

**ABSTRACTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN
THE ART AND CULTURE IN CHINA****DANIELA GRUBIŠIĆ**Department of Fine,
Shanghai University,
Shanghai,
China.**KEYWORDS**China Art, Abstract Expressionism, Culture, Development,
Globalism.**ABSTRACT**

The paper researches the beginning of abstraction in Chinese art as a Chinese calligraphy value connected to Abstract expressionism. It explores Shitao calligraphy from Ming Dynasty, which is connected to Jackson Pollock's action painting and is the beginning of abstract expressionism. The paper establishes research of the artwork as an unconscious manifestation of the act of pure creation throughout the development of abstraction. The Paper also explores changes in Chinese values, the development of Chinese identity, and the impact of modernization and globalization on contemporary art today and ultimately its impact on the growing cultural and creative industry. According that the paper researching the artworks of some contemporary artists who have significantly contributed to the development of contemporary art inside and outside China, achieving great success on the global stage. The research method includes the analysis and comparison of the art of the East and the West with the practical method of artwork.

I. INTRODUCTION

The research deals with the influence of culture on culture through certain periods. Certain artistic styles are touched and intertwine and take on a historic global context that continues today, developing through new contemporary art. The background of this research goes back to contemporary cultural anthropology and research deals with the problem of margins of acceptable art and cultural expression. The goal is to establish a connection and influence between Eastern and Western culture and art that flows in both directions depending on historical and contemporary connotations. This paper presents the Chinese art of development under the influence of the West and its significance in the world today. Today, China is under the strong influence of modernization, technological progress, large infrastructure where cities take the shape of the world scene, it is especially worth highlighting Shanghai, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Beijing and Guangzhou and other cities as the intersection of Chinese culture and Western culture. Undoubtedly, there is a strong influence of traditional, cultural, infrastructural, urbanism, architectural, urban, technological, industrial, modernization, AI development, etc. Through research, the influence of China on the West is followed, as well as the influence of the West on China, which are interactively connected through certain periods and today. The most significant step in art is the establishment of interaction through the artistic expression of today's art. Today, the difference between development of art China and West is almost non-existent. And China is in the further in the development of the art in global scene.

Abstraction in China Art and Abstract Expressionism

Chinese artist, the painter Shitao or Shi Tao 石涛, who was the first to introduce the abstract expression of painting into his landscape. Shitao has used more than two dozen courtesy names throughout her life. Life of him has influence for new innovations as a revolt for liberating in his paintings. He was a member of the royal house when the Ming dynasty 1644 fell to invading Manchus

and civil rebellion. In that time, he was run away from his destiny. 1651 he became a Buddhist monk and became known as Yuanji Shitao. During his life was frustrated by his inability to find a patron than he converted to Daoism in 1693 and returned to Yangzhou. I will present three paintings of him where he uses his innovations: 10,000 Ugly Inkblots (Fig. 1.), Reminiscences of Qinhuai River (Fig. 2.), and Album of Landscape for Elder Yu (leaf 2) (Fig. 3.). He was a famous individualist painter of the early Qing years. His innovations include drawing attention to the act of painting itself through his use of washes and bold, impressionistic brushstrokes. Shitao was interest in subjective perspective and the use of negative or white space to suggest distance. His stylistic innovations are difficult to place in the context of the period (1686). The painting 10,000 ugly inkblots (Fig. 1.), depicts the subversive and ironic aesthetic principles challenging beauty standards. This apperceptive work transforms the ink dot of the landscape into an abstract expression of beauty as in Pollock's works.

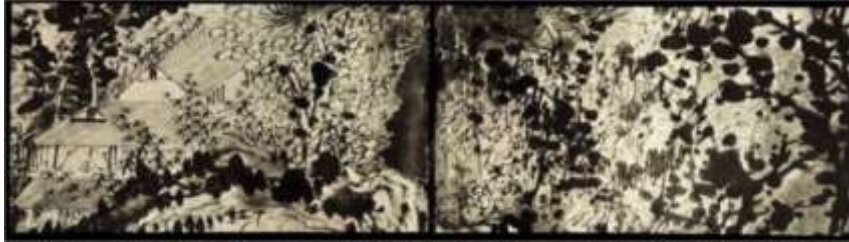


Figure 1. Shitao, 10,000 Ugly Inkblots, Ink and wash painting, landscape, 1685, Suzhou Museum, China

Shitao painting Reminiscences of Qinhuai River 1642-1707 (Fig. 2.), deals with man's place in nature. This painting represents a mountain bowing down and the rocky peak in the image is distorted and defiance of simplicity. The painting represents the respect between man and nature, which is explored in a style reminiscent of surrealism or magical realism. In this painting by the representing, Shitao expresses his respect and attitude towards nature. In this painting we can also see abstract form in the nature of the mountain.



Figure 2. Shitao, Reminiscences of Qinhuai River, Ink and wash painting, landscape, 1642-1707, Cleveland Museum of Art, US

Album of Landscape for Elder Yu (leaf 2) (Fig. 3.), is very good example of early abstract art. Chinese painting and calligraphy is based on splashing ink and outlining lines. Abstract elements in Chinese freehand painting, are the unique abstract art language of China from 16 century until today. This specific technique and painting language China artists access to the depths of metaphysical consciousness and reaching the extreme of human intuition.



Figure 3. Shitao, Album of Landscape for Elder Yu (leaf 2), Ink and color on paper, landscape 1641-1708, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US

In great influence of China philosophy evolves abstract expressionism movement in American painting. It is an art form from the post-World War II period, developed in New York in the 1940s. It is known for the first especially American movement which had a strong international influence. This movement put New York at the center of the Western art world, a role formerly occupied by Paris. The term "abstract expressionism" was first used in Germany in 1919 in the review *Der Sturm*, concerning German expressionism. Alfred Barr in the United States was the first to use this word "abstract expressionism" in 1929 in connection with works by Wassily Kandinsky. The most important act of abstract expressionism, I believe, is action painting and is closely associated with abstract expressionism. Some critics have used words such as action painting and abstract expressionism interchangeably. Action painting was a very common style from the 1940s to the beginning of the 1960s. A comparison is often drawn between the American action painting and the French *tachisme*. The term was coined by the American critic Harold Rosenberg in 1952. He signaled a major shift in the aesthetic perspective of New York School painters and critics. According to Rosenberg critic the canvas was "an arena in which to act". Previously, critics such as Clement Greenberg, focused on "the object of their works. Greenberg, it was the physicality of the clotted and oiled surfaces of the paintings that made it possible to understand them as documents of the artists' existential struggle. This term we can also find in China's calligraphy where artists used paints to show the inner power of the work. The criticism of Rosenberg moved the emphasis from the object to the struggle itself. The finished painting being only the physical manifestation of the work of art that was in the act or process of creating the painting. This spontaneous activity was the "action" of the painter, by the motion of the arm and wrist. Abstract expressionist painters use in paintings: painterly gestures, brushstrokes, thrown paint, splashed, stained, scumbled and dripped. The painter sometimes let the painting flow through the canvas, while dancing rhythmically, or even standing in the canvas. Sometimes painters paint on the subconscious mind, leaving the unconscious part of the psyche to assert and express itself. All that is hard to explain or interpret for some people because it is an unconscious manifestation of the act of pure creation. We can explain that is spiritual power what exists in each of us like fluid, energy that we can express and transfer through abstract expressionism as a freedom and liberation. Also, for that kind of expression we can say that is liberation of inside world which exist in each of us. Auto writing was a major tool for action painters like Pollock, Kline, Mark Tobey and Cy Twombly. They used gesture, surface and line to create calligraphic, linear symbols and skeins that resemble language, and resonate as powerful manifestations of collective unconsciousness. Create calligraphic in artworks of this artists is the most common way for connect action painting with China calligraphic painting. One: Number 31 (Fig. 4.), 1950 is one of the famous and largest Jackson Pollock Abstract Expressionist paintings.



Figure 4. Jackson Pollock, One: Number 31, Oil Paint, 2,7 m x 5,31 m, 1950, MOMA, New York, US

Pollock colors of the painting is a mix of "tans, blues, and grays lashed through with black and white" of varying luster in drip style painting. Pollock used sticks, rigid brushes, etc. to fling and free handedly throw paint onto a canvas placed the floor beneath him. His drip style painting technique encapsulated random gravitational effects of paint being flung onto the canvas felt that his drip style painting "there is no accident, just as there is no beginning and no end". Painting One: Number 31 is not containing any principle focal points or patterns. Interpretations of the painting are symbolized by the rhythms of city, nature and the cosmos. This kind of cosmos reference we can find in China philosophy as well in China calligraphy paintings. Chinese art is a tradition that emphasizes spirit and experience and has a powerful sense of expression. Today's Chinese people's spiritual life is complicated and overwhelming, and they need art to represent their spiritual world. Since the China have big tradition of spiritual life, they need art to represent their spiritual world. In that case Abstract art encourages individualism and has strong emotions. It is also including self-representation and rebelliously, detached from nothingness, escapism and expressing a longing for the future. German Expressionism, American Abstract Expressionism and German New Expressionism had big influence for Chinese artists. Abstract expression in ancient China was mostly exploring in the art of

calligraphy. Many Chinese calligraphers are just like abstract artists liberating got rid of physical form of paintings. Western abstract painting is more of an abstract way of thinking and directly reflects the painter's flow of thinking. The China artists use paints with calligraphy to condense the inner strength of the work. Critic Clement Greenberg is focused on "objectness" in works of abstract expressionism, creative struggle, which he claimed was evidenced by the surface of the painting. Subjective transformation of forms and lines is the core of the Chinese painting system in new era. Collective Subconsciousness as an idea was absorbed by modern Chinese artists in the 1980s and was reflected in "85 Art Movement" period. It is reflecting of the times and express personal spirit and art include in strong sense of alienation and strangeness.



Figure 5. Zao Wou Ki, Stunning Work of nature, brushstroke and calligraphy, 1957, Paris, France

Master artist Wou-Ki Zao (Zao Wou-Ki) a Chinese French painter who was one of the very first to make the link between eastern and western art. He was inspired by nature, something that we cannot see but something what exist like universe as in abstract expressionism. In painting Stunning Work of nature (Fig. 5) he is using powerful brushstroke and calligraphy to present strong emotions in nature. The range of his techniques (Fig. 6.) is from the vigorous, gestured brushstrokes of America's abstract expressionists to the delicate swirls of Chinese ink paintings. He said that "Everybody is bound by tradition. I am bound by two." Zao Wou-ki is a truly "global" artist, and his appeal stems from globalism thinking.



Figure 6. Zao Wou-Ki, oil on canvas, 59,5 x 81 cm, 1967, Collection Henry Clay Frick II, New York, US (sold for €1,392,500 on 5 June 2019 in Paris)

He explained that the intersection of poetry and painting attracted him the most: "I think the essence of the two forms of artistic expression is same, in reality. Whether it is brushing on canvas or writing on paper, they are both expressions of the breath of life. They can reveal the hidden meanings without the actual form, reveal the hidden meanings of the universe..." We can easily connect with Shitao way of looking nature and place man in Nature. Painting of nature was big traditional way of thinking that China is connect with nature and showing that through painting in expressive way such as calligraphy, abstract painting, abstract expressionism. In other side we can see this connection with Jackson Pollock as he connects space that surround him in move of showing this connection with himself as connection of China paintings with nature. That all is part of universes consciousness and unconscious. It is about feeling emotions, piece of mind, relaxation liberation of consciousness and subconscious as part of art acting for innovations and changing of view.



Figure 7. Zhang Lansheng, Free-way No. ∞ 1 《自由之路 第 ∞ 1号》, ink, acrylic, gouache, rice paper, 195 x 96 cm, 1987, China Photo courtesy of the artist

Abstraction has been a distinctive feature of contemporary art in Shanghai since the 1980s. One of significant representatives is Zhang Lansheng. In Zhang Lansheng abstract works Free-way (Fig. 7) series was searching for the meaning of freedom. Zhang artwork was liberating from a heavy philosophical or conceptual context. He has approach which started in the composition and an imitation of a freeway through broad brush ink strokes. His painting has free-flow and constrained fine lines, geometrical colored shapes, and a variety of ink dots. This way of expressing is similar with way of expressing which begins in Shitao, 10,000 Ugly Inkblots Zhang expressing the feeling of freedom by the way that the brush stroke moves and the line flows as flows in painting in Abstract expressionism. In these paintings constraints in the color shapes created a sense of alarm and raising questions about the meaning of freedom. I connect these artists to show how abstract art was developed from the 16th century until now through time and space in continuity and discontinuity. No matter of time and space I think that our consciousness and subconscious playing big role in art as a thinks or way of acting.

Changes and Development in the Art and Culture in China

In this part, I explore the changes in Chinese values, the development of Chinese identity, and the impact of modernization and globalization on contemporary art and ultimately its impact on the growing cultural and creative industry. I am researching the works of some contemporary artists who have contributed to the development of contemporary art inside and outside China. The most important Arts value in China referred as the "Three Perfections" are Calligraphy, Painting, and Poetry. Through time and history, these values in art have changed, but in some segments they still retain their value only in a modified form. The early history example of changing into art is the paintings of China artist Shitao (1642-1707). He was the first artist, which uses an abstract form in his paintings and in his landscape painting he uses degenerates into Pollock- esque splatter style as I mention before. In relation to history today China cultural identity is constructed as a discourse and soft power that is reflected in contemporary Chinese art outside and inside China. Contemporary art in China is reflected through the contemporary use of calligraphy in painting, spatial installations and other media. In this way, China has made a breakthrough in the art world by referring to its tradition and at the same time realizing itself in the contemporary world of culture and art. From this point of view changes in China strums to develop in contemporary cultural and art field. During the period from 1979, China made a great increase in trade with other nations, which contributed to the expansion of China in the cultural sense. China signed an agreement with one hundred and three countries by 1995. Since then, it has established close cultural ties with one hundred and sixty countries, which leads to the conclusion that the export of Chinese culture and the production of international visual art events is booming. One of the biggest examples is Shanghai, where they are held events such as the Biennale, the International Art Festival, the International Art Fair and the recent Annual Art Salon. In Shanghai is growing contemporary art scene. Many great museums and gallery today we can find in Shanghai. The great Contemporary Art Galleries today in Shanghai are: Yuz Museum, Ming Contemporary Art Museum, Long Museum West Bund, Rockbund Art Museum, Power Station of Art, Jing'an Sculpture Park and M50 Art Gallery. From this point we can see how rapid is growing contemporary art in China. Big changes in art also contributed '85 New Wave Movement, which make a shift in abstract art. Representatives of this movement are artists such as Xu Hong, Ding Yi, Li Liang, Qin Yifeng, Shen Haopeng, Shen Fan, Wang Nanming and Lansing Zhang. They shift the focus of abstract art from the philosophical and intellectual elements of the past to the

medium itself and the autonomous nature of art. Before that movement in Shanghai, avant-garde artists were greatly influenced by abstract art. They opposed the authoritarian art of the time and sought artistic freedom. Such visual art differed significantly from the official art of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Abstract art was interpreted in a broader sense, so that it could be understood in the East and at the same time in the Western historical and philosophical context. Artists separated their visual images from official visual images. Art explored by abstraction found inspiration in experiences and feelings. Artists were drawn motivation from music, ancient letters, and pictorial elements. Pictorial elements included elements such as lines, dots, and shapes. The abstraction was taken up by only a small number of artists. In the Shanghai art circles in the early 1980s, their art was called "Qianwei" (前卫). The term Qianwei translated from Chinese means avant-garde. The avant-garde is a term that has generally been used for all the innovative and experimental movements that are ahead of their time. Chinese artists used the term Qianwei to express defiance or thus oppose the official art of the time. In such circumstances, avant-garde is taken from, Western art and culture. Artists adopted artistic practice in the Qianwei period because of artistic freedom and the pursuit of individual artistic language. Artists of that period had a remarkable awareness of cultural and social history and contemporary life in China. They were aware of the Western world and their influence, and sought their inspiration for creative work in Chinese tradition and culture. Artists found significant motivation and inspiration in Eastern philosophical ideas. They combined traditional Eastern philosophies with a contemporary Western philosophy which contributed to the global understanding and interpretation of art. The most representative artist of that period is Zhang Lansheng. With his "Freeway" series, he sought freedom in art, mentioned above. Contemporary Chinese art has been criticized by critics through the prism of the perspective of the social environment in cultural, historical, urban and modern aspects. Another factor that has contributed to changes in art is certainly modernization. China modernization during the past three decades (1978–2008) had a big influence on the Chinese behaviors and Chinese values. The most important cultural characteristic in China is the ability to manage paradoxes. China never gives up on these kind cultural characteristics. China society retained cultural characteristics in the most significant sociocultural changes even in the new age of globalization. Life in contemporary China has undergone a big and significant cultural change. Facts as a globalization, modernization, paradox and values have proportionally elicited changes in China. Western society could not have foreseen such a change in Chinese society. China's "open-door" policy since 1978 make that China now is in open contact with foreign concepts in the field of technologies, cultures and lifestyles. Internet, foreign direct investment (FDI) and globalization open China for the first time in history of the big knowledge transfer, information sharing and cultural learning which put Chinese society in a significant place in the world. Modern Chinese society in terms of the thinking process is still in basic of the classical Yin Yang approach. Ying Yang approach refers to the complementary yet opposing forces. Those kinds of forces are both interconnected and interdependent and together create all aspects of life. A shadow cannot be created without light; both forces are necessary and must be in the right balance, which contributes to the life of today's urban world with nature. Such an approach creates stability in Chinese society, which is manifested through globalization, modernization and the growing development of China. An example of such an approach can be seen in the work of a Chinese contemporary artist Wang Nanming. In his artwork Balls of Characters Installation (Fig. 8) (字球组合, 1989, ink, rice paper vary in size) combines tradition with a contemporary way of looking at art and thus culture.



Fig. 8. Wang Nanming, *Combination: Ball of Characters*, ink on paper, 120 cm x 100 cm, 1992, Pusan Metropolitan Art Museum, South Korea

Wang Nanming in this artwork is recommending the use of traditional ink and rice paper as a traditional material Contemporary way. He is applying traditional material today in the contemporary technique. He arranges a large number of rice paper balls in a site-specific form. In each paper ball, he painted with the ink strokes of Chinese characters. This installation questions the relationship between tradition and the contemporary art. Balls of Characters Installation were a result of his artistic research of traditional Chinese calligraphy during the 1980s. Wang made a critical cultural aspect of this traditional form of art. He changes the structure and form of this artwork with key calligraphy elements as a brush stroke, ink, and rice paper. In that way he provokes new contemporary interpretations of traditional materials. One of the famous global Chinese artists is Ai Weiwei. He is an activist and in his artworks expands the definition of art to include new forms of social engagement. His work is conceptual artworks such as photographs, sculptures, films, performances, and installations. His work is very interesting in this era of contemporary globalization of world with movement in art excessivism. In excessive state. As Ai writes, "Creativity is the power to act." It's the power "to reject the past, to change the status quo, and to seek new potential." He is best known in western culture for his spectacular installation *Sunflower Seed* (Fig. 9) s at the Tate Modern in London.



Fig. 9. Ai Weiwei , *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010, Turbine Hall at Tate Modern

The artwork consisted of one hundred million porcelain "seeds". Each piece is individually hand-painted. 1,600 Chinese artisans was participated in painting this artwork. Porcelain "seeds" are scattered over a large area of the Turbine Hall. Ai has embraced technology in his art practice as a reflection of the modernization of urban society. He told Hans Ulrich Obrist in the book *Ai Weiwei Speaks*, "I think the Internet and information era is the greatest period mankind has encountered." The virtual reality for him is as important as reality itself. He believes that technology has the power which can reach of art.

On the other side Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are growth driver for economic and urban development in many countries in world. China's Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are sharing many common characteristics with Western civilization. CCI have a big influence on urban development and regeneration. In the past few decades with urbanization, many larger Chinese cities developed into the major international cities. Many cities in China constructed iconic opera houses, theaters, music halls, museums, and other showcase structures in that way, transforming and developing cultural and art scene in a global world. At the same time in other cities of all sizes develop, "creative districts". The development of creative districts sometimes is results of governmental, economic development strategies. This development of cities is part a replacement for the industries. Industries departed to new industrial parks and leaving behind the unused infrastructure. That gives city opportunity for creativity development in art and culture. Creative districts are also the result of real estate strategies. All those aspects of development lead to growing demand art and cultural experiences. This cultural arts aspect has become lucrative businesses. Culture and the arts started being promoted by agencies and appealing to younger generations. It is

evolving more art communities, and constantly testing the margins of acceptable art and cultural expression.

The result of the research is the acquisition of knowledge of Eastern and Western cultural and artistic influences, as well as the kinship of styles across periods. Today's modernization and globalization greatly contribute to the mix of styles that today intertwines creating a global art scene stronger than ever. Cross-cultural permeation is also reflected in AI technology, where tradition and culture take on a completely different interactive, meaning through space and time, marking themselves through various exhibitions, museums and cultural and musical events.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this research is that the development of culture and contemporary art is rapidly expanding in terms of creativity and global significance. Changes through Chinese values and identity under the influence of rapid modernization and the creation of globalization have greatly contributed to the development of contemporary art and cultural creative industries in China and outside China. Influence of globalism expanded contemporary art over the border. Influenced by Chinese culture in my European abstraction painting Squares Expression I, II techniques, I use traditional ink techniques to depict space in the modern city of Shanghai.



Fig. 10. Daniela Grubisic, Squares Expression I, 2024, Shanghai Art Collection Museum



Fig. 11. Daniela Grubisic, Squares Expression II, 2024, Shanghai Art Collection Museum

Today globalism delete border in art. As such, it reflects the complex issues that shape our diverse, globally and rapidly evolving world. We can say that contemporary art today in China has three ways of artistic creation as technology, nature and philosophy way.

References

- Jonathan, Hay, (2001). "Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China (Res Monographs in Anthropology and Aesthetics) ", Cambridge University Press.
- Li, Lei, (2019). Explosion of Colour: A Chinese Abstract Art, Unicorn Chinese Artists Series", Unicorn Publishing Group.
- Omri, Moses, (2004). "Jackson Pollock's Address to the Nonhuman", Oxford Art Journal.
- Barbara, Hess, (2016). Abstract Expressionism, Taschen.

- Rosenberg, Harold, (1994). *The Tradition Of The New*, Da Capo Press.
- Bruce, Guenther & Karen, Wilkin, (2001). *Clement Greenberg: A Critic's Collection*, Princeton University Press; First Edition.
- Zhang, Lansheng, (202). "Act of Rebellion: Abstract Art in 1980s Shanghai", CoBo Social - Asia community & media platform.
- Guy Olivier, Faurea & Tony, Fang, (2008). "Changing Chinese values: Keeping up with paradoxes", Europe International Business School, Stockholm University School of Business, Sweden.
- Joy Denise, Scott, (2006). "The impact of Chinese cultural values on the arts Management process ", Chinese Academy of Science, Shanghai Branch.
- Yao, Yung-Wen, (2015). "The Void of Chineseness: Contemporary Art and Cultural Diplomacy in China", *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, Vol. 5.
- Sisi, Liang, & Qingfang, Wang, (2020). "Cultural and Creative Industries and Urban (Re) Development in China". *Sage Journals*, Research Article.
- Hans Ulrich, Obrist, (2011). *Ai Weiwei Speaks: with Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Penguin.