG XIAOGANG**

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines case studies of artists including Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei and Zhang Xiaogang in the period from 1978 to 1999. These four artists have been chosen as they show the complexity of the relationship between China and the West. They all had Chinese backgrounds and moved to work in the West during the 1980s. They were studying during a period after the Cultural Revolution ended in China. In so doing, the thesis will trace how four prominent Chinese contemporary artists have been shaped as much by sustained engagements with Western art as by artistic training and education at home. The dissertation explores dialogues between Chinese and Western art through an analysis of art education, networks, and individual artists, and that the time period of the dissertation ranges from c. 1900.

The thesis unequivocally provides an argument that contemporary Chinese art was shaped through a dialogue with Western art, done notably both from within and outside of China. This dialogue between Chinese contemporary artists and the West was, in part, a product of Chinese political reality at this particular moment which refers to the period of the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's reform and opening up to the west (1978-1999). The methodology used to explore the complexity of such relationships is postcolonial theory. References to 'hybridization' and 'cultural hybridity' help nuance the synthesis of 'East' and 'West' in these works.

Specifically, the introductory chapter will review the literature on this topic, namely on the criticism of Chinese art in China. The following chapters will then

explore the effects of politics on art and education, and the engagement with the West by modern artists including the four case study artists working in the 1980s. The aim of this thesis is to question extant literature in the field of Contemporary Chinese Art which postulates for a binary between Chinese diasporic artist's engagement with the West and those practising on the Chinese mainland. The thesis successfully proves this point by engaging with postcolonial theories of hybridity as well as the complex dynamics of art education in China during the Reform and Opening up period, where competing visions of western and soviet style education were taught to art students. Indeed, the thesis artists who left China for overseas were still the products of its education system.

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INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, there is much news of ‘high price’ contemporary Chinese art in the international art market, in which the iconic Chinese faces (like works of Zhang Xiaogang) seem to symbolize contemporary Chinese art.¹ In fact, most of these artworks were produced by artists who left China or after an experience in the west since 1980. The process of modernization and globalization was accelerated by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s.² Some Western artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg were allowed to exhibit their works in Beijing since the 1980s; before that period, they were virtually unknown in China.³ These Western art exhibitions have prompted a younger generation of artists to learn from the west since the 1980s. Furthermore, some of Chinese artists had an opportunity to study abroad and participate in global art exhibitions. They utilized media encountered in the west, such as installation art, to create ‘Chinese Contemporary Art’, which consequently led to more communications between Chinese and Western artists. It should be explained that all Western art forms and movements were new to the Chinese young students and artists in the 1980s and 1990s. There was no clear difference between learning contemporary art or modern art. For this reason, unlike the strict distinction of Western art, it appears that the concepts of contemporary art

1 Wu Hung and Wang Peggy, *Contemporary. Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed, (New York: Museum of Modern Art MOMA press, 2010), pp. 40-42.

2 Goodman, David, *Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Revolution: A Political Biography* 1st, (London: Routledge Press, 1994) pp. 6-8.

3 Hung, Wu, *Transience: Chinese experimental art at the end of the twentieth century* 1st, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) pp. 153-155.

and modern art are vague in China, in that both represent an avant-garde art that is different from the art forms of the past. Some of Chinese artists living abroad declared that Europe is their hometown.⁴ They claim to have created a contemporary Chinese art outside China, with which to help China improve from outside.⁵ These works of contemporary Chinese art has been given great attention by previous academic research, which has framed them as an expression in which Chinese intellectuals suffered under the restrictions by the government.⁶ This statement overlooks a more complex narrative about contemporary Chinese artists and their relationship to the west.

This thesis concentrates on the period of 1978 to 1999 and the case study of artists including Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, Zhang Xiaogang, who all had Chinese backgrounds and were influenced by the Western art. It will trace how four prominent Chinese contemporary artists have been shaped as much by sustained engagements with Western art as by artistic training and education at home, thereby challenging narratives of Chinese art that insist on static and rigid definitions of it.

Specifically, this introductory chapter will review the literature on this topic, namely on the criticism of Chinese art in China. The following chapters will then explore art education in China, places and groups/networks of modern and contemporary artists

⁴ Hancox, Simone. 'Art, activism and the geopolitical imagination', *Journal of Media Practice* 12.3 (2012), pp.279-90.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Marie Leduc, *Dissidence: The Rise of Chinese Contemporary Art in the West*, 1st, (London, The MIT press, 2018), pp. 21–26.

in China, the effects of politics on art and education, and the engagement with the West by modern artists and the four case study artists. Through analyzing the works of each key study artist and comparing them to those artists who stayed in China, this thesis will uncover the relationship between early works and education, and the dialogue with Western art. It will challenge the previous view of certain scholars that contemporary Chinese artists are necessarily critics of China.

It unequivocally provides an argument that contemporary Chinese art was shaped through a dialogue with Western art, done notably both from within and outside of China. This dialogue between Chinese contemporary artists and the West was, in part, a product of Chinese political reality which refers to the fact that China was both open to the West and still had old ideological content in the 1980s and 1990s. The methodology used to explore the complexity of such relationships is postcolonial theory. References to ‘hybridization’ and ‘cultural hybridity’ help nuance the synthesis of ‘East’ and ‘West’ in these works.

Research Context

Many publications on this topic can be found in English, showing the relevance of contemporary Chinese art to the West, while some publications in Chinese focus on the relationship between contemporary Chinese art and policies. In addition, the majority of these texts insist on static definitions of it. Most of the publications on contemporary Chinese art list the process of Contemporary Chinese art in

chronological order. For example, *Contemporary Chinese Art: in the 1970s-2000s*, defines three periods: the 1970s to the 1980s, the 1990s as well as 2000s, listing the major events of contemporary Chinese art for every year since the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).⁷ It contends that the cultural differences between the China and the West in the global art world were rapidly dissolving after the Cultural Revolution. Since then, it became a dynamic force which was globally recognized. The author discusses contemporary art in public spaces after the Cultural Revolution and focuses on artist groups, such as the ‘painters’ village, a group named after its location around the summer palace in Beijing in the mid-1980s, where young artists and critics mobilized a national avant-garde art movement.⁸ The author has realized the significance of the critical environment in the painters’ village. However, there are many artist’s monographs and interviews that do this job. For example, ‘Cai Guo-qiang’s biography, *My Painting Story*,⁹ ‘Xu Bing: My true text, in Chinese, 我的真文字,¹⁰ Ai Weiwei: Interviews and Conversations’ edited by Weiwei Ai and Bernhard Schmitt, 2012’,¹¹ ‘Talk Asia: Interview with Zhang Xiaogang’ Posted by Sophia Cao, CNN,¹² and Lv peng: *The letters of Zhang Xiaogang, 1981-1996*, Beijing university press’,¹³

7 Hung, Wu, *Chinese Contemporary Chinese Art, 1970s–2000s*. 1st ed, (London: Thames & Hudson press, 2014), pp.3-5.

8 Ibid.

9 Cai Guo-Qiang, *My painting story*. 1st ed by Li, w. (Guangxi: Guangxi normal university press, 2017)

10 Xu Bing: *my true text in Chinese: 我的真文字*. 1st ed. by Li Cheng, (Beijing: Zhong Xing press, 2015)

11 Ai Weiwei: *Interviews and Conversations*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Obrist (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012).

12 Zhang, Xiaogang, *Talk Asia* [Interview] CNN. ‘INTERVIEW WITH ZHANG XIAOGANG ON TALK ASIA CNN’ March 2009

13 Zhang, Xiaogang, *The letters of Zhang Xiaogang (1981-1996)*. 1st edition, (Peking University Press, Beijing, 2009)

All of these artists have monographs dedicated to them, which can support the study of these artists' engagement with the West and help provide a better understanding of their work.

Nevertheless, Wu Hung has played a significant role in shaping the discourse around contemporary Chinese art. His book, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* features a collection of primary documents, including exhibition catalogues, papers and works that can be analyzed to better understand contemporary Chinese art.¹⁴ The author focuses on the Chinese mainland artists and reproduces documents from the post-Mao era, including related narrative materials of Chinese avant-garde art. He also discusses the activities of artists who migrated to the west in the 1990s. These important documents include statements from avant-garde art groups, official documents, exhibition prefaces, as well as critical theses.¹⁵ These documents provide a foundation for further study of contemporary Chinese art.

Moreover, in Paul Gladston's book, *Contemporary Chinese art: a Critical History*, he examines contemporary Chinese art in the context of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and open-door policy from 1978.¹⁶ In doing so, he provides a critical map of the ideas and practices in Chinese art and examines how these practices combine (due to artistic complicity or resistance) with power and state structures inside and outside

¹⁴ Wu Hung, Wang Peggy, *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, 1st ed, (New York: Museum of Modern Art MOMA press, 2010), pp. 12-20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art. A Critical History*, 3rd ed, (London: Reaktion Book press, September 2014), pp12-13.

China by focusing on China's political issues of state control.¹⁷ Gladston not only focuses on artists from mainland China, but also discusses contemporary artists from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau, as well as other diaspora Chinese communities, to solve the problems of contemporary art and Chinese culture.¹⁸ Through deconstructive analysis, he interprets the contemporary Chinese art and eventually provides a new theoretical foundation. In conclusion, the publications of Wu Hung and Paul Gladston both marked the systematic academic research of contemporary Chinese art as an independent field in the art history. It reveals the historical origins and appearance of contemporary Chinese art. Additionally, they form the most relevant publications to the four artists chosen to discuss in the thesis.

Other authors focus on specific themes of contemporary Chinese art from different theories and perspectives. In the book, *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989, A Semiotic Analysis*, Martina Koeppel Yang analyzes the major art movements in the 1980s by discussing the changes in Chinese art institutions and policies.¹⁹ The author provides a useful perspective to understand contemporary Chinese art through semiotic analysis. In *Between State and Market: Contemporary Chinese art in the post- Mao era, 1978-93*, Jane Debevoise examines the shift in the system of support for contemporary art in China between 1979 and 1993, from state

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art. A Critical History*, 3rd ed, (London: Reaktion Book press, September 2014), pp20-25(p.6).

¹⁹ Martina Koeppel Yang, *Semiotic Warfare, 1979-1989, A Semiotic Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Time zone eight press, 2003), pp.4-10.

patronage to the introduction of the market, and the hybrid space that developed in between.²⁰ Today, soaring prices for contemporary art have triggered a debate about the deleterious effect of the art market. In contrast, Debevoise suggests that, in the post-Mao era, the art market was liberating, because it offered artists a framework of legitimacy and support alternatively to that provided by the state.²¹ Debevoise explores the entangled role of the state and the market, and how experimental artists and their champions in China negotiated to find a creative space between the two systems, namely the state and the market, to produce and promote their work.²² She also attempts to explore how artists could develop between two different systems in this special transitional period. She persuasively argues how their works bring to light the valuable contribution of Chinese modern and contemporary art under changing socio-economic conditions. However, the above literature overlooks how Chinese artists were shaped as much by sustained engagements with Western art, as well as by artistic training and education at home, and how their work reflects on China's political reality and contemporary Western art at a particular moment (1978-1999). It refers to the period of the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's reform and opening up (1978-1999) and the comprehensive transformation of society with political changes.

20 Jane Debevoise, *Between state and market: Contemporary Chinese art in the post Mao era, 1978-93*, (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2014) p23-25.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

Another important strand of research has focused on artworks made by China's artistic diaspora who emigrated to the United States, France and Australia in the early 1990s. For example, in Melissa Chiu's book, *Breakout: Chinese Art Outside China*, she focuses on artists who emigrated in the lead-up to the 1989 protest at Tiananmen Square. These artists include Cai Guo-Qiang, Xu Bing, Wenda Gu, Zhang Huan, Huang Yong Ping and Chen Zhen. She firstly analyzes their important solo exhibitions and discusses the influences of variety of cultures on artistic productions of overseas Chinese artists by examining the experiences and histories of coordination, dialogue and resistance in the cross-cultural context in the 1990s. She attempts to differentiate it from the artistic community inside China.²³ However, her research is problematically classified into different countries and continents, such as settled in New York, Paris and Sydney. This approach is problematic, and a more thematic classifications may have been better. The author insists on the binary notion of two types of art within and outside of China. As a result, it can be further asserted that her approach overlooks the complexity of contemporary Chinese art produced outside China. From the Western perspective, whilst it intends to discover how their outcomes were shaped in the Western cultural context, it ignores how their practice challenged the situation of binary opposition of two art styles.

Some Chinese publications have focused on the relationship between Chinese

²³ Chiu, M, *Breakout: Chinese Art Outside China*. 2nd ed. (Milan: Charta press, 2008), pp.122-132(p.124).

contemporary art and Western rights since the 2000s. For example, this occurs in the article ‘Contemporary Chinese art should establish its own modernity’, published in the *Chinese Art Museum Journal* in September 2010. Its author, Wang Wenzhang, a senior cultural official of the Communist Party of China, condemns the practice of most contemporary Chinese artists in the West.²⁴ He contends that in the process of globalization, the landscape of contemporary Chinese art has changed immediately, and the connotation of contemporary art has been extended and evolved continuously. In light of this, he emphasizes the independence of Chinese art and questions here (in Chinese):

What is the cultural identity and value of contemporary Chinese art? What is the artistic appearance of contemporary art in China? How can Chinese artists have the cultural discourse in the Western society, as well as how to evaluate contemporary Chinese art?²⁵

The author also contends that ‘we’ should adhere to the cultural values of Marxism, carry forward the spirit of contemporary China, and show the atmosphere of the new era of China.²⁶ It should be noted that Wenzhang’s statement provides a polemical critique on western-centered artistic values and artists. His article deliberately binds

24 Wang Wenzhang, ‘*Chinese contemporary art should establish its own modernity.*’ *Journal of Chinese Art Museum*. (September 2010), pp44-46 (p.45).

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

domestic politics to contemporary art, one-sidedly emphasizing nationalism, state and socialist ideology, which ignores that in the era of globalization, the dualistic antagonism between Chinese and Western art has collapsed. Considering the critique on the western-centered artistic values and artists, chapter five of this thesis will use the concept of ‘hybridity’ in Chinese contemporary art to discuss how Chinese artists are responding to the challenges of globalization.

In addition, some of Western publications have focused on traditional Chinese art in the twentieth century. For example, Donovan Michael Sullivan, a Canadian-born British art historian, is known as a major Western pioneer in modern Chinese art history. In the 1940s, he worked with the International and Chinese Red Cross Societies in China and has since then taught in the country.²⁷ As a firsthand witness to developments in Chinese art, he made friends with many pioneering Chinese traditional and modern artists. He also taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and was appointed as the Head of the Department of Oriental Art at Stanford University before joining St Catherine’s College, Oxford.²⁸ His research on modern Chinese art since the twentieth century has received academic attention, because of his background: understanding both Chinese and Western culture. In his *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, Sullivan presents a description of Chinese art and artists in the twentieth century. Sullivan divides Chinese art into four periods; Republic of China

27 [Anon.], “Biography of Dr Donovan Michael Sullivan, 1916 – 2013” (2009), < <https://www.stcatz.ox.ac.uk/michaelsullivan> > [Accessed 14 Jan 2020].

28 *Art and artists of twentieth-century China*, 1st ed. by Michael Sullivan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp.11.

(1900-1937); the counter-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War (1937-1949); the art of the Mao Zedong era (1949-1976); and the period after Mao Zedong since 1976. He focuses on the narration related to modern Chinese history, as well as the grand landscape of Chinese art from tradition to modernity. He introduces the reformers of modern art in the *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China*, stating that:

As one of the three most important reformers of Chinese painting, Lin Fengmian has a long-term vision and is the most accomplished. This is not only because he has conducted extremely in-depth and detailed research on Chinese and Western art in Europe, but also because he understands that once Chinese and Western art is finally integrated, it is not a question of combining different techniques, but rather a form of self-expression out of nature and spontaneity. It can be explained the artist's dual experience is internalized.²⁹

As such, Sullivan's work offers a significant analysis about the reform of traditional Chinese painting. It is worth considering whether it is the same situation in contemporary Chinese art, a key research theme that this thesis develops. Sullivan's *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* ends with an analysis of artworks produced in the early 1990s. Consequently, his study does not cover the development of installation art and conceptual art in China since that time; the artist groups which

²⁹ Michael Sullivan, 1996, 'Leading masters between the war', in the *Art and artists*, pp.68-80.

have emerged in Beijing and other places are not included either in his book. In his conclusion, he states that ‘Optimism has undergone profound changes in cynicism and commercialism in the 1990s and the beginning of the new century.’ He continues,

If I can continue the story to the present, I will face two challenges: the first is the surge in the number of artists and the increasing complexity in the Chinese art scene, which makes it very difficult for any attempt to generalize the art of this country. The second problem is faced by people of advanced age like me: I am powerless or unwilling to give in to something, but many of the younger generation can accept it without difficulty, such as those more extreme in avant-garde art. We all know the power of new, but there may be nothing new in it.³⁰

From these statements, we might conclude that Sullivan has tried to present the extent of the changes and indeed, challenges, that existed in the direction of Chinese art. Overall, he provides important pictures and text materials of Chinese artists in the development of Chinese modern art. It is a significant foundation for further research of contemporary Chinese art.

Admittedly, these above reference books have been published for more than ten or twenty years, and the landscape of contemporary Chinese art has changed rapidly

³⁰ Michael Sullivan, 1996, ‘The new wave’, in the *Art and artists*, pp.255-272(p.255)

during the past few years. It still explains the multi-faceted characteristics of extant literature. My thesis builds on this research nevertheless, as an important foundation upon which to develop examinations of the early education of the case study artists under the historical context, and then I add an innovative, novel perspective to the debate.

This thesis examines how four prominent Chinese contemporary artists have been shaped as much by sustained engagements with Western art as by artistic training and education at home. These four artists have been chosen as they show the complexity of the relationship between China and the West. They were studying and working in China after the Cultural Revolution ended. They are Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, Zhang Xiaogang. It will then explore their art education in China, the places and groups/networks of modern and contemporary artists in China, as well as the effects of politics on art and education, and the engagement with the West by modern artists and the four case study artists.

This thesis will unequivocally provide an argument of the thesis that the contemporary Chinese art was shaped through a dialogue with Western art, done both from within and outside of China. This dialogue between Chinese contemporary artists and the West was, in part, a product of Chinese political reality.

Research Questions

The history of contemporary Chinese art has become more complex and diverse since the 1980s. As a result, several research questions will be addressed in this thesis. First, is it necessary to distinguish between contemporary Chinese art inside China and that outside China? In previous studies, it was a common classification method for researchers who divided Chinese artists into two ‘camps’, inside and outside China. For example, Dawei Fei’s article ‘Expatriates and their counterparts in China’ divides Chinese artists into two opposing groups.³¹ Moreover, Chiu even directly titled her introduction as ‘The Two Worlds of Chinese Art’ in the book *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*.³² This classification method emphasizes the binary opposition between Chinese and Western art and ignores the communication and dialogue between each other. Thus, this thesis will challenge the classification as method above, and overall, it will explain how these Chinese artists create hybrid works that make use of Chinese references while also engaging with Western art, by analyzing their art education, art groups and networks in cities.

The main research questions of each chapter will be presented below, followed by a brief synopsis of the contribution of the thesis as a whole. In chapter one, the research question will be framed to what extent did the early work of these four Chinese artists respond to the education they received within China? It will question what kind of

31 Dawei Fei, (2014) ‘Expatriates and their counterparts in China’ in *Journal of Art Historiography*, no.10.

32 Chiu, Melissa. ‘The Two Worlds of Chinese Art’ in *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vishakha N. Desai, pp26. Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, (2006).

artistic training they received in China, focusing on the case study artists Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, and Zhang Xiaogang. In chapter two, the research question explored is: has there always been a binary system of antagonism in the relationship between Chinese art and the West? It will also examine the effect of politics in China and argue that there has always been a long term, if complicated and limited dialogue between Chinese art and Western art, that shaped the art education system. Chapter three will question, to what extent, and how, have these case study artists engaged with Western art, and how have they made their career – either as individuals or as members of a group? The contribution is that art groups in China have frequently been in dialogue with the Western art, to some extent, and I will demonstrate how this has shaped the works of four case study artists. In chapter four, my thesis will question how ‘contemporary’ Chinese artists engaged with both Chinese media and its subjects, while also having a dialogue with Western art through a close visual analysis of the artworks under consideration that unpacks their cultural hybridity. Finally, in chapter five, it will question how these case study artists were influenced by contemporary Western art in works produced inside Western culture. It explores how these artists make use of Chinese references while also engaging with Western art. Together, these five chapters hope to destabilize and challenge the binary notion of two types of art within and outside of China.

Overall, the thesis will break down the dualistic relationship between Chinese avant-

garde art and Western art in previous scholarship. It will uncover the dialogue between Chinese contemporary art and the West, done both from within and outside of China.

Methodology

It is seemingly simple for Chinese scholars to explain that a traditional ink painting is ‘Chinese art.’ However, it is quite challenging to distinguish a modern painting, or an installation as a ‘Chinese art’. Chinese artists can be influenced by a variety of cultural styles and media which were local or imported since the late twentieth century. There have been various views and methodologies to identify the Chinese modern and contemporary art in previous scholarship. For example, critic Maxwell Hearn suggested that Chinese art employs specific techniques such as ink painting, while some argued that it reflects a particular ‘amorous feeling’.³³ Some other critics argued that artworks produced by Chinese-born artists should be considered ‘Chinese art’. This problem has led scholars to devise two stories of art happening parallel to each other in countries outside the West. John Clark, for example, argues that Yoga (洋画) was created as a name for Western painting that distinguished traditional Japanese art from it, which is termed Nihonga.³⁴ It differs according to techniques and

33 Maxwell K. Hearn, *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* 1st. ed by Wu Hung, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), pp. 16-20.

34 John Clark, ‘Yoga in Japan: Model or Exception? Modernity in Japanese art 1850s-1940s: an international comparison,’ *Art History*, (2nd June 1995), pp. 253-285.

materials (oil painting, watercolours, pastels, ink sketches, lithography, etching) and conventions on subject-matter. Clark admits that in contemporary art, it becomes increasingly difficult to draw a distinct separation between Nihonga and Yoga. Therefore, how might this debate be further complicated by an analysis of China, particularly when regarding the impact of the West on art? Jonathan Harris, meanwhile, contends that contemporary art can be interpreted as a part of the globalized world's order and disorder in *The Global Contemporary Art World*. It is a system of interrelated and interdependent objects, including producers, groups, networks, organizations, social economic relationships, materials and techniques of production and reproductions, as well as policies, critics and the power of speech. He continues:

If our global world order or disorder does constitute a 'system' that is, a functioning totality that is organized and productive, though manifestly also chaotic and destructive, as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis demonstrated, then the contemporary art world comprises a part of this wider world.³⁵

Indeed, the contemporary art world is not separate from this wider world, instead, it complicates the landscape of the contemporary art. In fact, contemporary Chinese art is engaged in the dialogue with Western art, its feature has been shaped through the

35 Jonathan Harris, *The global contemporary art world*, 1st. ed (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell press, 2017) p12-14.

dialogue with Western economy, culture, society, in which the world has become globalized. In order to build on Harris' argument and challenge still static narratives of Chinese art, this thesis will use postcolonial theory to identify the engagement between modern and contemporary Chinese art and the West and make reference to Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity specifically.³⁶

Postcolonialism is a critical academic study that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, rethinking colonialism, Western-centrism and imperialism. The origin is that the world needs a language to depict the global intersection of cultural diversity in the 1980s. Post colonialists provided a way of talking about modern culture which has been monopolized by Western culture for historical reasons such as colonialism. They argued that if non-Western cultures want to be accepted by the world, there is an assumption that they must adopt Western languages and cultures; in other words, they are still oppressed by colonialism.

Edward. W. Said's *Orientalism* (1995) is a significant postcolonial work that contributed significantly to the paradigm shift in the European-centric ethnographic model of academic pursuit. Said used Michel Foucault's theory of discourse, as described in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punishment* (1995), to examine 'Orientalism'. Said contends that during the post-enlightenment period,

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 2 nd, ed, (London: Psychology Press, 2004). pp 22-27.

European culture formally created the 'East' through political, scientific, ideological, and imaginary ways.³⁷ In order to clarify the concept of the 'East', Said hypothesized that the 'East' (the 'Orient') and 'West' (the 'Occident'), are artificially constructed and do not correspond to any stable reality. The 'East' has its history and traditions, enabling itself to exist in opposition to the 'West'. Thus, the 'East' and the 'West' reflect each other to some extent. In other words, the 'East' needs dialogue with the 'West' if it is to acquire new true knowledge of the other.³⁸ Postcolonial theory provides a framework that destabilizes dominant discourses in the West and promotes a cultural study of globalization in the 1990s. It should be explained here that globalization is related to the complexity of imperialism, that it is a local and national choice, not only in economics, which occurs through cultural practices, diffusion, differences and hybridizations, but also in imagination, having the potential to subvert the narrative of European modernity.

Postcolonialism provides an approach for analysing cultural phenomena, including race and racism, expressions of anti-colonialism, national ideas and concerns, and the relationships between nations and national schools.³⁹ This methodology can begin to provide a view of the hybridity and fusion in the modern and contemporary art world. Specific to this thesis, postcolonialism has direct relevance for dealing with the

37 Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism*. 5th ed, (London: Penguin Classics press,1995) pp26-35(p.26).

38 Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism*.pp76-90.

39 Gilbert, Helen; Tompkins, Joanne. *Post-colonialism Theory: Practice, Politics*. 1st ed. (London: Verso Books press, 1996) pp112-132.

creation of Chinese modern and contemporary art. Though some Chinese critics insist that China has not experienced a colonial society, in fact certain areas of China have experienced a colonial society. Manchuria was colonised by Japan from 1932-1945. Since the Opium Wars there was the concession system in many Chinese cities such as Shanghai (e.g. international settlement, French Concession). As Gao Shiming emphasizes that it should move on from postcolonialism, arguing that the latter has become highly ideological and political, losing its critical function in Chinese artistic production.⁴⁰ In contrast, my thesis argues that its relationship with the West over the past century has demonstrated that there is a real case of cultural hybridity since the 1980s. This thesis will demonstrate the postcolonial character of Contemporary Chinese art. Although the artists in China are considered to create a pure 'new art' such as Chen Danqin, Zhang Xiaogang. I will show how their work was in fact produced in direct dialogue with Western art in this postcolonial era (1980s to 1990s). It is necessary to use postcolonialism to identify the dialogue between modern, contemporary Chinese art and the West – and one particularly applicable theorist in this context is Homi Bhabha.

Homi K. Bhabha (born 1949) wrote extensively about postcolonialism. He is a professor of English and American literature and discusses the relationship between the history of cultural colonization and the development of translation in non-Western

⁴⁰ Gao Shiming "Farewell to the post-colonialism", The 3rd Guangzhou Triennial, *China Art Daily*, (May 2008), pp 12-14.

locations. Within this, he developed several key concepts, such as hybridity. The concept of hybridity in Bhabha's theory refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization..⁴¹ Bhabha uses the concept of 'hybridity' in a broader sense, emphasizing that hybridization is not a simple addition of different cultures but rather the creation of a new form of hybrid culture that combines features of several cultures.⁴² Hybridity, in Bhabha's theory, opposes the view that different ethnic and cultural groups are dualistic political consciousnesses. It could be regarded as a development of the classic narrative of postcolonialism.⁴³

Focusing on the complex processes of cultural dialogue, aggression, and integration, Bhabha believes that hybridity is the 'third space of enunciation', enabling cultures in different locations to interact and form dialogues. The 'third space' refers to an intermediate space which arises in the process of cultural transformation. Here, the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries and in-between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across class, gender, race, nation, generation, location.⁴⁴ It is neither Eastern nor Western. In a sense, it removes the boundary between the centre and the periphery. Bhabha contends that hybridity has the potential to disintegrate colonial discourses and subvert dualistic

41 Hallward p, *Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p. 25.

42 Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 2 nd, ed, (London: Psychology Press, 2004), pp 22-27.

43 Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*. pp 22-27.

44 Homi Bhabha. 'Third space of enunciation' <<https://english.fas.harvard.edu/people/homi-bhabha>> [accessed 4 July 2020].

thinking modes and authoritative discourse.

The concepts of 'hybridity' and 'third space' have implications for the exploration of hybrid identity in Chinese avant-garde art. The argument of this thesis is that modern and contemporary Chinese culture and art were constructed through engagements with the West. While Bhabha contends that hybridity is a strategy employed by the colonized in order to criticize colonial culture, in this thesis, hybridity can be deployed to reveal the relationships and contradictions between Chinese art and Western cultural powers in order to, ultimately, challenge the static, nation-bound, and frequently hierarchical narratives of Chinese art. On the one hand, the strong discourse of the West was presented as an advanced form or style in China, while the weak discourse of China was presented as a simulation or mimicry of Western art in the 1980s and 1990s. But the tactics of hybridity used by the artists in this thesis brought the 'denied' culture of the other into the dominant discourse, and alienated the foundations of its authority; eventually, all art was hybrid and none of it was monolithic.

In conclusion, through case studies of Chinese modern art and the West from a postcolonial perspective, it is possible to demonstrate the relationship between the development of Chinese avant-garde art and Western culture and art. We will see that

the binary is consistently subverted and broken down in their work, precisely because of the influence of the West on Chinese artists and their negotiation of it to very different degrees. As this thesis will show in the case studies that follow, domestic modern art in China has developed in dialogue with the Western art to some extent, creating a new hybrid culture that combined features of several cultures in the ‘third space’.

Scope

The scope of thesis is based around a select group of artists and their colleagues.

These are Cai Guo-qiang, Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing and Zhang Xiaogang.

These four artists have been chosen as they show the complexity of the relationship between China and the West. They were studying and working in China during a period which the Cultural Revolution was ended. After Tiananmen Square incident 1989, Several well-known artists were left China or had their works exhibited outside China, gaining a reputation in the West. The artworks of teachers and counterparts related to them will be examined as a contrast, in order to demonstrate the dialogue between Chinese contemporary art and the West in their work, done both from within and outside of China. The thesis does not include artists who was born and grew up in the West, such as Zeng Jingwen, as he was considered an authentic American painter, except that his name is Chinese.

The thesis focuses on the specific historical period that is from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. This is such a crucial time in the development of contemporary Chinese art and that showing challenge to East and West binaries; it is also politically dynamic period when art education shows substantial changes in China.

Based on the published material both in English and Chinese, it helps us to discover the dialogues with the west. For example, the exhibition catalogues and artworks will be analyzed in the thesis. The original Asia art materials were used to investigate the strategies for their fame globally and their changes in the west. This research uses visual analysis of these artworks. As noted above, it will also refer to postcolonialism and particularly the concept of ‘hybridity’ in postcolonial theory.

Structure

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter one, titled, ‘The Artists’ Education: Insights into Chinese Art Training’, examines the education of the four case study artists in China. Here, the focus is on the art training of artists received in China including Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing and Zhang Xiaogang. It will provide an insight into Chinese art education around the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and help provide a background for the exploration as to how the art education impacted on the artists’ works. It will also discuss the art teachers and schools that impacted those artists to bring to light how this training shaped their early application.

Chapter two, titled, 'The effects of politics on art and education in China', will discuss the effects of politics on art and education in China. This chapter seeks to place the discussion in chapter one in a much wider historical context, and demonstrates that there was a long term, if complicated and limited, dialogue between Chinese art and Western art that shaped the art education system. Leading on from this, chapter three, titled, 'The places and groups/networks of modern and contemporary artists in China', will discuss the groups and networks in cities for modern and contemporary art in China and assesses the four artists' relationship to them. This is essential to understand how they made their career: either as individuals or as members of a group. The argument of this chapter is that art groups in China have been in dialogue with the Western art, to some extent, and that this has shaped the works of four case study artists.

Chapter four, titled, 'Painting and the engagement with the West by modern artists in the 1980s', will focus on the engagement with the West by modern Chinese artists. It explores how these modern artists engaged with both Chinese media and subjects while also having a dialogue with Western art, to varying degrees. Different from the previous chapters, the contribution of this chapter is that it provides a close visual analysis of the artworks under consideration and unpacks their cultural hybridity.

The final chapter titled, 'Contemporary Chinese artists in the west', refers more extensively to 'hybridization' and 'cultural hybridity' in relation to the postcolonial

methodology to help nuance the synthesis of 'East' and 'West' in these artworks which produced inside Western culture. It explains how these four artists create hybrid works that make use of Chinese references while also engaging with Western art and it completely destabilises the binary notion of two types of art within and outside of China, which the thesis has sought to challenge and understand throughout the previous chapters.

The conclusion will show that the contemporary Chinese art was shaped through a dialogue with Western art, done both from within and outside of China. It will also underline that the dialogue between Chinese contemporary artists and the West.

Chapter one: The Artists' Education: Insights into Chinese Art Training

Introduction

Previous studies have rarely been concerned with the early education of the prominent Chinese contemporary artists. The scholarship merely pays attention to artworks produced by the contemporary Chinese artists and shown in international exhibitions. For example, Lü Peng's book *The Chinese Contemporary Art in the Period 1990-1999*, discusses some specific art genres such as 'gaudy art' and 'conceptual art' with the framework of economic and social conditions during the decade.⁴⁵ He interprets them as a revival of art after the oppression of the Cultural Revolution. This book divides certain artists into different art genres. Furthermore, Michael Sullivan's book *Art and Artists in Twentieth Century China* characterizes the period of the Cultural Revolution as dramatic and miserable for the arts and the prospect of art in the post-Mao era.⁴⁶ Both books continue to dominate the perception of Chinese art in the second half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, neither project specifically discusses artistic education in China, it only mentioned in Lv Peng's book as well as Gary Xu's book on Zhang Xiaogang address his early education at the Sichuan Academy.⁴⁷ So, the early education and artworks of artists who left China were an understudied area.

45 Lü Peng, '中國當代藝術史 1990-1999' ('90s Art China: 1990-1999'), in Chinese, 2nd (Beijing : Human Fine Arts Press, March 2000), pp.5-14.

46 Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, 1st, ed (California: University of California Press, November 1996) pp. 412-464.

47 Lv Peng, '中國當代藝術史 1990-1999' ('90s Art China: 1990-1999') pp26. And Gary Xu, 'Zhang Xiaogang's Bloodline Series,' in Zhang Xiaogang: Disquieting Memories, ed. Karen Smith (Hong Kong: Hanart T Z Gallery, 2002), pp4-19.

If we do not examine the education they have received in China, the artworks produced by the overseas artists seem to happen ‘suddenly’ in the West. So, it is necessary to analyze the education on their early works and assess the extent to which their early work *did* in fact respond to the education they received within China. It should note that in many cases, the artists themselves reference their education in their autobiographies, so this thesis refers to the secondary literature here.

This chapter focus on the art training that artists received in China including, Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing and Zhang Xiaogang. It will provide an insight into Chinese art education around the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and help provide a background for the exploration as to how the art education impacted on the artists’ works. It will discuss the art teachers and schools that impacted those artists to bring to light how the training has shaped their early application. Overall, this chapter serves to assess the extent to which their early work responded to the education they received within China during the early part of their respective careers.

This research is based on literature published by the universities and art institutions where the artists studied. Most of the evidence I use throughout this chapter is compiled in Chinese and included in periodicals. Some early artworks of these case study artists were briefly mentioned in periodicals, but they were not discussed extensively. These include ‘*Art Research*’[艺术研究](the journal of Central Academy

of Fine Arts), ‘*Journal of Beijing Film Academy*’ [北京电影学院学报], ‘*Dramatic Arts*’ [戏剧艺术] (the journal of Shanghai Theatre Academy), ‘*Contemporary Artist*’ [当代艺术家] (the journal of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute), ‘*Jiangsu Art Monthly*’ [江苏艺术月刊] and ‘*The Trend of Art Thought*’ [艺术思潮]. These journals are important sources of information as they reflect on the art trends and styles during the Cultural Revolution and the mechanism of Chinese art education. In addition to these resources, I used publications by the artists, interviews that record the details of their lives, letters and exhibition catalogues. These include Ai Weiwei’s personal statement headed ‘I have always been a person with no identity’; the biography of Cai Guo-qiang titled *The Story of My Painting*; the exclusive interview with Xu Bing published as *Art is the Most Honest* and a *Talk about Asia* produced for the television channel CNN, and Anjali Rao’s interview with Zhang Xiaogang on July 21, 2007.⁴⁸

The selected artworks discussed in the chapter one, which were produced during the student years of these artists, are taken from exhibition catalogues and university journals published in the 1980s. It will be beneficial to explore what knowledge these artists learned during the education, in order to ascertain the different ways in which their early works did respond to the education they received.

⁴⁸ As quoted on ‘INTERVIEW WITH ZHANG XIAOGANG ON TALK ASIA CNN’ Posted by Sophia Cao, (March 2009).
<<https://www.scribd.com/document/432975330/Reference-Comparative-Study>> [Accessed Feb 2020]

1.1 Cai Guo-Qiang and the Shanghai Theatre Academy

This section of the chapter serves to introduce Cai Guo-Qiang, one of the four key artists. Cai Guo-Qiang (as he is known in the Western world, though his surname is Cai), was born in 1957 and grew up in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, China. Cai had the opportunity to learn calligraphy as well as traditional Chinese painting from a young age, because his father, Cai Ruiqin, was a calligrapher and traditional painter who worked in a bookstore.⁴⁹ In his youth, Cai witnessed the social turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, and he had an experience of making Big-Character-Posters, which served as a propaganda in the Mao era. After the Cultural Revolution, Cai studied stage design at the Shanghai Theatre Academy between 1982 and 1985, where he began to transform the practice from calligraphy and ink painting towards oil and watercolor. It should be explained here that the Shanghai Theatre Academy (formerly known as the Shanghai Academy of Drama) was the first professional art school in Chinese history that specialized in drama performance and directing. As part of the 1952 reform of colleges and departments nationwide, the school was administered by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China.⁵⁰

The artist received the academic education which gave him a 'new' system of knowledge to some extent. Stage design is one of important departments of theatre

⁴⁹ Cai Guo-Qiang, *My painting story*. 1st ed by Li, w. (Guangxi: Guangxi normal university press, 2017), pp.16-27(p 22).

⁵⁰ As quoted on the website "The history of Shanghai Theatre Academy". < <https://en.sta.edu.cn/> > [Accessed Jan 2020].

academy. In the 1980s and 1990s, the curriculum of stage design included ‘stage design basis’, ‘stage design methods,’ ‘stage design creation,’ ‘scenery technology,’ ‘props production,’ ‘model production’ and ‘hand-painted renderings.’⁵¹ There were some compulsory courses such as the painting, which included the techniques of sketching, watercolor, nude and landscape painting. It should be explained here that these curricula, following a similar Soviet Union model, are applied to teaching in all academies China. For example, the black-and-white photograph (Fig. 1.1) shows Cai Guo-qiang and his nude painting. As seen here, the academic nude is typical of socialist realist painting which indicated that he had learned the basic knowledge of artistic anatomy. Moreover, the landscape training is a part of courses of the stage design. In the early landscape painting *River in the Sunset* (Fig. 1.2), Cai depicted the pond near his home in the dusk, the water is sparkling, and the surroundings are quiet. The artist received his basic training in painting at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. And the academic training influenced his early works and enabled him to modulate subtle colours, and to enhance the contrast of the light and dark colours.

Despite this single-style approach, the Academy encouraged students to try different materials in the curriculum of model production, and to test various methods in stage design. Thus, the practice of large-scale stage design provides the valuable skills and practical experiences to engage in large-scale installations, in contrast to oil painting.

⁵¹ “History of STA”, <<https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/shanghai-theatre-academy>> [Accessed Jan 2020]

As a result, several internationally renowned artists (who produce installations) graduated from the Shanghai Theatre Academy (such as Chen Zhen and Chen Junde). Therefore, it can be asserted that the knowledge and experience in stage design provided him with a foundation for the artworks for which he became known. These experiences helped other artists (including Li Shan and Zhang Jian Jun) create a personal art language in painting. In addition to the stage design training in Shanghai from 1981 to 1985, Cai moved to Japan from 1986 to 1995, where he began to explore how to use gunpowder in his later works.⁵² Thus, from what has been discussed above, it can be concluded that the influence of early education not only shaped Cai's artworks, but also laid the foundation for his significant and perhaps better-known works in the West. Overall, we might conclude already, that Cai's early works responded to the education he received in China.

1.2 Ai Weiwei and the Beijing Film Academy

This section will explore Ai Weiwei. It will introduce Ai's early works to determine the extent to which the early work did respond to the education they received within China.

Ai Weiwei (as he is known in the Western world though his surname is Ai) was born

⁵² quoted on website 'The Biography of Cai Guo-qiang', <<http://en.sta.edu.cn/74/91/c3890a95377/page.htm>> [Accessed Feb 2020]

and grew up in Beijing in 1957. Ai Weiwei's father, Ai Qing, was a Chinese poet whose work was denounced during the Anti-Rightist Movement. In 1958 when Ai was one years old, the family was exiled to a labor camp in Bei dahuang, Heilong jiang Province. They were subsequently exiled to Shihezi, Xinjiang in 1961 where they lived for sixteen years. Ai's family returned to Beijing after end of Mao Zedong's era.⁵³ In 1978, Ai Weiwei was admitted to the Beijing Film Academy, where he studied film.⁵⁴ The Beijing Film Academy is known as the cradle of Chinese filmmakers and is the only professional film institution in China. Today it is internationally recognized, enjoying a high reputation in Asian art and entertainment. However, during the Cultural Revolution, the film academy was abolished. In the early 1970s some film school students were forced to go to the so-called 'May 7th state farm,' which was in Zhu Xin village (situated in the Changping district, close to Beijing). The Beijing Film Academy was restored after the Cultural Revolution. In 1978 new entrants were recruited through the first national college entrance examination. Many applicants and subsequent students came from Beijing including Ai Weiwei, as the Academy was only known locally in the 1970s.

According to the *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, when Ai enrolled at the Academy in 1978, there are five departments in the resumed undergraduate education in school:

53 Merewether, Charles, *Ruins in Reverse*, in *Ai Weiwei: Under Construction*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales press, 2008), p.29-31.

54 Ren. 2015, *The Development of New China's Film Education* (Beijing) (in Chinese)
<http://www.bfa.edu.cn/xygk/node_32.htm > [Accessed Jan 2020].

directing, performance, photography, film arts and recording. Although the film art course involved many designs of scene model, students had less opportunities to participate in a film production in the 1980s. Teachers paid attention to training basic painting skills. The Academy organizes trips to factories and villages, so the students could have the opportunity to sketch there. Although excelling academically, according to Ai Weiwei's memory, his study in Beijing Film Academy was, according to the artist, 'boring', with too many constraints, and he could not find self-confidence at Beijing Film Academy and he dropped out in 1981.⁵⁵ Most of his classmates thought he was absolutely 'out of his mind', because it had been extremely difficult to be admitted to the university right after the Cultural Revolution due to the intense competition.⁵⁶ In 1978 China had a population of 950 million. Of the over 6.1 million high school graduates taking the national higher education entrance examination, only 380,000 applicants were accepted at university. The admission rate of higher education was as low as 7%.⁵⁷ As a result, the students valued their opportunity to have education. However, Ai was not willing to be limited by education and policies in the university. Eventually, he built up the courage to escape from the tedious university life and participated in the first exhibition of the 'Star Group', where their works attracted attention because of the rebellion. Indeed, he was not the main

55 As quoted online, Interview with Ai Weiwei, <<http://e.lifestyle.com.cn/stylelife/shishang/425450.shtml>> [Accessed 25 February 2020].

56. Ren. 2015, *The Development of New China's Film Education* (Beijing) (in Chinese) <http://www.bfa.edu.cn/xygk/node_32.htm> [Accessed Jan 2020].

57 Wan. Ping "China's first college entrance examination after the Cultural Revolution", *Chinese Daily*, June 2000 (in Chinese), <<http://www.sdfghf/ChineseDaily/202015457/.com.cn>> [Accessed 24 Mar 2020].

founders of this early groups of avant-garde art, to which other artists Ma Desheng, Wang Keping, Mao Lizi, Huang Rui, Li Shuang, Ah Cheng, and Qu Leilei also belonged. Thus, it can be determined that Ai received fewer academic education in school and participated in the group art movement as a student.

Although it is quite difficult to find the relevance between education and works, From Ai's early work the *Scenery* (Fig. 1.3), it reflects that Ai, as a member of 'Star Group', has dialogued with the art education in China. The *Scenery* (Fig. 1.3) seems like a landscape of ancient villages in southern China, including houses and wooden boats, which is a traditional subject in academic painting. Further, the *Scenery* (Fig. 1.3) implies the rebellion of artist: it depicts a boat on wild waves; the houses and the background seemingly move. The entire picture appears to be in motion, which was influenced by the Cubism and Expressionism (particularly Pablo Picasso and Käthe Kollwitz), these free lines and rough brush strokes appeal against ideological suppression.⁵⁸ It can be determined that the 'Star Group' was in fact inspired by the works of Picasso and Kollwitz. Ai's early work was influenced by this group of artists who believed that 'those artists who are afraid of form are actually afraid of the existence'.⁵⁹ In other words, Ai sought more free space by affirming the 'independent value of art form', while the academic education had an impact on the theme of

58 Tate Modern 'Stars group – Art Term', *Tate*. < <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/stars-group> > [Accessed 24 Mar 2020].

59 It is a slogan for star groups. Available at: Blog <<http://loveaiww.blogspot.com/2011/05/31-2009.html>>, 2009, [Accessed 26 Mar 2020].

paintings.⁶⁰

There is evidence of Ai thinking between China and the West here, early on. The ‘Star Group’ held two exhibitions in Beijing in 1979 and 1980. Ai participated in both exhibitions before relocating to the USA to study at the Parsons School of Design.⁶¹ The art group was disbanded in 1983, since the policy of studying abroad gradually loosened, and the artists in the ‘Star Group’ began preparing to go abroad. In the spring of 1989, Zhang Songren, a Taiwan art broker, launched the *Ten Years, 1989 (Hanart Gallery, Hong Kong and Taipei) of Star Group Exhibition* at the Han Yaxuan Gallery that he had founded in Taiwan, celebrating the ‘Star Group’ artists as freedom fighters.⁶² Ai Weiwei also sent his works produced during the time of his involvement in ‘Star Group’ from the United States.

From what has been discussed above, we may safely draw a conclusion that Ai Weiwei was thinking between China and the West for a long time. It also confirms that Ai’s early work was a response to the education experience in China, and that the ‘Star Group’ were crucial in shaping Ai’s current practice. It can be concluded that these works contain the original spirit of criticism and of freedom.

60 Li Xianting *The Stars: Ten Years' 1989*, Archive, the poverty of history. 1st ed (Shanghai: the century Press), (2002), pp23.

61 Aloï, Daniel. *Ai Weiwei literally smashes China's traditions in art and architecture*, Cornell University, 2006.

62 This exhibition is mentioned in Lisa Movius, “Stars Art Group, China's artistic freedom fighters, celebrate 40th anniversary”, *The Art Newspaper*, 29 March 2019, pp19-23.

1.3 Xu Bing and the Central Academy of Fine Arts

This section will move from Ai Weiwei to Xu Bing (known by his surname Xu). It will introduce Xu's early works to determine the extent to which the early work did respond to the education they received within China. Xu Bing is an internationally renowned contemporary Chinese artist, who won the MacArthur Award from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in recognition for his 'originality, creativity and capacity to contribute importantly to society, particularly in printmaking and calligraphy.'⁶³ However, the section will seek to foreground the relevance of their early application and the education at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

The section will first determine what education he has received in China, based on Xu Bing's autobiography *My True Text* published in 2015. It is known that Xu Bing was born in Chongqing City in 1955. His father was graduated from a private Shanghai college, joined the underground Communist Party of China in 1962 and was the head of the history department at Peking University in 1975.⁶⁴ His mother also worked at the Peking University Library. By doing so, it can be concluded that Xu Bing came from a middle-class, intellectual home in China.

⁶³ Zheng, Da. 'Chinese Calligraphy and the Cultural Revolution.' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 2008, no3.5. (2), pp 180-206.

⁶⁴ As quoted in the Xu Bing: *my true text in Chinese*; 我的真文字. 1st ed.by Li Cheng, (Beijing: Zhong Xing press,2015), pp.10.

According to the available information, Xu Bing received his early education at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Here he had studied sketch and oil painting skills of Socialist Realism under the guidance of a realist artist Li Zongjin. Li's painting '强渡泸定桥' ('*Battle of Luding Bridge*') was regarded as a masterpiece of China Revolution art by Jiang Feng who was president of Central Academy of Fine Arts.⁶⁵ Xu was firstly attracted to these high-level realist paintings and then determined to be a painter in the future. Unfortunately, Li Zongjin was accused of being a member of the counter-revolutionary group and committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution. The absurd reason was down to the fact that he liked to depict dark scenes in his work, using a large area of black and a beam of light to enhance the dramatic conflict, which was regarded as 'black painting' in the cultural revolution. In addition, his self-portrait with a pipe in his mouth was interpreted as 'arrogant' and signaling 'the hatred of socialism'.⁶⁶ After this traumatic experience, young Xu Bing understood the cruelty of China's domestic political movement. It made Xu recognize the consequences of his choices and judgments in art, and to some extent, it could explain the reason why he was vigilant about political themes and explored more options and possibilities in cultural themes.

In 1976 Xu was relocated to the countryside for two years under Mao Zedong's 're-

65 Li Zongjin who was one of the founders of the Western Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

66 Gao Minglu, *Chinese Contemporary Art History 1985-1986*. (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, Shanghai, 1991). pp33-35

education' policy.⁶⁷ He demonstrated superb realist painting skills here. He produced propaganda images and text on a blackboard at the entrance of the village in Ci Xian County, Hebei Province. His blackboard newspaper was praised by Liu Chunhua who was the director of the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture. He praised Xu's image in the newspaper clearly highlighting the political themes. It can be determined Xu had the experience of serving the communist country when he was young.

After the Cultural Revolution, Xu Bing was able to study in the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts because of his abilities to make realist portraits in the first college entrance examination. According to Xu, due to his superior skills, he even received an offer from the Beijing Film Academy.⁶⁸ It would be reasonable to suspect that in this extremely competitive exam, those artists who could pass the exam had excellent realistic painting skills. Professor Meng, who oversaw recruiting students, gave the offer of a study place to Zhang Xiaoren, ranking him the second-best applicant of all applicants. Zhang Xiaoren later became a photographer for state leaders, such as Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao.⁶⁹ Therefore, it can be asserted that the chosen artist had already showed outstanding abilities to meet the evaluation criteria of realist art.

67 Tianqi, Wen (April 2016). 'Dragonfly Eyes'. News China.

68 Xu, Bing, *Xu Bing: My true text in Chinese: 我的真文字*, 1st ed. (Beijing: Zhong Xing press, 2015), pp.13-16.

69 Xu, Bing, *My true text in Chinese*, Pp.17.

The drawing course he took was a compulsory option offered by the printmaking department. Xu's coursework already demonstrated his outstanding realist painting skills, as well as the potential to become an academic painter. Xu Bing's *David* (Fig. 1.4) is an early drawing of the plaster statue made at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. It delicately illustrated light, shadow, and perspective to reproduce a realistic image. As seen in *David*, Xu Bing emphasized the effect of the sculpture's hair and the plaster's structure. The sketch was known as the best David sketching since the establishment of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) by Jin Shangyi, the President of CAFA, a conservative academy painter who achieved political status since his portrait of *A Young Singer* (1984) which depicted the First Lady Peng Liyuan.⁷⁰

In addition to the basic drawing courses, the printmaking courses includes black-and-white woodcut printing, copper and stone engraving. According to the historical data of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the printmaking department was set up as four tutor studios managed by Li Hua, Wang Qi, Gu Yuan, and Huang Yongyu before the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, these teachers were persecuted. The surviving teachers were vindicated and returned to work until the printmaking department resumed and enrolled again in 1978.⁷¹ The curriculum was set up again including woodcut, copper and stone engraving studios. Li Hua made in-depth

70 Ya chang art. 2010. *A Young Singer*. <<http://jinshangyi.dflfg.com/product.php?action=416>> [Accessed 15 June 2020].

71 Yi, Z., 2013. *Contemporary Chinese print*. 1st ed. p.12.

explorations of such techniques as black-and-white woodcut printing and published the article ‘木刻的水印拓印’ (‘Wet Print and Woodcuts’), which explains traditional engraving methods. The main courses were Counter drawing and printmaking; teaching also included how to use traditional boxing knives and single-handed knives. Huang Yongyu, who taught at the Printmaking Department, explored colour watermark woodcuts based on his learning of traditional watermark woodcut in Rongbaozhai.⁷² He published the article ‘木刻的水墨套印技法’ (‘Woodcut ink overprint technique’), which appeared later as a textbook for new students.⁷³ The set of techniques was mainly used to copy traditional Chinese ink paintings. Li Hongren, Chen Xiaonan led lithograph and copper-plate studios. These two courses provided the techniques of lithography and engraving, and taught students to understand the history of the Western prints.⁷⁴ In addition, the Academy established a silkscreen print studio in 1981.

Xu Bing learnt wood-cut printing techniques from Li Hua, and he applied the techniques in his own works, such as the *Broken Jade* (1977-1981), which is a set of about 150 pocket woodcut prints (Fig. 1.5). These works depict traditional Chinese farm life such as the growth of rice and farming donkeys.⁷⁵ Zhao Xing, a critic

72 Rong Bao Zhai, former Song Zhu Zhai, was set up in 1672 (the eleventh year of Kangxi reign in the Qing dynasty). Song Zhu Zhai was a famous Nan Paper shop in the Qianlong reign.

73 Huang Yongyu ‘literary edition: *Huang Yongyu memoir*’ (Chang Sha: Hunan Fine Arts press, 2016), Pp. 88.

74 The course information is quoted from the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

<<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/xu-bing/>> [Accessed April 2020]

75 As quoted on Bing Xu ‘*My true text in Chinese*,’ Pp.44.

contends the subject of *Broken Jade* is simpler, contrasting the grandiose art in the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁶ From the Xu's autobiography *My True Text*, it can be asserted that in works such as *Broken Jade*, he was expressing the nostalgia for the pure and plain rural life in the countryside. These feelings may come from a real country life there. Student can explore different subjects outside the normal curriculum prescribed by the academy.

From what has been discussed above, we may safely draw a conclusion that, different from Ai Weiwei's or Cai Guo-qiang's works, Xu expressed new subjects by using traditional woodblock printmaking techniques in the *Broken Jade* (Fig. 1.5). By doing so, it can be asserted that he was influenced by normal art education in school but also developed approaches outside of these confines too.

1.4 Zhang Xiaogang and the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts

This section will move from Xu Bing to Zhang Xiaogang (known surname as Zhang). By focusing on Zhang's early experience and works, it will determine the extent to which the early work did respond to the education they received within China.

⁷⁶ As quoted on the online, <<http://www.xubing.com/en/work/details/213?year=1983&type=year#213>> [Accessed April 2020]

Zhang Xiaogang is a contemporary Chinese painter. His oil painting *Bloodline – Big Family* is well-known in the world. For example, *The Family no. 2* (1993) was sold by Sotheby's for 4,193,675 GBP in 2012, a fairly high price compared to other contemporary Chinese artists (such as Mao Xuhui and Fang Lijun whose works were sold in the same auction).⁷⁷ It is worth exploring to what extent these achievements have related to the early education he has received. The section will bring to light what education he has received in China and its relevance to earlier works. According to Lv, Peng's book *The History of Bloodline*, Zhang was born to Qi Ailan and Zhang Jing (both government officials) in Kunming (Yunnan province) in 1958 as the third of four brothers. Zhang's mother Qi Ailan taught him drawing, intending to cultivate his interest in painting. During the Cultural Revolution, his parents were imprisoned for three years by the Chinese government under the re-education policy. His mother later suffered from schizophrenia.⁷⁸ It can be argued the family encounters and memories during the Cultural Revolution would impact on his art production.

Like three artists above, Zhang regained the opportunity to study in 1977 and he trained as an oil painter at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts. According to Peng's book, the black-and-white photograph (Fig.1.6) shows the first batch of students dressed in Mao's suits at the entrance of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1978, most of them from the Southwest China, such as Zhang Xiaogang, Luo Zhongli, Ye

⁷⁷ As quoted on [online] Available at: <<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2012/contemporary-asian-art-hk0382/lot.810.html>> [Accessed July 2020]

⁷⁸ Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University press ,2010), pp.98-100.

Yongqing and Pang Maokun.⁷⁹ The department of oil painting was a four-year program. Socialist Realism was the dominant model for teaching there, and the basic modules included still life, landscape, portrait and nude drawing. Oil Painting was an advanced module, as it taught students to produce large size works of narrative figures. He was educated by professors, including Liu Guoshu, Xia Peiyao, Liu Yisi, Ye Zhengchang, Li Youxing and Wei Chuanyi. Most of them experienced the Cultural Revolution. Fearing unexplained political persecution, they strictly followed the principles of social realism. It was stated that the application works submitted for graduation should be limited to large oil paintings with multiple narrative figures rather than an abstract painting.⁸⁰ The course of modules followed the realistic painting technique. It should be noted that the technique was taught by Soviet Union artist Konstantin Mefodievich Maksimov, as a part of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendly Alliance and Mutual Assistance between the 1955 to 1957.⁸¹ It can be determined that Zhang Xiaogang learned the skills of socialist painting which features narrative themes and strong political propaganda. Unsurprisingly, the taste of European and British paintings was suppressed in mainstream art, and students could only appreciate oil paintings through examples from Soviet art style. As a result, Soviet socialist realism in the service of political and social literature dominated public art in the country. It can be explained that these paintings were ideological

79 Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*, 2010, pp.104-106.

80 Zhang Qikai, "Survival Strategy in Double Negation—the Oil Painting Department in Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts for 20 Year", *the Art of Oil Painting*, in Chinese, Sep 2007, pp3-5.

81 Cao Qinghui, "who is MakcNMob K.M.," in *Zhe Jiang Art World*, Magazine, No. 3 2002, p74-80.

historical subjects, which were widely understood as conveying ‘accurate’ political information to the audience.

After the Mao era ended, the control of art gradually loosened. Zhang and his classmates had the opportunity to learn about Western modernism from translated essays and imported books in the school library.⁸² They had access to various Western images through the albums and catalogues of Western artists. After that, most of them learnt from Western realism. However, Zhang was confused about how Western masters could express subtle and deep colours through realistic painting. As a result, he chose to learn through the work of the Impressionists, which are depicted in clear brushstrokes and easy to be imitated by young students. He learned from the representative Impressionist painters such as Van Gogh, Matisse and Jean-Francois Millet, by copying their works in sketchbooks.⁸³ Thus, we might conclude that Zhang learned from the Western art, early on.

Zhang’s graduation work, ‘草原组画’ (*Painting of Grassland*) (Fig.1.7) (1981), depicts a rural scene of Tibetan women relaxing on undulating grassland.⁸⁴ It should be explained that this piece of work does not conform to the popular trend of the ‘Scar Art’ and ‘Regional Realism’, which was practiced after the cultural revolution from 1976 to the early 80s.⁸⁵ The former reflected upon the Cultural Revolution through

82 As quoted on *Interview with Zhang Xiaogang.* transcript for CNN Talk Asia. March 2009.

83 Ibid.

84 Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*, 2010, pp.268-273.

85 Fineberg, Jonathon & Xu, Gary G, *Zhang Xiaogang: disquieting memories* (London: Phaidon, 2015). pp129-155.

lyrical realism, while the latter aimed to focus on the lives of ordinary people.⁸⁶

Although Zhang followed the similar principle of Chinese art education, expressing the lives of peasants in the '*Painting of Grassland*', the colours and lines reflected the influence of the masters of Post-Impressionism. As a result, *Grassland* was not approved by the Academy's Board, considering that two teachers did not recognize his graduation production method from the beginning, as a result, he did not get a teaching position at school.

We might conclude that in some ways, Zhang's education was similar to Xu Bing's, in that the state academies developed to control their engagement with the west. However, their application to art education occurred to different extents. Zhang's application is more critical and innovative. It reflects here that the extensive contacts with Western art might have shaped Zhang's later works.

Conclusion

In conclusion, on the education of Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, and Zhang Xiaogang in China, this chapter has analysed the extent to which their early works did respond to the education they received within China. From what has been discussed above, we see that these artists were similar in age when they experienced the Cultural Revolution. It is the first generation of students after the university resumed enrollment in 1978. Therefore, it can be asserted that they are same generation that

⁸⁶ 'Beyond the Visible: Eugen Popa and Chinese Contemporary Painting,' According to the exhibition introduction, 2019 CAA Art Museum, Hangzhou, Zhe Jiang, China.

received similar education in socialist art in universities, and their early works were all realistic showing the theme of the countryside and hometown. Overall, the major courses they took provided them with basic artistic skills and, to some extent, the abilities developed here are applied to their later artworks. For example, this can be seen in Cai Guo-qiang's skills in sketching stage design, Xu Bing's skills in making traditional woodblock prints, as well as Zhang's skills in oil painting.

Nevertheless, their tensions with the education system should also be emphasised. They appeared to negotiate these restrictions early on from *within* the system itself. For example, Zhang produced work that was disapproved of, and Ai Weiwei dropped out of school due to disappointment with Chinese art education. Although this does not make them political dissidents or dissenting artists, it does nonetheless suggest an uneven relationship to art education.

Chapter two: The Effects of Politics on Art and Education in China

Introduction

In the chapter one, my thesis demonstrated what kind of education Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, and Zhang Xiaogang received in China. This chapter will bring to light how these four artists and their early education can be contextualized within art trends, education and politics in China, particularly during and after the Cultural Revolution. It will discuss the art teachers and schools that impacted these chosen artists before they go abroad (1978-1990). In providing this wider context and comparison here, this chapter will question the relevance of Kristen Sharp's previously cited claim about Japan where there were two modern movements, to consider whether there are two art histories in China from 1978 to 1990.

On the topic of Chinese art and politics, a significant number of articles have been published previously. The American art historian Julia F. Andrews's book, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*, is crucial to this chapter.⁸⁷

In it, she divided Chinese arts in the Culture Revolution into two sections. She states that, before the Lin Biao Incident in September 1971, artistic production, in general, was mainly propagated and duplicated through picture posters, comics, sketching, gouache, drafting and wood engravings, which was how literary and art workers

⁸⁷ Quoted in Andrews, J., *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. 1st ed (Berkeley: University of California Press 1995). pp. 221-228.

mobilized support during the Yan'an period (1935—1948).⁸⁸

The primary themes of her work criticise old art and culture, eulogizing Mao Zedong and propagandizing the achievements of the Cultural Revolution. After the incident, she argues that artistic production was promoted through the medium of oil and ink painting, supported by the Jiang Qing.⁸⁹ Specifically, Artists were influenced by the standards of Chinese Socialist Realism during the Cultural Revolution and the popular genre of revolutionary romanticism after the Sino-soviet split in 1956. They attempted to highlight the workers, peasants and soldiers in their application. Since then, revolutionary arts gradually demonstrated a national type, which is more academic and historical. Through Andrews work, and others like it, it can be argued that contemporary Chinese art, as part of Chinese societal culture, has been dissociated from Chinese official art. It has its own rules and intrinsic relationship between art education and politics, whether it is inherited from transitional art or deconstructed political art. Therefore, there are, indeed, two modern art histories at play, and the two have always been in dialogue, though in a slightly different way than has been allowed by scholars as this chapter will show.

For this reason, the chapter two discusses the effects of politics on art and education in China. It seeks to place the discussion in chapter one in a much wider historical context, and demonstrates that there was a long term, if complicated and limited,

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ye, Ying. *The Biography of Jiang Qing*. 2nd ed. Li Zongyun, 2nd ed (Beijing: Chinese Writer Press, 1993), p.344-355.

dialogue between Chinese art and Western art that shaped the art education system. The Cultural Revolution Art will provide essential background to the discussion of the new art. It appeared in 1978 and allows us to fully and accurately grasp the changes in the art field after the Cultural Revolution. The previous studies have simply discussed the connection between Chinese art and Soviet Union art, while occluding the dialogue between Chinese art and the West.⁹⁰ This chapter is serving my argument by complicating the narrative of ‘two art histories’ in China, seeking to suggest that the two (Chinese art and Western art) have always been in some kinds of dialogue, even while totalitarian politics sought to reinforce this very binary. It will also contest the division between ‘Chinese artists at home’ and ‘Chinese artists in the West’ too.

2.1 The influence of politics on art

2.1.1 Chinese art in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)

This section analyses the complex relationship between art and politics during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, taking on board the analysis of Gao Minglu, a professor and scholar at Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.⁹¹ Minglu contends that Chinese arts has always been intertwined with politics. In the period of the Cultural Revolution, art was influenced and shaped by Mao’s politics, according to which ‘art

⁹⁰ Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University press, 2010), pp.129-136.

⁹¹ Gao, Minglu, *85 art movement. (1st edition)*, Guangxi Normal University Press, Guilin, 2008, p34-35. If not mentioned otherwise, this section is based on Minglu’s book.

serves politics' (in Chinese: 延安文艺座谈会), which was proposed and insisted in the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art from 1942.⁹² As a result, art became a political tool and strategy to serve socialist construction. Furthermore, the attitude of the Chinese government towards art during the Cultural Revolution was guided by the Hundred Flowers Campaign. From 1956 to 1957 the Communist Party of China (CPC) encouraged citizens to express openly their opinions on the communist regime.⁹³ The slogan was 'Let a hundred flowers bloom, a hundred schools of thought contend,'⁹⁴ which seemingly promoted the freedom of speech. The essential meaning of this slogan will be discussed to highlight the attitude of politics to dissidents. It was a premeditated effort to discover dissidents amongst intellectuals. Indeed, as Jung Chang and Halliday Jon argue in their book *Mao: The Unknown Story*, it 'became an orchestrated campaign to flush out dissidents by encouraging them to show themselves as critical of the regime, and then subsequently imprison them.'⁹⁵ These policies continued until the end of the Cultural Revolution. Once the intellectuals expressed some negative criticisms on the Communist Party of China, they would be deemed offensive by the Chinese authorities and labelled as rightists, as well as be persecuted. So, it made the intellectuals afraid of expressing their opinion publicly, as they contended that even the reasonable and uncritical viewpoint would be mistakenly

92 Andrews, J. and Gao, M. *The avant-garde's challenge to official art*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge university press,2000), pp.265-280.

93 Short, P. *Mao: a life*. 1st ed. (Milano: Mondadori, 2012) p.470-473.

94 Encyclopedia Britannica, *The Hundred Flowers Campaign* (2018), *Chinese history*, <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Hundred-Flowers-Campaign>> [Accessed January 2021].

95 Chang, J. and Halliday, J. *Mao: The Unknown Story*. 1st ed. (London: Anchor Press,2008) pp362-382.

regarded as anti-Party attitudes by the Chinese government, which indeed led to a series of injustice cases in the political struggle. Moreover, most artists had a lingering fear about the authoritarian politics which they had experienced in the Cultural Revolution, so they have to keep silent and succumb to politics in a tense political climate.

It was not only the freedom of speech controlled by the Chinese authorities, but also production, interpretation, and assessment of art were monopolized by the government. The main intention was to set up a sophisticated mechanism of bureaucracy, reward, and punishment. Politics had almost complete control over literature and fine arts. The content and political viewpoints of artistic works determined whether they would be promoted or criticized. Artistic production had to express the political intent clearly during the Cultural Revolution. The ‘Cultural Revolution Art’ had to follow the political guidelines for subject-matter, style, and techniques. These guidelines were published in official newspaper of the Communist Party. In general, the political function of ‘Cultural Revolution Art’ had to follow two aspects: one was to criticize ‘enemies’ negatively and/or had to praise the proletarian heroes. Indeed, the Revolution should be the main subject of artworks.

Furthermore, the replicas of European sculptures housed in museums and public monuments were destroyed, as they were considered symbols of bourgeois

ideologies.⁹⁶ These were replaced by new plaster statues of outstanding farmers, workers and of Mao. Students were merely allowed to replicate plaster sculpture mechanically in order to improve their skills. According to Yang and Suchan, the restrictions went so far that the colour black could not appear in large areas of a painting, as it was indicative of counter-revolutionary and dark viewpoints of artists.⁹⁷ Art should include 'red', 'brightness' and 'light' (红光亮). Workers, peasants, soldiers and figures representing the Revolution should be integrated in artworks and appear superior and magnificent. The approach was one that emphasised 'three highlights': positive characters should be highlighted; heroic characters should be highlighted, and heroes of the Revolution should be highlighted. Scenery merely served as the background of revolutionary figures, while the battlefield was preferred over natural scenery. Chinese society was divided into gods, people, and enemies. Mao was propagandized as the god of 400 million Chinese people, who were the main body of a socialist nation. The purpose was to promote the Communist Party. Artists who violated this dogma were denounced by propaganda groups, controlled by Chinese authorities and suffered imprisonment.⁹⁸ From what has been discussed thus far, it would be anticipated that in the era of the Cultural Revolution, political styles had become a single choice for painters. More importantly, this led to the suppression of artists' personal style in their artworks.

96 Gao, Minglu, *Meixue Xushi yu chouxiang yishu*. (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe Press, 2007.) pp 60-88.

97 Yang, G & Tom, S, *The Cultural Revolution and Contemporary Chinese Art Education*, 2009, published online, pp.25-32 [Accessed Nov 2019].

98 Landsberger, S. *The deification of Mao*. 1st ed. (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield press, 2002) pp.139-84.

2.1.2 The National Exhibition of Fine Arts and the Chinese Artists Association

The section will discuss the effect of the National Exhibition of Fine Arts and the Chinese Artists Association (CAA) in the Chinese art history, in order to use these two examples to illustrate the relevance of politics to art during the Cultural Revolution.

Firstly, the National Exhibition of Fine Arts and Chinese Artists Association were both established by the Chinese government in 1949. In previous scholarship, Huang Jianwu's article in Chinese roughly translated as, 'The Aesthetic Crisis of the National Exhibition of Fine Arts'. noted that the first National Exhibition of Fine Arts was held in 1949 and lasted for 70 years. 'The exhibition is highly politicized, [...] so far, the grand historical incidents and real life are the main subjects that artists must be considered.'⁹⁹ Huang Jianwu's statement appropriately assess the National Exhibition of Fine Arts which was organized by the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Artists Association. It is a national art exhibition held every five years to commemorate the founding of the People's Republic of China. The artworks were all produced in a realist style and exhibited in the following categories: traditional ink painting, oil painting, printing and sculpture.¹⁰⁰ The National Exhibition of Fine Arts was the only exhibition allowed in the Cultural Revolution.

It is acknowledged as the highest official award in Chinese fine arts, and only officials

⁹⁹ Huang, j. "the aesthetic crisis of the National Exhibition of Fine Arts". 2014, *10.8267/2* (165), p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Rules for members of the Chinese Artists Association in Chinese Artists Association website, [Accessed 04 April 2021
<<https://www.caanet.org.cn/Member.mxid=4>>.

from the provincial Culture and Publicity Ministry had the authority to decide which artworks would be qualified based on how well they represented Communist ideologies.¹⁰¹ The theme of artworks had to meet the political ideology, while aesthetics was seen as a secondary issue. For the purpose of increasing the chances to win awards, some artists produced exquisite artworks which adhered to the official image of the government. Furthermore, artists who win awards in the National Exhibition of Fine Arts had the opportunity to join the Chinese Artists Association.¹⁰² It can be asserted that the purpose of the National Exhibition of Fine Arts was to endow artists with social status and economic support, restrict different viewpoints and mechanisms of artistic production, thereby consolidating the views and practices in the Chinese fine art system, to some extent that the Communist Party of China spreads its political intentions through the national art exhibition.

The Chinese Artists Association (CAA) was a branch of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC) [中国文学艺术界联合会]. It was a government agency which modelled the system of the Soviet Union. Although the CAA has been criticized negatively in the past, it still exists today. This section will address the influence of the CAA on artists during the Cultural Revolution. As the only legal national association of Chinese artists and bureaucrats, it has absolute power to determine the fate of artists in China. Art was intertwined with politics on a much

¹⁰¹ Gao, Minglu, *Meixue Xushi yu chouxiang yishu*. (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubans Press, 2007.) pp 82-84.

¹⁰² 'The Constitution of Art Association', on National Art Exhibition-Official Website,

<<https://www.caanet.org.cn/about.mx?id=2>> [Accessed 22 Nov 2021].

deeper level. Indeed, the aesthetic taste of the CAA officials became a crucial evaluative institution. The themes of artwork were restricted to depicting politics images such as workers, peasants and soldiers, which lack innovation in artistic production. Therefore, it can be asserted that the only attribute of the Chinese Artists Association was its political nature, serving the authoritarian and dictatorial leadership. Chinese artists were organized by the CAA into a hierarchy according to their political status during the Cultural Revolution.

At this point it is also worth noting that the policy of a planned economy also substantially disrupted art production in China. Due to insufficient resources, even daily necessities like toothpaste, soap and light bulbs were in short supply, let alone art tools and equipment.¹⁰³ Some artists recalled that to purchase art supplies, you needed to get a certificate from the CAA, with which you could then purchase material in the government-operated stores. Individuals were not allowed to buy art supplies in private stores.¹⁰⁴ Under this economic policy, only the artists who were engaged in education, publishing, design and other artistic jobs could have the opportunity to get art supplies. From what has been discussed thus far, there was no individual artist who could make their living by producing art full-time. Overall, the artistic production in official units were tightly restricted by the Chinese authorities

103 Yang, z. and Li, w. *CAI GUO-QIANG my painting story*. 1st ed. (Guangxi: Guangxi normal university press, 2017), pp.120-134.

104 Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the Fourteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Establishing a socialist market economic 1993 [Accessed July 2020].<

<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64567/65395/4441750.html>>

during the Cultural Revolution, it was almost impossible for a Chinese artist to have the freedom in literature and art.

Despite the intense restriction on artistic production, nevertheless, Western art styles still reached China and deviated from the ‘mainstream’. There are several points in support of this view. Artists made initial attempts to get all kinds of information about modern art. Although Western modern art was seen as having harmful content and was banned in all publications, there were still images to be found in early archives, such as albums of paintings and exhibitions catalogues, which were stored and collected by individuals before the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the modern art movement could be discussed privately by artists who had overseas studies experiences, such as Lin Fenmian, Wu Dayu and Wu Guanzhong. They had learned about Post-impressionism and Expressionism in France in the 1940s and brought catalogues about modern art back to China before the founding of Communist China, which made Western art become an undercurrent in the society of China. Most significantly, painting courses unexpectedly brought about a style of Western art. For instance, the training of the Romanian artist Eugen Popa, invited to teach at Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, was an example as to explain how Western artistic styles and techniques reached China. Some artists, who were trained by Romanian artist Popa, used the style of Expressionism, though were not allowed to exhibit these works in

¹⁰⁵ Liu, D. and Lu, C., n.d, *Salon Salon (bilingual version)*. 2nd ed, 2006. Hongkong, pp67-70.

public space.

To understand why Popa was able to teach and exhibit paintings in a style associated with the West, it is necessary to go back to the meeting of the Romanian Communists in 1958. Due to conflicts resulting from national interests and ideologies, the Soviet Union stopped the aid for Chinese projects and the Soviet experts living in China began to be called back to the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union was about to fall apart. Therefore, China looked out for other allies like Romania, which led to the conference in 1958. There, it was agreed that in the art field, Romania appointed an expert to hold a painting course at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts. In return, China appointed a Chinese tea expert to teach tea planting in Romania.¹⁰⁷ This arrangement was ingenious, since Romania belonged to the socialist camp during the Cold War, not to the West and therefore it did not violate the Socialist principles of the Chinese government. Romania was, however, more open to Western modern painting, so Popa was able to execute works in an Expressionist art style. Same can be said to a certain of Mexican Communist Party leader David Alfaro Siquieros travelled to China and displayed his murals. Diego Riviera's work was also exhibited in Mao-era China.

Although the Expressionism art style was not officially allowed, it must be admitted

¹⁰⁶ Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling city: Guangxi Normal University, 2010), pp.60-71.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Exhibition Introduction 'Starting from Invisible: Ewuqin Popa and Contemporary Chinese Painting' Art Museum of China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. [accessed in September 2020].

that Popa's training was an exception and shows the permeability of an otherwise strict and totalitarian government. Furthermore, there was also Jose Venturelli from Chile. However, political factors and international political relations had intervened on Popa's art training from 1960 to 1962. On Popa's first class in China, he told his students through an interpreter,

I am not here to teach the European painting. The Soviet Painting that you studied hard before was outmoded. I hope Chinese painters do not follow the old European way and imitate others. All the cultures and arts are equal. [...] Although you learn from others before, you will learn from yourself in the future [...].¹⁰⁸

In other words, he emphasized the importance of individuality in art. This opening statement gave great encouragement and confidence to fourteen young students. Some of them continued to explore the style of Expressionism in private after Popa's training ended in 1962. These artists included Zhang Shifan and Bian Binggui in Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts; Xia Peiyao in Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts; Wang Guowei and Wang Tiande in Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts; Peng Shulin in Hubei Academy of Art; Mao Fengde in Central Academy of Fine Arts; Guan Weixing and Liu Li in Luxun Academy of Fine Arts; Jin Yide, Xu Junxuan, Chen Tianlong, Chen

¹⁰⁸ Gao, Minglu, *Meixue Xushi yu chouxiang yishu*. 1st ed, (Chengdu: Sichuan meishu chubanshe Press 2007). pp 60-88(p70).

Daqing and Zhou Hezheng in Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts.¹⁰⁹

In conclusion, artistic production, publication and assessment were closely related to the nation and party politics during the Cultural Revolution. Any art viewpoint or artworks that violated or deviated from the standards of the art of the Cultural Revolution would be seen as wrong and therefore repudiated. Artists had to fear persecution in the Cultural Revolution. However, private art activities and even official exchanges occasionally interrupted politics' control over art and made it possible for Chinese artists to touch a more Western artform other than Socialist Realism.

2.1.3 The influence of politics on art after the Cultural Revolution

Although political control continued in China after the Cultural Revolution in 1978, this section of the chapter argues that, even from this moment, both Chinese and Western art were in some kind of dialogue. According to the available information, the discussions about 'the practice is the only standard for testing truth' seemed to wake up the artistic field and make artists rethink what is the true arts in China.¹¹⁰ It means that Mao's instructions are no longer the truth. On December 1978, at the 'Art Exhibition for the 30th Anniversary of the Founding of PRC by Six Provinces in East China,' the meeting discussed the report in the third plenary session of The Eleventh

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Li, X and Ding, D. *Recording History with Lens* (in Chinese), Dialogue in *Change in China: 1976-1986*, (Hang Zhou: Zhejiang Photography Press, 2003), pp. 45.

CPC (Chinese Communist Party Central Committee). The meeting approved the proposal of the designated successor of Mao Zedong, Hua Guofeng who advocated that 'national newspapers, periodicals and literary works should focus more on workers, peasants and soldiers, as well as the revolutionists, and less on propagating individual (Mao Zedong).' ¹¹¹ It was welcomed by the participating artists. They noted that 'Chairman Hua talked about what had been kept secret by artists and what they had wanted to say for years.' ¹¹² This meeting was interpreted as a sign of reform in art, precisely because it signaled that the production of art depicting heroes and deifying leaders had finally come to an end. More importantly, the Chinese authorities had allowed students to study Western modern art publicly and to express personal feelings and individual artforms.

Nevertheless, the attitude towards those modern art exhibitions is explored briefly here, in order to assess the extent to which the restrictions around artistic production was loosened in reality. For instance, the 'Eliminate Spiritual Pollution' movement, a two-month political campaign in 1983, aimed to solve people's distrust of socialism, communism and the Communist Party of China by eliminating all kinds of bourgeois and feudal ideologies. This movement started from Beijing and rapidly spread to the whole country. Specifically, the Chinese government purged the books, movies, videos and music about Western culture and art in October 1983. The movement

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Gao, M. *'the 85' Movement, the Enlightenment of Chinese Avant-Garde'*. (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008). Pp154-180.

shortly expanded to an absurd degree and had affected people's daily lives. For example, a perm, applying skin care cream, wearing fashionable clothes and even planting bright flowers were regarded as 'bourgeois lifestyle' and 'Spiritual Pollution. None of these behaviours were allowed.'¹¹³ People were in chaos again since the scope of 'Spiritual Pollution' was not clear. Artists had to consider their own safety before artistic production. As Zhang Xiaogang observed the oppressive artistic atmosphere and expressed it in his letter to friend Zhou Chunya on 14 November 1983:

During the period of 'Elimination Spiritual Pollution' movement, many works created by Western masters for example, Munch, had a miserable fate in China (The leaders of the Chinese Artists Association allowed some of Munch's paintings. Nevertheless, nude paintings were seen as vulgar and indecent art, which were forbidden to exhibit in the gallery.) The control in Kunming city was tight. The government had required units to register and submit all nude paintings and photographs. In addition, a class of students in the Academy of Art were arrested because they had taken photos of a human nude. The atmosphere was depressing enough. If I lived in Beijing, I could choose a foreign partner and go abroad, but what should I do in Kunming? I don't know, my primary concern is to protect myself.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Yang, J, *Political struggle in China's reform era*. 1st ed. Hong Kong: Cultural book Press, 2004. pp.220-223.

¹¹⁴ Zhang, X. and Lv peng, *The letters of Zhang Xiaogang, 1981-1996*. 1st ed. (Beijing: peking university press 2009), pp.52-54.

It can be argued, then, that political control on art production still existed in China. I would argue that the purpose of ‘open’ and ‘reforms’ policies after the Cultural Revolution is to reduce unnecessary censorship. Although the Chinese government claimed that people should be accorded basic human rights, they did not intend to abandon the suppression of words, images, or ideas. Moreover, the extent of basic human rights is unclear, and its authoritative interpretation lies with Chinese governments. Any disgruntled or anachronistic content could be interpreted as anti-government and banned. For example, after the Huangshan Conference in November 1988, the authorities removed the prohibition on nude paintings in official art exhibitions. Critics argued that artists could express art freely because of the loose policies like this, but this is not the case: the most important contemporary art exhibition was ‘China/Avant-Garde Exhibition’, 1989. It was closed down early because Gao Qiang exhibited condoms in artworks and Xiao Lu shot a gun at her artwork in a performance at the National Gallery in Beijing.¹¹⁵ These artists were arrested on charges of endangering public safety and hooliganism. Moreover, Li Xianting, the curator of the avant-garde art exhibition, was demoted from journal *Meishu* to the *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (‘China Art Newspaper’) after this incident, due to his support for avant-garde art through his journalism. Li was previously an art editor of *Meishu*, which is a monthly art magazine. It should be explained that

115 Gao, M, ‘the 85’ Movement, the Enlightenment of Chinese avant-garde’. Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press 2008). pp145

Zhongguo Meishu Bao was a newly created newspaper, had few readers and lack of social influence.¹¹⁶ Thus, it can be determined on the one hand, Western artform had an impact on Chinese avant-garde art after the Cultural Revolution, and on the other hand, the Chinese avant-garde art was also shaped by totalitarian politics in China.

The modern art exhibitions also experienced even stricter political censorship after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. For instance, in one of the ‘Star Group’ exhibitions, discussed briefly in chapter one - a group led by artists including Huang Rui, Ma Desheng, Wang Keping and Ai Weiwei – They were briefly allowed to hang the works on the railings outside the nation’s highest temple of official art, the institution now known in English as the National Art Museum of China, or NAMOC, but after three days, the show was banned. Nevertheless 30,000 people attended so it was a significant exhibition despite how short it was.

The reason was that the artists’ behaviour had damaged the reputation of the gallery.¹¹⁷ This incident suggests that once a work of art is interpreted as ‘offensive’ or ‘anachronistic’, it may be restricted by the Chinese authorities. Nevertheless, these works of art learned from the European Fauvism and Cubism, alongside some abstract paintings. Therefore, it can be asserted that this avant-garde art exhibition reflects the study of the Western modern art. From what has been discussed thus far, the argument

¹¹⁶ Yang, J, *Political struggle in China's reform era*. pp.220-223.

¹¹⁷ The art newspaper.com, Stars Art Group, China's artistic freedom fighters, celebrate 40th anniversary, 2021.

is that although the political limitations on art still exist, it seems that both Chinese and Western art have always been in some kind of dialogue.

In summary, the modern art or avant-garde art in China was influenced by the authoritarian politics. Its development resembles how classicism was subverted by contemporary art. Through questioning the ‘authenticity’ of classical painting, the contemporary and modern art appeared. For instance, Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*: readymade production became individual artforms for the first time, which deconstructed the traditional art. The artist Liao Bangming had this to say on the matter:

For example, the initial objection to Duchamp’s *Fountain* in 1917 had as much to do with its subversion of exhibiting a urinal in a gallery. [...] Incorporating different elements into any mainstream aesthetics will trigger the rejection of the subject. The different elements will damage the stability of the original aesthetic. Therefore, the different elements must be suppressed, rejected and eliminated by the dominant aesthetic ideology [...].¹¹⁸

Similarly, in relation to contemporary Chinese art, the relationship of art and politics can be explained as follows: It was inspired by the question of official art under the

¹¹⁸ Liao, B, ‘The political significance of Duchamp’s Art,’ in Chinese, July 2011, <<https://www.douban.com/group/topic/2073016/>>. [Accessed January 2021].

background of China's 'reform and opening' politics. The different elements came from the transformation of ideology and made a remarkable change in the doctrines of red, bright, and shine (Hong, Guang, Liang in Chinese) during the Cultural Revolution. While the loosening of different elements was obvious, it could be demonstrated that the official art was still the dominant aesthetic in China. The loosening of the policies would be halted if the stability of mainstream aesthetics was jeopardized, which explains why the artists were only allowed to portray the down-to-earth life in a realist manner rather than showing extreme behaviours.

As outlined above, this section demonstrates that the relationship between contemporary Chinese art and official art were a binary opposition from 1978 to 1990. Unlike the situation in Japan, where there were two modern movements, one influenced by Western modern art and one that continued the traditions of artistic production, in China, there were also two movements, but the difference was that the binary was a result of totalitarian politics. And the Western modern art had an impact across both types of art in China.

2.2 The artistic education in China

Since art was politicized, how did art education evolve during and after the Cultural Revolution? This section will examine the appearance of Chinese art education through an analysis of published essays. It will focus on the impact brought about by

the key figures and major events during the reform of education, which influence the history of Chinese art education more than anything else. Overall, this section of the chapter seeks to demonstrate that there was a long term, if complicated and limited, dialogue between Chinese art and Western art that shaped the art education system.

The initial stage of Chinese art education lasted from 1900 to 1949 when artists learned from Japan and Europe. They were known as the school of pro-European artists whose purpose was to change the master-apprentice system of traditional art training. Compared with the old education styles, European artistic training methodologies were seen as more systematic. Cai Yuan-pei, the first Minister of Education in China, advocated that:

Western artists accepted the strengths of our art, why can't we learn from their strengths also? I do hope all the painting learners to learn from realist art, painting the plaster statues and landscapes of woods and fields [...] Now when we study painting, we should use Scientific methods [...] so, we should introduce scientific methods to fine art in China.¹¹⁹

The art education mirrors developments of post-secondary education in modern China. Art education shared many similarities with other subjects in terms of its curriculum

¹¹⁹ Ding, D. and Hu, Y, *Cai Yuanpei*. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Chinese people press 1996). p56-60.

and teaching methodology. The Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing Film Academy, the Shanghai Theatre Academy and Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts all followed the same principles, which is characterized by the transmission of communist values - for instance, art should represent workers and should be understandable to workers; the theme should be the scenes of everyday life of the people and be supportive of the aims of the State and the Communist Party.¹²⁰ These principles influenced by the Soviet Union, did not pursue individuality. Despite every university having a president, dean, and deputy dean, the educational policymaker was the Communist Party organization within each school. The Party secretary, a senior official of the school, had the real power to organize daily political work, including the appointment and dismissal of staff and curriculum setting. The principal and other management officers usually were members of Communist Party. Overall, art and politics are fairly intertwined institutionally in such institutions, and their impact of which have already seen in relation to my case study artists in chapter one. But the dialogue with Western art has always existed in this institutional organizations, and according to policy, from the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been possible to distinguish the three stages of dialogue between Chinese art and the Western art.

Western modern art movement have influenced the traditional curriculum

120 Andrews, J. and Gao, Minglu, *The avant-garde's challenge to official art*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge university press 2000, pp.114-118(p.115).

implemented in China. As proof, sketching and watercolour became mandatory courses for traditional ink painting. Specifically, Western painting methods at the end of the nineteenth century were adopted in courses, such as print, oil painting, mural, and sculpture. The students were required to sketch the plaster duplicates of *David* (as we have seen in chapter one) and *Giuliano de' Medici* made by Michelangelo, in order to improve students' skills to observe and produce realist art. It should be explained why this type of teaching method emerged in the twentieth century is because the May 4th movement of 1919 and it prompted the advancement of western knowledge. Chinese society advocates learning advanced Western knowledge to develop the country. As a result, the art application was heavily westernized, and the artworks produced tended to blend the Western and traditional Chinese techniques. As proof, the ink figure paintings presented reasonable proportions which learned from the anatomy from the classical period in Europe. Some sketches and watercolours were painted with a Chinese painting brush and were guided by science.¹²¹

The second stage of art education appeared around 1949. After the Communist Party of China defeated Kuomintang Party, China became a communist country and began a 'honeymoon period' with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The course design, teaching methodology, evaluation criteria and degrees all were studied from a Soviet perspective and were under the guidance of Soviet consultancy. Soviet art education

¹²¹ Lin, M, A century of Chinese paintings under the scientism. *China Art News*, 2018, CN 11-1697/J (174), pp.3-6.

consisted of the following. Sketching in the Soviet Union was taught with reference to Cheschakov (1832-1917), who was a Russian historical painter and educator. His teaching methodology required students to observe nature and the objective world. He emphasized the rigour of object and space and advocated the learning of anatomy and proportion for portrait, still life, and landscape. However, the teaching method of Cheschakov did not pay attention to the spontaneity of painters.¹²² The thirty-three Chinese students who learned Soviet painting skills became known as the Pro-Soviet artists in 1955.¹²³ As part of the Sino-Soviet friendship agreement, these students were sent to the prestigious Ilya Repin State Academic Institute of Fine Arts, Sculpture and Architecture in St Petersburg.¹²⁴ Many of them later became teachers and heads of art universities and departments across China. They supported sketching as ‘the foundation of all plastic arts’ and promoted the Cheschakov methodology within China.

This led to a unified artistic production, in which the process of drawing played a foundational role in all art teaching. To be specific, during the Cultural Revolution, few Western artforms and artistic styles could be embraced into academic teaching. Zhan Jianjun, Professor at The Central Academy of Fine Arts, only allowed classicism and social and socialist realism painting.¹²⁵ Therefore, the French Realist painter

122 Qiu Yongbo, *Study on Language of Sketch Forms* [M] (Liaoning: Fine Arts Press, 2005), (in Chinese) pp35.

123 Barmé, G, *In the red: The Graying of Chinese Culture*. 1st ed. New York: Columbia University Press 1999, pp.99-125.

124 Lang, S, “Painting Language and Artistic Individuality.” ‘*Mei Shu*’ 1980. (*Fine Arts in China*), No. 3(12). pp112-114.

125 Jian, J: “董希文先生的“兼收并蓄”和“顺水推舟”, 2009 in *the Beijing Academy of paintings: Dong Xiwen Research*

Gustave Courbet and the Russian Realist painter Ilya Repin were *both* considered politically ‘correct’, because they depicted peasants and workers.¹²⁶ Their art styles were adopted and taught as part of foundational training. All Post-Impressionist genres were considered as ‘downfallen’ bourgeois ideologies. ‘Modern’ artists, including Pablo Picasso and Paul Cézanne, were criticized and therefore not introduced to China. Only after the Cultural Revolution they were embraced in art teaching. However, perhaps more surprisingly, traditional Chinese ink painting was not spared either. Paintings by ancient masters and scholars, such as Huang Gongwang, Ni Zan and Zhu Da, were deemed ‘feudalistic’ styles, and considered to express decayed and old ideas, which was forbidden to be studied and displayed.¹²⁷ For example, Zhu Da (1626–1705) was seen as an ‘individualist.’ He was a descendent of the Ming dynasty and his paintings were very precise studies of nature. His paintings are known for having ‘eye-rolling’ animals. His *Swimming Fish* (Fig. 2.1), for example, is one such image and was therefore considered critical.¹²⁸ During the Cultural Revolution, his work was condemned. And students who subsequently studied Zhu Da’s styles, were also viewed as trying to express dissatisfaction with the current state of politics.

From 1971 to 1976, Chinese Art education learned much from Soviet models: art

Collection, Beijing :Beijing Culture and Art Press, p92.

126 Vukovich, D, *China and Orientalism*. 1st ed. London: Taylor and Francis press 2013. pp147-150.

127 Wang, A, Landscape Underground Art in the Cultural Revolution Anonymous Painting Society in the 21st Century Bimonthly, August 2016, 8(12) pp 156.

128 Bada shanren. and Zhu Yaochun. Bada Shanren hua niao. (Hang zhou: Xi ling Press 1999), pp45.

served politics. There was no obvious difference between education, publicity or indoctrination. Mao Zedong encouraged young students to criticize their professors who had bourgeois views. Students started insulting, beating and imprisoning their professors all over the country. Art colleges and universities were deeply affected by this movement. Higher education was significantly curtailed. With the escalation of the conflict, the revolutionary groups, composed of workers and peasants, cruelly persecuted artists. Those art professors, who had studied abroad, were arrested as members of the bourgeois class. Most professors of The Central Academy of Fine Arts were sent to the May Seventh Cadre School ('Wu qi gan xiao' in Chinese), which was in two small villages in Ci Xian County, Hebei Province. In fact, it was a Chinese labor camp established during the Cultural Revolution. It combined hard agricultural work with the study of Mao Zedong's writings in order to 're-educate' the prisoners.¹²⁹ The prisoners lived with farmers and worked in farms in the countryside. In the labor camp, all artists had to participate in farming, sowing and weeding with local farmers.¹³⁰ They were deprived the freedom of artistic production. Due to the huge fear, artists burned many of their abstract paintings. It should explain that the abstract painting was regarded as the product of bourgeoisie ideology, which is opposite the proletarian class consciousness. Many professors were forced to review what was considered as 'past mistakes,' to admit that they were the propertied class,

129 Zhang, S., n.d. *The study of Five-seven School*. '五七干校研究' 1st ed. (Beijing: Beijing university press, 1999), pp.582

130 Wang, A, *Landscape Underground Art in the Cultural Revolution Anonymous Painting Society in the 21st Century* Bimonthly, August 2016, 8(12) pp 172.

which is the enemy of Communist China.¹³¹ It caused some of intellectuals chose to commit suicide because of a mental breakdown. These include painters such as Pan Tianshou, Feng Zikai, Wang Shikuo, Dong Xiwen, Chen Banding, Ni Yide, Wu Jingting and Ye Gongchuo.¹³² During Mao's reign, only a select group of skilled artists, usually those with working-class parents, were granted the privilege of producing portraits of Mao and the Red Guards. Most art academies required students to imitate Soviet patterns. This was done to ensure that the artists produced works that aligned with the Communist Party's political goals and the aesthetic standards of socialist realism. As a result, there was little room for creative expression or individuality in Chinese art during this period. This strict approach to art education was intended to produce artists who would serve the political objectives of the Communist Party, rather than artists who were free to express themselves creatively.

While it is true that Chinese art education emphasized the ideology of communism, it is important to note that this did not entirely separate the country from Western art between 1949 to 1979. For instance, Eugene Popa was able to teach in China during this period, indicating that there was some level of engagement between Chinese art and Western art. However, it can be argued that this engagement was limited and that the dominant approach to art education in China during this period was influenced by communist ideology.

131 Julia F. Andrews, *Review on Art During the Cultural Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), p189-196.

132 Gao Minglu, 'Concept, Generation and Nationalization' in 'Painter', November 1985, No. 4.

The third stage of Chinese art education began in 1979, which was a complex period in China's history. The end of the Cultural Revolution, marked by the passing of Mao Zedong in 1976, was followed by the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1978. This meeting announced a new economic policy called 'Reform and Opening Up,' which moved away from the planned economy that had stagnated China's economy before and resulted in rapid economic development. As a result, the quality of people's lives gradually improved. This new economic policy also brought about changes in the Chinese art education system, allowing for greater experimentation and individual expression in artistic endeavors. This shift paved the way for new artistic movements and styles in China, making this period a critical turning point in the history of Chinese art education.

Firstly, as a part of this new policy, Deng Xiaoping proposed the resumption of the college entrance examination, which signaled the beginning of educational reforms and a shift towards valuing academic achievements over political and family backgrounds. In 1978, all major universities, including art academies, were officially reopened. The reopening of art academies not only allowed a new generation of artists to receive formal training but also provided an opportunity for the brightest students of the generation to come together.¹³³ Due to a backlog of applicants and limited

¹³³ Gao, Minglu, *History of Contemporary Chinese Art, 1985-1986*. (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press) , 1991, pp62-78.

class sizes, only the most talented students, such as Cai Guo-qiang, Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing, and Zhang Xiaogang, were admitted to these institutions in the early waves of students.

Secondly, professors at colleges of fine arts had different propositions in teaching. Some of older generations of teachers still insisted on the art education established by the Soviets. They contend that the art of Cultural Revolution was created by revolutionary artists with faith in socialism, which should be continued. For instance, Jiang Feng insisted on adhering to socialist realism and romanticism. Moreover, Qian Haiyuan and Yang Chenyin thought that revolutionary realism was the only way of artistic production in China.¹³⁴ They believed that the standards of evaluation were quality and proficiency of realist painting skills, while abstraction was the product of the bourgeoisie and did not belong to socialist China. They were heavily influenced by the political idea of class struggle and could not face the fact that their artistic ideologies from the first half of their life were becoming obsolete. Elsewhere, although the older generation of teachers defended realist painting, they had to compromise to follow the new trends such as Feng Fasi and Tuo Musi. Different to cultural revolution teachers, they emphasized learning from the Western art and focused on the structural aesthetics of works rather than the subject.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

The results of teaching in this way were immediately evident in the national art exhibition in February 1977. The paintings were delivered from local fine art academies to Beijing.¹³⁵ One-sixth of them depict new political leaders like Zhou Enlai and Hua Guofeng. There were many pictures depicting revolutionary achievements in journal *Meishu* (Fine Arts in China), which was the most popular art journal at the time. On account of no longer needing the portrait of Mao, the national art galleries and museums returned several of their works which were produced in the Cultural Revolution to the artists so as to demonstrate its determination to reform and open. These included Liu Chunhua's painting *Chairman Mao Goes to An-yuan* (1967)¹³⁶ and Shen Jiawei's painting *Standing Guard for the Great Motherland* (1974). These images featured strong political themes. The prints and paintings produced during the Yan'an period (1935-1948), and the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) were exhibited again.¹³⁷ These artworks commonly portrayed the image of regular farmers instead of revolutionary leaders. For instance, *The Bloodstained Shirt* (Fig. 2.2) was painted by Wang Shikuo, a realist painter. It is a large-scale pencil drawing depicts the Chinese Land Reform, which started in a small village near Beijing's Nanyuan Airport in the winter of 1949. As seen in the center of the image (Fig. 2.2), poor farmers took off their torn and bloodstained shirts, and mournfully told the history of being oppressed by the landlords and by being surrounded by angry people.

135 Gao, M, 1991, *Zhongguo dang dai mei shu shi*, pp335-360.

136 *Chairman Mao Goes to An-yuan* created when Liu was still a student at the Central Academy of Applied Arts, the painting was promoted by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, as a model of the artistic fusion between Socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism. Printed on 900 million posters during the Cultural Revolution, it remains the most reproduced painting in history.

137 Ibid.

This historical image propagates the necessity of the Chinese Land Reform, as demonstrated by the middle image of the weeping peasant. The purpose of the Chinese Land Reform was to transfer the property right of expropriated private land to collective ownership by the Communist regime through the policy of ‘Agricultural Production Cooperatives’. The landowners were deprived of the ownership of the land.¹³⁸ Compared with other works in that period, the work is unusual in that Mao did not appear in the center of this painting. The appearances and manners of people also became more animated. Moreover, Dong Xiwen’s painting *The Emancipation of Land* (Fig. 2.3), showed revolutionary ideas through combining socialist realism techniques with the bright colours of the Dunhuang wall paintings.¹³⁹ The journals *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (‘China Art Newspaper’) began to publish essays by old professors and critics arguing against new trends, mostly those in painting, such as Pang Yun aimed to keep the authority in academia and to propagate for a Communist China.¹⁴⁰

It can be argued that the reform of art education was difficult under the new policies of reform and opening up. The Cultural Revolution style was deeply rooted in art application. Old professors, especially those educated in the Soviet Union, became the

138 Xiao, Z., *The land reform movement in China*. 1st ed. Taiwan, Republic of China: China Land Reform Association, 1968. pp. 87.

139 Wng Duping ‘The Revolution artist: Dong xiwen’ <https://www.frieze.com/article/Dong_xiwen>. [Accessed, Jun 2021]

140 Pang Yun, “Resist the ugly art forms from the West”, *Zhongguo Meishu Bao*, 1982(‘China Art Newspaper’), pp6-10.

backbone of opposing new trends. Most significantly, artworks were still misappropriated and/or discarded for political purposes.

1983 witnessed substantial debate on the validity of the ‘Current of Life’ stream of realist painting, which will be discussed in the following section. It can be seen that the purpose of these arguments was to defend a realist style. Whether realist style was supported because of its propositional and restrictive production, or rather, because those arguing were unaware of the expression freedom, fueled these debates. Indeed, Lv Peng criticized that abstract art may embody some anarchist thought.¹⁴¹ This means that although ‘political functions’ were no longer working on the surface, the contests between politics and art still existed on a much deeper level. The old school had great authority in fine art colleges, and they also had a wide influence on artistic production as well as journal publication.

Some other teachers were open-minded and pursued liberalism in modern art. For example, Chen Junde, Professor at the Shanghai Theatre Academy, explored the light and shadow of impressionist paintings; Jin Ye, the young teacher, studied German Expressionism at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, and Chen Wenji, the teacher at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, taught the gentle colours of Italian artist, Giorgio Morandi, to his students.¹⁴² It should be explained that most of them were professors

¹⁴¹ Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University press, 2010), pp.121.

¹⁴² Bo, F., “The Temperance and Exquisiteness of Chen Wenji’s Works” in *contemporary Chinese art*, May 2015(2315-324-324),

who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and rehabilitated after it. They opposed the old method of art education because they firmly believe that nostalgic conservatism could no longer satisfy the people's aesthetics. They deemed the god-creating ideology and political art as the fake art and argued that new art education should pursue the Western modern artforms. In their viewpoints, accurate realist works should face the reality, and the observation of realistic scenes should not be exaggerated. The socialist realist style was not the only way of artistic output.¹⁴³ Moreover, since the restrictions of ideologies have become much more relaxed. Artists could learn from great Western masters such as Robert Rauschenberg and focus on artistic individuality.¹⁴⁴ It is indeed this era 1978-1989, in which artists like Wang Guangyi, Zhang Xiaogang, and Xu Bing, first began to gain fame with their art in China.

Although the young professors mentioned above believed that one should learn from Western art, they also realized it was ineffective if they only imitated the artforms. As a result, they began learning from Western philosophies. These theories became popular among artistic students who were born in the 1950s and 1960s. Under a relatively relaxed political environment for intellectuals, it became 'trendy' to translate and publish Western philosophical works. The young teachers encouraged

pp. p33-36.

143 Mi Zao "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art" in the China Art Newspaper Vol. 46, No. (1). (Beijing: CAA Press, 1987), pp. 38-45.

144 The perform of 'Chinese Painting on the Eve of the Communist Revolution: Chang Shu-chi and his Collection' 2006, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, pp52-55.

students to read philosophical works translated into Chinese, such as Friedrich Hegel's book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Jean-Paul Sartre's book *Being and Nothingness*, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Sigmund Freud's book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, his *Group Psychology*, *The Analysis of the Ego* and Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.¹⁴⁵ Students gathered together to exchange Western philosophical books and expressed views on political reform. It should explain that although the quality of the translation of the Western books still needs to be improved, undoubtedly, the artists embraced the contemporary Western thoughts due to a wide range of introductions and publications of modern philosophical books in China. It can be asserted that this dialogue with the West has reshaped the Chinese art education system to some extent.

In addition to reading philosophical books, the artists also painted the image of Western philosophers on canvas. Zhong Ming, an editor of The People's Fine Art Press, made a portrait of philosopher Sartre in woodcut print in 1983 and published it in journal *Meishu*. The publication caused a widespread discussion about Sartre's philosophy. According to art historian Lu Hong, 'Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy influenced us. Before that, we studied to be a brick in the life, and we would go wherever the Communist Party needed us to go. We were a screw of the Revolution, and the party needed us to screw it.'¹⁴⁶ However, Sartre emphasized that

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Zhong Shanshan, "The location of Chinese art" in *China Art News* 1986, No. 20. pp73.

¹⁴⁶ Wu, Hong, *The Contemporary Chinese Art*, 1st, ed (Guang zhou: Ling nan Press, December 2005), pp440-460.

people must choose and be responsible for themselves when they are alive. This philosophical thought was utterly different from Chinese belief – dominant Chinese philosophy.

From the example above, we might surmise that the spread of Western philosophy supported, to a degree, to liberate people's minds and laid the theoretical foundations of avant-garde art in China during the 1980s.

Meanwhile, it is essential to note that the first cohort of avant-garde artists began to graduate from academies and then either stayed at their schools as professors or engaged in art-related work, such as publishing and design, which would bring significant development to China's art education. However, along with more exchanges between China and the West in the 1990s, new professors also went to the US and UK to study art. The primary goal of learning from the US and the UK was to promote students' creativity and individuality, because the traditional Chinese art education was deeply influenced by Soviet art and had difficulty developing students' unique artforms independently in the past. As a result, the innovation, the basic principles of the multi-cultural pattern, has been placed in the essential position of educational reform. Creative courses such as experimental art and conceptual art were integrated into the academic structure in the 1990s.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Li, B 'Memory of Jiang Feng' in China Art News, February 2017, pp34-35.

From what has been discussed above, we may safely draw a conclusion that there are three stages of the Western influences on art education in China since the twentieth century. First, the thesis realized that which country to learn from depends on Chinese ideology, geopolitics. All these changes, in learning from France, the Soviet Union, or the United Kingdom or the United States, were shaped by Chinese politics and international relations at that time. Art language also played a crucial part, particularly considering the impact of the UK and the USA. To be more specific, even though it seemed that the education of realist art at different institutes shared the similar style and mainly developed with the ever-changing policies, teachers still held different views on realist art. This phenomenon is not only due to teachers received education and artistic thought in different countries, but also globalization, which has led to the accessibility of information, and the boundaries between art forms being rapidly broken down.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through this long discussion of the artistic education system, this chapter places the artists' education in a wider historical context. The foci artists of this thesis received a similar education in Chinese colleges. Crucially, their educational experience underwent sustained dialogue with the West to varying degrees. These foci artists' respective schooling 'fits' into this diverse model of education I have constructed here. It serves my overall argument by complicating the

narrative of ‘two art histories’ in China, and suggests that there was dialogue between Chinese art and Western art. As a result, the long-term influence of the West on Chinese art was partly shaped by the Chinese art education system.

Chapter three: The places, groups, and networks of modern and contemporary artists in China

Introduction

This chapter will move from the history of school education outlined previously, to art groups in China, and trace how these contexts provided space for an engagement with the west by the four case study artists. Previous literature has focused primarily on groups of artists living in central cities of China. For instance, in his *Chinese RenWen-Searching for Ideal Truth: Trans-Realism in the 85' Movement*, the influential Chinese art critic, Gao Minglu, discussed important Chinese Group artists such as The East Coast Art Group, The Northern Art Group ('Beifangqunti in Chinese') in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, The Pool society in Hangzhou, The Red Brigade ('Hongselu in Chinese') in Nanjing, The Shanghai Art Group in Shanghai, The Three-Step Studio in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, led by Song Yongping, as well as the most essential Southwest Art Group ('Xinan Yishuqunti in Chinese') in Chongqing city, including Mao Xuhui, Zhang Xiaogang, and Pan Dehai.¹⁴⁸ The map of mainland China included here helpfully represents the various locations of these art groups (Fig.3.1) Similarly, the sociologist Tong Dian calculates in his quantitative study of the artistic field in China, that in the 1980s, there were at least seventy-nine art groups across China that were formed to support the new art practices between 1982 to 1986.¹⁴⁹

148 Quoted in 'Jiangsu Pictorial' No1, 1987, pp64-65.

149 Tong, D, *The Landscape of China's Modern Art Movement*. 1st ed. (Wuhan: Hu bei ren ming chu ban Press 2007), pp.75-84.

Both Gao Minglu and Tong Dian's texts provide the foundation for a productive study about the relationships of the locations occupied by Cai Guo-qiang, Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing and Zhang Xiaogang. In terms of the cities of these artists, Cai Guo-qiang graduated from Shanghai Theatre Academy, Shanghai city, located in the east of China, which was known as the 'Eastern Paris,' and is considered the economic center of China. Theatre has been popular in Shanghai since the early twentieth century. Xu Bing graduated from The Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, which is the capital of China in the north. It has been the center of various Chinese art movements. Ai Weiwei graduated from The Beijing Film Academy, which is still the only film academy in China and many film directors graduated from this academy. Zhang Xiaogang graduated from Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, which is located in the city of Chongqing, the center of artistic education in Southwest China.

Overall, in chapter three, I will discuss the groups and networks in cities for modern and contemporary art in China and assess the key artists' relationship to them. This is essential to understand how they made their career: either as individuals or as members of a group. The argument of this chapter is that many art groups in China, and of which these four artists have been part, have in fact been in dialogue with Western art, and that this has shaped the respective work of artists within such groups and networks.

3.1 Jiang Feng's reform of art groups

This section of the chapter will move from the history of schooling to the origins of art groups in China. Some of the previous research on the contemporary Chinese art in the last decade has focused on the reform of art.¹⁵⁰ However, Jiang Feng, one of the key players of artistic reform, has been ignored by scholarship. In fact, Jiang Feng promoted freedom of assembly to a certain extent, and promoted the dialogue between Chinese art and Western art after the Cultural Revolution.

Feng was a left-wing artist in charge of the Chinese Artists Association (CAA) in the early 1980s. Between 1949 and 1957, he served as the leader in Mao Zedong's project of reforming the cultural forms in art field. In 1957 Jiang was rated as 'the right wing' and then deprived of the right of artistic production and imprisoned for ten years. He regained his reputation and resumed the post of the counsellor of the Ministry of Culture in April 1979 and the principal of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in August, and he was appointed as the chairman of the CAA in November.¹⁵¹ It suggests Jiang took charge of the whole direction of the Chinese official fine art from 1979.

There was a debate about whether Chinese artistic education should develop as socialist realism painting or as abstract painting. Feng insisted on realist art which is the foundation for the realist education in China. In contrast, Wu Guanzhong, a

¹⁵⁰ Li, B 'Memory of Jiang Feng' in China Art News, February 2017, pp37.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

famous modern painter, dedicated himself to exploring the modernization of painting.¹⁵² To be more specific, he advocated combining Expressionism with Chinese landscape painting. As evidence, ‘*The Soul of Pines*’ (Fig. 3.2) embodied the modernization of ink painting, which showed the five pines in the forest in the background. Here Wu simplified the form of pines and reconstructed it with the characteristics of modern art and design, as well as a poetic sentiment associated with traditional Chinese art. Wu contends that the abstract is the aesthetics of artforms. He used abstract lines, dark ink and colourful dots to express his concept. This style was inspired by Jackson Pollock’s paintings. It has been claimed that this influence was based on the journal *Meishu*, which introduced the artist Pollock to a Chinese readership in the 1980s.¹⁵³ Wu declared the aesthetics value of abstract art in the article the *Painter’s form* and challenges the government-sanctioned notion of content. However, Pollock’s drip-and-splash style was regarded as a random ‘scribble’ by Feng. It should be noted here that although this debate has no conclusion, it expands the influence of Western art in China, making more young artists aware of Western modern and contemporary art.

Nonetheless, the section here analyses the modern art exhibitions supported by Jiang Feng, in order to determine that Feng promoted the dialogue between Chinese art and Western art within the non-governmental organizations. For instance, the Spring Art

152 Yi, Qing, *Hua jia Wu Guanzhong*, 1st ed. (Nanchang Shi: Jiangxi mei Shu Press 2014) in Chinese, pp.234-256.

153 Quoted in *Art Journal*, China Art News. 1986, 35(20), pp.263-292.

Exhibition was organized spontaneously by artists who focused on landscape painting. Jiang Feng wrote a much-admired preface to the exhibition catalogue of the Spring Art Exhibition, which was soon published in the magazine *Reading*.¹⁵⁴ In this preface, Jiang Feng claimed that freely formed groups by artists could provide an experimental platform for art with various styles, forms and subjects. He suggested that artworks should be sold through these artist organizations. Most significantly, Feng promoted that the freedom of assembly is the human right endowed to the people in China, as well as the artist collectives could develop more innovative artistic styles. Michael Sullivan has asked the artist why he would allow these exhibitions that violated the official art. Jiang replied, ‘When these artists find that no one wants to see their works, they will change their direction.’¹⁵⁵ However, it promotes more students to study Western modern art, which encouraged the emergence of the avant-garde art groups in China.

For instance, *Nature, Society and Man*, was an exhibition held in the Su Yat-sen Park, Beijing that opened in 1976 and was sponsored by the April Photo Society.¹⁵⁶ This exhibition indicated the potential of photo beyond the pragmatic photojournalism of the past. Also in November 1979, the members of ‘Star Group’, Ma Deshen and Ai Weiwei organized a protest at the Xidan Democracy Wall in response to the coerced

154 The magazine *Reading* introduced the Spring Art Exhibition in February 1979, pp7-9.

155 Gao, Minglu, *Mei xue xu shi yu chou xiang yi shu*. (Chengdu: Sichuan Art Press2007). pp 60-88.

156 Chen Shuxia ‘Departing from Socialist Realism: April Photo Society, 1979–1981, Volume 8, Issue 1: *Art and Vernacular Photographies in Asia*, 2017

cancellation of their exhibition. Moreover, in December 1985, the ‘85 Movement Space’, at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, presents an exhibition focusing on Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi’s series of twenty-six paintings illustrating the application for learning from the Western modern artists. The exhibition organized by the ‘Youth Creative Association of Zhejiang’, which is an individual art groups in Hangzhou City. It can be asserted these group activities relate to Wu’s use of Pollock’s abstract art and the dialogue with Jiang Feng to some extent.

From what has been discussed above, we may safely draw a conclusion that, Jiang Feng promoted the freedom of assembly after the Cultural Revolution, and developed the individual art groups in cities, to some extent, resulting in the creation of a dialogue between Chinese and Western art within these art groups. This further contests the assumption of a division between ‘Chinese artists at home’ and ‘Chinese artists in the West’ too.

3.2 The groups of modern and contemporary artists in Beijing

This section of chapter determines the extent to which Xu Bing participated in art groups in Beijing. More importantly, it will analyze to what extent these groups shaped his early works. Among the case study artists, Xu Bing and Ai Weiwei both studied and lived in Beijing. As mentioned in chapter one, Ai participated in the ‘Star Group’ and dropped out of college in the early 1980s and came to the United States.

Previous scholarship has examined Ai Weiwei's relationship with emerging artist groups, for example, Li Xianting 'The Stars: Ten Years', 1989, 'Ai Weiwei is a part of art group and participated in the exhibition on the fence of the National Art Museum of China in Beijing.'¹⁵⁷ So, this thesis section will only study the relationship between Xu Bing's practice and art groups in Beijing.

From what has been established in chapter one, Xu Bing graduated from The Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. It is the center of culture and art in China. In fact, whether in turbulent times or the era of reform and opening, Beijing has always been the birthplace of various art movements. Unsurprisingly, it therefore became one of battlefields for the avant-garde art movement in the 1980s. This is described in the book *Regressive Collection* by Chen Danqin, a Chinese Painter. He states, 'Beijing, as the capital, has many advantages in the art communication. Some external information had not been shielded completely and then I don't know how it spread to these guys and secretly began to make these things.'¹⁵⁸ He is referring to installations, conceptual paintings, and behaviors as 'these things', since these practices were considered as outlandish, and there was even no formal Chinese language to explain them in the 1980s.

Art groups in Beijing have been in dialogue with the West to some extent since the

¹⁵⁷ Li Xianting 'The Stars: Ten Years' 1989, Archive, the poverty of history. 1st ed (Shanghai: the century Press), (2002), pp40.

¹⁵⁸ Chen, D, *Tui bu ji*, in English *Regressive Collection*. 1st ed. (Taipei: Li xu Cultural Press, 2007), pp.85-95.

1980s. According to Gao Minglu, there were many active art groups in Beijing during the 1980s and 1990s, which included the ‘Wuming Painting Group’, the ‘Star Group’ and the ‘New Generation Group’. They advocated learning from the realism and abstraction in Western art. The avant-garde art produced by groups in Beijing became a sensational effect over the country, which led to imitations by local artists all over the country. As proof, members of the ‘Generational group’ were students who graduated from The High School Affiliated to Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA). They gathered to study Western modern art in the early 1980s. Their applications learned from the European art were far away from the Soviet style and were allowed to be exhibited in the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC). Since the 1980s, these new art styles become an artistic trend and have spread across the country. Moreover, the members of the ‘Star Group’ all studied and lived in Beijing. These artists included Huang Rui, Zhong Acheng, Ma Desheng, Bo Yun, Qu Leilei, Wang Keping, Yan Li, Li Shuang, Mao Lizi, Yang Yiping, Shao Fei, Ai Weiwei, Song Hong, Bao Pao, Zhu Jinshi, Wang Luyan, and Hei Baosen. As mentioned before, these avant-garde art exhibitions were supported by Jiang Feng, who promoted the freedom of assembly. However, the parade, in the end, made Feng take the responsibilities. And the two ‘Star Group’ painting exhibitions caused a sensation in Beijing and these members of artists became well-known all over the country. It also prompted young generation to engage the dialogue with Western art in the 1980s.

Beijing, despite its cultural restrictions, has always offered great temptation for young artists who want to contribute to art. Artists thus came from all over China and gathered as groups there. Artist Guan Ningxin describes the location of the Beijing art group in *Beijing Painting Circles Around 1980*: ‘art groups located in courtyards between the inner city and suburbs. Moreover, they were several loose strongholds.’¹⁵⁹ The Yuanmingyuan (Old Summer Palace in China) artist village was one of several well-known artist villages on the North-western side of Beijing. Although the Old Summer Palace was a royal garden and hunting ground, it was burned by the British and French army during the First Opium War in the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁰ By the mid-1980s, it was farmland and a small village, which attracted young artist from all over the country to settle in the Yuanmingyuan Village and Guajiatun village near Peking University. Quite a few artists were graduates of art colleges. One reason why they chose Yuanmingyuan Village was that the rent was low. Most significantly, the artistic atmosphere here is very strong. There was also an art market, artists could produce artworks in individualistic style, as there were many embassies and consulates of Western countries in Beijing. Many foreign consular and staff liked to collect modern paintings to decorate their house or bring them back home as a souvenir. In this way, young painters could make a living by selling paintings. However, the ‘Hukou’ (Residence Permit in China) control was strict in the 1980s, which meant that the migration to large cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai,

¹⁵⁹ Wang, G, “Contemporary Chinese Art in Beijing, from Yuanmingyuan, Songzhuang to 798.” in *mei shu zhou kan* magazine, (2020)

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*

were still heavily regulated.¹⁶¹ The artists who lack a Beijing Hukou means it is not legal to live in Beijing. So, artists had to rent a private house secretly and relocate frequently. Although most of them had no job and were anxious about life, fortunately, they could still communicate with Western collectors about art and culture. According to the memories of artists Fang Lijun, Wang Yin and Tian Bins, ‘the initial idea was to find a cheap room to produce paintings [...] We also listened to Western rock music, videos of European opera and radio in a messy room. The Peking University and Tsinghua University nearby provided us knowledge, cafeteria, bathhouse and classroom.’¹⁶² Overall, it can be demonstrated that art groups in Beijing have been in dialogue with the West since the 1980s.

The reason why art groups in Beijing began to explore Western art is that the artists were able to see the latest foreign exhibitions in the city. According to statistics, from 1982 to 1989, many Western artforms and styles were introduced to Chinese viewers, including classicism, romanticism, cubism and pop art.¹⁶³ The influence of external exhibitions in Beijing will be discussed here, in order to evaluate the extent to which art groups have been in dialogue with the West. Picasso’s original painting exhibition (5-25 May 1983) was held at the National Art Museum of China. Thirty-three oil paintings and prints were exhibited in Beijing. French President Mitterrand (1916-

161 Chan, K. W. *Five Decades of the Chinese Hukou System*. In *Handbook of Chinese Migration: Identity and Wellbeing*, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc. (2015). (pp. 42-47).

162 Wang, G, “Contemporary Chinese Art in Beijing, from Yuanmingyuan, Songzhuang to 798.” in *mei shu zhou kan* magazine, (2020) (29779(155), p.2-4.

163 Zhou, Y, *The history of contemporary Chinese Art*. 1st ed. (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005), p.65-67.

1996) respected China's politics and visited China when he was the leader of the opposition party in 1961. He published the monograph *China Facing Challenges* in the next year. He had always been known for his writing in French politics, and high-level intellectuals even voted for him when he was president.¹⁶⁴ He influences the wave of 'French Maoism' amongst intellectuals here. He visited China in 1983, promoting the first exhibition of Picasso's original works at the National Art Museum of China. The exhibition lasted just twenty days and returned to France to the newly built Picasso Museum in Paris, so Chinese viewers in effect saw this corpus of works before the French. Those who once shouted, 'Kollwitz is our flag and Picasso is our pioneer', as a member of the 'Star Group' concluded, when looking at original works of Picasso, it was more powerful than Chinese works.¹⁶⁵ The meaning of this exhibition is also of note. Indeed, in a positive sense, for those art groups in a vague and budding state, this exhibition gave them inspiration and made them develop on a new pathway. However, there were some negative comments from older viewers who could not accept Picasso's modern art style. An extensive discussion about 'beauty' and the 'vulgar' was triggered after they learned that these paintings were about lovers.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, Robert Rauschenberg, an American artist, brought the first pop art

164 FitzGerald, S, Book Review: China Story Yearbook 2013-2014. *China Report*, 50(3), pp.280-282.

165 Siming, Zu, 2019. *The exhibition of Picasso's original works in Beijing*. [online] Chinese cultural. org. <<http://cn.cccweb.org/portal/pubinfo/2020/04/28/20000100300>> [Accessed March 2021].

166 Zhao Jianhua, "Deciphering Picass", in Chinese Culture Magazine, 15 Jul 2017, p40.

exhibition at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing 1985. His works made viewers realize that installation art and collage may be more contemporary than painting, graphic art and sculpture.¹⁶⁷ This exhibition was not only the first time that major American artists had been exhibited in Beijing, but it also demonstrated the positive attitude of Chinese government towards Western modern and contemporary art, which was, as we have seen, had until now been regarded as ‘spiritual pollution’.

I will evaluate briefly here to what extent these independent art groups were influenced by Rauschenberg. For example, Huang Yong Ping, a member of ‘Star Group’, recalled that he understood how an artwork ‘could exist over a long or short time period, be made through any medium, in any place, for any purpose, and have any outcome’.¹⁶⁸ Many Chinese artists desired to escape totalitarian ideology and deal with the actual materials directly. Huang calls the tendency a will to ‘action, not reflection’.¹⁶⁹ Wang Luyan, another artist, recalled that someone asked Rauschenberg whether ‘Chinese artists are different from American artists, we are carrying the burden of five thousand years of civilization. What do you think about this problem?’ Rauschenberg disagrees with this statement, he said, ‘You can put down this burden’, He pretended to grab a bag from his back and threw it out of the window. Then he explains, ‘Tradition is in your blood, it is not a burden that you carry.’¹⁷⁰ Thus, it can

167 Lü, Peng. and Doar, B., n.d. *Chinese contemporary art since 1989*. 1st ed. New York, pp.243-245.

168 quoted from Huang ‘Xiamen Dada art’ in Lü, P. and Dora, B., n.d. *Chinese contemporary art since 1989*. 1st ed. New York.

169 Ibid.

170. Wang Luyan “A immortal art dream” <<http://www.art-ba-ba.com/main/main.art?threadId=93707&forumId>> [Accessed

be asserted that Rauschenberg encouraged the younger generation to take action to challenge traditional Chinese art.

Overall, the emergence of Beijing as a hub for Chinese-Western cultural exchange in the 1980s was undoubtedly significant, but it's also important to acknowledge the role of Shanghai in the development of Chinese art during this period. Shanghai, being a major center for commerce and culture, was up to date with Beijing and hosted Modern Art exhibitions from 1979 onwards. In addition, it was home to a diverse range of influential artists and intellectuals who played a pivotal role in shaping Chinese art.

Thus, it's crucial to recognize the importance of both Beijing and Shanghai in facilitating the exchange of ideas between Chinese and Western artists and the impact of their respective cultural scenes in shaping Chinese art. Beijing's significance in the art field is comparable to that of Shanghai.

3.3 Xu Bing's early artistic practice in Beijing

Compared with art groups who had no permanent living places in Beijing, Xu Bing had a stable job in Beijing. Before graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, he became a teaching assistant majoring in woodcut printmaking.¹⁷¹ This meant he could participate official exhibitions organized by the Chinese government in Europe and the United States, such as 'Works by Members of the CAA in 1982' shown in

Nov 2020].

171 Exhibition of works by members of the Chinese Artists Association, presented by the Société des Artistes Français, Grand Palais, 1982, Paris, France Available at: <www.xubing.com> [Accessed Nov 2020].

Paris and 'Invitational Exhibition of Prints from China' at the Clark Arts Center Gallery, Rockford College, in 1984.¹⁷² Xu Bing had thus earned the reputation to be included in these official Chinese art exhibitions abroad.

Given, as I have established, that art groups in Beijing were in dialogue with the West, we should surmise that the avant-garde displayed by the Beijing art group impacted Xu Bing's art and shaped his personal style. On the China's avant-garde art, the critic Lv Peng wrote that since the 1980s, under the influence of Western modern and contemporary art, Chinese avant-garde art has formed a new artistic style, on the one hand, to rebel against traditional art in a more intense way, which in turn stimulates the audience's thinking. On the other hand, it has expressed avant-garde concepts and themes in installation art.¹⁷³ According to the discussion above, it is reasonable to speculate that the avant-garde concepts and gestures of Xu's early work was shaped by the art groups in Beijing.

It should be noted that the theme of political demands was a part of Chinese contemporary art in the 1980s, but in Xu Bing's work, he avoids the Chinese political theme in early works in China. This is because after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, as mentioned in chapter two, the modern art exhibitions made by group artists

172 Invitational Exhibition of Prints from China, Clark Arts Center Gallery, Rockford College, Rockford, Illinois, USA
<www.xubing.com> [Accessed Sep 2021].

173 Li Xiao-yan, *Xu Bing's Thought and Methodology*, Seminar· 2012, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing.
<<https://www.museummacan.org/exhibition/xubing-thought-and-method>> [Accessed Sep 2021].

in Beijing were forbidden by the government. It made Xu realize the potential risks which art groups could bring with their strong criticism of politics. As a result, Xu focused on the themes of culture rather than Chinese politics. Furthermore, as a teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts, the artist objected to the groups of artists who cater to the taste of the West and claimed, 'this Contemporary Chinese art has been prematurely spoiled by the international art dealers and it is in a danger state'.¹⁷⁴ It should be explained by the implication that the market has commercialized Chinese art. It causes Chinese artists to make more works of art which appetite of Western taste. Thus, Xu insisted on exploring 'true' avant-garde spirit, which meant integrating and maintaining Chinese references in artworks in tandem with Western one. As Xu emphasizes more traditional Chinese elements in his artworks, because he believes the traditional elements show differences in ideology and identity with Western works.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, it can be asserted that Xu's early works did respond to the art groups in Beijing to some extent.

In addition to the relationship of art groups in Beijing, Xu expresses an interest in the nature and characteristics of art media, which is related to the rigorous printmaking training he received in the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Different from the oil paintings, prints can be mass-produced. Xu Bing was able to translate his traditional knowledge into the impressive contemporary art. In other

¹⁷⁴ Xu, Bing, *My true text in Chinese*, (Beijing: Zhong Xing press, 2008), Pp.10.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

words, the dialogue with the West shaped the works of Xu Bing in significant ways outlined below. Firstly, we need to understand a little about the history of the engraving art movement, (木刻) in order to demonstrate why Xu Bing was determined to create a new style of printmaking. Engraving was introduced to China since the May Fourth Movement 1919. A large-scale Chinese student movement took place in Beijing under the Bei Yang Government of the Republic of China in May 1919, later known as the May Fourth Movement. The students started the movement as their request was not addressed properly in the Paris Peace Conference held at the end of World War One. The Chinese delegation asked the Western powers to return the sovereignty over Shandong to China. However, the Japanese government had set up troops in Shandong and claimed the sovereignty over Shandong. It eventually led to the Chinese government's refusal to sign the Treaty of Versailles.¹⁷⁶ The most significant slogan of the May Fourth Movement was to fight against the infringement of foreign powers and to punish domestic thieves (in other words, to punish officials who are Japanophile). The movement spread across the country. Students and intellectuals fought against the government through demonstrations, petitions, strikes, and violence. The reformers aimed to innovate culture and art to defeat colonial culture.¹⁷⁷

Cai Yuan-pei (1868-1940) established the Ministry of Education in 1927. Its artistic

¹⁷⁶ Zhou, C., *The May fourth movement*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1967), pp.12-16.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

programme was based on the French Academy (*Académie Française*). He was an advocate and implementer of artistic education. He studied philosophy in Berlin and Leipzig from 1907 to 1912. In 1912 he went to an exhibition from the Vienna Secession hosted in Berlin, where he became familiar with the artworks of Max Slevogt, Cesare Monti, Käthe Kollwitz, Maurice de Vlaminck and Wassily Kandinsky.¹⁷⁸ Despite his admiration of these artists, he still insisted that only realist forms of painting can revitalize Chinese artworks and awaken the sleeping populace to resist foreign aggression. He planned to establish an art university and gallery in China in 1912. However, the plan was shelved due to the outbreak of the counter-Japanese War. The project was supported by Lu Xun, a famous writer of Chinese short stories.¹⁷⁹ In the summer of 1931, Lu Xun first held China's earliest woodcut workshop in Shanghai and invited Japanese artist Kaji Nishiyama to come to China to teach woodcutting techniques.¹⁸⁰ The foundation of the woodcut workshop marked the beginning of the new engraving art movement. Lu Xun read and translated many Marxist books at that time.¹⁸¹ He was the representative of the left-wing literary camp of the proletariat. On 29 January 1932 the Japanese army attacked Shanghai. On 6th February 1932, Lu Xun established the 'Chundi Art Club' with friends Ai Qing (the father of artist Ai Weiwei) and Jiangfeng in the French concession of Shanghai. The Chundi Art Club aimed to inspire people's fighting spirit, a fight against the enemy

178 Yang, X and Liu, Q: 1977, *Woodcuts in Liberated Areas-Revolutionary Tradition* in 'Mei Shu,' No 3. pp18-27.

179 Ibid.

180 Hu, Y, c.,1976*China Woodcut Movement (Collection)* first edited, Beijing, Shenzhou Press, pp245-260.

181 Zhu Zheng 'The Biography of Lu Xun' People's Literature Press, 01 April 2018, pp 20-35.

through artistic propaganda.¹⁸² Prints were preferred because of their reproducibility in large quantities. In these students, Wang Qi and Li Hua became leaders of the Chinese print education later.

Although the name of the university had changed at the time of Xu Bing's studies, the print department of the CAFA still teaches the black-and-white carving skills, which is essentially a result of the new engraving art movement. In 1955 a print department was set up in the Central Academy of Fine Arts by Jiang Feng and Hu Qiaomu. Jiang Feng transplanted the teaching methodology from the 'Chundi Art Club' to this new print department. He invited Li Hua and Wang Qi, who were outstanding woodcarvers from the Kuomintang controlled areas, as well as Gu Yuan, and Yan Han from the CPC areas. Xu Bing was educated by professors such as Li Hua, Wang Qi, Gu Yuan, and Li Hongren. In chapter one, the discussion explained how he learned woodblock cutting and printmaking techniques. However, considering his educational background, it is hard to believe that Xu Bing would break out of tradition and produce works with the 'true' avant-garde spirit which includes criticism and innovation. The possible reason is that the dialogue with the West has shaped his works, to some extent. Specifically, he may have been influenced by external exhibitions in Beijing. It prompted him to develop a new style of visual arts. To some extent, his practice coincides with the principles pursued by the avant-garde art group

182 Jin Liu, *The Life and Works of Ai Qing*, 2016, SOAS, <<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/28613/1/10672772.pdf>> [accessed in May2020]

in Beijing.

This section will discuss the extent to which these new printing works are related to Western art methodology and traditional woodcut printing. From the visual analysis, new printing is no longer black and white woodcut printing. Rather, it is like an installation art in form, and it can be regarded as seeking to expand traditional printing practices in new ways. For example, *A Big Tire* (1986) (Fig. 3.3) is a series of prints using giant truck tires to produce abstract patterns. Xu developed the concept of printmaking to express more possibilities of traditional modernity. Specifically, the tire along with the printmaking makes up something like an installation, with the tires rolling forward, making marks on the ground, which seems to reflect the principle of black and white woodblock prints. The critic Wu Hong considers *A Big Tire* novel in appearance and as such, is one of the first installation artworks on display in Beijing.¹⁸³ This new printing technique was indeed shaped by installation art. *A Big Tire* is not unlike Rauschenberg's installation *Monogram* (1955–59). The title of *Monogram* is derived from the union of the goat and tire. Here Rauschenberg merged aspects of painting and sculpture. Perhaps *Monogram* inspired Xu Bing's exploration to combine the traditional printmaking with this new form. Moreover, that Rauschenberg's works could be exhibited in China's official art museums, indicates the extent to which the attitude of the Chinese government toward the Western avant-

¹⁸³ Wu Hung, *Transience, Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p 6-14

garde art was starting to change. Thus, it can be asserted that Xu Bing realized that installation art may be a government-permitted form of art, as well as an exciting new visual experience for Chinese audiences.

In conclusion, Xu Bing developed the method of printmaking, which can be understood as a form of dialogue between Western avant-garde art and traditional art.

In 1987, Xu Bing published the article ‘New Exploration and Re-Understanding of Plural Painting’ in *Meishu*, in which he compared Andy Warhol’s silkscreen prints with the repeated arrangement of Buddhist niches in The Thousand Buddha Cave and proposed that plurals and imprint forms were crucial aesthetic concepts of printmaking.¹⁸⁴ He also reassessed the traditional view that printmaking was considered a reproduction of art and not original expression of art. In his article, he argued that printmaking should be regarded as fine art. The reason why printing was not generally considered as a technique of fine art in China, is that printmaking, as elsewhere, had had primarily a practical function. Traditional Chinese woodcut printing can be divided into printed words and images. The main function of printmaking in the early twentieth century was war propaganda and mobilization. Students underwent strict training in techniques, such as studying how to transform images into black and white woodcut prints. The training of woodcut technology focused on how to use tools and materials. During the initial mastery of various

184 Xu· B, “New Exploration and Re-Understanding of Plural Painting” *in Mei Shu Newspaper* 1987 No 10, (e59-457). p.p50.

printmaking techniques, students unquestioningly accepted these common practices and rational thinking.

In contrast, Xu's new printmaking was significant. Firstly, Xu's practice broadened the scope of traditional printmaking techniques. The form and style of printmaking were no longer limited to square pictures. He produced works with a sense of structure, which were influenced by Western conceptual art. Secondly, the content was not revolutionary; it developed and expressed *his* personal ideas instead. All kinds of wild imagination or unconventional behavior could be considered to have induced his creativity. Therefore, it can be asserted that new printmaking was developed besides the traditional printmaking to make a form which was produced through the dialogue with Western modern and contemporary art, which was enabled by his engagement with art groups in Beijing.

3.4 The groups/ networks of modern and contemporary artists in Shanghai

This section demonstrates that art groups in Shanghai have been in dialogue with the West. More importantly, it shows the extent to which Cai Guo-qiang was influenced by the art groups of modern and contemporary artists in Shanghai, and how this shaped his early works.

A significant amount of research has been previously published on the topic of modern art in Shanghai, which is the largest city in the Far East in the first half of the twentieth century. Shanghai was devastated by the Cultural Revolution and struggled to recover in a short period. The Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts was China's first modern private art school founded by Liu Haisu in 1912. However, by the 1980s, it had already been closed for twenty years. Due to the nationwide college splitting movement in 1956, the Soviet school was used as a template to establish the party's actual authority in colleges and universities.¹⁸⁵ The Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts was directly annexed by East China Art College, located in Wuxi City, Jiangsu province. Therefore, Shanghai, as the largest economic city in China, did not have a truly independent academy of fine arts. In 1965, the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute was established and recruited researchers. Most researchers have previously worked as teachers and professors at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. They were orthodox realist oil painters and sculptors. It can be argued that these researchers did not teach, and the state sponsored these artists but restricted their subjects. They were just required to finish task works. For instance, Wei Jingshan and Chen Yifei, who were the most famous painters in the Shanghai Oil Painting and Sculpture Institute, still produced works about heroic military. It has been considered that the composition was novel, nevertheless the subjects was quite traditional.

185 [Anon], 2011, <<https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中国高等院校院系调整>> [Accessed Oct 2021]

The fine arts department of Shanghai University was founded in 1983, and its art teacher and professor, such as Yu Xiaofu and Tang Muli, were traditional painters, the former studied in the UK in 1988, and used realism techniques to represent the historical figure of old Shanghai.¹⁸⁶ The latter was a portrait painter, and in 1985 he went abroad and taught at the Art Department of Cornell University, and is now engaged in nude painting in Montreal.¹⁸⁷ By contrast to young teachers in Beijing, they encouraged students to explore realism art rather than contemporary art forms.

The scholarship has noted the art arena in Shanghai, for example, the essay of Zhang Lansheng *Act of Rebellion: Abstract Art in 1980s Shanghai*, dedicates a section of the text to Shanghai's social and cultural issues.¹⁸⁸ He insisted that the discussion about these issues have, in general, reminded audiences of Shanghai's semi-colonial past, including all the positive and negative connotations seemingly attached to it. However, some significant historical factors concerning the Chinese communist movement are often either used as propaganda tools by the Communist Part of China (omitted CCP). He says that 'The key facts are as follows: Shanghai was the CCP's birthplace (1921), the early cradle of the CCP-led Worker Movement (1921), and the birthplace of the League of Leftist Writers (1930). Such a historical legacy kept the CCP highly sensitive to the socio-political environment in Shanghai following the establishment

186 Yu Xiaofu (1950) 'Indices and biography of Yu Xiaofu' in Artprice.com, 2013, <<https://www.artprice.com/artist/125994/xiaofu-yu>> [Accessed in Sep 2021].

187. [Anon.], 'The Biography of Tang Muli', 2021 <https://en.wfther-fgkrg/Muli_Tang> [Accessed in Sep 2021].

188 Zhang Lansheng, 'Act of Rebellion: Abstract Art in the 1980s Shanghai', 2013 <<https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/abstract-art-in-1980-shanghai>> [Accessed in Sep 2021].

of the New China in 1949.’¹⁸⁹ Shanghai was subjected to the close control and vigilance of the CCP since 1949.

However, despite being subject to tight political surveillance, Shanghai was still an important hub for many individual artists who participated in significant exhibitions there. In terms of controls, Shanghai did not face any more restrictions than other cities in China during the 1980s. As previous scholars such as Gao Minglu, Lv Peng and Wu Hung have noted, the artists in Shanghai did in fact engage in dialogues with the West in the 1980s. It is worth noting, however, that Shanghai had fewer artist groups compared to Beijing and Hangzhou. This was partly since the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts was located in Hangzhou, which was about 160 kilometers away from Shanghai. Nonetheless, Shanghai reopened its doors in the 1990s and quickly became one of the most international cities. In fact, David Ross, the Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has even suggested that Shanghai could become the next New York of the twenty-first century.¹⁹⁰ With regards to art, Shanghai has been central to the exhibition of Western art in China, as demonstrated by the first Shanghai Art Biennale in 1996, which showed the city’s desire to integrate into globalization.

Back to the 1980s, although mainstream art was still conservative, some folk modern art exhibitions still emerged in Shanghai. In *Revisiting the abstract groups in*

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ David Ross, *Chinese Martial Arts: A Historical Outline*, 1st.ed (London: Create Space Press, 2017), pp147.

Shanghai around 1980s, art historian Zhu Qi summarized four representative modern art exhibitions in Shanghai in the 1980s, including the first modern art exhibition ‘Twelve Exhibition’ in Shanghai after the Cultural Revolution, the beginning of Scar Art, the comic strip ‘Maple’ produced by Liu Yulian, Chen Yiming and Li Bin, the first abstract art exhibition in Shanghai, China ‘83: Experimental Painting Exhibition (also known as: ten-person exhibition in the Fudan University), and ‘Gu Wenda: Modernist Experiments in Ink and Wash art’, which showed his attempts to combine traditional ink painting with abstract art styles. In fact, the avant-garde art produced in Shanghai is unique as a result of its combined strong conceptual thrust and delicate forms. It demonstrates a sensibility of painting. Like the ‘twelve artists exhibition’, these painters still have a psychological tone of the urban life of the Republic of China (1912-1949). This kind of ‘Old Keller’ tone cannot be produced by followers in other areas of China.¹⁹¹

In fact, some of young students exploring abstract art at the Department of Stage Design of Shanghai Theatre Academy, including Li Shan, Zhang Jianjun, Chen Zhen, Cha Guojun, Gao Jin, etc. Its origin can be traced back to Min Xiwen, who was a disciple of Wu Dayu in the late Cultural Revolution. Wu Dayu had studied in the L'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in 1922.¹⁹² Wu is one of the Chinese

191 Zhu Qi, *The Abstract art groups in the 1980s Shang Hai. Journal of History of Modern Art*, 1st.ed (Beijing: The century Press, 2013), null (33), pp.27-48.

192 Quoted from the introduction of Wu Dayu (2018). Available at: <<https://ocula.com/artists/wu-dayu/>> [Accessed 05 September 2021].

artists who studied in France under the work-study programme sponsored by government. He was influenced by Fauvism, Cubism and Abstract Expressionism. His work significantly pushed the abstraction movement forward in the twentieth century through expressive colours. It is with this kind of artistic heritage that Min Xiwen explored abstract art privately throughout his life. Notably, he was able to do this because he was demoted to work in the library of Shanghai Theatre Academy, which became the birthplace of abstract art in Shanghai in the 1980s.

The following content examines how Min Xiwen and other artists in Shanghai did in fact engage in dialogues with the West in the 1980s. Firstly, he found that there were many Western books about modern art in the library. It should be explained that the Shanghai Theatre Academy still had the privilege of importing Western modern and contemporary art catalogues in the Cultural Revolution.¹⁹³ Admittedly, the purpose was to assist in the creation of more dazzling stage designs rather than spread Western modern art and thought.

Secondly, it can be argued that his exploration attracted many art students in the school. As proof, Min Xiwen privately lent these precious books to Li Shan, Zhang Jianjun and other students who were interested in modern art.¹⁹⁴ By reading these imported books, students not only understood what Western modern art is, but also

¹⁹³ Zhang Lansheng, *The Act of Rebellion: Abstract Art in 1980s* (Shanghai: Shanghai People Press, 2013), pp54-57.

¹⁹⁴ Zhu Qi, Abstract art groups in the 1980s Shang Hai in *Journal of History of Modern Art* 2013, null (33), pp.27-48.

started to practice abstract paintings after class. Thus, the abstract art was spread to a small range among students in the Shanghai Theatre Academy. In *Does Abstract Art Exist in China*, James Presley claimed that in Shanghai, Yu Youhan, Ding Yi, Qin Yifeng, and Wang Zi were the first artists to create abstract works that employed dots and lines. This kind of Chinese “abstract” art, however, is crucially different from the Western modern abstract art rendered in geometric forms.¹⁹⁵ Young artists engaged with abstract art to Chinese representational and simplified motifs. The practices of Li Shan are exemplified through works such as *Order II* (Fig.3.4), in which he visually absorbed the concepts of Eastern philosophy, such as Zhouyi and Taoism.¹⁹⁶ The artist paints circles and straight lines in ink on the rice paper, responding to the views of Yin and Yang in Taoist thought. Furthermore, Zhang Jianjun’s work *Dialogue* (Fig. 3.5), depicts a type of cosmism through imitating the texture of early murals in the Northwest China, as well as absorbing calligraphy, seals and other eastern elements. In conclusion, such examples signal that Western modern art was in fact part of the Chinese art academy and that the community of artists in Shanghai were continually in dialogue with the West.

3.5 Cai Guo-qiang’s early artistic practice in Shanghai

This section is intended to illustrate the extent to which Cai Guo-qiang was influenced by the art groups of modern and contemporary artists in Shanghai, and how it shaped

¹⁹⁵ Presley, J, *Does Abstract Art Exist in China*, 2008. <<https://pollocksthebollocks.wordpress.com/>> [Accessed September 2021].

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

his early works. Cai graduated from the department of Stage Design of Shanghai Theatre Academy. During his student years, he continually focused on how to shape a dialogue with the Western painting. His works demonstrate a strong interest in Western art. This section will analyze these early works to demonstrate how he developed a personal style by borrowing from classic European painting and Soviet realism. In his autobiography, *My Painting Story*: Cai Guo-qiang himself noted the importance of Western art, claiming ‘I like to imitate the most respected Western artist El Greco (Spanish for ‘the Greek’). Is his magical brushwork and mystery landscape that reminds me of my hometown, Quanzhou? Or is there an aloof personality in El Greco’s painting? I don’t know.’¹⁹⁷ He produced a portrait the *Classmate* (Fig. 3.6) in 1982, which fully demonstrates the possibility of his combination of El Greco’s deformed art style on the Chinese portrait. Cai’s *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 3.7) tried to add distorted bodies, dramatic colours, and arresting light, which were learned from El Greco’s painting *A Nobleman with his Hand on his Chest* (Fig. 3.8). As Cai again claims, ‘I simply wanted to paint as good as the Western masters in black-and-white printed books.’¹⁹⁸ From such personal explanations, we might assume that Cai has no interests in exploring abstract art which has been regarded the avant-garde art style by art groups in Shanghai; in contrast, Cai has one purpose, which is to learn from the impressive Western masters.

197 Guoqiang, Cai., *My Painting Story*. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Li Xianghuo Press, 2015), pp.26-32.

198 Ibid.

Although the artist tried to explore Western artists such as El Greco, there is also much impact of Western Expressionism on Cai's early works. *Sunset at the Great Wall* (Fig. 3.9), for example, is a socialist piece created in 1987. In it he used earthy brown and amber colors, together with burgundy, to carefully illustrate the beautiful Great Wall under sunset. A few brushstrokes outline several pigeons flying over the sky, suggesting that the peace in China did not come easily. The Great Wall stretched along the mountains into the distance that the end is not visible to our eyes. Both the interesting composition and the rich color selections signal the artist's admiration of his homeland China. Although Cai Guo-qiang's painting conforms primarily to the 'rules' of Chinese socialist art production, and must be considered a realist work, it also combines some formal elements of Western Expressionism, such as exaggeration and fantasy.

In the mid-1980s, Cai still passionately produced art works about the Chinese landscape. This is evidenced by another early work, *Sea of Spring* (Fig. 3.10), which uses watercolor to express naturalism. In it we see waves and a fisher girl sitting calmly beside a boat. In the distance is a sunset on the horizon. It is a local landscape of the artist's hometown of Fujian Province China. The woman wearing the blue headscarf is called a Hui'an girl. (Hui'an country is a hometown of overseas Chinese in southern Fujian Province and the blue headscarf is the traditional costume of local fishermen.) Hui'an girls were hard working and honest in the artist's childhood

memory, most of them are engaged in fishing industry.¹⁹⁹ There are many artworks that focused on the theme of a fishing girl in southeast coastal areas China at that time. Cai mentioned in an interview that he traveled to cities of China for several months. Cai went to the desolate plateau and witness the golden deserts in Xinjiang where the local culture and people made a great impression on him.²⁰⁰ Thus, it can be asserted that the indigenized theme of Chinese socialist art creation shaped his early works, that is, to experience the lives of people in remote areas through painting, expressing their living conditions. Meanwhile, this work also synthesizes expressionist (western) influences, as in the *Sea of Spring* (Fig. 3.10), we nonetheless see elements of expressionistic styling such as depicting the subjective emotions and highly textured in application.

In conclusion, as we have seen, Cai Guo-qiang encountered, and was excited by, artworks by Western artists in China, and focused on learning the techniques and style of them. As he described his college life, ‘Shanghai has made my thought change in four years. It was an era of active thinking. I listened to many lectures on Western philosophy and aesthetics. I went to the Huangpu District Fighting Team to train every night. Although I carefully lay the foundation of painting in class and painted conservatively, my classmates younger than me have already joked about my art

199 As quoted from the introduction of *Hui-A girl* Available at <<https://zh.chinese culture.org/65336/Hui-An girl /72/45> > [Accessed 05 September 2021].

200 Guoqiang, Cai, *My Painting Story*.pp.78-85.

works, ‘You will be a master!’²⁰¹ It should be explained that Cai continued to explore Western artistic styles throughout his career. Nonetheless, of note is the fact that in spite of this, he did not take up new trends in art, such as abstraction, nor did he participate in group exhibitions or in activities to promote democracy. Be that as it may, his early works did begin a dialogue with Western art, which was partly shaped by the art community in Shanghai.

3.6 Zhang Xiaogang’s early artistic practice in Chongqing

The city Chongqing is a municipality located within Sichuan Province, Southwest China, but its structure is substantially different from the other municipalities. For instance, the area of Chongqing is thirteen times that of Shanghai. The vast majority of the Chongqing area is still rural. During the ‘85 New Wave Movement’, the political atmosphere for art production in Sichuan was more liberal than that in Beijing. Several artists formed a research group on art in the Chongqing and Sichuan province. They called themselves the ‘New Figurative’ group, which included Hei Duoling, Zhou Chunyu, Luo Zhongli, Gao Xiaohua, and Cheng Conglin.²⁰² Gao Minglu was the core promoter and theoretical supporter of the ‘Rational Painting’ that emerged in the 1980s in China. In his volume ‘The 85 Movement’, Gao splits the many artistic collectives that appeared throughout the 85 period into two general tendencies, the ‘Rational Wave’ and the ‘Current of Life’, assigning to the former

²⁰¹ Guoqiang, Cai, *My Painting Story*. pp.126-129.

²⁰² Abigail Fitzgibbons, ‘Zhang Xiaogang:Biography’ (March 2009). in China Project. Queensland Art Gallery. pp. 242–255.

collectives the Northern Art Group, the Pond Society in Zhejiang, and the Red Brigade in Jiangsu. For Gao, Rational Painting enjoyed a complementary relationship with the 'Current of Life' of the Southern artistic collectives. His praise for Rational Painting was unconcealed, holding that the 'emotions of disturbance and catharsis incited (by the 'Current of Life') may be transformed into active social elements but, in the long term, are not conducive to the calm analysis and critique of reality or the construction of a new culture and ideal society'.²⁰³ Thus, the purpose of criticizing the 'Current of Life' is to praise rational painting, that is, a kind of gentle painting style.

The Southwestern art group's exploration of individual styles and rejection of collectivist rationalization through their 'Anti-urban regionalism' movement was a significant foundation for the Chinese avant-garde movement. Their self-funded exhibitions were pivotal in showcasing their works and gaining recognition. It is important to note that the classification of the Southwestern art group was based on later achievements by Zhang Xiaogang and other art critics, which aimed to emphasize their importance. The works of Zhang Xiaogang and his contemporaries were heavily influenced by Western art, which will be visually analyzed in chapter four. It is also worth mentioning the importance of Chongqing in fostering artistic talent and providing a platform for the Southwestern art group's exhibitions, as the city played a crucial role in the development of contemporary Chinese art.

²⁰³ Gao, Minglu, *Zhongguo dang dai*, 1991, Pp230-232.

Conclusion

Overall, the chapter three has discussed the cities and local groups for modern and contemporary art in China and assessed the four artists' relationships to them. In the process, it has made the case that it is essential to understand how Chinese artists made their career – either as individuals or as members of a group – and that such early practices and experiences were shaped, to varying extents, by dialogues with the West. The analysis of different art groups covers the artistic practices in major cities Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing, and how they formed dialogues with Western art in these locales. It greatly facilitates the reader's awareness of how art groups in China have continually been in dialogue with the West, and it demonstrates that the work of the case study artists for this thesis was also influenced by these groups, enabling them to engage with Western modern and contemporary art in China.

Chapter Four: Painting and the engagement with the West by modern artists in the 1980s

Introduction

Various Western painting styles were introduced to China after society opened in the 1980s, including Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Surrealism, Photorealism and Dadaism.²⁰⁴ The independent art forms including installation art and performance were also introduced to China, such as through the exhibition of Rauschenberg's work, discussed earlier, which expanded the scope of visual culture in the country substantially in the 1980s.²⁰⁵ These Western artworks and movements were referenced by art groups all over China, which impacted various facets of Chinese art and in turn promoted the diversification of it.

Much scholarly attention has been paid to modern Chinese art. For example, some critics hold the positive view that young Chinese artists produced some of the most significant work of this era through learning from Western arts.²⁰⁶ Within a decade, they learned Western modern and post-modern art that had developed in the past century in the west. However, the opposing view argues that the development of modern Chinese art is based on Western art. Such artists are framed as simply imitating Western modern art while ignoring the originality. Critics argue that the mimicry of Western art cannot produce the 'true Chinese modern art', because the

204 Gao, Minglu, *Zhongguo dang dai*, Pp235-245.

205 Gao minglu "85 mei shu yun dong (in Chinese), '85 art movement". 1st ed. (Gui lin: Guang xi shi fan Press, 2008), pp.62-64.

206 Ibid.

practice would undermine the independence of Chinese modern art and give the ultimate authority over taste and value judgments to the West.²⁰⁷ Thus, they emphasized the dualistic relationship between Western and Chinese art by arguing that, historically, Western painting has conveyed information directly, while for traditional Chinese painting, information is hidden and less detailed.²⁰⁸ In contrast to these perspectives, the emphasis of this chapter is on the visual analysis of modern Chinese artworks by the four case study artists, with the aim of challenging this interpretation of Chinese artists' engagement with Western art.

It is common for art historians writing on Chinese art to make the above distinction (learning versus imitating) based on where artists reside – for instance, inside China or outside China. However, in the previous chapter, the factors regarding the place of education in the context of art education in China have been analyzed to demonstrate that dialogues between the West and China already existed through arts education and the formation of groups. I have indicated that Chinese painters could not avoid the influence of the Western art in China, even before the 1980s. As a result, we can assert that in an era of frequent exchanges between China and Western countries, the location – whether an artist remained in or left China – is no longer the main factor that makes a difference to an engagement with the West.

207 Wang, W. 'Chinese contemporary art should establish its own modernity.' In *China Daily*, 2009, no 3. Pp.117-118.

208 Wang, Y, *Fa xian dong fang*. 1st ed. (Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she Press, 2011), pp.45-55.

Building on chapter one, two, and three, this chapter four will focus on the engagement with the West by modern Chinese artists, particularly through painting. It will highlight Zhang Xiaogang, one of the several key artists, as he is a representative artist who engaged in painting. The other three key artists' artworks are only briefly mentioned here because they had already left China at this moment and were primarily known for work in installation art in the west, and these practices will be discussed further in the following chapter. Alongside Zhang, this chapter will analyze a broader range of artists who engaged in painting, as they were engaged with both Chinese media and subjects while also having a dialogue with Western art in China, to varying degrees. As part of the mainstream form of artistic expression in China in the 1980s, they had a profound impact on Zhang, as well as, less directly, the other case study artists, and stimulated their creativity. Through visual analysis, this chapter demonstrates that a very broad range of artists were influenced by Western art, like the nineteenth-century French Rural paintings, which has inspired many modern Chinese artists. Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to challenge the dualistic view of Chinese and Western art, and to unpack their cultural hybridity in the 1980s and 1990s.

My focus here is shaped by the writing of Hung, Wu, who has noted that production in China at this moment was marked by traditional painting, where artists emphasized

the theme of local culture.²⁰⁹ This chapter illustrates how their works mutually related to Western artworks after China had just opened to foreign countries in the 1980s and 1990s, and how Chinese modern artists influenced each other stylistically. In place Zhang's practice in a broader context, this chapter includes artists such as Zhou Sicong, Yan Binghui, and Gu Wenda, who engaged in Chinese ink painting, and Hei Duoling, Chen Danqin and Zhang Xiaogang who worked in oil painting. I will also consider the influence of nineteenth-century French paintings on Chinese art, in order to demonstrate a more complex picture of the influence of Western art on Chinese contemporary artists than previous scholarship allows.

The challenge in researching this thesis area is that it is difficult to find accounts of artists openly discussing their imitation of Western paintings. While biographies can be rich sources for art historians, we should treat them as critically as any other source. In recent years, some rediscovered Chinese artists' imitations of Western art in the 1980s have caused controversy, with Belgium-based artist Christian Silvain claiming that Ye Yongqin has been copying his works since the early-1990s.²¹⁰ Ye Yongqing and Zhang Xiaogang were regarded as representative figures of the 'Southwest Art Group' during the '1985' art trend. In response, Ye stated that he has been deeply influenced by Silvain for years.²¹¹ Whether or not these approaches can be considered plagiarism or imitation is not the focus of this thesis. Instead, this chapter is

209 Hung, Wu. *Exhibiting experimental art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). pp82-87.

210 Artasiapacific.com. 2021. ArtAsiaPacific: Christian Silvain Accuses Ye Yongqing of Plagiarism.

<<http://artasiapacific.com/News/ChristianSilvainAccusesYeYongqingOfPlagiarism>> [Accessed 01 August 2021].

211 Jiehong, Jiang "Chinese artist Ye Yongqing breaks silence in plagiarism row", in South China Morning Post.

<<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3002228/chinese-plagiarism-row>> [Accessed August 2021].

concerned with illuminating instances of dialogue and inspiration between Chinese artists and the West, rather than adhering to unproductive binaries of imitation. The overall focus of this chapter is on close visual analysis of the artworks under consideration to discern such dialogues, guided implicitly by the postcolonial methodology outlined in the thesis introduction, which will be addressed explicitly in the next chapter to unpack the cultural hybridity of these artists and their works in more detail.

4.1 The influence of Western art on modern artists in China

4.1.1 Ink painting

This section establishes the exchanges and dialogues between Chinese art and Western painting through a consideration of Chinese artists' adaptations and innovations relating to ink painting. Ink painting is considered a significant national type of Chinese work by the Western artworld. Ink painters who use brush, ink, paper or other oriental materials to produce their works are considered to have inherited the tradition of Chinese painting.²¹² During the second half of the twentieth century, the problem of traditional ink painting hindering the development of the country was raised, where it was criticized as an art form of national decline.²¹³ However, some artists transformed traditional ink painting into modern ink painting, such as Zhou

212 Kuo, Jiexia, *Chinese ink painting now*. 1st ed. (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Press, 2010), pp166-170

213 Pan, Gong, *Zhongguo xian dai mei shu zhi lu* 1st ed. (Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she Press, 2012), pp262-269.

Sicong, Gu Wenda and Ma Deshen, who inspired and borrowed from various styles of Western modern painting - specifically, Expressionism and Surrealism. For instance, Zhou Sicong's ink painting *The Woman Who Sell Wine Vessel* (1984) (Fig. 4.1), which depicts the life of the Yi ethnic group in Liangshan, Sichuan province. The Yi is an ethnic minority of more than 4,000 people in Southwestern China, with their own written script and language. In the image, two women dressed in traditional minority costumes sell wine containers made of lacquer. During festivals, weddings, sacrifices and other important events, the Yi people all use the handmade wine vessel to drink and sing. The painting presents fragmentation and historical vicissitudes. Figures are deformed deliberately by Zhou and the background is divided geometrically, which seems to misappropriate Cubist compositions. It can be inferred that the artist may be familiar with Picasso's artistic style and imitated it to give her painting a modern 'feeling'. She expresses her own cultural experience in the style of Western painting, rather than in realism.

It is worth reflecting on the use of Cubist-derived aspects to depict the traditions and practices of an ethnic group to which she did not belong. Zhou Sicong had received strict traditional painting training which is specifically focused on the depiction of figures and flowers.²¹⁴ As a result, she hybridizes Western modern art style with subjects of an ethnic minority group, to provide a new visual experience in China. In

214 Gao minglu "85 mei shu yun dong (in Chinese), '85 art movement". 1st ed. (Gui lin: Guang xi shi fan ta xue chu ban she 2008), pp.62-64.

fact, though it may seem, to some viewers, to be a simplistic hybrid artwork today, Sicong was committed to exploring the Cubistic style and was also regarded as a reformer of traditional ink painting. As a result, it could be asserted that her approach was to bring a seemingly ‘conservative’ style up to date, rather than simply subvert it.

Another artist whose works exhibit a direct influence from Western art is Yan Binghui. He was born in Tianjin, where he also graduated from university in 1988, and became a professor in the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. His ink painting *The Sun Suites*, (1984) (Fig. 4.2) seems to be an abstract painting. In fact, it is an expressionist work that expresses his feelings about the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which is the area on Earth that is the shortest distance from the Sun. The *jiangsuhuakan* magazine (1986) introduced Yan Binghui’s work which shows the bravery, strong character, and exuberant vitality of the Tibetan people through the image of the sun.²¹⁵ It is an unfamiliar and intriguing visual experience to most viewers. The *Sun Suites* was inspired by Van Gogh’s famous work *Sunflowers*; specifically, Yan referenced van Gogh’s composition and reproduced it in ink. Compared to Van Gogh, the image depicted by the Yan Binghui was far away from the sunflower, in that the petals were depicted like sun rays, which is to convey the feeling of heat. These images bring a new visual experience to Chinese audiences because the rays or snowy mountain is not a ubiquitous subject in traditional ink painting. It can be asserted that Binghui’s

²¹⁵ Peng Lei, “Modern ink painting” in *jiangsuhuakan*, magazine, 1986, no33(2).

engagement is similar to Sicong's; both examples demonstrate the engagement with aspects of Western modern art by artists inside China.

Unlike the two previous artists, Gu Wenda's painting is more unique. He was influenced by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud and others. Gu Wenda draws on the passion, criticism of traditional morality, and subconsciousness in their writings, and he emphasized similar content in his own productions.²¹⁶ This is evidenced in *The Totem and the Era of Taboos* (Fig. 4.3), which draws, for its title, on the similar name of Freud's text. The images are also inspired by Freud's thought, such as the 'taboo', which represent two aspects: the sublime and the sacred on the one hand and, on the other, the mysterious, dangerous and forbidden.²¹⁷ Gu implies various 'taboos' in China, such as the prohibition of loud noise, spitting and the smoking through painting. Specifically, he depicts the spoken language of life written in Chinese characters, and two sides of the picture are rendered in dark gray by ink. The content on the left is read as "prohibited from loud noises and smoking", and on the right the words read as "prohibition of spitting and the prohibition of throwing garbage everywhere". The three figures in the middle, from top to bottom, symbolize lips, spittoons, and cigarettes. The 'X' and 'O' symbol are also drawn on it. Gu reproduces these symbols in public places and outdoors in China with ink painting. Through these elements, the work takes on the appearance not so much of an ink painting but

²¹⁶ Gu, Wenda, 1997. *Wenda Gu*. 1st, ed. Taipei: Hanart Gallery, pp34-39.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

of a poster, which implies a variety meaning. On the one hand, it evokes the taboos imposed by policymakers in order to question whether we have the right to do these behaviors. On the other hand, the contents of work are absurd, ridiculous, anti-traditional, and so challenge the inherent aesthetic and appreciation habits of Chinese ink painting. It should explain that Chinese ink painting used to be considered as the art of Chinese intellectuals, but Gu's ink painting above has broken this tradition and was no longer featured as the art of scholars.

It can be assumed that Gu was influenced by American Pop Art, particularly as Gu expresses the ideas that art should return to daily life in a way that is similar to Andy Warhol's view.²¹⁸ In addition, his work was also inspired by Robert Rauschenberg, who, as mentioned in Chapter three, held an exhibition at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing 1985. Rauschenberg used newspapers, advertisements, trademarks, film and television images, cartoons to produce works.²¹⁹ It made Gu aware of a new approach which was to reproduce symbols of daily life in ink painting. Compared with Zhou Sicong and Yan Binghui, Gu Wenda is more critical, influenced by Western philosophy, and explicitly concerned with pursuing the freedom of speech and the liberation of creation.

Although these examples of ink painting maintained a relationship to 'Chinese

²¹⁸ Li Xian Ting coined the term 'political pop' in 1993 in his essay 'Major Trends in the development of contemporary Chinese art' in *China's New art post-1989*.

²¹⁹ *Rauschenberg in China*, exhibition, UCCA, Beijing, 2018.

tradition' in forms, the Western influences have a significant presence here as well. In the past, most critics have overlooked the Western influences on modern ink painting. For instance, Gao Minglu (*History of Chinese Modern Art, 1979-1989*) does not mention the revival of ink painting, because he contends that ink painting cannot be used to deal with contemporary issues.²²⁰ However, these examples above have examined artists who either extract meaningful contemporary symbols and questions from the original images of traditional painting or inject content of Western modern art into them. As I have demonstrated above, took onboard Western ideas to create new ink paintings. These works are not a 'Westernisation' of traditional 'Chinese' art forms, but emerge from sustained, individual dialogues between art forms from both places. It can also be asserted that such works challenged the traditional ink painting, breaking its fixed image and specification, such as trees, rocks as well as its pattern, and adding hybrid content in painting. Thus, their works, to some extent, shows a cultural hybridity, producing new art forms which were influenced by the Western art.

4.1.2 Oil painting

In contrast to the ink painters who used Cubism and Post-Impressionism to transform ink painting, most Chinese young artists preferred to express Chinese content and themes in oil painting and printmaking. One reason for this is that oil painting and printmaking are regarded as a Western technique, so the artist who uses oil or

²²⁰ Gao, Minglu, *Zhongguo dang dai*, 1991, pp70-87.

printmaking materials mean that they will no longer be ‘bound’ by traditional Chinese painting skills.²²¹ The second reason is that the turn to oils and printmaking occurred at the end of the twentieth century due to the influence of geopolitics, such as the Eastern European Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chinese artists, like other people who used to live in the communist nations, craved more equality, and they assumed that using the same materials as Western artists would allow them to achieve this by working on the same stage and with the same materials as foreign artists. At the same time, the content and subject matters addressed modern Chinese culture and society, and they emphasize the traditional value of painting, including stable structure and beautiful lines. In other words, Chinese modern artists were firmly committed to expressing the local themes in Western artforms.²²² As a result, new works appeared in the 1980s, which was called ‘Scar art’, ‘New literati art’, ‘Neoclassical School’, ‘New college art’, and ‘Contemporary ink painting’.²²³ These terms seem ‘new’ in Chinese art history, but all are, in some way, hybrid art forms. They transformed Chinese painting with Western techniques, while preserving references to traditional culture and subjects at the same time.

For instance, *The Youth* (Fig. 4.4) and *Spring Has Come Round* (Fig. 4.5), produced by Hei-Duoling, are representative works of these developments in painting. On the one hand, their composition and style were influenced by Western art, such as the

221 Wu Hung and Wang, P, *Contemporary Chinese Art*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), no page number.

222 Li, Shi. ‘Looking at art and politics in contemporary China’, *Modern China Studies* 18.2 (2011), pp.162-172.

223 Ibid.

twentieth-century American movement of Regionalism as well as Social Realism. On the other hand, these works were regarded by critics to reflect on the Cultural Revolution in China.²²⁴ It should be briefly explained here how these seemingly beautiful and innocuous images imply the injury of the Cultural Revolution. It is because the characters are dressed in the standard uniforms of cotton cloth. In *The Youth* (Fig. 4.4), the girl who was supposed to go to school, but had nothing to do in the countryside, suggests that the revolution deprived students of the right to receive an education.²²⁵ The following section provides a visual analysis of artworks to demonstrate how Chinese modern artist brought the ‘denied’ culture into the dominant discourse, and alienated the foundations of its authority, creating a hybrid art in the process.

Specifically, *The Youth* (Fig. 4.4) presents a white bird of prey casting a shadow, and a rock cutting into the composition on the right appears as an alien object. The girl in the center image looks sad and dazed on her face. She sits in a bare ruin of the sun, forming a symbolic icon with the white bird. The hidden meaning is that schools were closed, and the girl, who was supposed to go to school, had nothing to do in the countryside. Students were banished to the countryside during the ten-year Cultural Revolution. The notable features are gray tones appear to reinforce this boredom and convey the sad, lonely and desolate emotions. Similarly, the painting *Spring Has*

224 Lv, Peng. *The history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University press, 2010), pp.120-135.

225 Haiming, L, “Scar art”. in *The Chinese Art Newspaper*, 1988, No 5(37), pp.290-290.

Come Round is a work done in a realist painting style, which depicts a homely and poetic rural scene with a girl sitting on the grass. The buffalo and dog are her pets. Broad dry grass is turning green, hinting at the arrival of spring. Through an examination of historical evidence, it can be suggested that *Spring Has Come Round* imitated the work of Andrew Wyeth. *Christina's World* (Fig. 4.6) is one of the best-known paintings by Wyeth, an American modern painter. It depicts a woman semi-reclining on the ground in a treeless, mostly tawny field, looking up at a gray house on the horizon; a barn and various other small outbuildings are adjacent to the house.²²⁶

Through a visual comparison to *the Christina's World*, we can see that *Spring Has Come Round* depicts similar characters and landscapes in the composition of the painting. It can be inferred that Hei-Duoling has knew the story in *Christina's World* and sought to make use of the sense of moment, lonely atmosphere, and some realist techniques in the original painting, because there are undoubtedly close relationships between both paintings.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to determine that this kind of exchange was by no means entirely straightforward. Hei-Duoling had no opportunity to see the original works of Andrew Wyeth in the 1980s. He encountered Wyeth's work through

226 *Christina's World* in the MoMA Online Collection 2016. <<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78455>> [available at Jan 2022]

journals, such as *Jiangsu Art Monthly* and *The Trend of Art Thought* (all titles are in Chinese), which led him to pay attention to the details in the original work while combining them with the techniques of Soviet realism, which were part of artistic education and training as we have seen. Moreover, Wyeth used temper as his medium, but Chinese imitators did not know what egg tempera was. Additionally, the original work was painted on panel, but Hei-Duoling used canvases instead. Compared with *Christina's World*, Hei-Duoling's work revealed more believable details, with every blade of grass, every fold of clothing, and animal hair carefully depicted. Nevertheless, it brings to light how 'modern' Chinese artists had a dialogue with Western art in adaptive and specific ways, while also engaging with Chinese subjects.

Although Hei-Duoling's work appears, on the surface, to be a simple mimicry of the appearance of Western art, the work reflects that the artist brought the 'denied' culture of the other into the dominant discourse and alienated the foundations of its authority. The resulting artworks can, as a result, be considered hybrid, the products of complex and intentional negotiations by the artist. Thus, it can be asserted that the Chinese modern artists have created a hybrid art in painting at this point in the 1980s.

4.2 Case Study: Zhang Xiaogang's work

Following the above discussion of the developments in Chinese painting in the 1980s, this section turns to Zhang Xiaogang's work and explores how it negotiates a

similarly hybrid approach to painting at this particular moment (1978-1999). As above, this section provides a close visual analysis of key artworks, informed by a postcolonial methodology that can assist in unpacking their cultural hybridity.

In chapter one, it was demonstrated that Zhang received a realist art education in China and the discussion introduced his early work *Painting of Grassland* (Fig.1.7). This analysis confirmed that he was familiar with Western art and philosophical theories. He would have been aware that, in Europe, the rise of Expressionism is typically viewed as being in opposition to academic and classicism. The modernity of such a movement was in opposition to classical culture and art, which is considered orderly and contains hierarchical values.²²⁷ Thus the realist painting of Hei-Duoling may have appeared as an outdated style for Zhang Xiaogang. In contrast, he pursued Western Expressionism in the work, *Forever Lasting Love* (Fig. 4.7). The title, *Forever Lasting Love*, relates to the artist's feeling in traveling on the Tibetan Plateau with his partner. He reflects on a complex connection between the life, death, and love in nature. The artist explains in his autobiography that 'This painting is built upon the dichotomy of life and death; thus, I titled the name of *Forever Lasting Love*'.²²⁸ As seen in the left panel (Fig.4.9), the structure of the painting was meticulously contrived. Skulls of cows and goats, derived from his memory of Tibetan excursion, are complemented with a simplified male figure, the artist's proxy, and his female

227 V.L. Zolberg, 2001, International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, <<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/masteryart1/chapter/oer>> [Accessed February 2021].

228 Zhang, X. and Wang, G, *Zhang Xiaogang*. 1st ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press,2016), pp.60-69.

companion. Animals and plants are both forms of life, so are human beings, who happen to fall in love. They come into conflict or look into each other's eyes. The juxtaposition of a baby against corpses lying underground symbolizes the coexistence of life and death. The featured couple in the image corresponds to himself and his partner. It can be asserted that Zhang is seeking to depict a transformative image, both in content and theme, out of a style that challenged traditional or academic painting.

Zhang used the triptych format to distill a story in *Forever Lasting Love*. This choice was made because three images next to each other can tell a more dramatic story than just a single one. In other words, the triptych format enables three unrelated images to be distilled into a single story and presented in chronological order. His practice with triptychs was presumably inspired by Francis Bacon's *Three Studies for a Crucifixion* (Fig. 4.8), which depicted figures twisting in anguish.²²⁹ It should question here, how did the artist has access to these dark, weird, terrifying, and even bloody images, as it would have been impossible for such images to be encountered in China in the 1980s. The probable reason is Yang Qian, Zhang's friend, had studied in the United States since 1984 and maintained connection with him through letters.²³⁰ So, it is reasonable to believe that Zhang has understood the movement and formats in Europe and the United States in the 1980s. In addition to the triptych format presumably derived from

229 Three Studies for a Crucifixion by Francis Bacon, *The New York Times*, April 2002, online, < <https://www.icon.com/en/three-studies-for-a-crucifixion-by-francis-bacon/> > [Accessed 28 February 2019].

230 Li, X and Ding, D. *Recording History with Lens* (in Chinese), Dialogue in *Change in China: 1976-1986*, (Hang Zhou: Zhejiang Photography Press, 2003), pp. 156-172.

Bacon, it is also instructive to find Zhang also using similar compositions, particularly in the middle of the picture, where Bacon depicted three square black blocks. Similarly, Zhang depicted three rectangular forms, which represent tombs, and inside lies two couples who seem to be buried together. Moreover, both images express the theme of death and life in method of painting.

In addition, Zhang may have used sources other than Bacon, as the intuitive feeling is that he was also influenced by post-Impressionism, such as the work of Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. There is some supporting evidence for the statement. In the painting *Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* (Fig.4.10) Paul Gauguin depicted an expansive view of Tahiti in blue and green. Similarly, Zhang's landscape expressed the Tibetan landscape in milky yellow and brown. Both canvases are huge in size with a sense of originality, mysteriousness, and make reference to religious themes. Paul Gauguin depicted a vibrant baby on the far right, and on the far left is a dying old woman. In the middle, the man picking the fruits and the girl eating the fruits seem to symbolize Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which represent the ancestors and life of human beings. Similarly, as discussed above, Zhang's work relates to the lives of the Tibetan people and a personal, perhaps spiritual, understanding of life and death.

Although the series might have been classified as 'realist painting' in the past, Zhang

removes some of realist painting skills he had learned in the Academy of Fine Arts. For instance, he applies flat perspective to the space that his characters occupy and sought to express his personal emotions and subjective colours in the same way as Paul Gauguin, which was rarely attempted by Chinese artists in the 1980s. Because Zhang has read Sigmund Freud's books on psychoanalytic theories, he focuses on illustrating the abstract world in human's subconscious and trying to combine ideas in the real world with instinct and dreams. Thus, departing from the previous work *Painting of Grassland*, the painting *Forever Lasting Love* represents Zhang's most concerted effort at creating a work that builds on his research into Mysticism, as well as Surrealism which focuses on his meditation on the condition of humanity.

It can be concluded that *Forever Lasting Love* is an instance of cultural hybridity in that it mingles traditional subjects like the Tibetan Plateau with a self-reflexive content that is influenced by European Post-Impressionist artists like Paul Gauguin as well as contemporary Expressionist artists like Francis Bacon. It demonstrates that Zhang were deeply engaged with Chinese subjects, but was seeking to depict them via an active, sustained engagement with Western art – both artists exhibited in China and those encountered through communications with contemporaries who had left the country.

4.3 The influence of French Landscape Paintings on Chinese art

This section considers the influence of the nineteenth-century French rural landscape paintings on Chinese art in the 1980s. In doing so, it provides a close visual analysis of the artworks made by Chinese modern artists and makes use of postcolonial methodology to unpacks their cultural hybridity. It will demonstrate that these rural paintings have inspired a large number of modern Chinese artists including Zhang Xiaogang.

According to Gao Minglu, it was a trend for Chinese artists to take different approaches to visualize rural subject matter after the Cultural Revolution.²³¹ Many of these works depicted the common landscapes and figures of ethnic areas, such as Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet.²³² This is because Chinese artists realized that ethnic groups areas, such as the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Yi ethnic groups in Yunnan, and the grasslands of Xinjiang have unique natural landscapes and traditional customs. As seen in paintings *The Woman Who Sell Wine Vessel* (Fig. 4.1), Zhang Xiaogang's *the Grassland* (Fig. 1.7), as well as Chen Daqing's *the Shepherd* (Fig. 4.14), the content of these paintings was often several people dressed in ethnic costumes, standing in a wide landscape, composed of a stable structure. The scholarship has drawn attention to these ethnic subject painting and called them the local realistic. The previous works have researched the local realist paintings in China and reflected on

231 Cheng, Q., magazine: *Zhongguo xian dai mei shu*, 2012., No 3-11.

232 Gao, Minglu, *Chinese commemorative art* Pp193-195.

how the art moves away from politics.²³³ This critical argument is reasonable because most Chinese artists were accustomed to avoiding political theme in the 1980s, and the landscapes are relatively ‘safe’ subjects in politics compared to works with narrative plots.

However, this thesis contends that the ‘Local Realist Paintings’ with ethnic minority-themes were in fact inspired by Western art. It is a trend for Chinese artists to explore the West and combine it with the ‘Eastern’ context in the 1980s, as we have already seen. Through a visual comparison, it is possible to argue that the composition and style of ‘Local Realist Paintings’ were influenced by the exhibition *French 19th century rural landscape paintings* in the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, March 1978. This exhibition, which has been discussed in previous scholarship, is considered significant in that it was the first time that original realistic paintings were exhibited outside the Soviet Union style in China.²³⁴ The exhibition was organized by the French Ministry of Culture and sixty artists were shown, such as Camille Corot, Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet.²³⁵ It had a large influence in China. The contemporary artists above saw the exhibition, including some of case study artists who later became famous in the West. For example, Xu Bing recalled, ‘The painting depicted rural landscapes were reminiscent of my experience as an urban youth sent

233 Ibid.

234 Zhang, X. and Wang, G, *Zhang Xiaogang*, ‘French 19th Century Rural Landscape Paintings’ in *Zhongguo dang dai*. 1st ed. (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), pp.145-150.

235 Ibid.

to the countryside for re-education between 1974 and 1977.²³⁶ Moreover, Cai Guoqiang saw the exhibition of original works as well, as he recalled,

It is the first time I saw foreign works, Monet, Pissarro, Corot, and a little Fauvism. Although it is realism oriented, I clearly realized that different styles of painters in the same era. After seen these works, I liked to introduce these names of Millet, Courbet and Corot to my friends, and imitating French paintings.²³⁷

Clearly, these French paintings were extremely influential in China. And following this, it can be argued that these paintings were, in turn, particularly influential on young artists. This was in part because French landscape painting was a new style to Chinese artists – before that, the dominant style had been Soviet Realism and students constantly studied works by Soviet and Russian painters to improve techniques.²³⁸ Therefore, it can be asserted that the French Impressionist and Post-Impressionism was an eye opener in contrast. These French rural paintings in China were seen as an advanced art form by Chinese artists during the 1980s. By imitating French paintings, they gradually deviated from the realist painting with communist ideology.

Through visual analysis, this section brings to light how the Chinese artists found

236 As quoted in the Xu Bing: *my true text in Chinese: 我的真文字*, 1st ed. by Li Cheng, (Beijing: Zhong Xing press, 2015), pp.272.

237 Guoqiang, Cai, *My Painting Story*. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Li Xianghuo Press, 2015), pp.55-60.

238 Ren. 2015, *The Development of New China's Film Education* (Beijing) (in Chinese)

<http://www.bfa.edu.cn/xygk/node_32.htm > [Accessed Jan 2020].

inspirations from Western art in the exhibition and combined it with ‘Eastern’ contexts. For example, this can be seen in the series of *Tibetan Group Paintings* (Fig. 4.12) (Fig.4.14), made by Chen Danqing and *The Painting of Grassland* (Fig. 1.7) made by Zhang Xiaogang. Chen’s *Tibetan Group Paintings* includes seven realist paintings, which depicted the faithful pilgrims, the nursing mother and son, and the male with bare back on canvas.²³⁹ It was influenced by Jean Francois Millet, who was included in the sixty artists exhibited at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing in March 1978. According to the catalogue of exhibition, Millet’s *Feeding the Young* (1850) (Fig. 4.11) and *The Spinner, Goatherd Auvergne* (1869) (Fig. 4.13) were hung in the gallery.²⁴⁰ These paintings depict ordinary rural scenes or agricultural life in France. Chen studied the content, techniques and compositions of Millet’s works and his works indicated the influence of the European style of painting. The painting *Shepherd* (Fig. 4.14), one of Chen’s Tibetan group series, depicted a couple embracing and kissing, and has been considered the first painting to break through the shackles of sexual repression after the Cultural Revolution.²⁴¹ However, it can be argued that *The Shepherd* was obviously influenced by the Barbizon schools which inspired by the Romantic movement’s search for solace in nature.²⁴²

Firstly, the subject of *The Shepherd* is like Millet’s *The Spinner, Goatherd Auvergne*,

239 Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling city: Guangxi University Press, 2010), pp.98-100.

240 Ibid

241 Gao, Minglu, *China Today*, Pp178-190.

242 Daniel Bouguier, *Important French paintings of Barbizon schools*. 1st ed. New York: Arthur Tooth & Sons1990., pp.1-5.

which indicated that the artist was inspired by Millet and focused on the agricultural life. China used to be an agricultural country with many farmers, and artists could easily depict the scenes of agricultural work around them. Secondly, Chen seems to capture the emotion of pure love in the *Feeding the Young* (1850), in which Millet depicted three naïve children waiting for their mother to take turns feeding. And then Chen tried to express similar emotion in *The Mother and Son* (Fig.4.12), which depicted three Tibetan children who were cared for by their mothers and sat under tents. It sought to convey the strength, wildness and bravery of the Tibetan people, who are depicted here shabbily dressed and living in adverse conditions. Specifically, The narrative between the characters is simple and affectionate. This is different from the political style conveyed in the Cultural Revolution art. As seen in the *mother and son* and *The Shepherd*, Chen made use of gray-green and brown colours to show natural emotion in place of revolutionary passions. Thirdly, the composition places all the characters in the visual center of image. The artist may have depicted three figures because the number three had a sense of eternity, giving the image a stable structure in a triangle form. Additionally, Chen's painting usually consisted of two parts: landscape and people, and depicted on small size canvas, which were also similar in size to French realist paintings.

In general, it can be asserted that the impact of Millet's work on Chen is clear. Gao Minglu, a Chinese critic, argues that the *Tibetan group paintings* signalled a

significant aesthetic change in China, not only breaking with the aesthetics of Soviet painting, but also representing the re-emergence of pure Western aesthetics.²⁴³ This is an argument that exaggerates the significance of the Tibetan works as independent works. In fact, the ‘modern’ Chinese artist is mainly influenced by French nineteenth-century aesthetics. His practice is committed to an engagement with Chinese subjects, while also having a dialogue with Western art. This kind of understanding of these works breaks down the dualistic categories between Chinese and Western art in China. It is worth returning to the case study artists to reveal the extent to which they are engaged in the dialogue between modern artists and the West. Through the visual comparison of the artworks of Millet, Zhou Sicong, Chen Danqing, and Hei Duoling above, it can be determined that the influence of Western rural and landscape subjects expanded in China gradually, having an impact in terms of composition, color, and technique. The progress was made from artist to artist, with responding in specific ways to Western influences. Specifically, Millet’s work *Feeding the Young* (Fig. 4.11) and *The Spinner, Goatherd Auvergne* (Fig. 4.13) gave domestic viewers the first touch of Western realist art. And Chen Danqing’s series of *Tibetan Group Painting*, such as *The Shepherd* (Fig.4.14) shows the initial impact of studying the style of realist rural painting. Zhou Sicong’s *The Woman Who Sell Wine Vessel* (1984) (Fig. 4.1) attempted to integrate rural subject with Cubism in ink painting. Furthermore, in *The Youth*, (Fig. 4.4) and *Spring Has Come Round*, (Fig.4.5), Hei Duoling engaged with rural subject

243 Ibid

and the American regionalist art. Thus, it can be demonstrated that Chinese artists used culturally hybrid ways of creating new artistic forms and developing new ideas.

It was the engagement with western art, either through exhibitions or reproductions, which had a profound impact on the case study artists in China, stimulated their creativity in the 1980s. For example, the Zhang Xiaogang's, *Grassland* and the *Forever Lasting Love* are versions that engaged with both Chinese rural themes and Western post-Impressionism. Furthermore, Ai Weiwei's early work, the *Scenery* (Fig. 1.3) was influenced by the Cubism and Expressionism, and Xu Bing's artwork, the *A Big Tire* (Fig. 3.2) learned from Rauschenberg's installation art, using giant truck tires to produce abstract patterns. Moreover, Cai Guoqiang's *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 3.7) learned from El Greco's artistic forms, expressing distorted bodies and dramatic colours.

The complex exchanges by Chinese artists here should be examined via the lens of postcolonialism and hybridity. On the one hand, Bhabha's theory involves two key players: a powerful, 'dominant' culture and a second culture, perceived as less powerful, over which the first group exerts its influence.²⁴⁴ As seen in the examples discussed here Chinese artists have noticed the cultural differences and questioned the authority of cultural synthesis. The case studies above have demonstrated that artists

244. Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 2 nd, ed, (London: Psychology Press, 2004), pp 141-197.

tried to keep a balance between Chinese and Western cultural attributes; as a result, we see these artists emphasize Chinese subjects or material, while actively engaging with the West. The hybrid art transcends the dualistic relationship between Chinese and Western art and begins to form a new complementary relationship. Thus, it can be asserted that the practice of case study artists came into shape through the dialogue between the China and West. Through cultural hybridity, they produced new artistic forms which is different from 'traditional' Chinese culture. It responds to the notion of 'Third Space' which comes from the work of the theorist Homi Bhabha, referring to new cultures produced by local culture under the influence of Western culture.²⁴⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated the engagement with the West by modern Chinese artists after the Cultural Revolution, focusing on the significant place of traditional painting in the 1980s. In addition, through a visual analysis, it has identified a trend for modern artists to engage with both Chinese media and subjects while also having a dialogue with Western art, to varying degrees. Nevertheless, since these artworks still depict Chinese subjects and characters, their cultural hybridity was overlooked in previous scholarship. For example, some of art critics in Beijing regarded Zhang Xiaogang's works as folk art.²⁴⁶ This overlooks that Zhang's artistic style engaged in a dialogue between Chinese rural themes and Western art.

²⁴⁵ Ibid

²⁴⁶ quoted from the analysis of Zhang Xiaogang in Mv. J 'Concept, Generation and Nationalization' in 'Painter', November 1985, No. 4 pp56.

On the one hand, Chinese artists emphasize Chinese subjects to show and engage with their own culture. Its purpose was to reject the ultimate authority of Britain and the United States in judging the value of art. For example, Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin criticized the regional models in the *Empire Writes Back*, ‘something in the most entrenched linguistic and cultural identity of a postcolonial nation comes from the relationships of colonial power.’²⁴⁷ It should explain that the colonial/postcolonial relationship is more complicated than this in the Chinese context, given the issue of ‘semi-colonialism’, whereby China was unfairly forced into renting areas of cities to imperial powers, including, but not limited to, Britain. Thus, in this chapter, we see these artists expressed source themes like ethnic minorities and rural life to directly or indirectly declare a self-identification with Chinese subjects and themes.

On the other hand, these broader range of artists are engaged in the dialogue with Western art, more specifically, nineteenth-century French rural paintings, which has inspired many modern artists in China. It transformed traditional Chinese art to a certain extent. Some of Chinese critics claimed that the purpose of studying European painting is to develop Chinese painting in techniques.²⁴⁸ This descriptive evaluation simplifies the purpose of learning Western art. In fact, the domestic modern art has developed into a form of cultural hybridity which features both Western and Chinese cultures. For example, Zhang engaged the dialogue with Western Expressionism and

²⁴⁷ Bill Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp146-149.

²⁴⁸ Gao, Minglu, *Zhongguo dang dai*, Pp277-278.

Post-Impressionism and other forms, while also rejecting certain Western painting styles (such as cubism) at the same time.

In summary, the contribution of this chapter has been to provide a close visual analysis of key paintings produced in the 1980s in China. This analysis is intended to highlight how the artworks challenge a dualistic view of Chinese and Western art, emphasizing instead their cultural hybridity in this period. My focus here has been on Zhang, and I have placed his painting-focused practice in the context of a wider range of Chinese modern painters at this moment in order to show that the hybridity of his work is, in many ways, typical of this moment. Nevertheless, clearly these exchanges between China and the West in painting shaped the work of the other case study artists in this thesis.

As a result, the chapter five will move to back to focus on my four case study artists and consider their work produced outside of China. In many ways, my chosen artists - Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, Cai Guo-Qiang, and Zhang Xiaogang – typify the innovations attributed to contemporary Chinese art in the contemporary art world. Their works are characterized by installations and contemporary paintings, which were recognized as a part of global art.²⁴⁹ Moving on to consider these works is a way of continuing to trace how their practice was shaped by a dialogue between both the West and Chinese

249 Jonathan P, *The global contemporary art world*, Hoboken, 1st ed (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), pp65-67

art, even as they became established in global contemporary art.

Chapter Five: Contemporary Chinese artists in the west

Introduction

In chapter four, the influence of Western modern art on the works produced by Chinese artists in China was demonstrated, and it was argued that Chinese artists in the 1980s negotiated the influence of Western modern art alongside traditional painting during this decade. It brought to light various ways in which ‘modern’ Chinese artists engaged with Chinese media and subjects while also having a dialogue with Western art, to varying degrees. In chapter five, the thesis seeks to turn back to its four key artists, Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, and Zhang Xiaogang, to explore that this is tracing your artists’ progress once they’d left China. Although they received the same education as other domestic artists, they exhibited great differences in art application after they left China and engaged directly with the west.

Through studies of the works and experience of four artists, this chapter explores how they continued to be influenced by contemporary Western art produced in Western culture. In other words, the impact that the West had on the Chinese artists after they engaged directly with Western art in the west will be highlighted here. Overall, by examining their artworks and experience in the West, the study will bring a balanced view of these contemporary Chinese artists – that they were influenced by developments in the West, but they were also shaped by the social and political contexts in China. The discussion here is again informed by Homi Bhabha’s concept

of hybridity. The case study artists' practices in the West implicitly express the hybridity and integrated views of modern culture; though, as I have argued over the previous chapters, this dialogue is not new or sudden – it has been sustained and continuous, in different ways, across their careers.

5.1 Installation art

Before embarking on a discussion of each of the case study artists, this section first outlines some of academic research on these artists in the West as well as criticism from China, in order to establish how their recent practice has been discussed. Since the 1990s, the rise of installation art has challenged traditional media such as painting, and it has made some of the artists in this thesis, such as Cai Guo-qiang, Xu Bing, and Ai Weiwei, realize that they could express their concepts in a new way. This change has been mentioned by Jia Fangzhou, a Chinese art critic, who acknowledged that installation art, as well as performance, photography, and video, have been part of critiques of traditional artistic media in recent decades. For many, they became more impressive, inclusive, and fascinating than traditional media.²⁵⁰ They also inspired avant-garde artists to break away from genres associated with Chinese tradition. Jia argues that Chinese artists have followed the approach of deconstructivism to make various works, which showcase elements of postmodernism, including collage, pastiche, appropriation, and destroying barriers between fine art and popular

²⁵⁰ Jia Fangzhou, "Artist's text in 1989", 1st ed. (Hong Kong: Asia Art Press, 2005), P.9-10.

culture.²⁵¹ At the same time, Chinese artists applied these strategies by incorporating traditional elements into local and international interactions. Some supportive accounts of these developments argue that artists took up these techniques in order to challenge the art world and its hierarchies so as to increase the significance of contemporary Chinese art. However, this viewpoint overlooks the differences between and complexities of individual artists. In light of this, the chapter will reveal these different approaches used by individual artists by analysing artworks produced under Western art influence.

Unsurprisingly, negative views of these artists usually come from the official media in China. ‘Contemporary Chinese art is a visual symbol that does not have any innovative significance and aesthetic value,’ Chen Lvshen has noted in the book *What Is the Art*; ‘With the rapid development of technology in the 1980s and 1990s, mankind has entered the era of information globalization. People are living in a world of dizzying products, photos and images, which prompt Chinese artists to conveniently use symbols and patterns in their artworks.’²⁵² Chen Lvshen is a senior official of the Communist Party of China in charge of ideology, culture and theory. His criticism aligns with the mainstream attitude of the party towards emerging art forms, which is nationalist in tone with arguments that are full of generalizations. Chen’s opinion is supported by many Chinese critics and art historians, such as Lv

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Lvshen, Cheng, *What Is The Art(2008)*<艺术的的名义>, 1st ed. (Beijing: People’s Fine Arts press, 2008), Pp.140-142.

Peng and Shi Zhongya. They have queried the value of these avant-garde works, arguing their achievements are based on conformity with Western ideological standards.²⁵³ Specifically, the works of Zhang Xiaogang are considered to have gained international influence by satisfying Western ideological standards or the mentality of Cold War, and Ai Weiwei's performance was seen as an act of flattery to the West, which is irrelevant to art.²⁵⁴ Moreover, Wang Guangyi's works, *The Great Critique and Mao Zedong Series: AO* (1987), are called 'political pop art' by Li Xianting, a renowned art critic. Although the image of Mao Zedong produced by the artist is highly prevalent in China, where it represents social, cultural, political, and venerational significance, the critic Shi Zhongya still claimed that Wang's works present a reproduction of Andy Warhol's paintings of American pop art.²⁵⁵ Thus, these artworks were regarded as an imitation of Western art in China, contributing to the view that 'contemporary Chinese art grew in the shadow of Western art'. This kind of critical perspective has a wide influence in Chinese scholarship, such as in the report of the Chinese Artists Association (CAA), which states, 'contemporary Chinese art, like the political pop art and Cynical realism, blemished and slandered China's image'.²⁵⁶ Official art groups urged young artists to stay far away from images like Western artworks because they consciously accelerated the changes in the manifestation of art in the Chinese way. According to this viewpoint, contemporary

253 Li, p., 1998. question on the "contemporary", *Dangdai Zhongguo*, No 3-5, p.12.

254 Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University press), 2010 Pp.98-100.

255 Zhuan, Hang, 'Chinese-style' of political pop. *Journal of Aesthetics*, 2014, pp72-76.

256 Wang, Gangyi, *Art that vilifies the image of the Chinese must be abandoned*. Postgraduate, Fudan University, 2005.

Chinese art was regarded as a product of Western aesthetic ‘colonization’. The thesis argues that this view negates the original value of contemporary Chinese art in a nationalist tone, while the critical standpoint that I have discussed still emphasizes the dualistic antagonism between Chinese and Western art.

In opposition to the critical viewpoints outlined above, this thesis argues that the following examples, representative of the kinds of practices denigrated by the aforementioned Chinese scholars and institutions, can be considered as forms of cultural hybridity which are heavily influenced by both Chinese and Western culture. In fact, their purpose is not to express the criticism of China in artworks to but to satisfy Western viewers’ taste. For example, Cai Guo-qiang utilized Chinese allusions in his installation art, Xu Bing created English calligraphy for foreigners and wrote it in alphabetical order in Chinese, Ai Weiwei became an increasingly outspoken advocate for rights and freedom within China, and Zhang Xiaogang made unsettling portraits in the West, expressing his views on the Cultural Revolution with nostalgic aesthetics. Considering this, the view that ‘Contemporary Chinese art satisfies the taste of Western viewers’ seems tenable. Therefore, the next section will conduct a visual analysis of artworks made by the aforementioned key artists in the context of globalization. It examines the approaches employed these artworks and makes use of a postcolonial methodology to unpack their cultural hybridity.

5.2 Chinese elements to confront global challenges: Cai Guo-qiang's *Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats*

The works of Cai Guo-qiang were regarded as a Western artist by the critic Gao Ming Lu. In his article '*Inside Out: New Chinese Art*' (1998), Gao Minglu writes: 'Cai Guoqiang, who lives and works in Tokyo, has developed a mode of creation that straddles the realms of Western modernism and Japanese contemporary art.'²⁵⁷ This suggests that Minglu considered Cai Guo-qiang's works to be a blend of Western and Japanese influences, which could be regarded as a Western artist.

Another view is that the artist reconstructs pure Chinese themes which can be understood as a Chinese artist. However, both views are inadequate and only partial - I have already outlined how Cai's training and networks meant his work was forged through a more complex dialogue between China and West. Building on this, this section argues that Cai's artistic work in the West is also a cultural hybrid of China and West. The section will assess how Cai Guo-qiang uses Chinese elements to confront global challenges by examining the artworks he produced in the West, to bring a balanced view of his work and indicate that he was not only influenced by the Western contemporary art, but also shaped by social and political contexts in China. It utilizes the concept of 'Third Space', which comes from the work of the influential post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha.

²⁵⁷ Minglu, G. (1998). *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*. Asia Society Galleries and University of California Press.p51.

In this first work to be discussed here, we see how Cai Guo-qiang remodeled an abandoned wooden boat in *Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats* (Fig. 5.1), which was filled with arrows of the cold weapon era. There is a Chinese flag in the front of the boat. It indicates a well-known story during the Three Kingdoms period (A.D 220-280), that recounts how General Zhuge Liang lacked arrows in the war. His strategy was to fill the boat with straw dummies. In this performance piece, in the morning fog, the ship crossed the river. The enemy mistook Zhuge Liang for sending a full load of soldiers to attack. They used arrows to shoot the dummies and Zhuge Liang was then able to reuse the arrows.²⁵⁸ In his work, Cai Guo-qiang gives the story a new symbolic meaning. He claims that,

This boat was excavated from my hometown of Quanzhou, which is a port city.

The city is over a thousand years old and historically has had a very open-minded attitude towards different cultures. It has inspired the cultural pluralism and inclusiveness of my work. [...] The image of a flying boat fascinates me.

Most boats travel on the surface of the water, but this boat is different because it is filled with feathers from the arrows. It suddenly transforms into a bird and seems able to fly.²⁵⁹

In light of this, the boat not only implies traditional Chinese culture, values and beliefs, but also seeks to speak of common interests across cultural communication.

258 The Museum of Modern Art, *Cai Guo Qiang. Borrowing your enemy's arrows*, MoMA Online Collection <<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/182/2432>> [Accessed 25 February 2022].

259 Cai Guo-Qiang, *My painting story*. 1st ed by Li, w. (Guangxi: Guangxi normal university press, 2017), pp.127.

And the arrows around the boat symbolize ‘foreign’ culture and imply that cultural integration may transform traditional culture. It can be asserted that the *Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats* (Fig. 5.1) expresses the concept of cultural hybridity.

This notion of hybridity was termed by Homi Bhabha in his seminal 1994 work, *The Location of Culture*. Here Bhabha argued that hybridity undermines the colonial discourse of essentialist identity. Bhabha’s ideas productively relate to the dualistic relationship of Eastern and Western cultures as presented throughout this thesis.

The *Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats* (Fig. 5.1) sought to reproduce Cai Guo-qiang’s cultural background by expressing forms of cultural integration, rather than simply expressing the love for his hometown, as demonstrated in the early paintings *Sunset at the Great Wall* (Fig. 3.9) and *Sea of Spring* (Fig. 3.10). The artist in effect engaged in dialogue between local and Western cultural discourses. In order to understand this process further, it is necessary to discuss how the artist utilized Chinese elements in the West.

Firstly, his art is global because he was not in China at the end of the Cold War, when, at this point, the world was experiencing the globalization of the economy. Visual art was also shaped by these forces. Singular, linear narratives of art were increasingly discarded, especially in international cities such as New York, Paris, and London. It has been argued in previous scholarship that the year 1989 signified the end of the

Western monopolies in the art world, when the exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre' took place in the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The argument in this exhibition was those artists making work outside the West and its traditions are equal to those making work (either together or in parallel) within it.²⁶⁰ It signaled the rise of contemporary art from Asia, Africa, and South America in Western institutions.²⁶¹ This exhibition also provoked significant debates about the alleged divide between Western and non-Western. As a result, more Chinese artists, including Cai Guoqiang, realized it is a common approach for an Asian artist to utilize local elements to form dialogues with the West. Furthermore, Western art was willing to share a broader stage with art from different identities, cultures, nations, and civilizations. More importantly, Cai had the equally diverse perspectives with other Asian and African artists. The artist's unique cultural background meant that he had experienced the problems of a globalized world differently from many of his contemporaries in the West.

Secondly, it has indeed been established by scholars that Chinese overseas artists utilize approaches to increase their global visibility. As the approach is noted by Hou Hanru, a curator and artistic director, 'certain tactics were common among artists in their endeavours outside China. Facing the globalizing world, their 'imagined backgrounds' namely, 'Chinese culture' were used as a productive resource with

260 For the notion of 'Magiciens de la Terre', see Pablo Lafuente, 'From the Outside In – 'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions', 2013.

261 Lucy, L, *Making Art Global (Part 2) 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989*. PHD. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh College of Art, 2013), no page number.

which to launch their resistance in new, often syncretic visions in the West.²⁶² According to Hou Hanru, the approach is the use of ‘Chinese elements’ to confront ‘global’ challenges. Artists have frequently emphasized and embraced direct engagement with local contexts, with the concepts and the language of projects inspired by their research into the given conditions and histories of the sites.²⁶³

The Chinese elements in *Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats* include the ancient boat, bronze arrows, national flags, and classical mythological stories that were used to symbolize national culture, values and beliefs. Such an approach made Cai Guoqiang’s work more attractive and effectively more marketable, on the global art stage, far away from other domestic artists’ works. He expressed views on the collision and exchanges of different culture from all the world, and he reconsidered what China has achieved through cultural communication.²⁶⁴

In conclusion, Cai Guo-qiang utilizes the Chinese elements to metamorphorize the mystique of culture, as well as demonstrating an interest in the cultural hybridity. As the artwork is produced in methods associated primarily with installation art. He and other Chinese artists were influenced by the exhibition ‘Magiciens de la Terre’ in Paris. Cai Guo-qiang was one of many artists who deliberately made hybrid art to productively confront global challenges – make their artwork marketable - and

262 Alexandra Munroe, Hou Hanru, “THEATRE DU MONDE ” in *Art and China after 1989, Theater of the world*, 1st ed, (London: Thames&Hudson, Press,2017), Pp 54-56.

263 Ibid.

264 Ibid.

transform the ‘limitation’ of the reconstruction of traditional values into a source of originality.

5.3 Deconstructed Chinese materials to embrace of ‘Western’ installation: Ai Weiwei’s the Table with Two Legs on the Wall (1997)

Similarly, Ai Weiwei is influenced by contemporary art produced outside of Western culture. It is known that he became engaged with the New York art world in the 1990s and was exposed to original Western artistic forms during this period.²⁶⁵ One would assume therefore that his work engaged with Western modern and contemporary art. On the contrary, he deliberately produced and exhibited many works with Chinese features and critical themes in New York. Some critics have argued that Ai Weiwei utilized Chinese localized and indigenous elements in his installation work.²⁶⁶ Considering this, we should carefully analyse the way in which the artist created a new artistic form through cultural hybridity.

The work *Table with Two Legs on the Wall* (1997)(Fig. 5.2) intuitively features an eighteenth-century Chinese antique mahogany table. The tabletop is curved; half of the legs and tops are on the ground, while the other half stands on the side wall, so that the reassembled table is no longer functional.²⁶⁷ It shatters the viewer’s inherent perceptions and offers a sense of strangeness and curiosity. Ai disassembled the original morphology of the Qing Dynasty table and reassembled it by using ancient

265 Lv, Peng, *Journal Literature and Art*, New Wave artists. Central Academy of Fine Arts Beijing, 2012.

266 Chiu, M, *On Ai Weiwei*. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 2016, No 83(1), pp.175-177.

267 Metmuseum.org. 2012. [online] <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/77803>> [Accessed 4 February 2022].

wood structures with mortise and tenon connections. In this sense, Ai has asserted a specific approach to the construction of artworks; he not only deconstructed traditional Chinese elements but also reconstructed the global art landscape through his rejection of Western technologies. It should be explained that he probably achieved this through his rejection of Western technologies. Ai Weiwei did not utilize nails in works or add any new technologies to the table. Regarding the of his works, Ai Weiwei did not utilize painting and printmaking, on which most Chinese artists were keen. Rather, he simply retrofitted ready-made products (an antique table) as installation to express his respect for the technical achievements of Chinese antiques. By doing so, it can be asserted that the artist attempts to emphasize the ‘difference’ and the principle of subverting imperial hegemony in deconstructivism.

In other words, the Table with Two Legs on the Wall raises basic questions, according to Britta Erickson, such as ‘what makes up a work of art?’ and ‘When viewers call something a work of art, do they negate its functionality?’²⁶⁸ In light of Erickson’s questions, it can be argued that the artist not only deconstructs the function of antique furniture, but also challenges conventional ideas about inherent order and form. His work cleverly blurs the lines between functional table and artwork; he takes function away – it is no longer a working table.

²⁶⁸ Erickson, B, Britta's bibliography of contemporary Chinese art. 2nd ed. (2005), pp.150-155.

The traditional Chinese elements were regarded as a kind of heritage that inspires his creative imagination. Ai Weiwei emphasized the background of the furniture series in an interview,

I began to make this type of furniture in 1997, when I have already understood Chinese antiquities, jade, silk veils, bronze and wood, etc. I approached Chinese artifacts from the past five thousand years in New York and pondered how these artifacts reflected the thinking of the people who ordered, designed, and manufactured them, the ideas they expected to express through the objects and the technical difficulties they had to overcome. When I came back to Beijing from New York, I thought about how to find and use these Chinese materials, it is the beginning of those pieces of furniture.²⁶⁹

By doing so, it can be asserted that the Table with Two Legs on the Wall is a mixture of his experience in New York and the situation of Chinese society, history, and the artist's understanding of them. Specifically, he relied on personal knowledge of antiquities in order to deconstruct existing works, which constantly formed the basis for the reconstruction phase. The purpose of the reconstruction is to discover the new relationship between the table and the person. The Table with Two Legs suggests a new relationship between Ai and Chinese culture, as he encountered it again in New York.

²⁶⁹ Artnet News, a Memoir of dissident Artist Ai Weiwei, 2009 <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ai-weiwei-memoir>> [Accessed February 2022].

Compared with his early painting, *Scenery* (Fig. 1.3), it is obvious that here Ai focused more on his historical background and identity rather than on pursuing a style similar to that of Western art. However, it is also possible to consider how Ai Weiwei might nonetheless have been influenced by the West. Firstly, he was inspired by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Fluxus, and conceptual art. Ai Weiwei's work was clearly influenced by the concept of the 'ready-made' sculpture in the Marcel Duchamp's work *Fountain*, 1917/1964 and *L.H.O.O.Q. Mona Lisa*, 1919, which were amongst the most revolutionary and influential works in art history. Duchamp utilizes a glazed ceramic with black paint and reproduces Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with an added beard to mock the idea of a masterpiece, reject the aesthetic value of traditional art, and demonstrate the 'anti-art' of Dadaism.²⁷⁰ It can be argued that the concept of 'an object can qualify as an artwork' offered the artist new possibilities, which motivated Ai Weiwei to reproduce 'ready-made' objects in order to encourage audiences (especially Chinese audiences) to rethink, discuss, appreciate, or condemn what is and what is not art.

Secondly, in a written interview with *Life*, Ai Weiwei refers to a dream he had in which he became China's Picasso before going to New York.²⁷¹ Ai recalls showing his latest paintings to his friend Allen Ginsberg, who is an American artist and poet. After

270 The Art Story, Marcel Duchamp Biography, Life & Quotes, 2022, <<https://www.theartstory.org/duchamp-marcel/life-and-legacy/>> [Accessed Mar 2022]

271 Philipp, J., 2021. Ai Weiwei recalls childhood with his father. <<https://today.line.me/tw/v2/article/x2QOK0q>>, [Accessed Feb 2022].

looking at it, Ginsberg sighed and said that he did not know which gallery could exhibit these paintings by Chinese painters.²⁷² Ginsberg's comment suggests that back then, Ai might have struggled to find an audience for his paintings in the West at this point.

Another reason is that the popular idea that 'painting has been declared dead' was raised again in the 1990s due to the influence of installation art, performance, and film. It means that with the rapid development of digital photography technology and the internet, painting was undergoing an irreparable transformation. As Polonca Kocjancic indicated in a letter to Diane Overmyer, 'With the current democratization of art and lots of folks with time on their hands, painting has become a mainline avocation, second only to photography and tropical fish.'²⁷³

It should be noted that, compared to the emerging art forms like performance and installation art, painting has an exceptionally long historical tradition both in China and in the West, it was therefore not an attractive medium in which artists wanted to experiment. Perhaps in light of this finding, Ai Weiwei did not challenge the statement that 'painting is dead'. Rather, he believed that there is no future for painting. Thus, Ai Weiwei was spurred by his experiences abroad to create a hybrid artistic form by deconstructing an object of Chinese culture, alongside his embrace of 'Western' installation and ready-made production.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Kocjancic, P., 2012. 'The death of painting' on the painter's key [online] <<https://painterskeys.com/death-painting/>> [Accessed Feb 2022].

5.4 Double visions to construct hybrid works: Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky*

Xu Bing has extensive experience overseas. He moved to the United States in 1990 and lived in Brooklyn, New York for 20 years before he returned to China to become the Deputy Dean of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2010. As chapter two noted, his practice transferred from traditional woodcut prints to conceptual art; the latter was where he felt he found artistic freedom.²⁷⁴ This chapter also already explored his education and early artworks in China in order to showcase his innovative skills in printmaking; moreover, I demonstrated his attitude of non-cooperation with other dissident artists in China. This section examines Xu's artworks in the West, using a postcolonial methodology to unpack their cultural hybridity. This will in turn explain why Xu has attracted global attention.

Xu Bing's early breakthrough installation, *Tian Shu* (1998) (*Book from the Sky*) (Fig. 5.3), exhibited at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art in Wisconsin, received critical attention. As Brita Erikson wrote, 'The melancholy and orderly arranged thousands of hand-carved Chinese characters which were printed the white paper in

²⁷⁴ Bing, Xu, *Thirty years of Chinese Contemporary Art*. 1st ed, (Manchester: Centre for Chinese Contemporary press, 2017), p24-26.

ink on the walls, dangled from the ceiling, covered on the floor.’²⁷⁵ In fact, the thousands of characters in his books are all nonsensical and meaningless, as they were all invented by Xu Bing. According to *My True Text*, the source of inspiration for his work can be easily explained. Xu Bing spent much time in the library familiarizing himself with all kinds of books when he was a child. And this experience impacted his artworks, which were mostly about books and words. *Sky Book* (1988), therefore, may be related to such early memories in the library.

If this is the case, one is left asking however ‘Why did Xu make these unreadable books?’ In his work, the artist seems to ridicule the ancient classics, leaving viewers surrounded by verbose nonsense. Here, the *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 5.3) are related to Chinese words, languages, influenced by contemporary art produced outside of the Western culture. The printed papers on the floor were bound in the traditional way of ancient Chinese books, which ingeniously demonstrates the artist’s printmaking technology. The printed papers dangling from the ceiling followed the typography styles of the ancient logia or religious scriptures, and the papers on the walls suggest that the newspapers were posted for the public to read during the Cultural Revolution.²⁷⁶ In short, although Xu expresses his concerns about Chinese society, characters, as well as culture through ‘Chinese hieroglyphs’, he also makes this culture nonsensical and unreadable. We might interpret this work as Xu signalling his

275 Britta, E, *The Art of Xu Bing: Words Without Meaning, Meaning Without Words*. (Olympia: University of Washington Press, 2001), no page number.

276 CHATTOPADHYAY, C. Xu Bing: calligraphy, language and interpretation. *Today*, 2005, 21(1), pp.5-10.

recognition of culture carried by traditional Chinese characters, including aesthetic psychology, as well as cognition of nature and society. But the cognition of Chinese characters is increasingly being ignored by people.

Although it is widely acknowledged that *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 5.3) engaged with new and original artistic forms, what prompted the artist to make these changes seems not to be widely discussed in previous scholarship. It should be analyzed what inspired him to use installation art to express Chinese content. Unlike Ai Weiwei, who uses the ready-made product, Xu Bing utilizes an extremely complex and traditional handicrafts method to explore the local or national subjects, as well as introduce new content in installation art. His work can thus be interpreted as an approach of cultural hybridity for non-European artists to emphasize different cultural identity and background in a newly globalized culture in the West. On the one hand, overseas Chinese artists need to determine the position of their artworks in Europe. Installation art was a form of identification used to express concepts in the West. On the other hand, it is necessary to distinguish their difference from Western artworks, pursuing a unique form. Using Chinese elements is a unique way in which artists could show their difference on equal terms. Thus, it can be concluded that Xu Bing emphasizes the equivalence of values and differences in nature. In other words, he insisted that the artworks of various countries should be unique and diverse, and treated equally.

The work, *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 5.3) was interpreted by critics differently, with one view, put forward by Mathieu Boscovich, arguing that it symbolized the ideological isolation between China and the world.²⁷⁷ It can also reflect the huge inefficient labour in China. Especially when it was read as a challenge to authoritarian cultural authority, hegemonic systems, this work attracted the attention of conservative art critics in China who were appalled by Xu's affront.²⁷⁸ 'The Chinese characters in the *Book from the Sky* to certain extents, which is against the basic rules to characters for Chinese calligraphy' stated the critic Lv Peng, in the Journal *Literature and Art*.²⁷⁹

This negative view emphasized that the value of art production should be established on basic rules; it implies that Xu Bing's works are deviant. However, in doing so, it ignores the value of Xu Bing's works as informed through his critical thinking that sought to break down the binary opposition of Chinese and Western cultures. It is worth reflecting in more detail on the cultural meaning in these unreadable books. Sherman Lee notes in *The History of Far Eastern Art* that 'Chinese characters are almost wholly abstract; calligraphy was considered a more creative art than even paintings.'²⁸⁰ In doing so, it seems to subvert Chinese culture while also subverting Western people demanding to understand traditional Chinese culture as well. Xu transformed the Chinese characters from the long cultural and historical context into

277 Boscovich, M., *Xu Bing's Book from the sky*. 1st ed. Beijing, 2012., pp.7-10.

278 Bing, Xu, 2016: Art, Bio, Ideas. [online] The China Art Story. <<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/xu-bing/>> [Accessed February 2022].

279 Lv, Peng, "Journal Literature and Art, New Wave artists" in Central Academy of Fine Arts Beijing, 2012, No5(3): pp.12.

280 Lee, Sherman E. *History of Far Eastern Art*, 1st ed (New Jersey: Prentice Hall; Reprint Press,1994), p480-495.

Western forms.²⁸¹ It can be asserted that the *Book from the Sky* (Fig. 5.3) is a new form which engaged the dialogue with both the Eastern and Western art.

It can be concluded that Xu Bing, as an avant-garde artist, aspired to construct a new contemporary Chinese art at the turn of the twenty-first century. Due to political and cultural constraints in China, he had to construct the new art by hybrid double visions in the West. It is a kind of hybrid art belonging neither to the East nor to the West. This relates to Homi Bhabha's conception of the third space, which proposes an intermediate space for cultural negotiation.²⁸² This cultural hybridity destroys the dualistic relationship between Eastern and Western cultures. I would argue that it is almost impossible to show a single vision in his Western works, a fact which reflects wider cultural hybridity and dissatisfaction with hegemonic cultures. The artist asserts that the multiculturalism between countries and societies should be treated equally.

5.5 The Revival of the painting: Zhang Xiaogang's *Bloodlines: Big Family*

In contrast to the above artists in the case studies thus far, Zhang Xiaogang did not produce artworks in the West. However, he created a new form of painting after encountering Western art. The achievement of Zhang Xiaogang's painting has received scholarly attention in the past. It is known that Zhang's paintings reflect the Chinese Cultural Revolution; however, he was also influenced by the Western

281 'Artist bio - Wenda Gu's bio'. WendaGu.com, 2006, <http://www.bfa.edu.cn/xygk/node_32.htm>, [Accessed February 2022]

282 Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, 2 nd, ed, (London: Psychology Press, 2004), pp 22-27.

contemporary painting, a fact that what also ignored. This section focuses on how the artist created new works through cultural hybridity.

According to available materials, it can be determined that Zhang Xiaogang was directly influenced by Western contemporary painting. As he was allowed a three-month visit to Germany from 18 May 1992, described in his autobiography as a visit that ‘symbolized my dream to be an artist comes true’, adding that ‘it is the first time I visited the quadrennial Documenta in Kassel, walked into galleries of European cities such as Bonn, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, Berlin, Hamburg, Amsterdam and Paris, where I saw the original masterpieces, which I had previously seen in the Chinese catalogues. I met with my ‘teachers’ Van Gogh and Millet at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, two guides who made me understand the art.’²⁸³ Most importantly, He pays attention to the current state of arts, the emergence of contemporary art, as well as the differences between Chinese and Western art. He inquired what kind of art can make contemporary Chinese art completely different from the West. In Zhang Xiaogang’s letter to Ye Yongqing on August 24, 1992, he clearly expressed the roadmap for his future career development, ‘[...] If Chinese artworks are divorced from the unique domestic cultural background, they will lose meaning. [...] the international artistic forms did not exist in the West. I think we need to participate in Western art then make a form of hybrid cultures in the contemporary world, which requires us to

²⁸³ Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010), pp.98-100.

explore and develop our unique history and culture. I'm confident about it [...].'²⁸⁴ It can be concluded that, at that point, he had realized the differences between Chinese and Western art and admitted that it is impossible to 'counter' Western culture, vowing instead to further break down the dualistic relationship between Chinese and Western art. Simply, this experience in the West prompts the artist to have more confidence to engage with both Chinese references and Western art in his painting.

For instance, his series of works *Bloodlines: Big Family*, (Fig. 5.4), begun in the early 1990s, has been recognized as a 'symbol' of contemporary Chinese art in the global art world by critics like Gao Minglu.²⁸⁵ Zhang Xiaogang's paintings were completely different from existing styles in China. He was inspired by old black-and-white family photographs and tried to imitate the similar composition, shapes and tones of the photographs.²⁸⁶ The *Big Family* attracted the attention of art critics and was regarded as a reflection on the Cultural Revolution. As Jerome Sans wrote, 'his wide-eyed subjects featured in his stylized portraits of Chinese people are posed stiff and upright, deliberately reminiscent of family portraits from the 1950s and 1960s.'²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the relationship between Zhang's works and the original photographs have received less attention in the past. It is likely that Zhang was influenced by the approach called 'the second edition' of photographs and paintings in which based it on photographs and painting but did not reproduce them completely. Zhang followed

284 Ibid.

285 Gao, Minglu, *Mei xue xu shi yu chou xiang yi shu*. (Chengdu: Sichuan Art Press 2007). pp 85-88.

286 Hung Wu, *Transience: Chinese experimental art at the end of the twentieth century*. pp 22-23.

287 Jerome Sans, *Bloodlines: Big Family* from the Ullens collection. Hong Kong. (2015).

this principle, not only referring to the pattern of black-and-white family photos, but also adapting and developing the photos, in order to change the original form. It is evidenced that Zhang encountered and was inspired by the works of Gerhard Richter in a gallery during the trip to Germany 1992.²⁸⁸

Both Richter and Xiaogang studied painting in the Social Realist style in socialist countries. Richter began his artistic career in the academic system of East Germany in the 1950s, and Zhang Xiaogang experienced a decade of sociopolitical movement in China between 1966 and 1976. The similar upbringing made it easy for him to understand the meaning in Gerhard Richter's early works which responding to authoritarian regimes. Through visual comparison, the influence of Richter's *Aunt Marianne* (Fig. 5.5) on Zhang is obvious. *Aunt Marianne* is a painting reproduced from a snapshot that was taken in 1932. The baby is Gerhard Richter. His Aunt Marianne, also featured, was 14 years old. Five years after the photograph was taken, Marianne was interned for suspected schizophrenia, forcibly sterilised as part of the massive Nazi euthanasia program and starved to death.²⁸⁹ It can be speculated that Richter's family photographs prompted Zhang to revisit photographs of his own family during the Cultural Revolution, such as a black-and-white photo of Zhang Xiaogang with his parents, taken in 1958 (included alongside fig. 5.4). During the Cultural Revolution, Zhang's parents were imprisoned for three years by the Chinese

288 Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling city: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010), pp.98-101.

289 the introduction of Gerhard Richter on <http://www.vlinder-01.dds.nl/cdr/paintings/gerhard_richter. 2020. Gerhard Richter>, [accessed Jul 2022]

government for re-education policies, which led to his mother later suffering from schizophrenia.²⁹⁰ The artist uses political elements to express Chinese subjects, as seen the characters in the *Bloodline: Big Family* were dressed in Maoist Suits, a political garment and a symbol of the Chinese collective suffering in the Mao Zedong era.

By contrast to Richter's photo-realist paintings, Zhang Xiaogang's *Bloodline: Big Family* did not leave more brush traces on canvas - the light-affected part of the figure's face is extremely smooth, and the notable features are in grey tones. The facial features are deliberately simplified, as the similar blurring effect in the works of Gerhard Richter is the most resonant with viewers. Through cultural hybridity, Zhang found an approach for these paintings, which consisted in combining the effect of camera viewing with the traditional hand-painted method. The advantage is that the artist could hybridize the method that was learned from social realist painting with more challenging approaches derived from conceptual art. Moreover, Gerhard Richter shows that his painting is still powerfully question all images for their truth potential, no matter whether they originated from the news media, the cinema, the internet, or even the family photo album.²⁹¹ Thus, it can be asserted that this approach inspired Zhang to create his photographic style of paintings by hybridizing Chinese and Western art.

290 Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010), pp.342-368.

291 The reinvented painting, 2016. Available at: <<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2016/february/09/>> [Accessed April 2022].

Indeed, cultural hybridity is a way of creating new artistic forms and progressing human civilization. As Homi Bhabha explains in his theory of hybridity, out of the constant separation of colonial values from native values through discourse arose a new hybrid culture.²⁹² This concept is particularly revealing for Zhang Xiaogang; he was influenced by Western art but also shaped by social and political contexts in China. Therefore, Zhang Xiaogang's artwork operates in the 'Third Space' of cultural hybridity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter five focuses on the artworks produced by the case study artists of this thesis after they left China in the 1980s. In this chapter, I have addressed some approaches of overseas Chinese artists in the face of global challenges and cultural exchange. In doing so, I also considered how the artists' backgrounds and Western experiences have influenced their production. Through a visual analysis of the selected works, it can be concluded that the practice of these four artists is innovative both in China and in the West. The study brings a balanced view of these contemporary Chinese artists – that they were influenced by the West, but also shaped by social and political contexts in China, even after they left China and began working, and found widespread recognition, on the global stage. In other words, these artists have developed more inclusive art forms rather than simply emphasizing

²⁹² Ibid.

nationalism and excluding Western culture or embracing Western culture at the expense of Chinese themes, subjects, and histories.

The discussion was informed by Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories. The concepts of hybridity and the third space contributed here to break down the antagonistic binaries of Chinese and Western culture, and to nuance the synthesis of 'East' and 'West' in works produced by the case study artists in direct dialogue with the West. Overall, this chapter has unpacked their cultural hybridity, explained how the four artists created new works by using Chinese references while also in dialogue with Western art, and argued that such works completely destabilise the binary concept of both types of art within and outside of China.

CONCLUSION

Summary

As outlined in the introduction to this study, this thesis traces how four prominent Chinese contemporary artists have been shaped as much by sustained engagements with Western art as by artistic training and education at home, thereby challenging the narratives of Chinese art that insist on static and rigid definitions of it. Specifically, the thesis has explored the art education in China, the places, groups, and networks of modern and contemporary artists in China, the effects of politics on art and education, and the engagement with the West by modern artists and the four case study artists. It, overall, unequivocally provides an argument that contemporary Chinese art was shaped through a dialogue with Western art, done both from *within* and outside of China. This dialogue between Chinese contemporary artists and the West was a product of Chinese political reality at the end of Cultural Revolution.

Contemporary Chinese Art and Its Limitations

In light of what I have argued, there is an outstanding question worth discussing: Do Chinese artists have complete freedom in their creations during the 1980s and 1990s? The thesis contends that Chinese artists have limitation in creativity, which can be proved by the three aspects here. Firstly, the Chinese government still dominates ideologically. Although it should of course be noted that the creative freedom of Chinese artists has improved significantly from that of those working during the

Cultural Revolution. They engaged with Western artists to promote mutual understanding of their cultures, which broadens the horizons of Chinese artists and allows them to learn from the Western styles. However, radical acts and politically critical artworks are still regarded as anti-socialist, to be strictly banned.

Secondly, Chinese contemporary artists must adopt a certain style for commercial reasons and to achieve recognition from the West, which makes contemporary Chinese art more marketable on the international art market. In the 1990s, almost all the collectors of contemporary Chinese art were not Chinese. Some of them made large-scale cheap acquisitions of contemporary Chinese artworks and speculated to manipulate the market, including Johnson Chang (the operator of Hong Kong Hanart TZ Gallery), Myriam and Guy Ullens (famous Belgian entrepreneur engaged in art), and Uli Sigg (former Swiss ambassador to China).²⁹³ The Western collectors preferred works that focused on Chinese Revolution themes. As a result, many Chinese artists deliberately catered to them by vilifying Mao Zedong and combining the Cultural Revolution illustrations with Pop Art, which critics have widely criticized. Most critics negatively believe that Western collectors are only looking for the ‘Chinese cases’ of contemporary art in China, so that the works collected by Western collectors cannot represent real contemporary Chinese art. Chen Lvsheng, director of the National Museum of China, expressed concern that ‘it is absurd to find the

²⁹³ One of the most important collectors of contemporary Chinese art, Uli Sigg's Art Castle, 2016.
<<https://post.smzdm.com/p/a99254zp/>> [Accessed 15 June 2022].

development direction of contemporary Chinese art in Western rules and seek Western recognition'.²⁹⁴ He described contemporary Chinese art thus: 'Many artists fight in various Western biennales like they are fighting for bargains in a fair, seeking acceptance, present themselves vigorously, and gaining a certain position through commercial ways. These people have no time to rethink the true art at all, and they cannot bear social responsibility.' Combining these viewpoints, it can be asserted that when Chinese artists try to break away from the control of Chinese official art and get recognition in the West, they seem to be free, but they fall into another invisible control. Therefore, complete freedom cannot be achieved in such a context.

The third reason was that contemporary Chinese art was shaped by social aesthetics in the 1980s, during which the rapid modernisation and commercialization process allowed Western culture to intervene strongly, leading to the blurring of cultural differences between China and the West, as well as Westernised social aesthetics. It can be asserted that the Chinese artists unconsciously construct a charming 'Western' realm in China. Furthermore, the cultural ideal of China in the 1980s is 'modernisation, progressiveness, social democracy, as well as national prosperity'.²⁹⁵ Learning and creating 'Western' modern art was regarded as practising this ideal or being 'synchronised with the global art trend.' Obviously, Western modern art, as a real force that may make Chinese society change and progress, has been endowed

294 Chen, Lvsheng, *Shi jue qian yan*. 1st ed by Kiog Pei (Beijing: Zuo jia Press, 2016), pp.65-78.

295 Jinhua, Dong, *Chinese Cinema Culture*, 2nd ed, (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2020), pp.83-84.

with greater social responsibility. Artists were influenced by social aesthetics, creating a new art form different from the Cultural Revolution art. In fact, this is not caused by cultural consciousness. Objectively speaking, the reason why artistic production is not completely free is that artists must cater to the needs of mainstream society for new art to win social recognition.

Contribution

This thesis has focused on the relationship between contemporary Chinese art and the West by complicating previous critical opinions that have separated Chinese art from the West. Consequently, this thesis makes a number of critical contributions to scholarship on Chinese art.

The first chapter reveals that early works of case study artists in China, to some extent, did reflect the significance of education and training they received within China. Although each of them is doing it differently, it demonstrates their tensions with the education system. They negotiated these restrictions early on from within the education system itself. The second chapter sought to place the discussion in a historical context, and by complicating the narrative of ‘two art histories’ in China –it argues that there has always been a long term, complicated, and limited dialogue between Chinese art and Western art, the latter of which shaped the art education system. The third chapter discusses the places, groups, and networks for modern and

contemporary art in China and assesses the four artists' relationship to them. This is essential to understanding how artists made their careers: either as individuals or as members of a group. The contribution is that art groups in China have been in dialogue with the Western art, are earlier than previously surmised and that this has, to some extent, shaped the works of four case study artists. The fourth chapter has conducted a close visual analysis of the artworks under consideration and unpacked their cultural hybridity. It brings to light how 'modern' Chinese artists, particularly in painting, engaged with both Chinese media and subjects while also having a dialogue with Western art, to varying degrees. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates the existing Western art styles that have been used to integrate with Chinese themes. And then, through a visual comparison of these existing styles in one of the case study artists (Zhang Xiaogang's works), it explores in detail how he engaged in the dialogue between Chinese art and the West. Fifth, the final chapter utilized references to the 'cultural hybridity' in relation to the postcolonial methodology to help nuance the synthesis of 'East' and 'West' in works produced by the case study artists in direct dialogue with the West once they left China. It explained how these four artists create hybrid works that make use of Chinese references while also engaging with Western art and it completely destabilises the binary notion of two types of art within and outside of China that challenged throughout the overall thesis.

Overall, contemporary Chinese art warrants renewed study, as we can see how closely it interacted with and related to Western art during the 1980s and the 1990s. These four artists are globally recognized as contemporary artists who have an international reputation, although Zhang Xiaogang did not leave China, he went on a short-term trip to Europe. This thesis questions extant literature in the field of contemporary Chinese art which postulates for a binary between Chinese diasporic artist's engagement with the West and those practicing on the Chinese mainland. In response, this thesis contributes the argument that these works were shaped as much by both sustained engagements with Western art through artistic training and education in China. These engagements allowed them to absorb and reconfigure Western artistic practices and ideas to fit their Chinese cultural and historical contexts. More important, by engaging with postcolonial theories of hybridity as well as the complex dynamics of art education in China, where competing visions of western and soviet style education were taught to art students. The thesis points out that artists who left China for overseas were still the products of its education system. The dialogue between Chinese contemporary art and the West, done both from within and outside of China, was, in part, a product of Chinese political reality at that particular moment (1978-1999).

Illustrations



Fig. 1.1. Photographer unknown, Cai Guo-qiang with his nude painting in the Shanghai Theatre Academy, 1982, photograph, size unspecified, reproduced in: *Art Research* (the journal of Central Academy of Fine Arts).

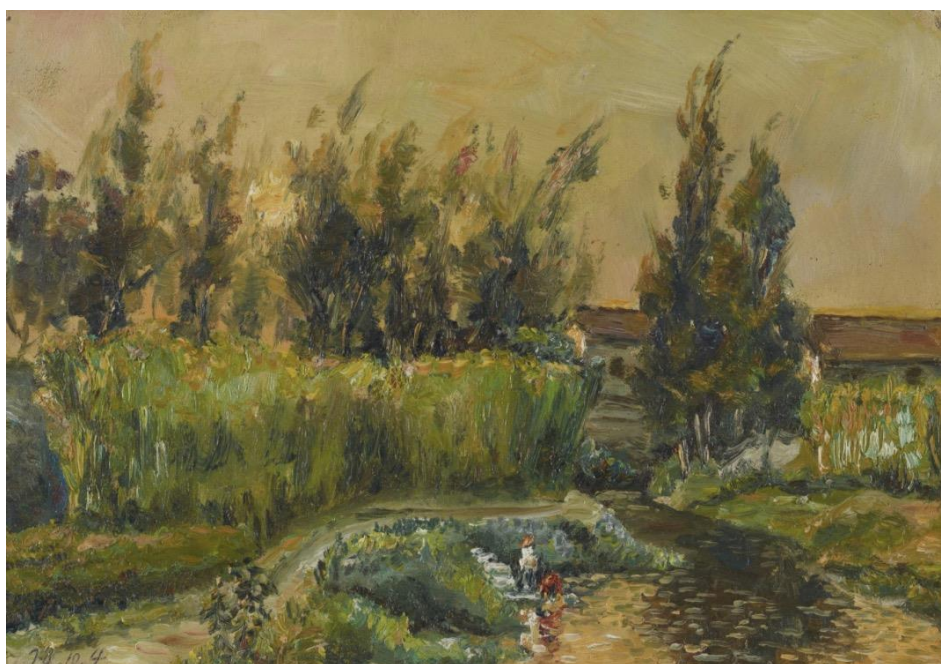


Fig. 1.2. Cai Guo-qiang, *River in the Sunset*, 1970s, oil on board ,19.2cm x 27cm, Photograph by Ron Amstutz, reproduced in: Guoqiang, C., 2015. *My Painting Story*.

2nd ed. Beijing: Li Xiangghuo, pp.42.



Fig. 1.3. Ai Weiwei, *Scenery*, ink on paper, 160 x100, Sep 1979, source: *Jiangsu Art Monthly* volume 12, number 2.



Fig. 1.4. Xu Bing, *David*, drawing, sketch on paper, 1978, 82.5×101 cm, the artist's studio, Source, reproduced in Xu Bing, *My True Text*, published in Chinese in 2015, pp. 23.



Fig. 1.5. Xu Bing, *No Title*, part of the series *Broken Jade*, woodblock print, 1977—1983, printing on paper, 21x 21cm, Source, reproduced in Xu Bing, *My True Text*, published in Chinese in 2015, pp. 28.



Fig.1.6. Photographer unknown, Zhang Xiaogang (first from right) was admitted to Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts with his classmates, 1978, photograph, size unknown, Source: *Contemporary Artist* (the journal of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute)19(6).



Fig.1.7. Zhang Xiaogang, *Painting of Grassland, Clouds in the Sky*, 69.4x118.5cm, oil on canvas, 1981 source: reproduced in *Contemporary Artist (the journal of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute)* 1996.



Fig. 2.1. Zhu Da, *Swimming Fish*, 28 x56.8 cm, The Palace Museum of China, Beijing, 1650s-1660s, exact date unknown, ink on paper, source: <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/33689234.html>. [Accessed Nov 2020]

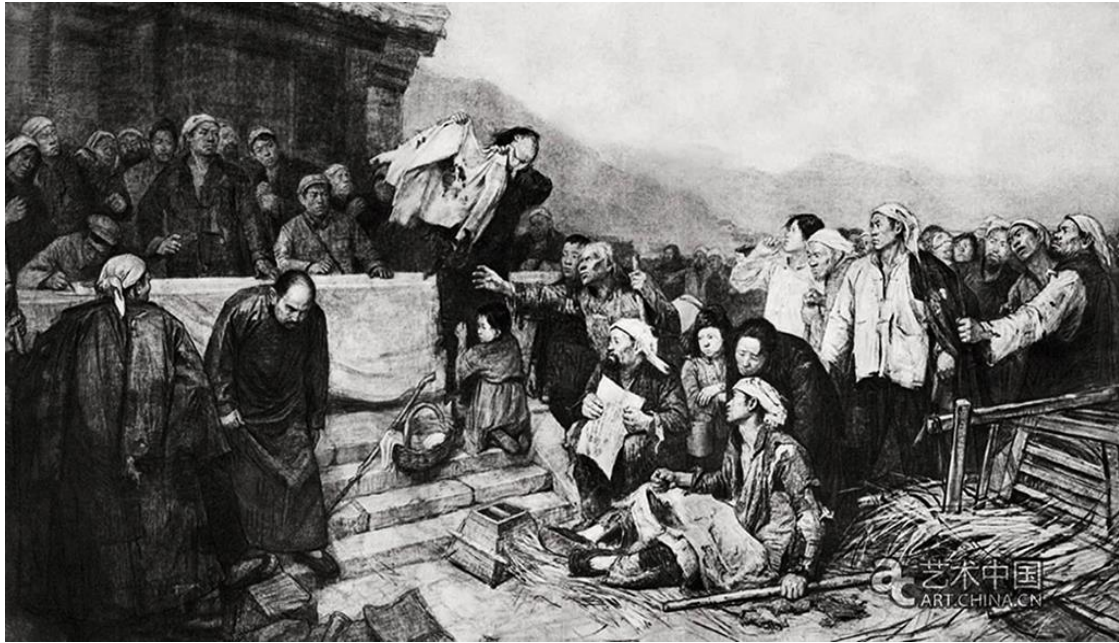


Fig. 2.2. Wang Shikuo, *The Bloodstained Shirt*, sketch on paper, 192x345cm, 1960s, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, source: (http://www.art.china.cn/zp/zpml/ysp/202012/t20201216_248479.shtml). [accessed Dec 2020]



Fig. 2.3. Dong Xiwen *The Emancipation of Land*, Oil on Canvas, 77cm×143cm, 1963, National Art gallery of China, Source: (http://www.artron.net/zsjs/gczp/cpjxs/201304/t20130417_219443.html). [accessed Jan 2021]



Fig.3.1. The map of China art groups in the 1980s, author's own, 2021



Fig.3.2. Wu Guanzhong, *the Soul of Pines*, Colour ink on paper, 1983, 148×201 cm, source: 'Artist,' Chinese Artist Press, February 1985, No30, P9.



Fig. 3.3. Xu Bing, *A Big Tire*, Ink, Tire, Paper, 1986, Installation, exhibited in Central Academy of Arts Gallery, Beijing, size unspecified, Source: (www.xubing.com/32179/55.02). [accessed Feb 2021]

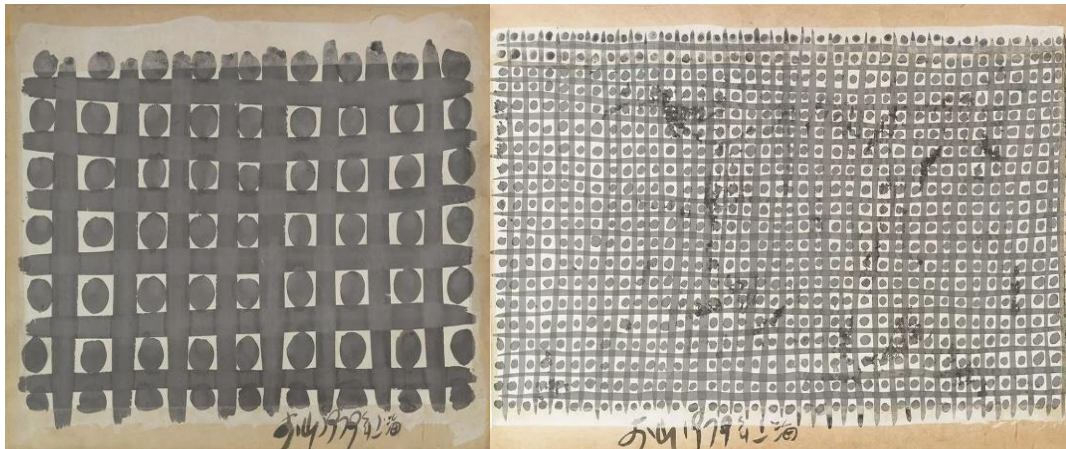


Fig. 3.4. Li Shan, *Order II*, Ink on paper, 57×73cm, 1979, exhibited in Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012. Source: (<https://www.goethe.de/ins/cn.html>). [accessed Feb 2021]



Fig.3.5. Zhang Jianjun, *Dialogue*, Oil on canvas 100 x143cm, 1979, photographer unknown, Source: (<https://shanghai.nyu.edu/works/zhang-jianjun>). [accessed Mar 2021].



Fig. 3.6. Cai Guo-qiang, *Classmate*, oil on canvas, 78.5x49.5cm, 1982, Photography by Ron Amstutz, reproduced in: Guo-qiang, Cai, *My Painting Story*. 2nd ed. (Beijing:

Li Xiangghuo Press, 2015), pp.26.



Fig. 3.7. Cai Guo-qiang, *Self-Portrait*, 1980s oil on canvas, 55x50cm, Photograph by Ron Amstutz, Source: Guo-qiang, Cai, *My Painting Story*. 2nd ed. (Beijing: Li Xiangghuo Press, 2015), pp.38.



Fig. 3.8. El Greco, *A Nobleman with his Hand on his Chest* (1578-80), Oil on canvas, 81.8cm × 66.1cm, Source: Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain. Photograph, Source: (<http://www.spainisculture.com/en.html/>). [accessed Jun 2021]



Fig. 3.9. Cai Guo-qiang, *Sunset at the Great Wall*, oil on paper, 1987, 24x27cm, Cai Studio, Photograph, Source: ([www.sotheby.com/Cai Guo-qiang/17856449463/09](http://www.sotheby.com/Cai-Guo-qiang/17856449463/09)). [accessed July 2021]



Fig.3.10. Cai Guo-qiang, *Sea of spring*, watercolour on paper, 1984, 55x77cm, Source: (www.sotheby.com/6543222428/06). [accessed Feb 2021]



Fig. 4.1. Zhou Sicong, *The Woman Who Sell Wine Vessel*, 1984, ink on paper, 96x90.5cm, photographer unknown, reproduced in: Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling city: Guangxi University Press, 2010), pp.98.



Fig. 4.2. Yan Binghui, *The Sun Suites*, 1984, ink on paper, 68x68cm, Source, Mi Zao “Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art” in the *China Art Newspaper* Vol. 46, No. (1). (Beijing: CAA Press, 1988).



Fig. 4.3. Gu Wenda, *the totem and the era of taboos*, 1985, ink on rice paper, 120x 85.5cm, Source: Hung, Wu. *Exhibiting experimental art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).



Fig. 4.4. Hei-Duoling, *Youth*, oil on canvas ,148X160cm, 1984, Source: The Chinese Art Newspaper, Mar 1985, Source: [www. Chinese Artnet.com/45639/Hei-Duoling-Youth/5443jugv=0098.jpg](http://www.ChineseArt.net.com/45639/Hei-Duoling-Youth/5443jugv=0098.jpg). [accessed August 2021]



Fig.4.5. Hei-Duoling, *Spring Has Come Round*, oil on canvas, 70x96cm, 1984, Source: China Daily, 04 July 2013, Source accessed < [www. China Daily.com](http://www.ChinaDaily.com)> [accessed November 2021]



Fig. 4.6. Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, Egg tempera on gessoed panel, 1948, 81.9x121.3cm, Source: Museum of modern art, New York. [accessed November 2021]

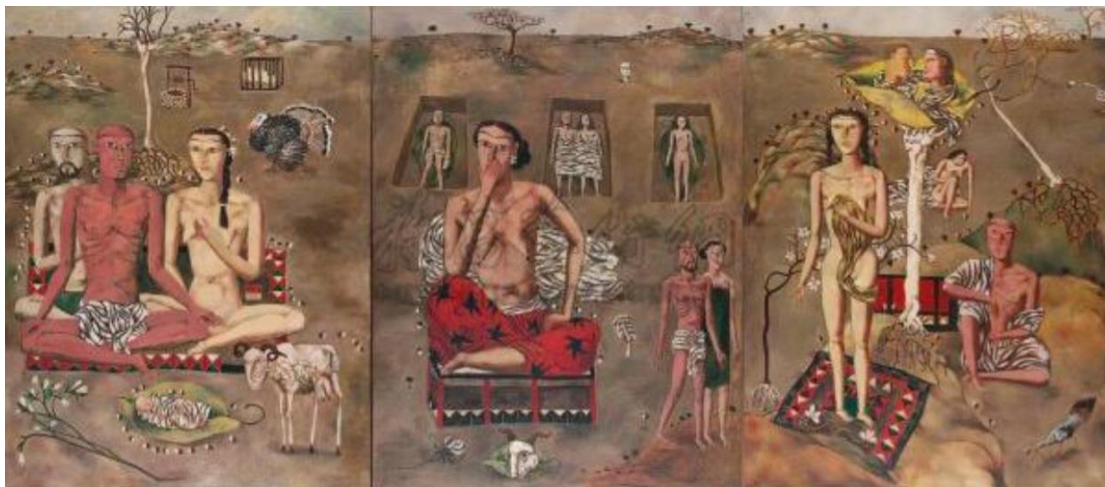


Fig. 4.7. Zhang Xiaogang, *Forever Lasting Love* (triptych), 1988, oil on canvas, each 125x 97.5cm, Source: Great Wall Museum, Beijing. (<https://www.badaling.cn/Museum>). [accessed November 2021]



Fig.4.8. Francis Bacon (1909-1992), *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 198 × 114 cm (each), oil on canvas, Source: Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York. [accessed December 2021]

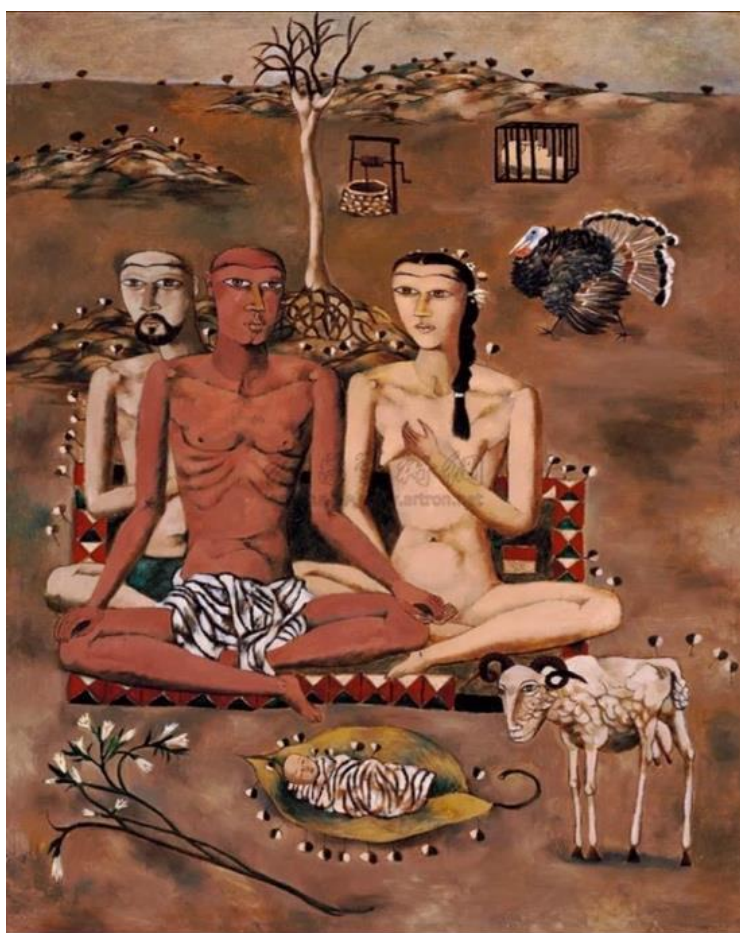


Fig.4.9. Detail of Zhang Xiaogang, *Forever Lasting Love*, oil on canvas, 1988, Source: Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York. [accessed December 2021]



Fig.4.10. Paul Gauguin, *Where Do We Come from? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* 1897–1898, Oil on canvas, 139 cm × 375 cm (55 in × 148 in), Source, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 4.11. Jean-François Millet, *Feeding the Young* (1850), Oil on canvas, 74 × 60 cm. Source: Lille's Fine Arts Museum, Paris.



Fig. 4.12. Chen Danqing, *the mother and son* ,1983, oil on canvas, 68.5x85.5 cm, Private Collection, USA. Source: (https://www.christies.com.cn/lot/lot-chen-danqing-5445879/?sc_lang=zh). [accessed December 2021]



Fig.4.13. Jean-François Millet, *the spinner, goatherd Auvergne* (1868-1869), Oil on canvas, 92.5 cm × 73.5cm, Source: Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig.4.14. Chen Danqing, *The Shepherd*, Sep 1980. oil on panel, 78.6 × 52.3cm, private collection, Source: (<http://www.chinashj.com/sh-ddsh-yh/62.html>). [accessed Jan 2022]



Fig. 5.1. Cai Guo-qiang, *The Borrow Arrows with Thatched Boats*, Sep 1998. Wooden boat, flag, Arrows, electric fan overall approx. 152.4 x 720x 230 cm, Source: The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Fig. 5.2. Ai Weiwei, *Table with Two Legs on the Wall*, 1997, Qing dynasty wooden table, 125.4x 99.1x125.4cm, Source:(https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/ai-weiwei/artworks/table-with-two-legs-on-the-wall?image_id=14972). [accessed Feb 2022]

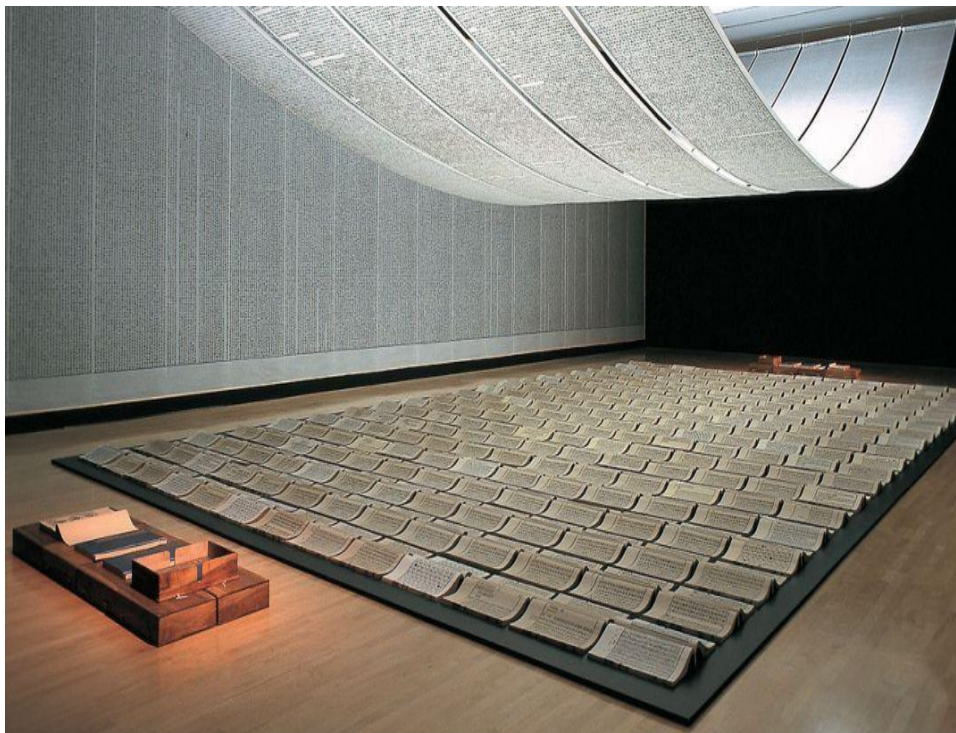


Fig.5.3. Xu Bing, *Book from the Sky*, mixed media installation, 1998, installation view, Source: National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

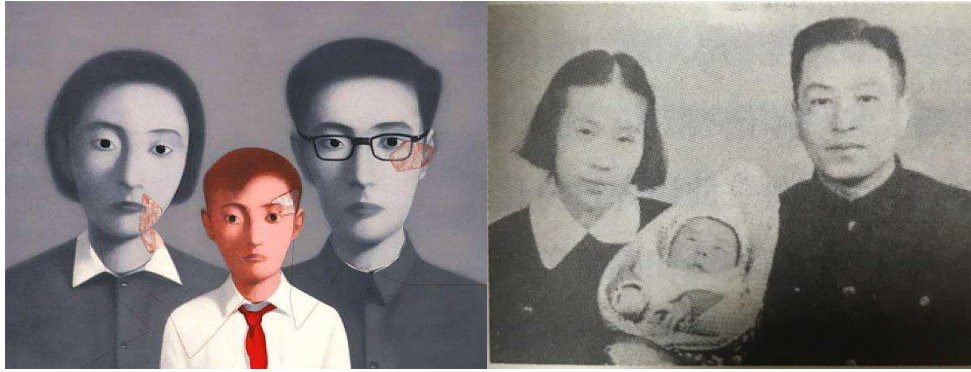


Fig. 5.4. (left) Zhang Xiaogang, *Bloodline: Big Family NO 26*, 1995, Oil on canvas, 179 x 229 cm,

Source: (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/317996423675243636/>). [accessed April 2022].

(right) the photography was reproduced in Lv, Peng, *the history of Bloodlines*. 2nd ed. (Guiling city: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2010), pp.98-101.

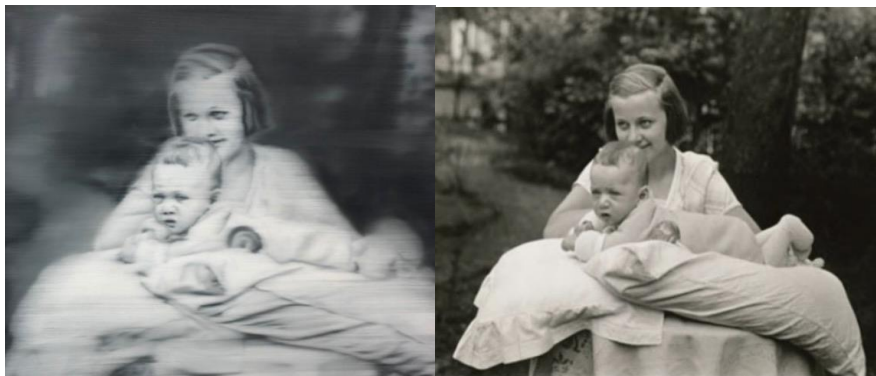


Fig. 5.5. Gerhard Richter, *Aunt Marianne*, 1965, Oil on canvas, 100 x 115 cm, Source: (<https://www.gerhard-richter.com/zh/art/paintings/photo-paintings/death-9/aunt-marianne-5597>). [accessed May 2022]

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